



THE COVER-UP

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«HOW I BECAME A SCAPEGOAT IN A COCAINE SCANDAL»

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this book to my children and to the memory of my parents.

PROLOGUE

During the latter part of 2005 and through most part of 2006, I made the headlines of Ghanaian news bulletins over an allegation that I had bribed some senior police officers in a cocaine scandal. It was a very trying moment for me but I survived it and moved on with my life.

However, over the years since the incident occurred, I have pondered from time to time on documenting my side of the story which was rejected and twisted because of a grand cover-up scheme in which I labeled an informant and consequently sacrificed as a scapegoat. But the time has come for me to publish my story and I do so in exercise of my fundamental human rights.

This is a testimony and I want the world to hear of it. It would be a source of encouragement for others that no matter the struggles you find yourself in, God would see you through and give you a testimony.

I am very certain some individuals will come out and deny some of the things I have said in this book. Of course, it is their right to do so as it is my right to tell my story. In spite of the vilification, I was subjected to and dangers I was exposed to all because interests and public images of some big people had to be protected while I was sacrificed as a scapegoat, I survived to tell my story.

I could have been murdered because of the public claim that I was an informant. And I could have been jailed (possibly for nothing less than 10 years) for allegedly being an accomplice in trading of narcotic substances. I would have suffered the same fate like many innocent people who go to prison because they were framed and could not defend themselves. I know there are many people in prison who are innocent but have been jailed due to cases like this just to protect the images of the powerful men and women in the country.

I tell this story so that no one goes through the kind of injustice I went through. To understand how I ended up as a scapegoat in the cocaine case, it is crucial to appreciate, through the chapters of this book, how I evolved as a person, starting from my early years in Bongo and how my life's journey brought me to Accra.

Chapter 1

BALUNGU: MY EARLY YEARS

Gurigo Nyzoreyaaba, my maternal grandfather was a wealthy man, and he owned stocks of millet and heads of cattle. With ten wives and many children, he founded a village which bears his name. One of Nzoreyaaba's beloved daughters was Ayoka, my mother.

In Balungu, another town, about 30 kilometers away from Goroko, Abiseba chose to dare the status quo. When she lost her husband with whom she had 5 children, she was required by custom to marry the man who inherited her deceased husband. The rationale behind this custom is continuity of a man's family line. Thus, there were other widows that the deceased left behind and while these other women agreed to follow custom, grandmother Abisiba refused to marry the brother of her late husband.

In view of grandmother Abiseba's bold decision, she was referred to as *Ayipoka* that is, concubine of her husband's brother. That notwithstanding, she was maligned and suffered a great deal of vilification and physical abuse until she later chose a man after her own heart, albeit from her deceased husband's family who were direct descendants of the first settlers of Balungu. It was with this man that she had two other children, Asaa (which translates as 'Rain') and Atore Asabire (meaning 'Small Rain'). Asabire, my father, was Abiseba's last born and she was fond of him.

Asabire meets Ayoka

Asabire, like all other boys in Balungu, grew up to fend for the cattle of the household and went to farm during the raining season. As he came of age, he could

go to other towns to look for employment to earn some income particularly during the off-farming season. On one of such trips outside Balungu, Asabire visited Gurigo and it is there that he encountered Ayoka, the tall and beautiful daughter of the founder of that village. Ayoka was strikingly pretty, long- nosed and with curly hair. Some people assumed she was of Fulani descent.

My father was equally handsome and very hardworking but he was not from a wealthy family as my mother. Theirs was a union full of contrasts in terms of external features for apart from her wealthy background, my mother was darker and my father was very fair in complexion. And my mother was taller than my father. But those were mere external features transcended by their bond of love which was so visible throughout their lives together.

Nyzoreyaaba usually would not allow his children to marry from a poor family but seeing how much my father loved my mother and the fact that he was hardworking, he gave them his blessings. Nyzoreyaaba, took a liking for my father so he sought to help him as reports indicated that his would be son-in-law was not from a wealthy family. He cared so much for his daughter that he did not want my mother to starve or suffer under any circumstance. Grandpa Nyzoreyaaba is said to have sold a cow and given the proceeds to my mother as startup capital. My mother also, hardworking as she was, managed to make something worthwhile of it and became one of the rich women in Balungu where she settled with our father to start a family.

My birth

My mother bore 8 children with my father but unfortunately 4 of my siblings died before I was born sometime in 1981. Like my father, I was the last born of my mother. In terms of features, I took my mother's height and my father's complexion. According to Elizabeth, my eldest sister, who witnessed my birth, our mother had gone to the market to sell her wares as usual when her labor pains started.

Apparently, it took a long time for me to be born so it was very unbearable for my mother as she had to endure severe pains from the Friday afternoon through Saturday night. My grandmother, Abiseba is said to have prayed throughout the night for her daughter in-law to have a safe delivery. At some point in the night, my mother was taken from the room to the *samsure* a kind of drainage where childbirths are usually performed so that the fluids and blood could be easily drained off. At the *samsure*, some elderly women, led by one Akingarige performed my delivery around 1 am on Saturday, hence my name Asibi which is the name given to a female born on Saturday in most communities within the northern part of Ghana. It is the equivalent name Ama among Akans in southern Ghana.

During those days, before a child was named, the elders had to go to the shrine for divination in order to know the name to give a child. The child, before it gets to have a name is therefore referred to as *Asampana*, meaning he or she has not yet been welcomed into the world. There is usually a sacrifice of a guinea fowl or a goat before such a divination is done. I have been told that when the elders consulted the deity with regards to my name, it was divined that I should be named after our paternal great grandmother (Abiseba's mother) who had died at Yorugu.

Accordingly, during the ceremony to outdoor me, I was named, Asegloba.

Later as child I was commonly called Nbinge, a name my grandmother, Abiseba gave me. Nbinge translates as foundation or inheritance for prosperity. Abiseba was then old and nearing her grave. When I was born, somehow, she considered me the one to inherit her as provider of the family and her departing gift to the family for generations yet unborn. I was little and I can't tell what she might have seen in me, but she blessed me as the foundation she was leaving behind for posterity.

Portrait of my parents

Mma Ayoka, as my mother was affectionately known throughout Balungu, was not the talkative type. Nevertheless, she talked a lot when incensed. She was very compassionate, generous and hospitable too and these were traits that endeared her to many. Many testified to her attributes when she passed on in 2001.

Later on in their marriage, my father married a second wife, but it was actually my mother who proposed the idea. My mother was a busy woman due to her work schedule as she traded a variety of foodstuff in large quantities. So, as they were both growing old and she needed to give more time to growing the business, she thought it would be for the best if there was another woman at home to be taking care of my father and the home in her absence. In fact, it was my mother who found the woman for my father. This may sound strange to a lot of us women who have grown and been educated (or perhaps mis-educated?) to be strictly monogamously minded without any tolerance of mind to find any usefulness with non-monogamous relationships.

Indeed, my mother who was well-to-do took it upon herself to cater for the needs

of her ‘rival’ and her mother as best as she could. Mma Ayoka was an exceptionally thoughtful woman with such a big heart. The two wives lived together in peace with my father.

My mother was truly financially independent. Of all the women in our family, she was the most financially successful at the time. She could easily afford to see us through school if my father and uncles had not been against formal education.

Baba Asabire, our father was equally a very quiet man. And one thing I knew about him was that he loved our mother dearly and their love was so beautiful to behold. He was also a compassionate man and reveled in giving alms to the needy. He usually would give more than enough to the deprived. I remember the practice in our town when the underprivileged would knock on doors for food. My father would give them more food than what they requested for.

My father was very particular about our upbringing as regards our virtues as women. He never stopped schooling us on the need for submission, humility, and diligence. He advised us against sluggish attitude toward our responsibilities like, sweeping, fetching of water from the river, and other chores. As far as he was concerned, we had to be dutiful so we don’t end up branded as lazy wives since such wives were in those days returned to their parents’ house. He instructed us on the need to be content with what we had and never envy or steal someone’s assets.

And he never spared the rod when any of us his children misbehaved.

As indicated earlier, we were not sent to school when we attained the school-going age. Instead, it was the norm that we as children led the cattle to the field for grazing. It was ordinary to see a five-year-old child herding cattle.

I recall that when I was a child, some white people-likely tourist and researchers-would

patronize my mother's goods and a few of them who were regular customers would bring me gifts like dresses. Sometimes they would put me on their bicycles for a ride. Those were really fun and memorable moments for me.

A tough decision

During my infancy, one of my cousins (my father's niece) migrated to the southern part of the country and settled at the Afram Plains in the Kwahu North district. She was a trader and she was based there with her husband, a farmer who was also from the North. They had a daughter and were expecting another child. Combining her trading with taking care of duties at home was increasingly becoming difficult. She needed a helping hand or as I was soon to discover someone to slave for her.

When I was 8 years old, my father's sister came to inform my parents that her daughter who was based in the Afram Plains wanted a young girl to stay with and she had recommended that, since I was named after Abiseba, their mother, I was the preferred choice among all the other children in the house. My aunt presented a rosy picture of how well her daughter was going to look after me. My parents (especially my mother), were not enthused about the idea of me going to the Afram Plains. However, during those times if your sister requested for your child, you just had to oblige; it was ingrained in our culture. Such were the considerations which made our guardian, my father's brother give his consent. My parents had no option but to acquiesce with the decision.

It was my mother who broke the news to me after their decision. She told me my cousin was coming to take me far away to the south. I felt quite happy initially

because I thought it was going to be a pleasant experience. But as it would soon turn out, there were difficult times and painful memories in stock for me at Afram Plains.



Typical landscape from the Northern Region of Ghana

Chapter 2

AFRAM PLAINS

After the family had agreed that I should be sent to the Afram Plains, Ayambire, my cousin travelled back home to take me along with her down south.

Journey to the South

I remember that on the day we left, my mother cooked for us that day and after eating, we set off. Being the last child of my mother, it was a very painful separation between my mother and me as I embarked on my first journey outside Balungu. Prior to that, I had only travelled to markets of nearby towns with my mother.

From Balungu we walked to a town called Sikabisye where Ayambire's husband hails from. We passed the night there and the following morning continued our journey by foot to Bolgatanga. We spent the night at the Bolga station and boarded a car for Kumasi the following morning.

In all, it took us a little over a week before we arrived at Afram Plains. The road network from the North to the middle and southern belts was terrible and the vehicles we travelled with were unlike the buses available today. We traveled on Bedford which was popularly known as "Bone shaker" or "Aroglass" and they all kept breaking down on the way, making the journey a very dangerous and hectic one. We had to pass several nights in the bushes or forests while waiting for the vehicles to be fixed. We were exposed to so much danger sleeping out there. I was worn out and had developed swollen feet by the time we arrived, having passed through Nkawkaw and crossing the platoon at Kotoso Kwahu.

Surviving the cruelty

The next morning after we had arrived, I started work. My cousin, Ayambire, was a trader at the market, so I assisted her to convey her wares to the market. We were living among some Dagaate folks so she was very cautious how she treated me. She was doing most of the chores with me.

We used to fetch water together.

Initially-for about a week- she treated me quite well. But after that, everything started changing for the worse. I am moved to tears whenever I tell this bit of my story because it was the most difficult and painful time of my life. The more I reflect on my life's journey so far, I'm led to believe that surviving the abuse at the hands of my own relative as a little girl however painful, toughened me up to face challenges later in life.

To start with, after the one week of pretentious welcome treatment, Ayambire, instructed me to carry the food items to the market alone. She sold rice and beans so I would carry bowls of food to the market every morning. By the end of my second week in Afram Plains, I knew that the reason given to my parents for bringing me down South was a complete lie. I was going to be working with her instead of babysitting her baby as she had made my family to believe. It was apparent my cousin wanted a house-help instead of playmate for her child. While her daughter who was a little younger than me went to school, I followed her to go and sell at the market.

Ayambire started treating me unfairly and there are many people who are witnesses to the things she put me through. I now had to do alone all the chores we used to do together. There were several times she refused to give me food. To

survive, I had to chew raw gari which I managed to hide from her. Other times too, the Dagaati folks would give me food for which she would beat me mercilessly when she found out. She warned me not to accept food from anyone and never to tell anyone she was not feeding me.

Her husband later purchased a farmland for rice cultivation which was far from where we lived. It was my responsibility to drive away birds from the rice farm. The farm was too quiet and dangerous for me to be alone there. One day, the husband came to find me sleeping at the farm. He found a stick and beat me so badly I had to run into the bushes. He chased me and managed to catch me. He was infuriated that I had been sleeping, irrespective of the fact that I was compelled to wake up very early to assist his wife cook. He said I had allowed the birds to feed on the rice. He beat me again then he stayed on to tend the farm with me.

There were so many times I went to the farm to work on an empty stomach. I would get home in the evening only to be given some little food to eat.

