

MARGARITA ROMANO

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Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

Instead of going to bed, I sat at the top of the stairs to listen to see who it was. It was the next door neighbor. I overheard her and Mrs. Arnold speaking about my mom who they said was in prison. I was shocked. At twelve and one half years of age, I never knew my mom existed.

My name is Margarita Romano. At 28yrs of age, I am the mother of five beautiful, energetic daughters, thanks to the caring atmosphere of the Jonestown community. I know that if our lives had not been integrated into this progressive humanitarian community, there would be no existence for me or my precious children. I am grateful for the opportunity to live in a constructive free society where my children's future security is not predicated on my economic status or ability to take care of them. Instead, here in Jonestown, my children along with several other hundreds, are guaranteed a prosperous, meaningful life.

Reflecting back on my past life, I see that total destruction was inevitable for my family and me. I knew that death would have been a pleasurable escapism for my life miseries but I was never lucky enough to accomplish this goal. My arms still bear the razor scars indicating the life I attempted to end. In the past, I had been hooked on drugs. I was beaten by pimps (from New Jersey and Detroit) because I wouldn't prostitute for them. I was a victim of sexual abuse by a maniac rapist who raped me twice consecutively while I was suffering from a high fever. A lot of my trouble came from my mother's being imprisoned for life, ^{and the} way I found out. I was being threatened by ex-associates of mines (including members of mafia-like gangs) whose daily occupations were based on crime.

At two and one half years of age, I had to face the realities of a cold, lonesome cruel world. I was prematurely issued a double dose of rejection when my mom was sentenced to life in prison for murder. And my Dad, a poor Sicilian who hardly spoke English could not afford to take care of me. Consequently, I along with my brother, Johnny Romano, who was one year younger than me were placed in the Salvation Army Children's Home. Although I was very young, I still can remember the hurt I experienced when my Dad left me at the Children's home. Through my screaming and yelling, I could hear him saying, "Go to sleep, and I'll be there in the morning." I finally cried myself to sleep. But when the morning came, Daddy was gone. Daddy would come and visit me on a visiting pass every month. Boy! Was I ever so glad to see him the hour he came to visit. But when the hour was up Daddy would leave and I was as disappointed as ever. My withdrawn life resembled that of a snail who would retreat in his shell for shelter. It was here at the Salvation Army Children's Home that I was sexually assaulted by one of the assistants of the orphanage home. This lady would sit in her rocking chair and place me in her lap. She would then proceed to stick her perverted finger up my private parts. I was too young to fully understand what was happening. But I never uttered a word of it to anyone.

My brother and I were then moved to the Catholic Charity Bureau of Children's Shelter Home. This was a strictly controlled home where I stayed temporary until placement in a temporary foster home. Later my brother and I went to live in a foster home supervised by a lady named Mrs. Sibiggi who had a daughter named Rosie. Mrs. Sibiggi was very nice to us, but on the contrary her daughter Rosie was mean, mean, mean. Rosie was 22 yrs. older than me. She used to bully and threaten my brother and me all the time and make us do things for her. She would mistreat us behind Mrs. Sibiggi's back, constantly telling us how she hated us. At night I had to sleep with Rosie. She would demand that I made no moves whatsoever in the bed, stating that if I did, she would beat me. Nevertheless, she would roll all over me in her sleep nearly suffocating me. Rosie was so mean that one day when she got mad at my brother Johnny, she threw him right down a flight of twelve stairs.

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Next the authorities from the Catholic Charity Bureau of Children's Shelter Home came to take my brother and me back to the Shelter Home. We remained there until a Mr. and Mrs. Arnold decided to take us in as foster children. Mr. Arnold was a quiet, passive man who was bossed around by his wife. By this time my brother Johnny had developed a terrible habit of stealing. Emotionally and mentally disturbed, Johnny would steal peoples belongings and hide them. When people would register their complaints to Mrs. Arnold, she would strip Johnny naked and beat him with an extension cord. It wasn't long before Mrs. Arnold turned him over to St. John's Orphanage Home for boys, stating that she could no longer cope with his behavior. From here Johnny was sent to St. Francis Home for the Emotionally Disturbed. My heart ached as I had to be separated from my brother. I felt as if I had lost my last and only friend.

I stayed with Mr. and Mrs. Arnold for five years. All the time I stayed there Mrs. Arnold never showed me any type of affection. She never kissed or hugged me not even once. The only time Mr. Arnold kissed me was at his child's request. He was on his way to work one morning as I stood by watching him kiss his children good-bye. His three year old daughter, Patty, looked at him and said, "Daddy, why don't you kiss Margarita good-bye?" Blushing, he kissed me on the forehead. It was a kiss I shall never forget. Regardless of how it came about, it was a kiss—an expression of affection and it meant so much to me. I vowed not to wash my forehead after this.

