

PEPPINO: BEFORE



PEPPINO: NOW

Giuseppe Angiolillo alias "Florinda" - Nickname: Peppino

TESTIMONIAL: PEPPINO

Giuseppe Angiolillo (Nickname:Peppino) alias "Florinda"

The Story of one of the first Transvestites in Italy

"For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son He loves..." (Col. 1:13)

EDITOR: Peppino, tell us about your story and what the Lord has done in your life. To start with, tell us about your childhood and about your family?

PEPPINO: I come from a big family, we are twelve in all: my father, mother, and ten brothers. When I was young I was easy going, joked around, and my way of acting, by some, was misunderstood. Once I remember an adult telling me that I acted effeminate, said I was cute, and very nice. After these words I withdrew into myself. This very same person took advantage of me for over three years until I reached the age of 11. That's when I convinced myself of having effeminate tendencies. In my neighborhood there were a lot of effeminate people and I thought maybe I should also live like them.

EDITOR: What area of Naples did you come from?

PEPPINO: A suburb called Sanità.

EDITOR: Were your parents in the dark about all this?

PEPPINO: Yes, I kept it hidden because my father was a very violent man who came from a very bad area called Forcella. For the least little thing he would blow up and destroy everything in sight. Imagine if he know about my tendencies! I kept this dark secret inside of me and I confided in no one. Meanwhile, I continued to convince myself that I was made this way. Then the thought came to mind to leave home so that I could be as effeminate as possible.

EDITOR: Before you spoke about that terrible experience you had as a young boy of 8 years old, but at that young age did your parents permit you to run the streets?

PEPPINO: No, this person lived in our same apartment complex and we would meet on the roof top.

EDITOR: Did you feel condemned for doing this?

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PEPPINO: I come from a big family, we are twelve in all: my father, mother, and ten brothers. When I was young I was easy going, joked around, and my way of acting, by some, was misunderstood. Once I remember an adult telling me that I acted effeminate, said I was cute, and very nice. After these words I withdrew into myself. This very same person took advantage of me for over three years until I reached the age of 11. That's when I convinced myself of having effeminate tendencies. In my neighborhood there were a lot of effeminate people and I thought maybe I should also live like them.

EDITOR: Did you go to the military?

PEPPINO: At 16 and a half I signed up for the Navy to make my parents happy, but I served only 4 months and then decided to leave. I felt bad for my dad because he really wanted me to serve in the Navy.

EDITOR: After leaving the Navy what did you do?

PEPPINO: I returned to the 'Spanish Quarters'. I was 17 years old, got my own apartment and returned to the streets.

EDITOR: When you say, "to the streets" do you mean to prostitution? Did you work days or nights?

PEPPINO: Nights, but some times, during the day because a few clients knew where I lived and would come to my house.

EDITOR: Would you stay out until late?

PEPPINO: Not at first because I didn't like working the streets, however, the worst was yet to come.

EDITOR: Can you describe a typical day in the life of a transvestite, from the morning to evening?

PEPPINO: The first thing to do was to act nice, laugh and joke around with the others to show off until you were noticed. You would have to let the clients know that you were available. In the mornings you'd have to put on a mask, laughing and joking, even if you didn't feel like it.

EDITOR: Were you one of the first transvestite in Naples? How many were there?

PEPPINO: Yes, I was one of the first ones. In Naples there were about twenty, divided up into the different areas of the city. Then we'd come together to eat and pass a little time together. In the evenings we decided about our make-up and the kind of clothes to prepare for the night. We always talk about who was the most 'beautiful'. It was like a race to see who could look the most effeminate possible.

EDITOR: What were you called in that environment?

PEPPINO: I was called Florinda.

EDITOR: During the day did you dress like a woman or sometimes dress like a man?

PEPPINO: No, always as a woman but during the day I wouldn't dress so revealing.

EDITOR: And the nights?

PEPPINO: At night we were almost nude because we had to draw as many clients as possible.

EDITOR: How long would you stay out at night?

PEPPINO: Sometimes until 5:00 o'clock in the mornings because we would go dancing. There we would meet boys.

EDITOR: In this life-style weren't you afraid of contacting a contagious disease?

PEPPINO: No, I wasn't afraid because I would be careful with those with diseases.

Traveling around the big cities, like Turin, I was taught how to work 'clean'.

EDITOR: Your clients, what type of people were they? What would you think when you went with a family man?

PEPPINO: Nothing, for me it was normal. It was like a job. When a father with a family came I would try to get more money.

EDITOR: Did you ever stop to think, "Why do they do this, why do they seek after these things?"

PEPPINO: No, by then I was used to it and I would go with anyone, also different social classes. Once I remember I had a relationship with a man of nobility. I didn't need to sell myself on the streets because he took care of me.

EDITOR: At first, did you feel a sense of shame?