We later moved to their farmhouse and the maltreatment heightened. Where I had to go and fetch water was very far so she would wake me up at dawn to walk through the forest alone to get water. The forest was too quiet. I would normally find a place to sit and wait for other people to come and fetch the water so I could go with them. After fetching the water, I had to ensure that her bath water was ready before heading to the market with the wares. She had given birth to her second baby at that time. She could give me food without soup. I would then proceed to sell water to the traders. At this stage, some people from the North, particularly the Dagaate and Frafra started frowning upon her treatment of me. Coincidentally, one woman called Adisa, a relative of my elder sister's husband happened to be around and witnessed my

maltreatment. It was Adisa who later travelled back home to inform my elder sister (Elizabeth) of my suffering condition.

Apparently, upon hearing stories of the cruel treatments being meted out on me by our cousin,

Elizabeth immediately informed my mother who went to ascertain the details from Adisa. My

mother then went to my father's brother (our guardian who gave the final word for me to be sent away) in tears, pleading with him to try and bring me back to Balungu. Moved by my mother's pleading, our uncle is said to have found someone to whom he dictated a letter which was dispatched through a family friend to the Afram Plains demanding that Ayambire should send me back home.

But Ayambire read the letter and ignored the request from home. When nobody was hearing anything from my cousin in respect of my return to Balungu, my father incidentally came to Afram Plains to look for me himself but because he didn't know exactly where we were, his attempt was in vain. He got back to Balungu determined to bring me back home. He and my uncle dictated another letter which was sent to Ayambire. This time, realizing she was gradually incurring the wrath of the family, Ayambire obliged and sent me back to my parents, having subjected me to 3 years of constant emotional and physical torture.

Back home

I obviously had changed drastically. I looked different. My family couldn't believe that as fair as I was in complexion, I had turned dark that people wondered whether I had been selling charcoal all this while. I was also looking very frail with sores all over my body and cracks on the soles of my feet.

“How come people travel to Kumasi and the South and came back looking good but my little sister is looking so sick and unkempt?” I recall Elizabeth my elder sister asking. She had rushed to our family house from the nearby town where she lived with her husband as soon as she heard I had been brought back.

Initially, I couldn't even make out my sister. It had been a long time and just as I had changed physically, she had also transformed a lot after marriage, childbirth and the fact that she was pregnant at the time. Apart from my sister, I really couldn't easily identify most of my family members. Clearly, if I had stayed any longer in Afram Plains, I would have completely forgotten my blood relations. The sweet memories of my childhood were fast being replaced daily by fear, self-pity and despair as a result of the abuse I was going through.

I recall vividly how angry Elisabeth was. She argued fiercely with Ayambire and wanted to beat her up for not taking good care of me. But because she was pregnant, she was asked to calm down. Finally, someone had come to my defense. I started having flashbacks of being maltreated without anyone coming to my defense. I didn't even know I had people who would ever fight for me and would not let me endure all the pain I went through. Ayambire could even let her two children beat me up. And there was one instance where I was pounding rice in the mortar (a local method of removing the

shells from the dried rice) and some accidentally fell to the ground. She hit me with the mortar and I fell into unconsciousness. I was thinking about all such painful memories as I sat there watching Ayambire lying through her teeth initially denying doing anything bad to me but later appeared to be remorseful when she was fiercely confronted by my sister and other relatives. My mother was no doubt very sad but I could see a glimmer of joy in her eyes whenever she turned to look at me. For her, the most important thing was that I was back home alive.

Following all the drama of confrontations with Ayambire, and there being no water at home, Elizabeth took me to a nearby river to bath me. At the bank of the river, she bathed and cleaned me up well. As we walked back home, memories of growing up with my sister started flooding back into mind. At that moment, I held Elisabeth's hand, holding on to her tightly. I began feeling at home after so many lonely days and nights in Afram Plains.

Days after, my mother took me to the hospital to check if I hadn't contracted any disease. The doctors said I was fine and with that assurance, she insisted that I ate well, bathed regularly and applied some really nice body cream which she bought for me. I felt special.

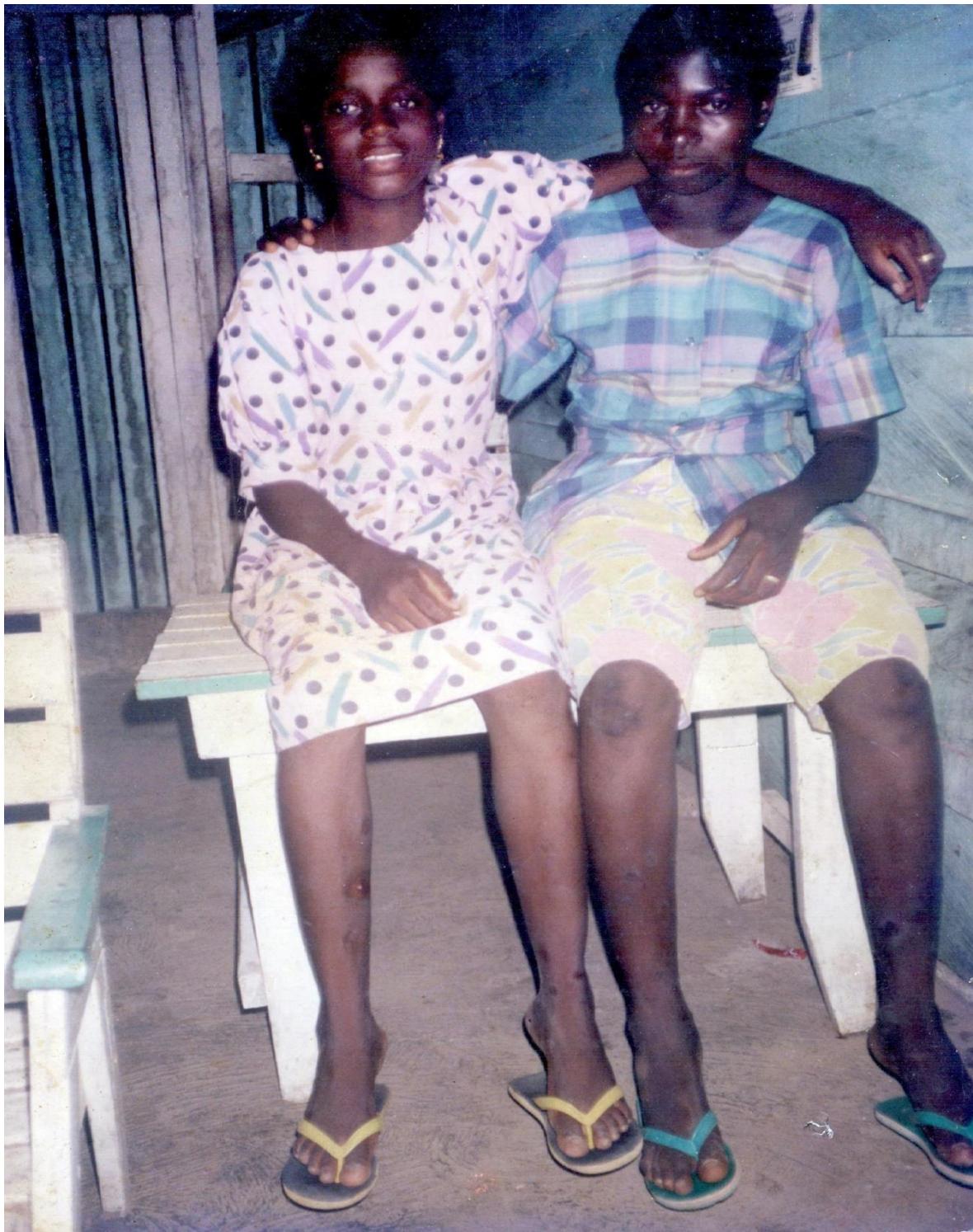
My desire for schooling

Once I settled back home, I told my parents I wanted to go to school. At the time there was a school in the village. The boys outnumbered the girls because most parents thought that schools corrupted the girl child. Schools turned girls into thieves, they said although I never understood what they meant by that. In any case, I wasn't bothered by what the grownups were thinking; all I wanted was to go to school.

But there was a big impediment to my yearning for education: my uncle. My father's brother, the same man who saw to it that I was sent to and brought back from Afram Plains, prevented me from going to school. I persisted so much that one day, going against the orders of our uncle/guardian, I started attending school with one of my cousins. Unfortunately for us, our uncle got to hear of it so on the second day when we were returning from the Balungu Primary school, he met us on the way and beat us mercilessly, reminding me of my ordeal at Afram Plains. After those beatings I gave up on my desire to go to school and kept to my task of heading cattle. Instead of a dream to learn and play with other children in school, I now had to be limited to the usual banter and petty fights with other children on the fields.

My mother was not happy about the fact that I was prevented from going to school but women didn't have much power to take such decisions so there was nothing she could do about it. One of our brothers, Atanga, was resilient enough to go to school in spite of the strict orders and punishment for his defiance. He went to school and became a teacher till he retired. He is currently the chief of Balungu.

Although I was prevented from going to school, I kept on imagining and dreaming of a better life and future.



1993, “12yrs old” me (left) after coming back from the Afram Plains

Chapter 3

FORCED TO GROW

I continued tending our cattle especially during the millet growing season when the crops had to be protected from stray animals. The animals had to be carefully tended by sending them far away from the farms in the morning and returning home with them in the evening. In the bush, we survived on millet and groundnuts that we had stacked in tiny bags. This work usually ceased after the season's crops had been harvested and the animals could be left on their own with little supervision as there were no longer crops to be protected. It was during one such period that my cousins and I had attempted going to school but we were beaten up and warned not to dare step foot in school as recounted in the previous chapter.

AnomaKojo and back

Although my mother couldn't do much when I was prevented from going to school, she had alternative plans for me. A short while after I was beaten up, my mother thought it wise to send me to AnomaKojo in the Eastern Region where one of my sisters and some cousins were based. She thought it was a better option than staying home idle.

My mother gave me money and saw me off up to the Bolgatanga station. Though I was quite young, I could go on my own. All I had to do was ask for directions and I arrived safely in AnomaKojo. At first, I used to look after the babies of my elder siblings while they went to work but I soon asked to be allowed to go to work with them at the small-scale mining (galamsey) pits.

I was allowed to join them to work one day and I realized it wasn't an easy job. I

had pain all over my body the following day so I declined to join them again. Hence, I had to continue looking after their children. After a few months in AnomaKojo, my father who had also come South (at Asuom) to do some menial work, visited us at AnomaKojo. He entreated me to return to Balungu and gave me transport fare for the trip back home.

A stint at Bawku

Back in Balungu, I had a persistent desire to find some employment from which to make life a bit comfortable. I therefore planned with a friend for us to travel to Bawku in search of paid jobs. One of our sisters was living in Bawku so we intended to go stay with her and look for something useful to do. It was an arduous trek, on foot from Balungu to Bawku. And when we finally got to Bawku we couldn't immediately locate my sister's place.

We lodged with an old lady who took us in and took very good care of us till we found our sister. I then found a job with one food vendor. She was good to us. However, after nearly three months in Bawku, I felt returning home to help our mother with her work would be better than what I was doing in Bawku. With the little money we had made from the work, my friend and I returned to Balungu.

Compelled to marry

A few months later, one lady from our town came to ask for my hand in marriage for her brother in-law. My guardian uncle wanted to accept this proposition. She started bringing gifts to my uncle. When my mother got to know of my uncle's scheme to give me out in marriage, she became furious and vehemently rejected the move. She then decided to rather give me to my elder sister's brother in-law

(her husband's younger brother) called Nyaaba. That way, I would be closer to my sister who would exercise some supervisory responsibility over me and prevent me from going through hardship. Following the maltreatment, I endured at Afram Plains, my mother resolved never to send me away to any stranger again. Although me would be partner not proposed to me, he willingly obliged to the arrangement and because of my mother's apprehensions, I followed her advice. On one market day when one of my sister's husband's relative returned to Bulungu, I left with him to Bongo. My sister Victoria was then at a place called Anoma Kojo, near AnomaKojo.

All along my uncle wasn't aware of my mother's plan and how I left for Bongo. So, when he found out, he was incensed but I had followed my mother's advice and gone away. And, because she was adamant all my uncle could do was to insist that the bride price of two cows and one ram paid instantly and in full. There was no ram at that time, so he demanded three cows and the matter got settled.

The reality however, was that I was still a child at the time I left home for Bongo. I was 15 years old and a virgin. Like many young girls who have had to endure forced child marriages- an illegality which still goes on- I was compelled to settle down with Nyaaba, a man I did not love. Of course, it wasn't a question of love; it was a matter of doing what the elders proposed. Indeed, my mother had to get me out because in any case my uncle was going to give me away. The only difference was that my mother rather wanted for me a more comfortable home than the one my uncle wanted to force me into. My uncle was insisting that I should be given away but my mother felt that if it was the bride price, he was interested in she would get him his bride price and give me to someone who would make life less stressful for me. My mother ultimately did what she did to protect me.

Foster and Faustina

Once I settled in Bongo, I had to attend to my duties as a wife. We were both busy going about our roles and responsibilities. Nyaaba used to go to the farm while I had to see to duties at home. Then, within a short time at Bongo, I got pregnant. My source of joy during that period was my mother's visits. She used to visit me frequently and I always looked forward to her visits. She would pass by almost every two days especially on Bolgatanga market days when she would bring food items from the house or from Bolgatanga and even money for milling millet. She was more concerned with my wellbeing than ever.