Mrs. Arnold was a very insensitive person. She would send me to the store to get "us" (her children and me) some treats. However when I returned with the goodies, she would send me to bed and distribute the treats among her two children. During the time of my youth, I suffered from a respiratory condition which caused me to breathe mostly out of my mouth. Mrs. Arnold would make fun of me and tell me to shut my mouth and breathe out of my nose. Mrs. Arnold was very conscious of the fact that I was afraid of the dark. Consequently, she would push me into dark rooms and lock me in. A lot of times when she felt I was being a disciplinary problem, she would beat me. Then when her husband returned from work, she would order him to beat me again. Mr. Arnold was a man who carried a lot of guilt. He knew how mean his wife was. He would take me upstairs, instruct me to holler and pretend that I was in pain, while he beat the coach. He often told me that he would be glad for me when I moved because he knew I was unhappy.

One night when Mrs. Arnold had sent me to bed I heard someone coming to visit. Instead of going to bed, I sat on the top stair to listen to see who it was. It was the next door neighbor. I overheard her and Mrs. Arnold speaking about my Mom who they said was in prison. I was shocked. At twelve and one half years of age, I never knew my Mom existed. When the foster home authorities came, I anxiously asked them was it true that my Mom was in jail? They were amazed and wanted to know who told me this. I told them what I had overheard. I asked them could I go and see her. Soon the authorities made arrangements for both my brother and me to see our Mom. It was good being with my brother again, but we could not wait to see our Mom. It took us six long hours to get to Muncy State Correctional Institution. We impatiently waited in the visiting room until the authorities brought our Mom to us. She was a beautiful little lady about five feet tall. As we stared her up and down, she likewise stared us up and down. Her first expression was, "My babies, my babies, well you're all grown up." She then hugged us affectionately. Along with the superintendent sitting in, we spent the visiting hour trying to get acquainted with each other, talking about likes and dislikes. The hour was soon over and Johnny and I reluctantly kissed our Mom good-bye. As she turned away from us, I noticed a tear twinkling from her eyes. Although we did get to visit our Mom a few more times before she was off on parole ten years later, this one visit alone had a negative effect on both my brother's and my own actions. We were both resentful and hostile of the fact that we could not be with our Mom. I especially took on an arrogant, rebellious attitude--no longer wanting to be subjected to the instructions of my foster parents and supervisors. Consequently, things didn't work out at the Arnold's foster home. I was removed from the Arnold's foster home to the Rotelle's foster home. The supervisors here tried to teach me how to be a lady. They introduced me to the proper way to eat, dress, talk and walk. They also introduced me to this rich Judge who wanted to adopt me. The Honorable Judge escorted me throughout his house exhibiting his luxuries and wealth to me and informed me what comforts of

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life I could partake of if I would allow him and his wife to adopt me. However I had no lust for the Rotelle's bourgeois taste. Therefore I ran away from the Rotelle's foster home located in Amber, Pennsylvania to the Catholic Charity Bureau Children's Shelter Home in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. I went there to talk to the one nun, Sister Paul Marie, who I felt that I had a good rapport with. I explained my situation to her and asked her could I go and live with my Dad. She spoke with a Judge concerning the matter. The decision was to allow me a temporary permit to reside with my Dad until my court case regarding permanent placement with my Dad took place.

When I first moved into my Dad's house everything was just fine. My stepsisters told me from the beginning that I'd be sorry. They warned me that I should go back to the foster home. It was not until later that I found out that they were referring to my Dad's violent temper. He would get angry with my sisters and started beating on them. Later, when I began to be attracted to boys and vice versa, my Dad's anger also became directed at towards me. He had no tolerance for my relating to males. Evidently he had some type of sexual hang-up because at times he would display such obscene behavior, such as masturbating in front of me. He would only do this when we were in a room alone watching T.V. or something. On one occasion he started off holding me around the waist, and ended up slipping his hand down into my pants exploring my private parts. After this, I made it a point to exit whenever my Dad started going through these changes. He would often tell me, "You look just like your Mom." When I questioned my stepsister regarding my Dad's interaction with her, she said that he never tried this with her. Eventually my Dad started physically directing his irrational anguish at me. He would get violent and beat on me for the slightest things I did to make him mad. I finally decided not to take any more of his beatings, so I again ran away.

