

**LA BELLA
MAFIA**

A single phrase from among the many memorable ones in this remarkable woman's gripping, powerful, so readable story nails it for me, and will do so for most readers: "...I learned how to cry." What a journey!

- Thomas B. Sawyer

Author of the bestselling thriller, *No Place to Run*,
Showrunner/Head Writer of *Murder, She Wrote*

This is one remarkable lady. She has a presence about her that just inspires you to want to reach out and help someone. We need more people out there like Bella Capo whose sole mission in life is helping women in serious need. Congratulations on a most definitely inspiring book and movement you have created.

- Ricky Cash and Aaron Phillips, Vegas Unwrapped Radio

Reading *La Bella Mafia* is like watching the movie Titanic. You know disaster looms, but the story is so compelling, you can't tear yourself away.

- Mike Dennis, Author of Man-Slaughter

<http://mikedennisnoir.com>

This story is riveting, somewhat painful to read, but imagine the Bella Capos of this world who weather this sort of physical and emotional abuse and come out on the other side willing to help others and educate the world! I cringed at the stories, the worded visuals, the turmoil this poor child and woman endured. What kind of strength that must take! Amazing recollection of a life nobody should have to experience.

- C. Hope Clark, Author The Carolina Slade Mystery Series

www.chopeclark.com

Editor, FundsforWriters, www.fundsforwriters.com

Writer's Digest 101 Best Websites for Writers, 2001-2013

It's great! "The most difficult books to read are often the books that are the most important to read. *La Bella Mafia* shows us the pain that exists all around us as well as those people who are struggling against it."

- John Brantingham, Author of Mann of War

Professor of English, Mt. San Antonio College

This book is the most heart-wrenching book I've ever read. It opens doors of understanding for those who have maybe not been through everything that this woman went through but perhaps parts of it. It also gives the reader an understanding as to why and how a person will allow themselves to be put through this Hell.

- Martha A. Cheves, Author, Reviewer

Shocking experiences of a little girl growing up in an incredibly dysfunctional family, then learning how to survive as an adult among others who are not what they seem. Unfortunately, far too common a reality that makes for an unforgettable read.

- Chris Roerden,

Author of Agatha Award winner *Don't Murder Your Mystery*.

The ultimate making lemons into lemonade story! Bella Capo's journey from horrific abuse to building La Bella Mafia, a worldwide network of women helping other women in trouble, will fill you with a sense of hope. An awe-inspiring story.

- Kris Neri, author of *Revenge on Route 66*
The Well Red Coyote bookstore

La Bella Mafia is a powerful, inspirational account of domestic violence and abuse and how one special woman dealt with the horrific mental and physical sequelae and the steps she is now taking to help those who suffer from this find a way out of their hell and back to a normal life. Bravo.

- Christie Tillery-French,

Award Winning Author/Poet, Dames of Dialogue blog

LA BELLA MAFIA

*"I had endured so much, I was beyond feeling anything.
Because I believe in angels, I had a crying angel tattooed on
my back so it could cry for me when I couldn't cry for myself."*

~Bella Capo

By
Morgan St. James

&

Dennis N. Griffin

As Told By
Bella Capo

HOUDINI[™]
PUBLISHING

LA BELLA MAFIA. Copyright © 2013
by Morgan St. James & Dennis N. Griffin.

All rights are reserved. Printed in the United States of America. No part of this book may be used or reproduced in any manner whatsoever without written permission except in the case of brief quotations embodied in critical articles and reviews. For information address Houdini Publishing, 6455 Dean Martin Dr. Suite L, Las Vegas, NV 89118.

ISBN: 978-1-936759-18-7

Cover design by Blake Whiteside
Printing Production Specialist- Barry Hess
Cover Photo by Mikel's Fine Art Photography
Edited by Judith Deutsch

Hair and Makeup for cover by La Bella Mafia Beauty,
Las Vegas NV. 855-LA-MAFIA (526-2342)

HOUDINITM
PUBLISHING
www.houdinipublishing.com

DEDICATION

My biggest dedication is to God. Because of Him this book is a reality.