I gave birth to Foster, my first-born child on 4th June, 1997 at age 16. I delivered at home. It was a very painful experience because I was in labor for nearly 48 hours. Unfortunately, my mother was not available because in line with the norm then, my mother could only be informed after delivery. If she had been told of my labor, she would have insisted that I was sent to the hospital.

Nyaaba was also very anxious but there was nothing he could do. Apart from the herbalist, men were generally not allowed to come close. It was a herbalist who brought me some medicines and made some incisions before the baby could come out. It was not easy at all and at some point, I thought I was going to die. It was from that experience that I always have this belief that it is God who gives and takes. If you are bound to die, no doctor can save you and if it is God's Will that you live, nothing can prevent that.

Without proper planning, I got pregnant again barely 4 months after giving birth to Foster. My second childbearing was much easier compared to the first. I believe it was so because I was very active during my second pregnancy. I did a lot of work, beside house chores which is all I did during my first pregnancy. I used to sell cooked food carrying it on my head moving from house to house in Bongo and

nearby towns such as Balungu, Atampiisi, Via and Zorko. I would normally wake up around 2 am every day and by six in the morning, I was on my way.

One day on my way from my usual food sales, I began to feel some pains associated with labor. Those were days one wouldn't know the expected delivery date because we didn't attend antennal clinic. As labor pangs increased, a man helped me home and just as I got home, I gave birth to Faustina, my second child.

When I had Faustina, my husband was not around. He had sojourned to AnomaKojo Asuom in the Eastern region of Ghana to work. I was left alone to take care of our two children and this put a lot of strain on me. Life was increasingly becoming difficult and unbearable by the day. I had not yet received any remittance from Nyaaba and the little money I made from selling could not sustain us. Although my mother was supportive, she was aging and I didn't want to continue to burden her. I thought through my situation and decided that the best I could do was to also sojourn down South to earn a living.

Faustina was only three months old when I left for Kumasi to find a job. I left Foster with his grandmother (my mother-in-law).

Chapter 4

HUSTLING IN KUMASI AND ASUOM

God being so faithful, I got a job a day after I arrived in Kumasi. Someone directed me to a lady who sold curtains at Kejetia. The lady told me that her mother sold doughnuts and needed someone to assist her. I immediately agreed to serve her mother. The lady liked Faustina from the start and bought her some cloths, gave us food and allowed us be with her till she sent us to her mother at Aboabo in the evening.

Benevolent support

Her mother was equally hospitable. She gave us food to eat after which she gave us a room with a comfortable bed. We felt at home. I started work with her the following morning and she treated us with care. Her daughter too was checking up on us frequently. As I worked with her, one lady saw me and gave me many beautiful clothes. My life in Kumasi was a good one.

Unfortunately, however, my madam fell seriously sick and we couldn't work again. Nonetheless, she was still giving me money every day for upkeep but I felt I wasn't being fair. She was paying me for no job done and I couldn't keep accepting that. I felt I was taking her kindness for granted. I decided to start something with the money she had given me so I moved to stay with a woman from my hometown. She also accommodated us. I started cooking brown rice (mostly known as 'kwenkwen') for sale at the market. The woman used to take care of Faustina while I went to the market to sell the food. Everybody I met in Kumasi was so good to me and they made my short stay there easier.

After about three months in Kumasi, I felt an urgent need to lookout for my family as they had no knowledge of where I was and there were no mobile phones-for

ordinary people like me-to communicate with them. Mobile phones were then a luxury that only a few people could afford. My hosts in Kumasi were not happy about my wish to leave but they wished me well and I left to go and find my husband at AnomaKojo Asuom.

I didn't know exactly where Asuom was, so I had to ask my way to the place. It wasn't difficult to find Nyaaba as soon as I got to Asuom. He had established himself as a butcher so I found him at the abattoir. Nyaaba was very happy when he saw us. It had been a while since he left home and he was absent when I gave birth to Faustina so that was the first time seeing his daughter.

Life in Asuom

As soon as I got to Asuom, I had to find some work to do. I started by fetching water for people for a fee along with doing head pottery jobs that came my way. I later got to work for a woman (Nana Ama) who used to sell rice and stew at the Asuom lorry station. She was good to me and was paying me well too. Later, she fell ill and died. It was such a sad moment for me.

Looking back, I always feel grateful for the women who were kind to me during this period of my life. In a way, after my terrible experience at the Afram Plains, I met people who were really good to me. As it is of the polarities of our lives, sometimes in life you need to experience the bad to appreciate what is good although both experiences ultimately lead to forming us into better person if we pay attention to the lessons. Perhaps, I would not have appreciated much the kindness of people if I had not experienced that ordeal at the Afram Plains.

Over the years, I have learned to be grateful for kind gestures and content with what I have. So, I always tell my children to never expect me to buy luxurious cars and flashy things that have no purpose for them. The best I can offer them is

education and should I get more money than I need, I would rather invest in the lives of others. Life is never about competing with others for anything. Things should be as simple as they can be because life is but a fleeting moment. It's a pity to see people wasting money on material things while there are lives and projects worth investing in.

Father's demise

My father had also since travelled down South and was working at the diamond mines at Eti near Assin Fosu. We got a message that my father was seriously ill and in a critical condition so we sent for him to be brought from Eti to us so we could send him to the hospital. He got admitted at Akwatia hospital where I used to visit him. We found a young cousin, who had come to visit, to stay close to him at the hospital while we toiled to make some money for our father's upkeep and bills. My sister, Elisabeth, was then based at Nkwanta/Akwatia, also working on small scale mining sites.

After two months on admission, our father was discharged and travelled back home at Balungu to recuperate. He later came back to Asuom to check up on me in spite of the fact that he was still not very well. He just wanted make the journey to see me regardless of the consequences on his health. It was the last time I would see my father. When he went back home after this visit, his condition deteriorated and he never recovered. He died during the latter part of 1998.

Tough times

Later, life in Asuom became very difficult. I had to take up several menial jobs and it was so stressful. I started hawking light soup and getting the goat meat for the soup was easy because of my husband's occupation. Some of my customers were

workers at a rural bank in the town. I was on good terms with some of the staff and once told some of the female tellers of a dream I had of travelling abroad. They simply made mockery of my dream. To them, it was funny for a butcher's wife to dream of traveling abroad. But knowing that some of my dreams tend to come into reality (for instance, I dreamt of my mother's death before the news of her demise got to me), I didn't bother at all. I continued hustling, believing that things would get better. I was convinced that it was only a matter of time.

I became pregnant again at Asuom. When my delivery was due, I went to my elder sister, Elizabeth at Akwatsia and I delivered my third born, Isaac, at a hospital there. After delivery, I went to our hometown with the baby to spend some time with my mother since she was old now. It was during the harmattan and my mother was always saying the weather wasn't good for the baby so I should return to my husband's place. She was insistent so I had to return to Asuom. Little did I know that she was nearing her death and didn't want us around. She died shortly after I departed.

After the death of my mother, I asked my husband for money so I could contribute to the funeral arrangement. He refused to help. He had done a similar thing when my father died. He didn't

attend the funeral and I also couldn't because I didn't have money. Nyaaba was a typical miser. He hardly gave me money. Sometimes I took rice on credit to cook and sell but I wasn't making enough to pay back immediately as anticipated. I recall that even when some of my debtors had come to the house to demand their money amidst all the embarrassment, he wouldn't help even if he had. I knew he was saving money but he never gave me money.

Thus, when my husband refused to give me money to attend my mother's funeral, I got money from elsewhere and left for the North with Isaac, my youngest son.

However, we couldn't hold the funeral because my sisters couldn't come at that time due to financial constraints.

Unfortunately, the men we married were stingy and weren't supporting us. So, we decided to hold on till they were ready. I left Isaac with my mother in-law who was already taking good care of Foster (I sent them money from time to time) and I left with no intent of going back to live with Nyaaba at Asuom.

I really toiled at Asuom. Many people in that town know me for my hard work and perseverance. That's why when they heard of the cocaine issue a few years after I left there, they kept faith with me. Some of them called during the radio sections declaring my innocence and their belief that I would eventually be vindicated.

Moving on

I have never been an over-thinker. I am a woman of actions, always on the go.

I have always been a go-getter so any time I get an idea, I just go with it. If I fail, I just move on to the next

thing I can do. That is why when my husband refused to give me money for my mother's funeral, I didn't sit brooding over it but rather got a plan B. I had a little money from my trade so I managed to get to my hometown with it. So, when I got there, I asked myself why on earth I should even go back to him. He was not making any meaningful contribution to my life. He was not supporting me or the kids. Moreover, I married him because my mother wanted me to and as she was dead now what should still keep me there. Thus, I made up my mind to move to Accra sometime in 2003, having spent almost 7 years at Asuom.

A TRANSFORMED LIFE

It was not my first time in Accra. Prior to that, I had been paying a visit to a sister-in-law in Ashiaman from time to time. I was therefore quite familiar with Accra. Nonetheless the bustling life of the capital city was distinctively worlds apart from the slow-paced life I was used to in Asuom.

When I was leaving Asuom, my plan was to stay with a half-brother in Accra called John. John was the son of my father's last wife. He knew my mother very well for during his secondary school days, on his way home from school he would pass through my mother's home where he'd be treated to a meal or given some money by my mother. John however was not aware that I was coming to stay with him. Unlike today when mobile phones are common, I didn't have the means to contact him. In any case, he also didn't have any phone number to reach him on. In those days, barely two decades ago the best option for reaching others was through a nearby communications center.

Apart from not informing John, I also didn't know where he lived but I was sure to find him through some northerners at one of the areas in Kaneshie. Fortunately, I found someone who knew John and took me to him.

John wasn't happy I came without prior notice. Besides, he was married. I got there at night so we couldn't talk much. It was the following morning that I told him of all that had happened and my reason for coming to Accra. Upon hearing my reasons for leaving Asuom, John didn't want to host me for fear of being branded as abetting or having a part to play in my leaving my husband to come to Accra. But I assured him there was no need for him to worry.

“I do not plan to stay here for long. I would return home when our mother’s funeral is due. I only need a place to keep my stuff and to spend the weekends,” I said. He grudgingly allowed me to keep my stuff at his residence. His wife was a very good woman and she made me feel welcome there. Meanwhile, back in Asuom, I had left my children, (Foster, Faustina and Isaac) in the care of my husband. I made him believe I would return shortly. He therefore had no clue of my intention to settle in Accra and leave him for good.

Finding a job

I planned finding a job to make some money. I needed to earn something as soon as possible so as to make some financial contribution towards the impending funeral of my mother back home in Bongo. I had no particular work in mind. Any menial job that would pay was okay for me.

It took me five days before I found work to do. I went job hunting and got employed by a food vendor at Kantamanto, a popular market area in the center of Accra. I joined a team of girls who had been employed already. The vendor was a Kotokoli woman who cooked food for sale at the Timber Market. The job came with accommodation so I would go to John’s residence only on weekends.

However, my work with the food vendor was short-lived. Some of the customers started making sexual advances at me to the extent of indecently touching my body. I could not endure the harassment and instinctively protested. Some of the customers took offence, interpreting my reaction as rudeness and complained to my employer. She would rather dispense with my services than risk losing her customers in the competitive food vending environment of Timber Market. I consequently lost my job along with its perk of free lodgings after just a week.

I thus had to search for new lodgings with part of the money I had made for the week and I found a twenty pesewas-per-night (2,000 old cedis) lodging patronized mostly by *kayayie* (*head potters*). I shared the small room with other *kayayie* who equally needed a place to lay their heads. I then decided to invest the rest of the money I had made in hawking oranges at Kantamanto. That turned out to be more rewarding than my previous work.

John ‘disappears’

I still went to my half-brother’s residence at the weekend. On Sundays we went to church together. One weekend, I went to John’s place as usual only to be told my brother and his wife had packed out. They had relocated to a new place earlier that week on Monday, a day after I had spent the weekend and gone to church with them. They had left my stuff with a co-tenant and just moved on. The co-tenant told me he wished he could take me in but his place was too small to accommodate another. I had no option than to go back to the *kayayie*’s lodgings at Kantamanto.

I called home to enquire if any of my siblings had come there. I was told they hadn’t. I went on with my life and continued hawking the oranges. It wasn’t safe keeping my money on me so I started saving with a man who operated a *susu* scheme.

Chapter 5

GIUSEPPE BOTTA CARLO

I sent the oranges to the Accra Arts Center one day and there I met a man called Isaiah. He bought some of the oranges and as we got talking, he asked where I came from and if I'd be interested in being employed as a house-girl at the residence of some expatriates. I was thrilled by that offer and told him to contact me any time he found something for me. I met him at the Arts Center days later and he told me he had found a job for me so I should see him after my sales. I went to meet him later in the day and we went to Paloma Hotel where he introduced me to the European who needed the services of a house help. He was an Italian engineer called Joseph Carlo. I couldn't speak or understand English that much then so Isaiah did the translation. He told us he got to the country not long ago to manufacture a chocolate factory at Spintex named Monta and was yet to be given his residence so I should give him a few days to sort out his accommodation issues before he could start work. He gave us his number but because of the language barrier, I had to resort to Isaiah anytime I wanted to contact Carlo.