At the age of fifteen, I found out the hard way how difficult it was to survive in a cruel, uncaring world. At this age, I was raped by a married man. I came in contact with mafia-like members of gangs who promised me that they loved me and would give me the world. Instead, they gave me babies, drugs and pains once I would not succumb to their wishes to prostitute, rob and steal etc. They would beat the hell out of me and try to force me.

At the age of nineteen, I was savagely raped by *A man in Philadelphia* - lunatic who throughout the whole ordeal held an *icepick* → at my throat. Since I was trying to come off of drugs at the time, my body was already sick, weak, and feverish from the withdrawal symptoms. This madman had entered my house through the bedroom window. He warned me to stop screaming and to shut my baby up from screaming or he would kill me. He then enacted all of his sex fantasies on me in front of my two and one half year old daughter who went hysterical. I sincerely felt that this night would be my last night alive as I begged the man to please leave. I promised him that I would not tell the cops. When he finished, he threatened to kill me if I spoke one word to the police. Feeling dead already, I reported the matter to the police and went through a series of interrogations and medical examinations.

After this incident, I was always fearful, thinking this rapist would find me. I became highly paranoid. Every place I went I was on the lookout hoping that I wouldn't run into this rapist again. My inflamed state of paranoia finally led me into a complete mental breakdown. As a result I spent two and one half months in a psychiatric ward and I was an out-patient for three years. I continued to indulge with the hoodlums in the ghetto streets.

At one time I finally thought that I had found me a peace of mind when I married a preacher man. Our relationship was good for a little while then suddenly all hell broke loose. We had severe conflicts of ideas over religion, domestic affairs, and finances. Contributing to our religious conflicts, my husband's brother would interject his two cents into the matter to inform my husband that I was a devil. In desperate search of the truth, my husband and I both found ourselves in the Blue Horizon Auditorium in Philadelphia. There I came in contact with Pastor Jim Jones, minister of Peoples Temple. He was having an Inspirational Meeting along with several hundred people he had brought along with him from California on a summer vacation trip.

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I was astonished at the courageous manner in which Pastor Jones spoke. He talked about the apparent inconsistencies in the Bible. He spoke about the plight of the minorities in their struggle for equality and self determination. Every word that proceeded from his mouth reflected strongly on the realities of today. Although he spoke with much authority, he presented such modesty in his actions and interactions with others. I can truly say that I was impressed by this man and his humanitarian spirit.

Shortly afterwards my husband and my difference of opinions reached a climax so we went on our separate ways. Due to the fact that I did not have sufficient funds, I found it impossible to take good care of my children. I therefore temporarily placed them into foster homes until I could get financially stable. When I finally could barely make ends meet, I requested my children back. The authorities at the foster homes acted as if they did not want to give me my children back stating that I was not financially able to keep them. After sitting up several nights crying over the situation and spending several days dealing with legal personnel and demanding my children back, they were turned back over into my custody.

I moved into a small apartment and went back to school to learn a trade. My mind continuously thought about the living atmosphere I had witnessed in Jim Jones' meetings. The following summer when Jim returned to Philadelphia vacationing with several hundred people of all races, religious backgrounds and ages, I too made up my mind to travel with them. I packed up my children's and my own luggage and boarded the Temple buses with the rest of the people. I ended up staying in California for a few years. There I got to know even more the man called Jim Jones. I saw the consistent life he not just talked about, but actively lived. A total life of sacrifice giving of himself and sharing with others. He took on the burden of educating the people to be sensitive to the needs of one another. Although many self-centered people opposed his equalitarian beliefs and practices, in times of antagonism, I have seen him take a firm stance for what he felt was right. I never noticed him to take a stance motivated by the need to accomplish something for his own personal gain or self esteem. Instead he would take a stance in support of those whom he knew were being unjustifiably mistreated. He would take a stance to uproot the outcasts of society out of the depths of their oppressive hell. And for this, he was hated by many within and without the movement.

Eventually for the safety of his people, Jim Jones made a reality out of the dreams of such people as Martin Luther King and Marcus Garvey. He provided a place for his people where they would no longer have to suffer from the pains of racism, sexism or poverty caused by the lack of money. The place he provided is named Jonestown. And I am proud to be a resident of this beautiful little community located in Guyana, South America. I am presently a primary school teacher helping to educate the minds of our youth. This is a privilege I never would have dreamed of experiencing in the States. But the most wonderful thing of all, for the first time in my life, all of my fears have been eliminated. It is a good feeling to be able to walk the streets after dark and have no one harass or molest you. Also to me, it is an extremely good feeling to be able to leave your windows and doors open and not have to worry about some raging maniac coming in and raping you. For my own safety and the safety of my children, I am grateful.

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