To my children, my grandchildren and my mother who have stood by me through all of the trials and tribulations.

To Tony “Nap” Napoli for standing by me with love and for holding my hand from one side of Hell to the other.

To Ali MacGraw, the best mentor a girl could have.

And, to Kathryn, my dear, dear friend from my earlier years.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

In writing the acknowledgements for this book, there is no way I could possibly thank everyone who helped me survive, or those who saw me through the writing of La Bella Mafia. There are many human Angels out there and they know who they are. However, I will mention a few that come to mind.

My two aunts and two cousins, always dear to my heart.

Of course, Bella Nassy a very strong Prayer Warrior, the Bella Team and all of the individual Bellas who made this possible through their love and dedication to the cause and, in turn, make La Bella Mafia possible.

The Napoli siblings and sisters.

And my doctors, Dr. Dad and Dr. T, for their work and the care they have given me along with my therapist Mat, plus the amazing nurses who nursed me back to life more than once. They helped me find that will to live with the physical and emotional damage.

Doctor Robyn Westbrook, a very special woman.

My writers Morgan St. James, Dennis N. Griffin and editor Judy Deutsch for making this all happen. They are not

just my writers, but have become my family and have helped me to organize my thoughts and words in a healing way as they held my hand through it all. It changed my life forever in a positive way.

My God daughter Marly and her mama—they are forever with me no matter where I go or what I do.

To Geoff, my best friend, who passed away from cancer a couple of years ago. He was a guardian angel for many years. Rest in peace.

Sonny and crew for being there through these last few years and the work they have done to help others who suffer from PTSD.

JR, the friend who walked me through the hardest two years while I got used to living away from the city. He talked me through my fears with a pure intended heart.

Gwynn and Linda, my two female friends and supporters who have held my hand in the new life that's been created, always there to help me and they have never thought of giving up.

Again, there is no way possible I could thank everyone but reading this, you know who you are. Thank you and God Bless each and everyone one of you.

Bella Capo

FOREWORD

I first met Bella about twenty-five years ago, in Malibu, California, where she was spending a period of time in a facility that purported to help young teenagers who were, for various, tragic reasons, caught between new foster homes and, often, Juvenile Hall. There were certain of us who went up there once a week to try to help these kids have some sense that people cared for them and wanted to try to make life a little easier. It was a very disturbing experience, as all of the boys and girls there had childhoods of indescribable fear and sorrow and neglect, as well as unspeakable abuse of every imaginable variety. This was my first experience realizing firsthand just how tragically many young people have negotiated that time which is supposed to be all about Innocence and Love. I was shocked and deeply saddened, and although I did go there every week for a long time, I never felt that there was much I could do...it was frankly devastating to witness.

Among the numbers of boys and girls I met, there were several who stood out, and none more so than a beautiful thirteen year old girl: This was Bella. At that time I had only a sketchy idea of the exact nature of the horrors she had survived, but it was clear that she had endured a level of abuse that was unspeakable and life changing. With all that, there was an enormous spark of Life to this particular child, and I remember thinking right away that Bella had an inordinate amount of resilience and a lack of self-pity that was amazing, given her history. Weekly, too, a group of well-meaning “art

therapists” came to the facility to perhaps help unlock some of the children’s pain through Art. Once, when we asked for whom a specific project was intended...as a special gift...I remember Bella saying, “my father,” which stunned me, given the little I had learned of her home life. It was quite a revelation as to the deep, primal need kids have to reconstruct or remember their childhoods in an almost fairytale rewrite.

I spent a fair amount of time with Bella in particular, and grew to love her very special Spirit as well as her tough street-wise attitude. She was clearly a remarkable young woman, and I always thought that, given a chance, she would somehow work her way out of the darkness she had been forced to inhabit. Of course, I did not really know how that would come about, but I do remember thinking, “This one is a Survivor, and she is going to be Something.” I saw her on and off for some years and watched her grow into the beautiful woman she is today, and along the way she married, and had a family of wonderful little girls. The last time I saw her she was in a lovely home with her family around her (including her exceptional mother, a survivor herself). I was thrilled to feel that she was happy at last, living with a man she loved and admired, and starting a brand-new life.