Carlo asked us to meet him at Paloma another time. This time, he introduced us as his friends to his boss, Monta. Later, Isaiah informed me one day that Carlo had expressed interest in me and was prepared to take very good care of me. Because Isaiah and I had become friends, he knew I had a husband whom I did not want to be with anymore. So, he told Carlo about it. I kept going to see him at Paloma with Isaiah and Carlo started giving me money and other gifts.

I called back home to get updates on the funeral arrangement but they were still not ready.

One day, Carlo promised to see me through school if I formalized divorce with my

husband to be with him. He was ready to take good care of me. I knew this was an opportunity I couldn't let go. I had already left my husband's home and had vowed never to return. I had lost all hope in that marriage so taking the decision was quite easy. I went to discuss with one elderly woman I knew and she asked me what I really wanted. Annulling marriages during those days was not an easy task. Before going to see the woman, I had had a dream in which my mother warned me not to return to our hometown not even for her funeral. The woman told me I could go ahead if I was very positive about the decision to leave my husband for the white man.

The transformation

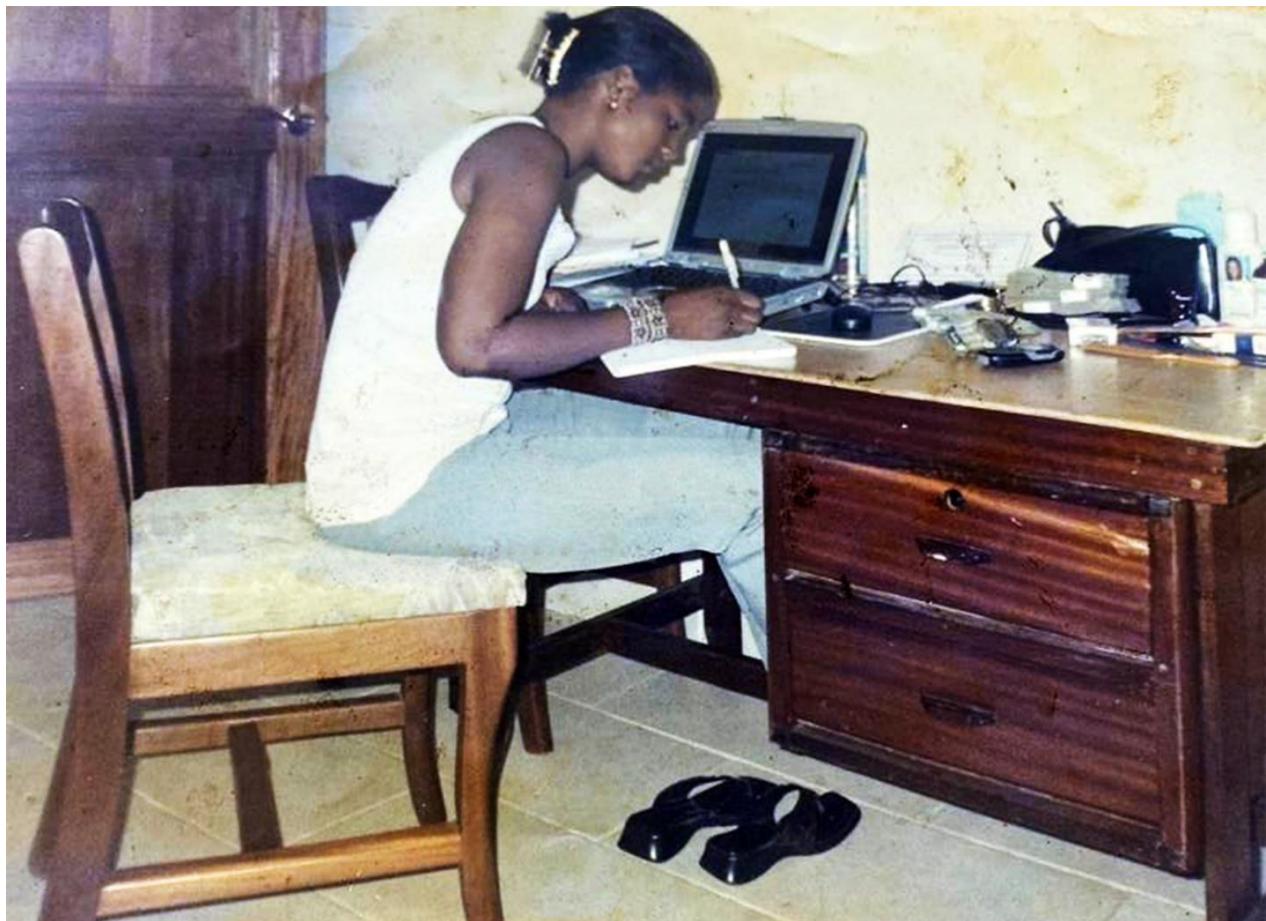
Weeks later, Carlo got his apartment at Manet Estates sorted and I became a frequent guest of his. He took me to a boutique to get me new clothes, bought me a mobile phone and told me to stop hawking. My life had taken a drastic turn and many were amazed at my transformation. I called my sister, Victoria and found that the funeral rites had begun and they were not happy I was not present. As the lastborn of my mother, there were rites I had to perform during the ceremony so my absence was really felt. I told her about the dream I had and the happenings in my life and why I couldn't make it. I told her to get back to me when they were done with everything.

After the funeral, Victoria went to Asuom to inquire about me from my husband. He told her he had heard I was in Accra. She called for directions to my place and she came over to Accra for a visit. Carlo then was sharing an apartment with a Philipino colleague so there was no way I could host my sister where I lived with Carlo. When she visited, she was against my decision to leave my husband. Both of us had married from the same family so she didn't think quitting was a wise

decision. But I made it clear to her that for me to even get the opportunity to date a white man was a stroke of luck. I was undeserving of such good life looking at where I was coming from. But just as a cocoon transforms into a beautiful butterfly, I believed such was God's plan for me and I was always grateful and humbled.

Being with Caro was a total transformation. Things had gotten better for me in a matter of just six months in Accra. True to his word, Caro got me enrolled as a student at the Accra Workers College. Initially, I found it very challenging grasping the lessons at Workers College. But I was determined and fortunately for me I had a good teacher. She was a very good woman and she was very patient with me. She painstakingly took me through the lessons and she was very particular about me constantly speaking of the English language.

The course at Workers College was for one year, but I couldn't go for the whole one year due to some challenges along the line. During my school time, Caro went back to Italy for holidays. I was still attending the classes while he was away. He came back later and he had some issues with his job so he had to quit and find another job. He found another with Consar Limited in Tarkwa so he had to relocate there. He helped me rent a place at East Legon so I could continue with my classes. I used to visit him frequently and that disrupted my schooling. I eventually decided to quit school and join him at Tarkwa.



Learning English at workers college time

By the time I joined Carlo in Tarkwa, I could express myself well in the English Language. We could now communicate better.

Changes

Carlo helped me a lot. He played a very instrumental role in my life, enabling me to live a dignified life with peace of mind. After some time with Carlo at Tarkwa, he declared his intention to marry me.

However, after a few months at the Tarkwa mines, the gold business started a declining trend. He worked until his contract ended when he decided to return to Italy. We came back to Accra. He made the arrangements to take me along but we couldn't get anyone to guarantee that I'd return to Ghana after my visit. Mr. Andrew Awuni, then deputy minister for information and native of the area I hail from, gave me some assurances and I was looking up to him to serve as guarantor but he disappointed us so my visa application failed. We weren't married at that time but Carlo planned to marry me once I got to Italy with him. But under the circumstances, he had to leave for Italy without me.

I resumed school at the Workers College and before leaving, Carlo bought me my first car to help make my going to school easier. He then left for Italy with the intention of making arrangements for me to join him later.

During this period, I drove to AnomaKoj Asuom in my Opel sports car and I recall how people, especially the workers at the Asuom rural bank were mesmerized at my transformation. Joyce, the cashier was thrilled. I returned to Accra with my daughter, Faustina, whom we sent to a Catholic boarding school.

Later, Carlo came back to Ghana. He had gotten a new job at Mozambique so he came to see me before going on to start the next phase of his career. We were still trying to get the visa but he had to leave in the process. My rent at East Legon expired at that time and the landlord said he wasn't going to give the room out for rent again so he didn't take our money. Carlo had to leave so he asked me to find a new place and let him know. He left and kept sending me money for my upkeep.

After Carlo left for Italy, I couldn't easily find a place to stay. In the meantime, I paid for a 3- month's affordable temporal accommodation at Greenleaf hotel at Osu while searching for an

apartment to rent. While at the hotel, I went to a boutique to shop one day and there met Edem, a young lady who soon became my friend. She used to visit me at the hotel every now and then and we really bonded very well.

On one occasion, Edem and I went out and about town when we met another lady called Lydia. She said she had come from Koforidua to find a job but had not found one and had nowhere to stay. She pleaded with me to allow her be my house-help and accommodate her. She promised to serve me well. It was surprising how she approached us and my friend Edem advised me against taking her in. She doubted her story but I was touched so even though I had no permanent place myself, I took her in to stay with me at the hotel. Lydia stayed with me for some time and she was a very respectful and humble lady. She was so industrious too.

Another attempt at getting a visa

During that period, someone connected me to one travel agent who we were very certain could help with the process of acquiring a visa. He owned a girls' football training academy at Anyaa, a suburb of Accra and that was the network we learned he used to get visas for people. I told Carlo and we decided to give it a try. I sold my Opel car and Carlo sent me extra money to add to the amount from the sale and paid the man with the hope that he'd help me acquire the Italian visa. He made me join the academy and we trained for weeks. That didn't work out and he didn't refund my money either.

Carlo was very disappointed my second attempt at acquiring an Italian visa

didn't work out. Things started getting tough for me and somehow, I couldn't reach Carlo again. His number wasn't going through and I had no idea what happened. I did not know whether he had lost his phone or he had given up on me all together.

Moments of desperation and survival

I was saddened I could not connect with Carlo. Then in the midst of all that, my three month's rents at the hotel expired and I had no money to pay to renew. It was as if things were suddenly conspiring against me. I had spent the money I had from the sale of my car and what Carlo sent on trying to secure a visa and I was left broke and frantically helpless.

Lydia and I returned from town one day to meet an unpleasant incident. The Greenleaf hotel management had locked our room and they were not ready to give us our belongings unless we paid for the days we had stayed after my rent expired. I didn't have any money so we left the hotel premises and strolled through Osu. We ended up at another hotel around the Arko Adjei park and had to tell to the management of the hotel. We told them we had just come from the North and we forgot our luggage in the bus so we were stranded and had no money on us. They were kind to us and told us to wait for their boss to come. When they informed their boss, he allowed us to be accommodated with no guarantee of payment. For us, it was a miracle; we believed God was at work on our behalf.

We got our room and we were so hungry so we left for Papaye restaurant. We didn't even have money on us to buy any food. There was a woman selling rice near the restaurant and we went to buy from her. After serving us, she asked for the

money and we told her we had given her money already and she even had to give us a change. It was a lie but we had to be smart or we would starve. She gave us the change. My mobile phone developed some fault too and I still couldn't reach Carlo. We decided to linger around for some time so I could try calling Carlo from the communication center nearby. We had to find a place to wait so we bought one bottle of Malta Guinness with the change we had from the woman at a spot opposite Papaye.

Chapter 6

DAVID VASQUEZ

As Lydia and I shared the bottle of malt at the spot, a prominent man came over and offered to buy us drinks and meat. We opted for bottles of malt. He bought us food and we talked for some time. From the way he spoke and looked at me, I knew he was interested in me. As we were talking, I noticed a white man nearby beckoning me to come but I ignored him. But ignoring him didn't put him off. He walked up to our table, introduced himself as David Vasquez and asked who the prominent man was to us. We said he was our uncle. He gave me his card and another to the man with us. David said he lived at Cantonments but had to rush home so he would join us soon for us to talk. He left and joined us later as he promised.

We had a good time chatting but as it was getting late, we alerted the gentlemen that it was time for us to go. It was time to part ways. The other man (our 'uncle') went his way, hoping to see us soon. In his absence, Vasquez offered to drop us home. We didn't want him to know where we were lodging so we told him we lived with an aunt of ours who wouldn't take it lightly if she saw a man had come to drop us. So, we got off at the park and he gave me US\$100.

A dramatic day it was! Whenever I think of the events of that day, I feel embarrassed about the lie we told the food vendor. Nonetheless, through my experiences of the vicissitudes of life, I have no doubt that God would always write straight with a seemingly crooked line.

Moving on

The following morning, I went to repair my phone and changed the dollars into cedis. We paid for the hotel room and kept the rest for our upkeep. All this while, I was still trying Carlo's number to no avail. I called David Vasquez to thank him and we kept in touch. About two days later, David called and said that he wanted to take us out for shopping because he felt we needed a change of clothes. We smelled badly and he didn't hide it from us. We had worn the same clothes since they seized our clothes at our former hotel. He took us out and bought us many clothes, perfumes, provisions and what have you.