PEPPINO: In the beginning I had to force myself, especially when I had to go with many men. I don't know how to explain it, on one hand I didn't like it, but on the other hand it made me feel more like a woman. The most important reason was for the money.

EDITOR: How much money could you make in one night?

PEPPINO: Not much, but we're talking about 23 years ago. Every night around £.500.000 (\$294.00).

EDITOR: How many people would you go with?

PEPPINO: In the beginning when I didn't take drugs (that was until the age of 19), with about 10 or so men a night. Then I lost interest in myself and I started shooting drugs. I would go with those with whom I didn't like. I tried making as much money as possible. I arrived to the point where I would go with as many as 50 a night and would go to bed totally destroyed. In the mornings I'd apply more make-up and returned to walking the streets. Sometimes I would go with friends to rob truck drivers on the highway.

EDITOR: What type of people would you go with?

PEPPINO: With old men, boys, with whomever I would find available. I didn't care about with who, just as long as I got their money and got out of the car as quickly as possible.

EDITOR: Have you ever worked another job?

PEPPINO: In Rome and Milan I did advertising for jeans. Once I did publicity for the car Peugeot along the seafront in Margellina on the evening of its inauguration. But this didn't earn as much money as I was used to making during that time.

EDITOR: Did you ever feel loved?

PEPPINO: No, once I was disillusioned. I had a relationship with a 22 year old man and we were together for 22 years. For 19 years we got along well together, but then with my drug habit, he would only drive me home. By this time I spent almost all my money on heroin. I arrived to the point where I had to make at least £600.000 (\$354.00) per day. I was no longer interested in being with my friend.

EDITOR: Did he do drugs?

PEPPINO: No, he never used any kind of drugs.

EDITOR: During those times what did you think about God? Did you ever turn to him?

PEPPINO: No, because no one was religious in my family, nor went to church, we just didn't think about it. I knew that my friend Gabriele (in Naples he was called Gabriella, who was also a transvestite for many years) had gone to a mission a few years back.

I thought he was with a social worker.

EDITOR: Have you ever been in prison?

PEPPINO: No, I've never been, even though with a few stoned clients, I'd rip off their wallets or gold chains. While I would caress them, I'd pickpocket and they wouldn't even realize it. Once I was very desperate to get off the drugs, I'd quit but then start up again. The police pulled me over and took me down to the police station. I went crazy, breaking out all the windows in

front of me and tried to cut my arms. They took me to the hospital and the day after I was transferred to a jail in Poggioreale. I was very sick going through withdrawals. They gave me tranquillizers because I was in such crisis. I thought they would keep me in jail for two or three months, I'd be dried out and then my problems would be over. However, they kept me for only three days, because I wasn't a repeat offender. They only booked me as a transvestite.

EDITOR: Were you ever threatened while prostituting?

PEPPINO: Yes, once I was shot in the arm but the bullet was surgically removed. Another time I was stabbed twice: once through my lung and the other through my leg.

EDITOR: After the gun wound and the stabbing did you continue the same life-style?

PEPPINO: Of course, I couldn't live without drugs. I would get up in the mornings and couldn't even breathe. At times my nine year old niece would carry me out to the taxi, I would lean on her since I could barely walk.

EDITOR: Did you have friends who had the 'operation' to "become a woman"?

PEPPINO: Yes, I have friends who have had the operation in Rome and in Florence.

EDITOR: Did you ever think about having this operation?

PEPPINO: I tried twice. One of these times I was in Genoa and was in the clinic to get off drugs, waiting to have this operation. I had the money, around twelve million lire (\$7,000). In those days, it wasn't possible to do this operation in Italy, so I needed to go to Brussels, Belgium. Today, things have changed. It can be done in Italy also, through the social welfare plan. While I was in the clinic something happened that stopped my plans: my father died. I went to Naples to be close to my family. I wasn't able to do the operation anymore, so I spent the \$7,000 on drugs. Four years had passed and I tried again, going to the clinic to dry out before being on. I telephoned home to tell my sister that I would be home in about one week after the operation. My sister was so happy because she thought, "I don't care what he does, as long as he's off drugs". That day she gave me some bad news: my mother was in the hospital to remove a tumor from her intestines. I returned to Naples and once again spent all the money on drugs.

EDITOR: Did you ever think about taking your life?