I will not spoil the extraordinary story you are about to read, except to say that her life took a surprising and terrifying turn several years ago, and the fact that this amazing woman...Bella...has turned her life into the inspiration it is now, is the reason for this book. Bella is a creature of pure Light, and in spite of another chapter of harrowing fear and darkness, she has triumphed over all of it and created a life that will be an inspiration to all who read about it. In addition to her four girls, she has added a huge blog where young women can go to be mentored by Bella and guided through some of the atrocities that she herself survived. Bella offers Hope and Solution and a Future to all of these women, and she is the embodiment not only of those qualities, but also

of Love and Faith of the purest kind. She is one of the most remarkable people I have ever met, and I adore her and know that she will touch the heart of each and every one of you as you read and hear her story. You are in for a mind-blowing account of Courage and Forgiveness and Strength...and Love.

Ali Macgraw
Award-Winning Actress And Activist

PREFACE

On March 3, 2012, I received an email from Tony “Nap” Napoli, a highly-respected former associate of New York’s Genovese organized crime family. His father was the late Jimmy “Nap” Napoli, who had been a boss with the Genovese family and at one time ran the largest illegal gambling operation in the United States.

I had first met Tony a few years earlier while doing research for one of my organized crime books. I found him to be extremely knowledgeable when it came to the history of the Mafia in America. He was also totally candid, except when it came to discussing current mobsters or their capers. In that regard, Tony is old-school and would rather rot in prison, himself, than compromise a former associate.

In this case, he asked me to help a friend of his who was looking for someone to assist her in writing a book. He said she had a great story to tell, but added that she had concerns for her safety. He would only identify her as Bella Capo. Could he give her my contact information?

Because I know Tony is the real deal, when he reaches out to me I always pay attention to what he has to say. And the mysterious Bella Capo increased my desire to learn more. I told Tony to have her contact me.

Shortly afterward, Bella Capo connected with me. As a result of numerous phone conversations and emails, I learned of the sexual, physical and emotional abuse she had suffered beginning at age four. This was followed by experimenting with street drugs, the onset of severe Post Traumatic

Stress Disorder (PTSD) and an ensuing addiction to prescription psychiatric medications. Knowing her experiences are shared by a multitude of women, Bella Capo probably would not have merited a book of her own. However, Bella Capo's story doesn't end there. This was just her beginning. What separates her story from the thousands of others like it is what happened afterward—she has survived, she has grown stronger, and she has reached out to succor other tortured souls. This, to me, makes Bella Capo's account an uplifting and compelling tale that must be told. I agreed to write it.

It was understood that security would be an issue, and that in most cases real names, and sometimes locations, could not be used. That eliminated the need for an Index, which I and some readers like to see in a nonfiction book. Thinking I had all of the bases covered, I started on the manuscript.

However, I soon realized that several of the subjects to be addressed were not my strong suits. For example, I was far from an expert on PTSD. And having been an only child, wasn't sure I'd be able to adequately address mother-daughter or sibling relationships. I decided to contact my friend and fellow author Morgan St. James, who had an encounter with PTSD following an automobile accident, is a mother and sibling, and who could provide further insight and understanding of Bella Capo's amazing life.

I ran the scenario past Morgan and she agreed with me that a book had potential. I'd never co-authored a book, but Morgan has a mystery series she wrote with her sister, and found the relationship workable. Bella Capo agreed to Morgan's participation and so began "Team Bella"—Bella Capo, Morgan, and me.