We still didn't let him see our place so he dropped us off at the usual place and we struggled to get the things to our room. He gave me US\$500 to sort out other things we needed. I went to settle the debt at the Greenleaf hotel and got back our stuff.

Settling again

Vasquez was very good to us and took us out frequently. He went to show me his place of residence and it was after that that he proposed to me. I had lost all hope of ever reaching Carlo again so after some time, I accepted Vasquez's proposition. He told me he wanted to rent a place for me so I could leave my aunt's place. He gave me five thousand dollars. Out of that money, I gave Lydia two thousand dollars to go back to her mother at Koforidua. I sent some to my sister and some for the upkeep of my daughter whom Carlo had supported for me to bring her from Asuom to put in a boarding school in Accra. I bought a television and other stuff for my boys back at Asuom with their father.

I found a new place at East Legon and Lydia used to visit sometimes. I used to cook

for Vasquez and his friends. Later, he said my room at East Legon was too small; he wanted me to move to a bigger place. I got an agent who took me around to check out places. We found one 6-bedroom house at Cantonment going for two thousand five hundred dollars per month. I felt it was quite expensive but Vasquez said it was okay and he paid for two years advance. He joined me at Cantonment and we started co-habiting. He was so welcoming. My family could come over any day and I could also pay them visits. As far as I knew, he was a very good man and I saw nothing suspicious in his dealings.

Meanwhile, I had still not gotten over the fact that I didn't know where Carlo was and why he had not been in touch. From time to time, I would try his contact numbers, all to no avail.

In all, David and I stayed together at the Cantonment residence for about six months before the whole cocaine brouhaha started. During the period I was with him, he had an office at Osu, working as Managing Director of Compimchex Ltd. He used to trade in gold and diamonds and I would often go and work with him. Even though he had two secretaries, Rosita and Mohammed, I was the one seeing to the transactions with clients. He had plans of starting an oil and gas company at Tema. One of his business associates who would come to his office from time to time was Rojo Mettle-Nunoo who was referred to as a consultant.

David later opened a boutique for me. It was called Afrodita and located at Osu near Venus restaurant. Although it was registered as a subsidiary of his company, it was mine to run.

Afrodita became a very popular boutique within a short time. We launched it at the International Conference Centre. We sold lingerie which was imported mostly from Columbia. It was a very profitable venture. Lydia, my friend came back from Koforidua to help manage Afrodita.

No suspicions

As I mentioned earlier, I never had any cause to suspect Vasquez was into any illicit business. I was not privy to anything that was illicit. I was unaware perhaps because I was a very naive person and I was just focused on the business of trading in gold and managing the boutique. He did not seem to have anything to hide. But with all that I went through, I now know better, that drug dealers are smart and very meticulous about their dealings so it is difficult to detect if someone is involved in the illicit drug trade.

Upon reflection, I realize it is possible David would have eventually let me in on his trade and as has been explained to me by some security experts, I was in one way or the other being recruited by him. It is also even possible that although the lingerie business was mine, it could in the end have passed as a front for the drug business, as I suspect his gold and diamond dealership firm must have served a similar purpose of laundering drug money. Even though this insight makes a lot of sense, it is difficult to accept that that had been David's plan all along. He was a very generous and unassuming person; very simple and kind. He genuinely cared about me so I would never think of him as someone who was just exploiting me for his selfish gains.

I would soon have a rude awakening of the reality surrounding the man I was in a relationship with. The quiet life that I had and cherished would be shattered as I appeared on headlines of national news bulletins in the twist and turns of a cocaine scandal. It all started with an incident at Mempeasem, a suburb of East Legon in Accra.

Chapter 7

MEMPEASEM

The word *Mempeasem* literally means, “I do not want trouble”. The irony of this part of my story is that the troubles I had started at a place called Mempeasem, a well-known suburb of East Legon in Accra. The story of how I became the center of attention in the seizure of 559kg of cocaine (worth \$36 million), during the latter part of 2005 and subsequent events throughout 2006 are well known. But the story, as it unfolded and appeared on national media was full of carefully crafted disinformation and falsehood to discredit my account because I was a ‘nobody’ fighting a system of a sophisticated cabal as well as senior police officers and government officials who had interests to protect.

It is, thus, an imperative that I tell my side of the story of how that cocaine story unfolded. I have no shred of doubt that I was framed up in a grand cover-up scheme to protect the interests of the real players behind the scenes in that cocaine scandal which rocked the nation.

Plot 348, Mempeasem

In the course of our stay at Cantonment, Vasquez once asked me to look for accommodation to rent for some relatives who were due to come to Ghana for a vacation and to tour the country. I just searched for the place and notified him I had found one (plot number 348) at Mempeasem in East Legon. He gave me the money to go and pay. The amount he gave me was forty-five thousand dollars.

Like the Cantonment house, the house in East Legon was also rented in my name.

I saw nothing fishy about having to rent the places in my name, mainly because, Vasquez used to travel a lot so I felt he made me use my name because I was in the country. He could travel and be away for between a one week and three weeks. I was made to believe that most of these travels had to do with establishing an oil and gas company at Tema and it kept him busy.

Shortly after securing the house at Mempeasem, only one of his visitors, Joel, whom he introduced as his cousin arrived in Ghana. We took Joel to stay at Plot 348, Mempeasem as planned.

The arrest

Joel wasn't fluent in English although he was able to express himself quite well. We found a young man to stay with Joel so as to help him polish his English language and to assist him whenever he went out, especially if he wanted to buy something.

In the afternoon of Thursday, 24th November, 2005, Joel and his aid had gone to Madina market to purchase a SIM card for Joel when the whole incident started. Apparently, when they got back, Joel was arrested along with another man, Castillo.

As for the Castillo guy who was arrested along with Joel, I still do not know what his identity was and how he got into the picture. Of course, the policemen claimed it was because he was a Venezuelan and they saw him around the residence at the time of the arrest. I knew all Vasquez's friends in Ghana and he clearly was not familiar to me. Joel also insisted he didn't know Castillo and he got involved into the whole matter.

The payment

I was home when Vasquez called me and said I should take some money to someone at the Mempeasem residence. This was not unusual because it was common in the gold business to move money at short notice. Such transactions were a normal thing. So, I went to the office for the money (\$200,000 thousand dollars) and headed to the residence. When I got there around 3pm, there were two men at the residence. I hadn't met them before and I didn't know they were policemen because they were not in uniform.

I had no idea some arrests had been made and had no clue whatever was happening. Vasquez didn't tell me the details of that payment I was supposed to make. All I knew was I had to send an amount to some people at the residence.

“How are you doing?” asked one of the men who were waiting for me at the residence. I said I was fine. When I inquired about the whereabouts of Joel, the gentlemen told me he had gone out. I tried reaching Joel's aid to no avail.

The man who asked me how I was doing, obviously the leader of the duo asked me again if I was the one Vasquez asked to bring the money.

“Yes,” I responded.

“Follow me, let's go outside” he said.

I followed him outside the house as directed. As we were exiting the house, the man asked me to meet him with the money at the Tetteh Quarshie Interchange. I told him I was busy and had to attend to work back at home so he should just take it for me to go back. He insisted he had to do a few things so I should meet him at the preferred location. I did as he said. I went to park my car at the African Regent Hotel and walked to the meeting point.

I waited for a long time at the Tetteh Quarshie Interchange for the man and I kept calling Vasquez and he insisted I do as the man had said. He came later in a police

car which startled me because I'd seen no police car at the residence. He came out of the car and told me we should get into the car for us to go to the police station because it was not safe to receive such a huge amount in the open. He was already aware of the amount of money I was to deliver to him and I had also stated the amount at the Mempeasem residence. I thought he probably came along with some police for security reasons. I still had no clue who he was.

So, I left my car at the African Regent Hotel and left with the man in the police car, all the way, not to a simple police station, but to the headquarters of the Ghana Police Service. It was at the headquarters that I started suspecting something could be wrong. The man asked me to wait while he went to an office to talk to someone. While waiting for the man to return to me, I attempted to reach Joel but could not get to him. I asked the man after he returned,

“Why did you decide to bring me here?” I asked.

“For security reasons,” he said.

I still wasn't convinced because two hundred thousand dollars could fit into my small handbag so it was not an amount that couldn't be checked anywhere. I could have safely transferred the money to him in the car.

I demanded a receipt before handing over the money to him. He said that wouldn't be necessary as he was in tandem with Vasquez so I should just give him the money. I insisted on getting the receipt else I was not going to give him the full amount because there would be no other way of ascertaining that the money had been delivered to the right person. I needed proof of payment. I offered to give him one hundred and seventy thousand dollars and later if I found out he was the one, I would add the rest. So, he accepted and took it. I took a taxi to the African Regent and went for my car and I went to Vasquez at his office.

I told Vasquez what had transpired and he told me he had already been briefed. I explained to him why I did what I had done.

This was not the first time I was handling a payment transaction on behalf of Vasquez but the stress that the man put me through, the delays and all made me become suspicious. Any of the previous transactions hadn't been as complex so I thought the man was a wrong person who was out to swindle us. Also, taking receipts had been the norm in the gold business; everyone I had ever made payments to had issued a receipt so why should this one be any different? Vasquez told me to return the remaining thirty thousand dollars to him the following day.

When I met the man, asked why I had been reluctant to give him the full amount the previous day and I told him my reasons. That's when he mentioned that if only, I had any idea what that money was for, I wouldn't have acted the way I did. Then he told me there was an issue and that the residents at the Mempeasem apartment were in serious trouble and that the money was needed for some vital information at the airport to be altered in order to clear Vasquez's name and any connections with Joel.

He didn't give me any more details so I didn't know it was in connection with drugs. It was after the weekend, on the following Monday that I saw in the news that the police had discovered some quantity of cocaine at the residence in East Legon and had arrested Joel and Castillo. This news got me the more confused. I soon discovered that the man I had been dealing with and given the money to was, apparently a senior police officer: Superintendent Edward Tabiri (then at the Property Fraud Unit of the Ghana Police Service). I never wanted trouble but trouble had surely found me.

Chapter 8

TIMES OF TROUBLE

The grounds for how I became a scapegoat were two false allegations against me. First, that I was an informant and second, that the money I gave to Superintendent Tabiri was a bribe. These were the basis of creating a narrative by the powers that be to discredit me. But for the fact of my outspoken nature and how I spoke out, I would have ended up in prison. I also now realize that perhaps the powers that be feared that because I had lived with Vasquez, the man at the heart of the cocaine ring, I knew more and could spill the beans. Meanwhile, to ensure that the cover-scheme worked, one of the first things the powers that be did was to facilitate-using the police and immigration officers- the escape of Vasquez from the shores of Ghana.

Vasquez escapes

A couple of days after witnessing the news of the arrest of Joel and Castillo in the news, Vasquez left home. I recall that, the morning of the day he left he sent me to go and take some money from a friend of his at East Legon for him. I did as direct and brought Vasquez an amount of about 25 million dollars. When I brought the money, he told me he wanted to leave the country for some time because of the incident so I should use that money for all the legal proceedings in defense of Joel. He also asked me to contact Supt. Tabiri who connected me to Lawyer Atta Akyea to serve as Joel's counsel.

When Vasquez told me to keep the money and use it to sort out Joel's case, it did not occur to me that he was also involved in the case as the prime suspect. My understanding-obviously due to my naiveté- was that because the house Joel was arrested in was rented in my name, Vasquez had reasoned I was the best person to handle the case and support Joel. I never knew I would be connected to the case.

Well, Mr. Atta Akyea charged \$40,000 thousand dollars and promised to help Joel get bailed. For the other guy, Castillo, we knew him from nowhere so he was not our responsibility. Once, I was assured of bail for Joel, my next challenge was how to safely keep the huge dollars Vasquez had left. I didn't want to keep it anywhere in the house and I couldn't also take it to the bank as Vasquez had firmly instructed me not to. By the time I was done sorting legal services for Joel, I had asked enough questions to have some details about the case. I needed to be careful while doing my best to help. Thus, for safety reasons, I drove to Bodua, near Akwatia with the bulk amount of dollars and left them with my sister for safe keeping. The plan was that whenever the need arose to make any payments in respect of the case, I would drive to Bodua for whatever amount that was required. Under the circumstances, I felt it was the best thing to do.

How the framing started

One week later, Vasquez came back home with a cousin who was with his wife and 3-year-old son. Vasquez said he had some issues to sort out in Venezuela so he needed the money. I explained to him that I had sent it to Bodua for safe keeping. Hence, Vasquez along with his cousin's family accompanied me to Bodua for the money. Many people at Bodua can testify that I went there with some whites during that period. I handed back Vasquez's money to him, intact.

When we got to Achimota on our way from Bodua, I got a call from Lawyer Atta

Akyea, who was serving as counsel for Joel, that there had been a new development so he wanted to see me at his office. I informed Vasquez and he told me to go and see him. He was going with his cousin to meet a friend of his called Solomon who was present on the day he gave me the 25 million dollars. When I got to Atta Akyea's office, what he told me was something not relevant and he could have even said on the phone. It was later that I learnt Vasquez had been informed that I had tipped off the police for the arrests so the call from Atta Akyea was just a plan to get me off his back. He thought he couldn't trust me anymore and that was why he came for the dollars he had given me earlier. They had painted me black to him that I connived with my family and the police to arrest them take the drugs and share the money from its sale. The people who had interest in the matter managed to put a wedge between us.