PEPPINO: Yes, I desired to, especially just before my conversion. I wanted to die because I thought there was no more hope, neither with the hospitals nor with my family's help. In four months I sought to swallow a strong quantity of tranquillizers, drops, pills and drugs, (as many as I could), and ended up about twenty different occasions in the hospital. Almost at the end of my life. The last time that I tried I swallowed a capsule with rat poison and it paralyzed my arms and legs. After I took the rat poison, my two and a half year old nephew opened the door to my room and found me lying on the floor, and then called out to his grandma. I was falling, I grabbed my throat because I couldn't breathe. They called the ambulance and I woke up five days later in the hospital. I couldn't move my legs or talk. The poison paralyzed all of my muscles. One time Christians from Naples came to visit me in the hospital, but I threw the first thing I found in my hands at them. The time I was paralyzed in bed, these believers took advantage of the occasion to speak to me about Jesus. I couldn't say a word or move, but I could hear every word they were saying about Jesus. They spoke about Him being the only hope for my life, how He could save me. Day after day they came to see me and continued to speak about the things of God. Two months later I started a friendship with them. Before leaving the hospital, one night I got up because I was regaining my strength. I had to go to the bathroom and I was embarrassed to call the nurse, but after two steps I fell face down on the floor. I wanted to scream for help but I just couldn't. In that moment, I cried out to God and said, "What have I done to deserve this? Give me a little peace, even if I must die to get it!" God answered by allowing me to know so many people who love Him. They took me to their fellowship and three times to the 'Christ is the Answer II' tent meeting.

EDITOR: How did you meet Gabriele?

PEPPINO: I meet him about 24 years ago, he lived my same experience. I hadn't seen him for over 10 years, although I'd heard, through the grapevine, that he'd become a missionary. Things went like this: I had to return to the hospital. There I met a male nurse who was a believer. He told me he knew Gabriele and if I wanted, he could contact him come visit me. I had mind battles, when the brethren told me that I could never be like them, nor experience what they had because I still had breasts and the look of a woman. But the Lord is faithful, because in those days I saw Gabriele again after not seeing him for many years. I was so happy! I spoke with him about old times. But he instead spoke about new things and the word 'Jesus' was always on his lips. Inside of me I thought, "Was it possible to experience what Gabriele had experienced?" In that very moment, Gabriele, about to leave the room, turned, saying, as if he had read my thoughts, "Peppino, you can change. Jesus loves you." His simple words touched my heart, and birthed in me a hope, realizing that he had really been changed. In the following days Gabriele invited me to come with him to visit the tent team, 'Christ is the Answer' which had moved to Sicily. When I arrived I didn't feel a judgmental spirit, even though there were a lot of people, and in that atmosphere I felt such freedom. I stayed for about one month with them. Then I started to have inner conflicts, thinking, "What am I doing here? Now I can go home, but I won't live that old life anymore!" At that same time, I was climbing these stairs when I fell and broke my arm and had to be rushed to the hospital. The Lord stopped me once again! He knew I was an impulsive type when I made decisions. I had to stay in the hospital for another two months. The first week in the hospital, the Lord baptized me in the Holy Spirit. I was in bed, it was around 10:00 p.m.; when I felt the power of the Spirit upon me. I spoke in other tongues until 11:00 o'clock the next morning. Then the doctors arrived to make their rounds. All night long, nurses were coming in and out of the room, checking on me because they heard me speaking in a strange language. I didn't realize how loud I was singing and shouting. It was so beautiful and so strong that I didn't even feel tired. I really was changed! I came back to camp with a whole new attitude wanting to learn as much as I could about the things contained in the Word of God. The desire came in me to work in His vineyard and to be used by Him.

EDITOR: If today you returned to the 'Spanish Quarters, in the midst of your old friends, would you find it difficult?

PEPPINO: No, I've already gone back, together with Gabriele. They were shocked because they already knew Gabriele's testimony, but they never expected to find me changed too! They thought I was dead because different ones that I knew, who shot up less years than I, were dead.

EDITOR: When you were saved, scars from your old life remained. You were willing to go through another operation to remove a problem. Tell us about it?

PEPPINO: Being in the team 'Christ is the Answer', I felt uncomfortable about having liquid silicone implants for breasts. I had them installed when I was 19 years old. I felt the need to go under another operation to have them removed. With time, the silicone attached to the muscle and to the nerves and it's not so easily removed. The doctor had to pull and scrape it away. The operation was very painful. At first, the doctors didn't want to risk such an operation, but after much consultation they decided to go through with it.

EDITOR: Did you have difficulties feeling a part of the mission?

PEPPINO: No, not really. I have trouble with my character, because I have always been touchy, susceptible, and impulsive. To live together with so many people is not always easy, but it is a good way to form your character.

EDITOR: What did you think about Jesus today?

PEPPINO: Jesus is my life. Before I was dead now I feel like a young boy again. It feels like a breath of fresh air! I have a new life and a new love.

EDITOR: If you wanted to give counsel to people that find themselves in your previous condition, what message would you like to give them?

PEPPINO: When I found myself lying face down on the hospital floor, I cried out to God Almighty with everything that was in me! I couldn't speak, but it was a cry from deep within me. God answered me. When everything seems lost and you are at the end of your rope, and you can't see any hope, cry out to God, He will answer!

Giuseppe Angiolilo



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