With more than one writer and three sets of fingers in the pie, Morgan suggested we bring in an outside editor to help catch typos, identify inconsistencies, and maintain con-

tinuity. This person would be able to tell if Morgan and I were melding our writing seamlessly, or if there were grammatical, stylistic, or literary distractions to the reader. Morgan recommended Judith Deutsch, who she had worked with in the past. Judy has a background in writing and editing and Morgan found her easy to work with. Bella Capo and I agreed, and Judy became Team Bella member number four. And what a great addition she is!

Another tremendous asset to the project was Tony Nap, who I mentioned earlier. Any time I needed information or clarification regarding an incident or situation he was involved in, he responded candidly and without hesitation. I didn't list him as a member of Team Bella, because Tony is unofficially known as the Godfather of La Bella Mafia for the guidance and support he offers.

Quite frankly, in the beginning stages I wasn't sure four people with different backgrounds living in various areas of the country—could work together efficiently to produce a well-written manuscript. But between conference calls, emails and the professionalism of my female colleagues on Team Bella, I believe we have done just that.

I hope that by the time you reach the end of La Bella Mafia, you will share our sense of awe and appreciation for what Bella Capo has accomplished against overwhelming odds.

Denny Griffin

Las Vegas, Nevada

April 10, 2013

PROLOGUE

I never believed I would be able to write about the shocking existence I endured from the time I was only four, but now I know I must if others are to be helped. Bella is not my given name, but it is who I have finally become and this is my story. My co-authors, Dennis Griffin and Morgan St. James, held my hand all the way through the trauma of reliving everything and have put my memories and stories into what you are about to read: *La Bella Mafia*.

I warn you, this book is not for the faint of heart. No child or young woman should ever have to go through what I did. If you looked at our family on the surface, we appeared to be living the American Dream with a nice house, luxuries, my father's successful career and plenty of his important friends. The dark secrets of a sadistically abusive father and brother, sexual abuse, ties to organized crime and free-flowing drugs should have had no place in the life of the little girl who twirled and danced in her perfect pink bedroom while wearing a fluffy tutu.

That lovely image was what everyone saw, while the horrendous underbelly of our family remained hidden, and continued into my life as a teen and an adult. You might think things like these only happen in movies, on TV or in fiction, but let me assure you, everything is true. By all odds, I should have died many times but something in me gave me the strength to close out the horrible reality, the physical abuse and living on the edge. Every page is stained with my tears.

I have been through hell on earth, but I know beauty like no other. My sole purpose is to keep reaching more people through the brutal honesty of my story.

There are many more like me, facing a life that makes them wish they were dead every day, but we are survivors.

We call ourselves La Bella Mafia.

Before I begin my story it is important that I tell you a few things about my family background; and specifically about my father—who and what he was—so you'll better understand what lurked beneath his successful public image and what my life was really like growing up.

I didn't have a very large extended family. My father had been adopted, so I had adoptive grandparents as well as grandparents and a couple of aunts and cousins on my mother's side, and that was it.

I remember staying with my adoptive grandparents during the summers when I was a little girl. My grandmother let me cook with her; and she did a lot of other stuff with me that I really enjoyed. When we slept out in her camper she let me sleep with her and I'd always kick her off the bed. Both of us thought that was funny. During those early years, staying with her was the closest I came to a normal life. I very seldom saw my maternal grandparents, but the few recollections I have of them are pleasant.

Childhood memories of my mother are scarce because the trauma of those years caused me to block most of them out. But there is one memory that is crystal clear: she was a drug addict. And that, I believe, was a contributing factor to some of the horrors I went through as a child.

Moving on to my father, he was born in February of 1951. He was a very large man, standing about 6'6" tall and weighing in the neighborhood of 250 pounds. He had dark

skin and hair. I was forever in awe of how easily he did everything. For example, he loved motorcycles and built his very own Harley when he was around eighteen years old. And he built several more bikes after that. He was able to achieve almost anything if he set his mind to it.

As an adult he became involved in the production of semiconductors, and designed and built the plants where they are produced. After a plant was up and running he'd move to another area and build the next one. That meant my family never lived in any one place for very long.