From what I gathered; it was that same night following our trip to Bodua that Vasquez left the country. That evening, when I got home after the meeting with Atta Akyea, I tried calling Vasquez several times but I couldn't reach him. Somebody had managed to make him distrust me completely. If indeed I wanted to stab him in the back and take his money, why then would I even be stupid enough to give it back to him? If indeed that was my intention, I would have kept it. But whatever it is that he heard, he believed it and left the country without a farewell. I went back to my boutique business and moved on with my life. However, the storm was not yet over.

My arrest

Apparently, as it would later become clear to me during the trial, the police and whoever was scheming behind the scenes wanted to create the impression that Vasquez was out of the country at the time Joel was arrested. That was their plan

and they wanted to pin the whole thing on me. I had to be sacrificed. Consequently, after Vasquez left the country and I went on minding my business, the police invited me to the police headquarters and detained me. The police claimed that because, house number 348, Mempeasem was rented in my name, I was a suspect in the case.

I passed the night in the cell and I was so vexed and disappointed because I was innocent in the whole thing. Tabiri sent me to his superior, Mr. David Asante-Apeatu, the following day and he told me I have been involved in all these because I rented the place for Joel, so they had to go and search my residence at Cantonments, opposite the National Film and Television Institute (NAFTI). This was my first encounter with Asante-Apeatu, the soviet-trained forensic expert who had led in investigations into serial murders of about 30 women during the late 1990s.

I went with the police to search my residence and they found nothing. From there, they ordered me to go with them to Vasquez' office and then to Afrodita. At the office too, the police found nothing implicating. But they took my computer along with them to their headquarters for further investigation. Meanwhile the fridge and other items at the Mempeasem house had been taken away by the police and never accounted for.

After the search, I was taken back to Apeatu's office. There, Apeatu asked if I knew Vasquez's partners or associates, I should give the names so they could go and arrest them.

"I don't know any of his associates," I responded.

"You have been arraigned before the court. Because the house was rented in your name, you are an accomplice," the police chief declared and directed that I should be sent back to the cell.

Back in the cells, Supt. Tabiri, came to ask me what I intended telling the court. I told him I would tell the court exactly my part in the whole matter, which is the rent and the money I paid to him (Tabiri) because that is how I got dragged into the case.

“I have not been to the court before but I heard before I even testify, I would be given a Bible to swear to say nothing but the truth so that is exactly what I would say: the truth,” I stated.

Then Tabiri assured me that I shouldn’t worry and that they would release me. Every night he would come to my cell to assure me that everything will be fine and that I shouldn’t talk to anyone. Atta Akyea was by default my lawyer because we had already paid him when the case started. He was therefore called by the police to come to my rescue. He saw to my release that same day and I was told I was cleared of all allegations so I could go home and move on with my life. But intuitively, I did not trust the matter was over because among other things, the police did not give me back the computer which they seized from my office. Feeling that they were likely other allegations to follow, I resolved to act smart and cautious.

Being extra cautious

Following my gut feelings, I decided to put a recorder on me and get Tabiri to admit he took 200 thousand dollars from me to settle some issues that Vasquez had (I found out later the money was purportedly used to get Vasquez through the Ghana Immigration and sneaked, so that it was recorded he was not in the country when the arrests occurred). Obviously, they could have published his photo but this didn’t happen as the powers that be who were likely to be implicated, wanted to eliminate any trace of Vasquez.

I started frequenting Tabiri's office with the reason that I needed my computer. I realized anytime I went there, he would take my bag from me before any conversation between us. On one fateful day, I placed the recorder in my underwear and went to the office. He took my bag as usual and asked if I had heard from Vasquez.

"No sir," I said.

"If you hear from him, tell him to compensate us for the huge risk we took to help him," said, Tabiri.

I acted I was naïve to the help he was referring to so I asked him what help he was talking about and he said they were the ones who helped him escape from the country. I then referred him to the two hundred thousand dollars I gave him and told him I think that was enough a payment for the help. He told me that money wasn't for him alone and that his superior Apeatu and others took their shares. All this while, I had my recorder safely hidden on me so all he said was recorded. I told him Vazquez didn't even bid me farewell when he was leaving so I had no idea he owed him or any police officer anything. I asked to use the washroom and he gave me my bag. I was not interested in any discussion with him again because all I wanted was to get him to confess, he had received an amount of \$200,000 thousand dollars from me on behalf of Vasquez and I had accomplished that.

One of the reasons I had to act smart was that I had heard rumors that I was an informant of the police and that I knew about the whole business when renting the house for Joel. I used to overhear Vasquez's Cuban secretary, Rosetta (Rosa Iris Dosoo) and her associates discuss it.

And she brought it up one day during a heated argument between us that I was an informant and after all that Vasquez did for me, I betrayed him. I discerned the matter was going to escalate and I needed something to defend myself when the

time came. The police had no basis for searching my residence at Cantonment, yet they did and that was suspicious. I may not have gone to school to have book education, but I was not dumb and as usual I followed my instincts.

After using the washroom, Tabiri took me to the office of Ampewuah, another officer who had my computer. Mr. Patrick Ampewuah, then deputy director of the Criminal Investigations Department (CID) told me they would give me my computer but I should not let anyone know I gave any money to police officers and that everything would be sorted. I got to know he was also part of those who planned the whole conspiracy but I had already taken the recorder from my underwear when I went to use the washroom so I couldn't record him. I went back home and kept the recorder at a safe place. I kept calling Tabiri concerning my computer. I needed it for my business and he kept telling me to exercise patience. I went back again and Ampewuah promised to give me the computer and warned me not to disclose anything concerning their involvement in the issue to anyone.

Matter resurfaces

A few months went by without anyone disturbing me with any drug dispute. I traveled to London for holidays. While in London, I went on the internet to send an email and that's when I saw a big issue regarding a vessel called M.V. Benjamin. This was during the latter part of April 2006.

Apparently, the M.V. Benjamin docked at Kpone, near Tema on the night of 26th April, 2006 and discharged 77 parcels of cocaine (with each parcel weighing about 30kg). 76 parcels were loaded into a waiting vehicle for onward delivery to the owners. When the security officers appeared on the scene, only one parcel was found on the ship with the 76 parcels purported to have disappeared. Interestingly, a few days later while the MV Benjamin was docked at the Tema port it mysteriously

caught fire. There was a public outcry for Government to set up a fact-finding committee.

Someone called me from Accra to tell me the Mempeasem cocaine saga had reemerged in connection to the M.V. Benjamin issue and I was in the papers that I had tried bribing the police with an amount of \$100,000 thousand dollars which they rejected and I had escaped from the country. The report that I was in the news again for bribing the police sounded bizarre and preposterous.

I hurriedly came back to Ghana and I bought the Daily Guide to read what had been published about me. I was taken back so I called Gina Blay, the Managing Editor of Daily Guide newspaper, that I wanted to have a meeting with her and Ato Sam (popularly called Baby Ansaba), the Managing Editor of the Punch Newspaper concerning the controversy and that it was not as reported in the papers. I met with them in my office, and told them the details of the matter insisting that there had never been an instance of my trying to bribe the police. Also, I did not flee the country as alleged and that the police cleared me of any connection to the case and told me I was free so I traveled to London and I returned as soon as I heard the news.

After explaining my side of the story to the senior journalists, Gina Blay told me she couldn't publish it because of the severity of the matter. Rather, she would take me to Hon. Kan Dapaah, the Minister of Interior so I tell him what I had told them. I met her the following day and she sent me to Kan Dapaah's office. I repeated the story to him and substantiated with the recording. He requested I let him keep the recording and I told him it was the only copy I had so I wanted to keep it. He insisted so I gave it to him. However, it was not the case that I had only one copy of the recording. I managed to make a few more copies and hid them.

The threats

Interestingly, the evening after meeting Hon. Kan Dapaah, I had a call from someone I believed to be Ampewuah, threatening me. I had no doubt it was Ampawuah because I had spoken to him in person while he had my seized computer, so I knew his voice. I was on the lookout for a call from the police after my meeting with Kan Dapaah and I intended to record any call that came from them. I purposely stalled him by repeating ‘who is this?’ just so I could get my recorder to record. He refused to reveal his identity and was asking why I was going about telling people I gave them two hundred thousand dollars or four hundred thousand dollars. I knew it was obviously Tabiri who had asked him to call me and for him to appear to not know the exact amount made it interesting to me because it could mean Tabiri didn’t divulge the actual amount to him. I told him I didn’t know of any other amounts but two hundred thousand dollars Tabiri had received from me and I have not told anyone about it.

“You bitch, who told you to tell people we collected money,” he said.

Then he said they were giving me 24 hours to leave the country and if I refused to comply, they’d kill me because I was going around telling people I have given them money just to endanger their jobs. I told him their job is not to be taking bribes from people and asked which job he was talking about. He called me a whore and repeated his threats. I replied that being a whore was better than taking bribes from people. He ended the call and called again. I stopped the recording since I had recorded his threats. He repeated his threats.

I called Kan Dapaah to tell him Ampewuah had called to threaten me. He asked how I knew it was Ampewuah and I told him I was confident it was him because I

recognized his voice. I told him they said if I was still in the country after twenty-four hours, they would kill me.

“I don’t see why this should be a matter of concern to me,” said Kan Dapaah.

“Sir, you should be concerned because I came to you with my side of the story and you took the recording from me and you instructed that I should call in the event that anything happened,” I said.

Kan Dapaah said he would call me later and he ended the call. I waited for a while and when he didn’t get back to me, I called him again. He asked how I knew it was Ampewuah. Then I replied that even if it was not Ampewuah, I was threatened because I came to him. He was not ready to help me out so I knew I had to fight my own battle. I discussed with someone and he recommended Alhaji Bature, the journalist to me. I went to him with my case and the threats I had received. He directed me to Kwesi Pratt Jr. and after listening to my case, Kwesi took me to Francis Opoku, who was the coordinator of National Security. After telling Mr Opoku my story, he patiently listened to the recordings in my possession, that is, of Tabiri’s admission of receipt of payment and Ampewuah’s threat. Kwesi Pratt also listened and he published my side of the story.

Foreseeing that there were immanent challenges ahead, I hired the services of a new counsel, James Abioduka, who was recommended to me by Alhaji Bature. James gave me the best defense I could ever ask for during the hearings of the Georgina Wood Committee.

Democracy must bring change in people's life
—Veep
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THE GHANAIAN TIMES

Ghana's most authoritative newspaper

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MONDAY, NOVEMBER 28, 2005

NEW COVER PRICE

The increased cost of production has compelled us to raise the cover price of our *Ghanaians* from 24,000 to 30,000 and the *Security* from 24,000 with effect from December 5 and 10, respectively.

Your *Times* will be increasing its number of pages with effect from December 5.

PRICE: c3,000.00

2 DRUG BARONS BUSTED

By Francis A. Tuffour

TWO Venezuelans were arrested on Thursday by the police for allegedly possessing 580 kilogrammes of substances suspected to be narcotics with a street value of 38 million dollars.

The suspects, Joel Mella, 35, and Italo Cabeza Castillo, 38, were arrested at a house at East Legon, where the substances were being kept.

Briefing the *Times* on Saturday, David Asante-Apeatu, Director of the Police Criminal Investigation Department, said that the suspects had for the past five months been under police surveillance.

He said the substances were found in wrapped tablets concealed in paper boxes in two rooms when the police raided the house on Thursday.

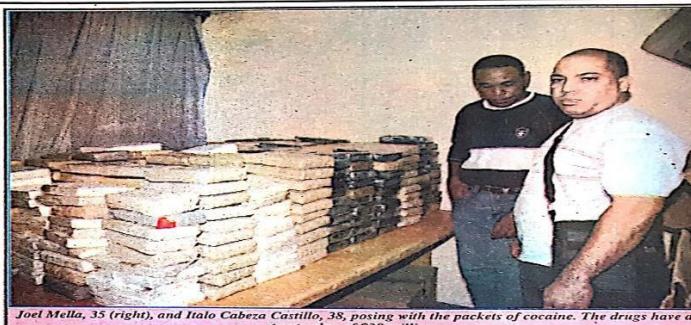
Mr Asante-Apeatu noted that as a result of the tight and strict security measures instituted

by some continents such as the U.S. and Britain, among others, most traffickers had diverted their routes to the West Coast and particularly South Africa, either as transit points or warehouses from where they transport the drugs to their final destinations.

He gave the assurance that the police and other security agencies would not allow the traffickers to have a field day, and appealed to the public to assist the security agencies by volunteering information on criminals.

The suspects are in police custody for further investigations while the suspected narcotic substances are to be taken to the forensic laboratory for examination.

Asante-Apeatu, Superintendent of Police, Kwes Ofori of the Police Public Relations Directorate expressed concern about the state at which Ghana is being used as a transit point by drug traffickers and warned that the security agencies would not allow criminals to dent the image and reputation of the country.



Joel Mella, 35 (right), and Italo Cabeza Castillo, 38, posing with the packets of cocaine. The drugs have a street value of \$38 million.

Source: Article from the *Ghanaian Times* 28.11.2005

The image shows the front page of the Daily Graphic newspaper. At the top left, there's a box for 'Current crude oil prices' with information for BBQ and Light Crude. The main headline is 'The MV Benjamin cocaine saga' with a sub-headline '€250m PLACED ON 5 SUSPECTS'. Below the main headline is a large photo of Kwak Yeo Seoung, identified as a suspect. To the right is a photo of Asem Darkwei (alias Sheriff), also identified as a suspect. The masthead 'Daily Graphic' is in large letters at the top, with 'ADVERTISING' and 'CLASSIFIED' written vertically on the left. The date 'WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 20, 2006. NO. 149850.' and price 'PRICE: ₦4,000' are at the top. A sidebar on the right is titled 'Akosombo Dam: Water Level' with a table showing maximum, minimum, and current levels. The newspaper is described as 'GHANA'S BIGGEST SELLING NEWSPAPER SINCE 1950'.

Source: Article from the Daily Graphic 20.09.2006

Source: Article from the Daily Graphic 23.09.2006

Five to probe missing cocaine

Story: Albert K. Salla

THE Minister of the Interior, Mr Albert Kan-Dapaah, has set up a five-member committee to investigate the whereabouts of 77 parcels of cocaine, each weighing 30 kilogrammes, from a vessel which was intercepted on April 27, 2006.

The committee is also to investigate the various allegations levelled against some police officers with respect to the seizure of a quantity of narcotic drugs in East Legon in November last year.

A statement signed by the minister yesterday named the members of the committee as Supreme Court judge, Mrs Georgina Woode, the Deputy Director of the Bureau of National Investigations (BNI), Mr. Kyaku Duah, a lawyer, Ms Jennifer Mawuli, the President of the Ghana Journalists Association (GJA), Mr Ransford Tetteh, and a Member of Parliament, Mr Abraham Ossei Aidoo.

The committee, which has one month to complete its work, will be inaugurated today.

It recalled that on April 27, 2006, the Narcotics Control Board, acting on intelligence information, intercepted a vessel with the assistance of the Ghana Navy.

Officials of the board, it said, conducted a search on the vessel and discovered a leather bag containing 30 slabs of a whitish substance suspected to be cocaine.

Our Stars, our pride

• Continued from P.1

after decorating them personally, President Kufuor said the honour they had brought to the nation could not be

"This was seized and taken to the headquarters of the board for safekeeping," it said. The statement said intelligence information, however, indicated that originally, there were about 78 parcels in the vessel with one parcel containing 30 kilogrammes of cocaine.

The statement said that 77 parcels of cocaine, each weighing 30 kilogrammes, were taken out of the vessel just before it was intercepted," it stated.

The statement said the terms of reference of the committee would, therefore, include finding out the persons or persons who brought the parcels on board the vessel in the first instance, determine the actual number of narcotic-drug parcels on the vessel immediately before it was intercepted and determine whether some of the parcels on board the vessel were removed from the vessel before it was intercepted and, if so, to establish when and how that happened and recommend appropriate punishment.

It said the committee would also determine the whereabouts of the parcels of narcotic drugs, if any, which were removed from the vessel and to investigate any other issues relating to the loss of the narcotic drugs and make recommendations on how to avoid them in future.

In an interview to explain the formation of the committee, in view of an earlier one comprising mostly security personnel, Mr Kan-

Dapaah said the work of the five-member committee was different from the three-member committee set up earlier by the ministry to investigate the loss of five kilogrammes of the 30-kilogramme cocaine seized by NACOB officials.

He said the report of the three-member committee, which was chaired Mr J. K. Mensah of the National Security Secretariat, had been submitted to the Attorney-General's Department for advice.

The other members of the committee were Mr Patrick Ampewuah, the Deputy Director General of the Criminal Investigations Department (CID), and Alhaji Adam Malik of the BNI, member-secretary.

He said the government was awaiting the advice of the AG's Department to act appropriately.

Mr Kan-Dapaah said the government was determined to get to the bottom of all the cases and would not shield anyone found to have miscondoned himself or herself.

According to him, it was in that vein that the five-member committee had been tasked to investigate the allegations levelled against some police officers with respect to the seizure of narcotic drugs in East Legon.

He said those allegations had been published in the media in the last few weeks and it was important that they were investigated.

'Don't destroy Ghana's reputation'

Story: E. Kojo Kwarteng, Banjul

PRESIDENT J. A. Kufuor has advised Ghanaians living abroad not to engage in activities which

uses of openness, communal living and sharing should be their guiding principle. The President gave the assurance that the government was still working through three committees set up which affect

Source: Article from the Daily Graphic 04.07.2006

THE COVER-UP

On Tuesday 4 July, 2006, the Ministry of Interior set up the Georgina Wood Committee following public outcry of recent cocaine scandals. The Committee was tasked to investigate the circumstances surrounding the disappearance of 77 parcels of cocaine from MV Benjamin. It was also set up to investigate purported allegation that I had bribed senior police officers. But why were these two cases put together? Could it be the mere fact that both were cocaine cases which happened around the same time or as I suspect, the behind-the-scene high profile people (those Vasquez served) of Ghanaian society were the real beneficiaries in both cases.

As far as I am concerned- and with all due respect to Justice Theodora Georgina Wood- I have no doubt that her committee was part of a big cover-up scheme. Otherwise, why weren't majority of her recommendations implemented? Why couldn't the Georgina Wood Committee- a fact finding one for that matter- tell us where the cocaine disappeared to?

Prior to the Committee hearings, I had to be a witness at the committee in connection with the trial on the 358 Mempeasem case. Thus, with the Georgina Wood Committee in place, I had to appear before the committee concurrently until the committee completed its work. It was a tense and difficult period of my life as I had to fight back false allegations against me and threats on my life.

Committee blues

I appeared before the Georgina Wood Committee on a number of times over a one-month period. Although I requested for a translator, I was not given one, so I

did the best I could with my ‘broken’ English.

I recall some interesting moments on the committee, one being an encounter I had with Honorable Kan Dapaah, who was then Minister of Interior and the initiator of the Committee. Also present on that occasion was, Superintendent Tabiri.

When I appeared before the committee on the said day, during the early part of the Committee’s work, Justice Georgina Wood hostilely (perhaps to bully me), asked what evidence I had to prove and any amount of money given to the police. I reminded her that the evidence I had was given to Hon. Ken Dapaah.

When it got to the turn of Superintendent Tabiri to talk, he insisted I was their informant and that I gave them the tipoff that led to the arrest. He was asked to prove that, but he could not back his claim with any evidence.

I told the Committee I had a recording to prove I gave them the said amount and I had handed it over to Kan Dapaah. The Minister admitted that indeed it was true I had given him a recording but it was not audible so he could not make any case out of it. That’s when I took the copy I had from my bag and we all listened. Everybody was shocked at the exposé and as soon as Tabiri started mentioning names of the people who had shares in the two hundred thousand dollars, Georgina Wood asked him what proof he had to counter the proof a young illiterate like me had provided.

She started drilling Tabiri so harshly and when the heat was too much for him to contain, Tabiri said, “I can’t carry the Ghana alone” and started mentioning names, including the IGP, Patrick Kwarteng Acheampong. Just then, Georgina Wood asked them to pause the recording and ordered all the journalists to go out. I also said I would not talk anymore if the journalists left. They sacked all the journalists that they would continue the hearings in camera. One of the

journalists-Alhaji Bature-protested vehemently and insisted on staying. That was a journalist who had followed my case closely and I believe if he had not been involved, some people-who felt I was stepping on their toes- would have killed me or put me in serious trouble.

In the end, Tabiri was restrained and could not mention any names. And after this initial incident, Kan Dapaah, never asked me any question throughout the rest of the hearings. I also noticed Justice Georgina Wood gradually started changing from her cordial attitude towards me. She started being so hard on me and giving me pressure to the extent that she was no longer asking me questions directly pertaining to the details of the case. P

More denials

When Mr Patrick Ampewuah was called in connection with his threats, he denied calling me to issue threats. Georgina Wood asked me how sure I was it was Ampewuah. I told her I was confident it was him. She then informed my lawyer [James] to enlighten me on legal matters and he should teach me that I should use the word suspect and not state without facts that it was Ampewuah. But I insisted it wasn't a matter of him being a suspect; it was him.

I took out the recording and they started playing it. The room became very quiet. Everybody had perceived it was his voice and all the journalists present believed it was him. And strangely, when Ampewuah was asked a question, he amazingly altered his voice which sent everybody rolling over with laughter. It was so dramatic. I was asked how I was certain it was him and how I knew him in the first place. I told them about my first encounter with him and the warning he had given me earlier at his office.

At the end of that day's hearing, the committee said it was sending the M.V Benjamin recordings to the GBC studio to play for verification of voices and that they would add the Ampewuah recording. We went with them but they played that of Tagor which was related to the M.V Benjamin case and didn't play mine. They said they would play the next day but they didn't. I believe my recording of Ampawuah was not played again because everybody knew it was him and it was embarrassing.

We kept meeting with the committee and they kept asking me virtually the same questions everyday just to see if I would contradict myself. One day, the committee asked Tabiri why he said I was the informant and he said Appeatu had told him the informants were a lady and a gentleman so he suspected I and the caretaker/aid at the Mempeasem residence were the ones.

Mr Appeatu was consequently called before the committee based on what Tabiri had said. He denied he had ever met me. I'd wanted to query him but Georgina Wood stopped me.

"Let your lawyer talk," Justice Wood directed.

But I was adamant and said my lawyer was not present on the day I met with Appeatu so I would talk for myself. They nearly arrested me that day because they said I had insulted Georgina Wood. She really got so incensed. Then she asked, "When you sent the money to the police on behalf of your boyfriend, did you think they were in the business of selling salt or tomatoes?"

"I know the police don't sell tomatoes, they don't sell salt, and even if they sell salt and tomatoes, I was not the one who bought it from them, someone bought it and asked me to come and pay, so when I paid, I asked for a receipt, so I don't know how I ended up as their informant."

I told Appeatu he should not deny knowing me and that Tabiri had brought me to his office a couple of times. He said he never mentioned I was the informant. Kan Dapaah was present as issues unfolded.

At some point, the Committee also brought Rosetta to testify against me. She claimed that as far as she was concerned, I was all along working for the police.

On Vasquez leaving the country

During one of the hearings, the police claimed and insisted that Vasquez was not in the country at the time the 588 parcels of wrapped substance suspected to be cocaine was impounded at Mempeasem along with the arrest of Joel and Castillo.

Surprised at such insistence, I reminded officer Tabiri he shouldn't forget he told me the day I paid him the money that they were sorting out some issues with the Immigration Service involving Vasquez. Fortunately for me I placed a recorder on me the day he spoke about sorting out the Immigration issues (which as I have come to believe, was to backdate his departure from Ghana before the arrest occurred).

Meanwhile, it was on record that the police in a correspondence with the Attorney General's department (a letter signed by Chief Superintendent George Appiah) indicated that Vasquez (a.k.a. Charmo) had gone into hiding since the arrest. Obviously, the police were officially aware or had cause to believe that Vasquez was in Ghana at the time of the arrests. The Chief State Attorney, Mr. Francis Amison Agbosu was equally reported to have confirmed that Vasquez was in Ghana on the 24th November, 2005 when the house at Mempeasem was raided. This was reported in the newspapers with the Chronicle giving it prominence. It confirmed Vasquez' absence from home for a number of days before he appeared to collect the 25million dollars he had given me for paying legal fees in respect of

Joel's case.

The police maintained that per their records Vasquez left the country on 10th November, 2005, that is two clear weeks before the arrest. These were layers of sophisticated lies aimed at discrediting my account of having given money to the senior police officers. In the words of Ellis Owusu-Fordjour, counsel for Tabiri, "It is on record that Vasquez had left Ghana on November 10, 2005...Grace Asibi could not have had the \$200,000 to give to some police officers as bribe as she had always insisted in her testimony before the Committee."

The police maintained their stance in spite of a testimony by Fredrick Coleman, a former officer in charge of operations at the Ghana Immigration Service (GIS) before the Georgina Wood Committee. According to him, the GIS could not capture all the entry and exit details of Vasquez and Joel. This was obviously a big security lapse that the powers that be capitalized on to aid Vasquez's exit from the country. Aware that the GIS could not possibly capture all exits- or were possibly directed to turn a blind eye- it was easy for the police to claim that Vasquez left the shores of Ghana on a convenient date in line with the cover-up story.

From what I learnt later; Vasquez exited the country through the Togo border.

Witness protection

In the course of the committee's sittings, my life was threatened. As I was fiercely defending myself against the powers that be, it was clear that some faceless people were ruffled by my statements, fearing that if I was close to Vasquez then I possibly knew more.

I started receiving calls and messages threatening to kill me. This was when I

made my famous statement: “*My life is in dangerous.*” Of course, it was the best English I could speak at the time and although some people made fun of me, many also admired me for my courage and being outspoken. In any case, my desperate call was made and I received help.