Through his business activities he was able to bring a lot of people up the ladder of success with him. He built these men up out of nothing and made them into something. But my father was always the top dog, the leader, and those he helped elevate to become successful and respected businessmen were indebted to him. In my opinion it was like he was the leader of a kind of cult, and they were his followers.

He wanted to be the best and always took first place in everything he entered or tried. In addition to moving so often, we traveled from state-to-state showing off his bikes. Everywhere he went he constantly developed new contacts ranging from the biker gangs he was affiliated with, to lawyers, judges and politicians. His domineering personality coupled with his vast network of followers and connections, made him a very powerful overlord. He could make somebody's career with a phone call or a whispered word. And he could destroy them in the same way. Some of my father's personality and drive rubbed off on me and I am like him in some respects, in that I'm strong and can get people to follow my lead.

When I was still a child, our house was the scene of many parties and get-togethers. Virtually built for entertainment, one floor had a pool table, a handmade glass chess table, a fireplace and video games. Sometimes a hundred or more people were partying and other times just a handful of

guys playing poker. But it was almost always busy, and marijuana was always available.

Despite my father's violent streak, he was my hero and I saw him as someone who could do anything and knew everyone. Back then I didn't question the "how" and "why" of it. I had no reason to. That's just the way it was.

Looking back, though, there were signs of how my father operated that I didn't pick up on. As a little child he took me into bars with him and I hid under the tables while he had meetings. I heard things, but at the time I was too young to understand. As I got older I'd hear him call people I knew he didn't like and have the friendliest conversations with them. It didn't seem important to me then, but now I realize he was gathering information about people that he could later use to coerce or intimidate them, and he also talked about tapping people's telephones. I guess the reason it didn't seem odd to me at the time was because I thought that's how things were done—to me it was normal.

Due to his connections, and the ability to get things done and make or break people, my father had the aura of a Mafia Godfather. People came to him for everything. And if he granted their request and helped them get what they wanted, then they owed him. People have asked me if he actually was in the Mafia. I don't know for sure either way. But I do know that he wielded Mafia-like power.

My father might have been a charmer, but he was also capable of extreme violence. He abused my mother physically and emotionally. And he physically abused both my brother and me.

On the following pages you'll learn much more about him, but I think that for now you know enough to be able to appreciate the world I lived in.

Bella Capo

April 15, 2013

PART ONE

My Hell on Earth

CHAPTER ONE

One of my earliest memories is of me as a little girl, all decked out in my ballerina outfit, my hair in pigtails. When I allow this memory to play in my head, it is as though I'm looking at a video of someone else. In my movie that little girl sits in a bedroom with pink walls and carpet. Even the bedroom furniture is designed to match the furniture in her doll house.

She plays with her dolls and her doll house, like any other little girl. But, if you think this is the picture of a happy child, you are dead wrong. Suddenly the "me" I view from a distance grabs a pair of scissors. She chops off her Barbie's hair, then makes the dolls beat and rape each other. Breathing heavily, she snatches up the mutilated dolls and throws them into a closet, pretending to lock the door. That's not what most little girls would have done with their beloved dolls, but she is acting out the things she sees every day—her normal.

Was she sending the abused dolls to a safe place by throwing them in the closet? I couldn't tell you, but I do know my closet was used as my own hiding place. I did weird stuff like hide food and other things in there. Years later I learned

that abused children often hoard food and hide it in their rooms. Sometimes they eat as if there will be no more meals, even if they have no reason to feel insecure about their food supply. In fact, so much of my behavior was classic of abused children, even mutilating my poor Barbie dolls.

For example, I'd crawl up to the top floor and just sit in the closet. You see, there came a point when my tears stopped. From that time on, I couldn't feel anything. No wonder I can't stand to acknowledge that the child in my mental movie was me.

From the time I was four years old I lived for dancing. When I was dancing, I could be that perfect little girl in the perfect room with the perfect parents, not the "me" hiding in the closet who witnessed things so horrible they were squashed down in my memory for most of my life.