I was put under witness protection by the National Security per orders from Mr. Francis Opoku who was then the National Security boss. I had rented out the house at Cantonment and found a smaller place at Lapaz, so that’s where the National Security operatives came to give me security protection.

Freezing of Assets

Around this time too, as the committee hearing was ongoing, my bank accounts were frozen. Section 13 of the Serious Fraud Office (SFO) Act, 1993 (Act 466) gives the Director of the SFO the power to direct the freezing of the assets and bank accounts of persons or organizations under SFO investigations. According the SFO, my accounts had to be frozen as part of investigations into the cocaine case.

I threatened to talk. There was indeed some information I had but didn’t find it necessary to talk about at the committee, especially when I felt I was being antagonized and used as a scapegoat.

For instance, I had pictures Vasquez had taken with President Kufour’s son. When Afrodita was launched, they were present. Vasquez informed me that it was the (the President’s son) who had brought him to Ghana. I equally knew of an argument that had occurred between Vasquez and Chief Kufour some time ago. So, I told the police if they claim I was an informant, why then would the SFO freeze my account?

Mr. Andrew Awuni who was then the spokesperson for the Ex. President Kuffour heard of my threat to talk about Vasquez and Kuffour's son so he contacted me that he wanted to meet with me at the Parliament House. I didn't want to meet him in any public place, so I rather went to meet Mr. Awuni at his residence and told him about all I knew, showed him the pictures and told him I would speak to the public about all I knew unless they unfroze my accounts. I reiterated that if the SFO could freeze my account because they claimed I was a drug dealer, then everybody I knew must go down with me. Surprisingly, some of the things I told Andrew Awuni was published in the Crusading Guide newspaper the following day. Indeed, I was shocked because not everything we talked about was published, only a portion of it. Why would he do that? What was his interest? After the Crusading Guide publication, I tried contacting Andrew Awuni severally and there was to no avail. I have no doubt he betrayed me because he was the only person, I disclosed such information to. Ironically, he was called to speak concerning the scandal on Adom FM, but he portrayed himself to be on my side by praising me on air while in reality he wasn't even picking my calls.

A few days later, my accounts were unfrozen.



Grace in Bolga, Northern Region of Ghana (2006)

Chapter 10

THE ‘COKE COMMITTEE’ REPORT

The Georgina Wood Committee which was nicknamed ‘Coke Committee’ released its report to Mr Albert Kan-Dapaah, the Minister of Interior on Friday, 22 September, 2006. In all, about 30 people before the Committee as witnesses.

Sections 4 and 5 of the report give a detailed account of the Committee’s findings on me and Supt. Edward Tabiri as excerpted below:

“...4.12 The Committee had no difficulty in concluding that GRACE is a very outspoken and assertive person.

4.14 On the question of how the bribe itself came to be paid, the Committee found her story rather incredulous.

4.15 Her account was that on the instructions of SUPT. EDWARD TABIRI, she went and waited with the money at the Tetteh Quarshie circle for well over two hours for him to pick her to the police headquarters to collect the bribe.

4.16 The Committee finds that the most incredible part of her story, certainly, is her claim that on arrival at the Police Headquarters, in spite of the fact that SUPT. EDWARD TABIRI being the leader of the team was bound to be the most sought after officer, he nevertheless abandoned the team and the several boxes of cocaine and, took her into his office to collect the bribe.

But what was even more incredulous was her account of how the money changed hands. The story she invited the Committee to accept in preference to the officer's denial of having collected a bribe, is that in spite of the flurry of activities, SUPT. EDWARD TABIRI, locked his office door, while she nevertheless took pains to count \$170,000. Her further claim is that TABIRI, presumably consumed by greed and avarice, was not just satisfied with taking the money and releasing her to go, but also recounted the entire \$170,000!

4.17 Understandably, the Committee needed to know why she gave SUPT. EDWARD TABIRI only part of the money. The Committee found GRACE's explanation even more bizarre. She explained that SUPT. EDWARD TABIRI was unwilling to give her a receipt for the money she was to give him.

The Committee had little difficulty in dismissing her explanation as being absurd. Who sets out to pay a bribe to a police officer in order to obtain a favour and turns round to demand a receipt for the bribe?

GRACE'S TAPE ON SUPT EDWARD TABIRI

5.1 In order to buttress her claim, GRACE produced a recorded conversation between SUPT. EDWARD TABIRI and herself and which relates to an alleged admission by SUPT. EDWARD TABIRI that he had indeed demanded and received the bribe.

5.2 The Committee however found that the supposedly incriminating part consists of only one sentence from GRACE alleging the fact in a rather not so direct and forthright manner.

The Committee finds that there was no clear unambiguous admission by SUPT. EDWARD TABIRI that he had collected a bribe from her.

5.4 On listening to the tape, the Committee found that the first few sentences of the dialogue, appears word for word also at the tail end of the conversation. The Committee's reasonable conclusion was that the tape was an amateurish piece of cut and paste work of different conversations between GRACE and SUPT. EDWARD TABIRI.

The Committee observed that because GRACE was an informant and was being managed as such by the police, she had unlimited access to SUPT. EDWARD TABIRI, who was virtually in charge of the investigations. The evidence shows they have had a number of discussions over various aspects of the case.

5.5 The Committee finds that indeed, the transcript shows a disjointed dialogue between two persons parts of which does not flow sequentially."

The basis of the Committee's finding as reproduced above was the premise that I had bribed Supt. Tabiri. But that was not a premise that took into account my side of the story as I appeared before it. It was the official stance that the Committee maintained so as to discredit my account. Of course, as I have explained, I did not set out with any intention whatsoever to bribe any police officer. And the first time I met Tabiri and gave him the money as I had been directed, I had no idea he was a police officer. There was nothing wrong or strange about counting the money I gave him and demanded receipt for because whenever I was sent to make any payments, I took receipt.

When did I ever become an informant to the police? According to the report, but for my role as an informant, I would have been made to face prosecution for the offence of deceit of a public officer. But I was never an informant to the police. Again, this was part of the grounds to use me as a scapegoat when Vasquez and masters who brought him to the country were let go. Why was Vasquez aided out of the country and not brought to answer as to why he gave me the money to be given to the police?

In the end, the Committee cleared Supt. Tabiri and Deputy CID boss, Patrick Ampewuah of any wrong doing. And that my allegations against those officers, "were actuated by malice."

15.09.2006 : GENERAL NEWS



Why Rawlings met Grace Asibi, Rojo, Bature and Archer

By statesman

[Listen to article](#)

Before she went public this week to say "my life is in dangerous," Grace Asibi had a strategic top secret meeting with former Head of State Jerry John Rawlings at his Ridge home.

According to sources. also at the meeting were high profile critics of the

Source: Article from Modern Ghana 15.09.2006

In the above News headline by Modern Ghana, it was published that I met with Ex. President Rawlings which was false. There has been no occasion where myself, Rojo, Bature and Archer met with Ex. President Rawlings. Such publications were Politically influenced and was just to tarnish my image and also to involve people who had no idea about the case. Sometimes the media rather makes matters worse by publishing fake news without doing their intensive investigation.

04.08.2006 : DISASTER



I Gave Asibi A Ride At Great Risk — Tabiri

By Daily Graphic


[Listen to article](#)

The former Head of the Rapid Response Unit of the Ghana Police Service, Superintendent Edward Tabiri, said yesterday that he risked danger by commanding a cocaine hauling convoy to stop and give Ms Grace Asibi, the girlfriend of the Venezuelan drug fugitive fleeing justice in Ghana, a ride.

Under cross-examination by Mr James Abiabuka, counsel for Ms Asibi at



Source: Article from Modern Ghana 04.08.2006

17.08.2006 : GENERAL NEWS



Tabiri, Asibi Conclude Evidence

By Times


[Listen to article](#)

THE Justice Wood Committee yesterday ended its hearing of the cocaine bribery case between Superintendent Edward Tabiri and Grace Asibi, girlfriend of the fugitive East Legon cocaine baron, Gerardo Vasquez.

This was after four weeks of evidence and cross-examinations at the sittings of the committee investigating allegations of bribery that Asibi had levelled against Count Tabiri, saying he had taken 200,000 dollars

Source: Article from Modern Ghana 17.08.2006



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05.10.2006 : GENERAL NEWS



Grace Asibi Punched

By daily guide



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The Justice Georgina Wood Committee, which branded Grace Asibi, girlfriend of Vasquez Gerardo, a liar and an unreliable witness, must have arrived at the conclusion with no difficulty whatsoever. Grace's testimony at the Georgina Wood Committee suggested that she was a lady with a diabolical intention to destroy, as she went on roping in all people she met on her way to reaping from the East Legon cocaine haul,

Article from Modern Ghana 05.10.2006



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23.01.2008 : GENERAL NEWS



East Legon Cocaine Case

By Daily Guide



Listen to article

Joel Disowns Asibi's Lover

Joel Mejia Duarte, the first accused person in the Venezuelan Cocaine Trial, has denied being a brother to Grace Asibi's boyfriend and fugitive drug baron, Vasquez Duarte.

Joel, a native of Nakiva in the Republic of Venezuela in South America, speaking through an interpreter, denied also being a worker, shareholder or a director at Compinchex Company where Vasquez, aka Bude

Source: Article from Modern Ghana 23.01.2008

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I Thought Grace Was With Police - Rosa

By Graphic

*Source: Article from modern Ghana 09.08.2006*

EPILOGUE

There are still unanswered questions about the cocaine scandals of 2005/2006 especially in connection with the whereabouts of the cocaine. Where did all the cocaine go to?

Obviously, there were many people who were complicit in this and Vasquez knew so much and the people involved so they let him escape because if he was arrested, they would all go down. But make me a scapegoat? Why put the blame on me when I had nothing to do with it? And who were the police bent on protecting?

I have no doubt that Supt. Edward Tabiri knew a lot, that is why he blurted out at the Committee that he could not be the only one carrying the burden. But trained to keep secrets, he and the other senior officers did their best to protect whoever or group of persons they were to protect from public shame.

The former IGP, PK Acheampong apologized to me later on, when the dust had settled. I was aware he and Vasquez knew each other. He invited me to his residence at Cantonments and apologized to me. He invited me again on two other occasions to his house, with a senior intelligence officer present to have a friendly chat with me. I detected it was out of some sort of guilt. Also, I believe he wanted to find out if there was much more, I knew about the case that I was not disclosing. At some point, he pleaded with my lawyer not to mention his name at the Georgina Wood Committee. I didn't mention his name because I had no proof against him. But who were the persons the police system which he led, protecting? How did Vasquez leave the country?

As for Vasquez, I think he was not completely convinced that I was an informant as the police claimed. It could even be that the police had already told him that I was an informant before he gave me the money, to test me. But I gave him back his

money and it was intact so he would definitely wonder why I would do that if indeed I would betray him for money.

During the case I was given protection by national security operatives. This may have been witness protection of sorts but I knew it was all part of the scheme to keep tabs on me. Hence, I did not trust the security operatives. And when the case was over, there were instances I felt someone stalking me. Perhaps, I may have been paranoid but those instances occurred for some time. In my quest for protection, I got into a relationship with a soldier who was married but had expressed interest in me. With him, I truly felt protected and safe and somehow the stalking (real or perceived) stopped. Unfortunately, our relationship ended sometime after I had my fourth child, Confidence, by him.

Through it all, I have learnt to forgive and let go of all hurts and negative feelings. As Tyler Perry said “It’s not an easy journey, to get to a place where you forgive people. But it is such a powerful place, because it frees you.” For instance, I brought in the daughter of my auntie who maltreated me at Afram Plains to come and live with me for a couple of years. I took her to IPMC, a computer school in Accra and found a job for her to do.

I have spent the past decade doing my best at all times to help all the children in my family- immediate and external- as well as several other children to obtain the benefit of formal education which I did not get.

I’m equally on a mission to stop child marriages which destroy the dreams and potential of many young girls. Also, I would advice parents not give out their wards to relatives or friends to be taken care of. Immediate parental love is very important and every child must not be deprived from it.

Also, our judicial services must make intensive investigations before awarding

punishments or putting culprits who in some cases may be innocent into jail. Imagine if I hadn't been vindicated and was put to jail. Who then would have been taking care of my children?

I became a fashion designer and developed my own brand-named ER SUITS which deals in suits and bags. However, this cocaine scandal has affected my business in so many dimensions. There are people who wished to have invest millions of dollars into my business but the scandal has become a hindrance which makes them pull back even though I was vindicated. Imagine the employment my company could have created for the Ghanaian youth and many people across the globe if such investments were being made to push my company thrive.

Nevertheless, I haven't given up on this dream to make the world a better place for the young generation. I will continue to fight for the good course.



Between 2005 and 2006, Ghana's media was filled with headline stories about two major cocaine scandals: one at a residence in East Legon and MV Benjamin. Both cases led to the famous **Georgina Wood Committee of enquiry**.

Several years later, **Grace Asibi**, who was at the center of the East Legon case, emerges to reveal how she was used as a scapegoat in a cover up scheme to protect the interests of certain prominent people.

THE COVER-UP - GRACE ASIBI - «How I became a scapegoat in a Cocaine Scandal»

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