Dancing kept me going. Roller skating, the beach—these are the things that made me feel good. School was hard because I never could concentrate. I'd been thrown around and punched so much that my mind wasn't functioning right. But they didn't have traumatic brain injury awareness back then, so I just felt dumb and out-of-place.

My mom took me to dancing lessons three times a week, sewed outfits for my performances, got my hair done and was my biggest fan in the crowd. That part I do remember. But through the years I protected myself by suppressing so many memories, that it wasn't until a few years ago I had any memories of my mom at all. I just felt I had to protect her. I guess I'd just seen her battered or drugged-out so often I thought I could make it better.

Life at home was such a hell that I was suicidal from the time I was four years old. That was when I began to pray to Satan to take my life because I knew God wouldn't. I knew God wanted to save me, but being "me" was so hard.

Every time I'd done something wrong, I still felt I was a child of God, so I knelt down and cried with all my heart.

“Please, please God, forgive what I’ve done.”

I experienced the comfort of Him telling me it was okay. He told me my life was going to be harder than most people’s, but it would be okay. He told me to pray silently to Him because only He could hear my mind, and Satan couldn’t.

That calmed me, but I couldn’t grasp what it all meant and why I felt so different. Sure, there are times when everyone feels like they’re different, but most four-year-olds don’t think that way. They are still innocent, just past being toddlers. However, I knew who God was and believed what He told me—that I was here for a purpose. It wasn’t a church that taught me I had to survive and have faith, either. It was something deep in my heart.

One memory I’ve recovered through therapy is the night my mom came home in the middle of the night and my father screamed at her so loudly that she gathered me up and took me to the spare room downstairs, where we hugged one another tightly, trying to shield each other from my father’s wrath. But he blasted into the room with a huge jug of cold water and dumped it right over both of us. As the vision of that awful night flashed into my mind, I shivered just as though the water was hitting me again and desperately tried to cling to the rare happy memories I have instead, like her getting me ready for a dancing recital.

When I got old enough to go to school, I pulled Cs even though I wasn’t trying. By the third grade I’d quit going home after school and went to my friend Heidi’s house instead.

That’s where I experienced my first molestation outside of my own family. For a long time I didn’t tell anybody. It was disgusting. She gave her older brother blowjobs and did all kinds of other sexual things. He threatened to tell and then pulled out the porn magazines and made us mimic the photos. He and my own brother were two-of-a-kind and

they wielded a crazy power over us by making us believe we were the ones who were wrong.

I was terrified of what would happen to me and to Heidi if my parents found out, instead of being confident they would support me and the boy would be punished. It may be hard for someone who hasn't walked in my shoes to understand. And you may even think I plead my case too vigorously, but I went by what I saw happening to my own mother. How could I know that wasn't the way it was supposed to be?

Finally, I couldn't take it anymore, and I did tell my family what was happening. Who do you think was the most pissed? It was my brother, who was abusing me, too. Why do you suppose he was upset? Because he didn't have control over these episodes with Heidi's brother.

The police got involved but no arrests were made. Heidi's family moved away very suddenly. Looking back as an adult, I don't think it was a coincidence. My father would have used his power, connections and influence to achieve this outcome. As for the police department's disinterest, it only reinforced in my little-girl head that people like my father could do whatever they wanted. He was able to resolve problems in his own way.

The San Diego neighborhood I grew up in was close. On the surface it looked like the American Dream with nice houses and cars in a well-tended atmosphere. We all played kick-the-can and other childhood games.

But there was a big, dark, secret among us all and that was the little sexual underworld of molestations that occurred from one house to another.

My best friend, Kelli, was older than my brother. She also was the only one who stood up to my father and hid me in her house when things got really bad. It took a lot of courage because as I said, everyone was afraid of my father, and that was a fact.

La Bella Mafia

A few years ago I reconnected with one of Kelli's brothers on Facebook, and the first question he asked was, "So did he (my brother) grow up to run gangs like your father?"

I laughed to myself and replied, "No, the little girl in the tutu did."