

Homage to Gianluca Congiusta, a young businessman from Calabria, an innocent victim of the ‘Ndrangheta and our indifference.*



During the Summer Term Course field study in July of 2013, we met with Mario Congiusta, the father of Gianluca, the young entrepreneur assassinated on May 24, 2005 in Siderno by the ‘Ndrangheta, the powerful and bloody Calabrian mafia.

The meeting with Mario was very instructive due to his clarity in explaining to the students about the dynamics of the mafia and its illogical nature, but it was especially hard and moving for the students. It was also difficult for me, a teacher of this difficult subject, to digest, for I thought I had been used to these tragedies by reading the daily news.

We briefly met Mario with his wife Donatella a few days before the inauguration of the confiscated property in Gioiosa Ionica: the house where the Arcadian students stayed for the entire period. Donatella had conquered everything with her force and her humanity: more than one student, after hearing her few moving words about Gianluca, and after seeing her sweet and hopeless face, approached her after to give their condolences and tell her how grateful they were to meet her. And she smiled hopefully, with gratitude, and gave them a tender hug as if they were children. Meeting the heartbreaking strength of Donatella definitely cancelled those traces—if they’d had them—of the glossy image of the mafia: the real pain of a mother swept away the golden crust of the lie of many American show business productions.

The meeting with Mario, a long interview lasting over two hours, was just as difficult. When a father tells you with pride the story of his son, of a brilliant son full of life, you find it difficult to think that this life was swept away in a moment and for no other reason than the human bestiality that is the mafia. You feel shame for not realizing the depth of the problem before the story, because you feel you are not doing enough in your daily lives to spread the history and the culture of the anti-mafia, of the life and the beauty in opposing that culture of death and corruption that is the culture of the mafia, that unfortunately today pollutes all of Italy.

Then the Arcadian students and myself made a promise to Mario: to make as much of the world as possible to know about the story of Gianluca, the smiling Calabrian man that lived two times. Because, in an ironic sort of way, Gianluca had already been close to death. But death had lost as he healed from leukemia.

* by Dr. Alberto Corbino, professor of “The Economics of Organized Crime and social innovation”, Arcadia University Center for Italian Studies, Rome, January 2014.

The second time, Gianluca had been spending years being devoted to honest work, to his family and to the future, without rest, maybe — I come to think of it — so he could give even more in every sense and in every breath so that he could share the joy with those who stood beside him.

But the bestiality and the cowardice of the mafia do not know reason. Today the murderer of Gianluca is condemned to life in prison, thanks to the perseverance of Mario, who constantly pressured the police and judiciary so that the case would be resolved and not end up forgotten. In today's Italy, a man struck by such fatality must take this on, as well!

But, even if justice is done, Gianluca, the honest and courageous young man from Southern Italy that would like to live free from the Mafia, from the accomplices entrepreneurs and bad politicians, to life he cannot be returned, unless by honoring his memory.

Here, the translation of one of Roberta's letters, a sister of Gianluca, is the smallest tribute that the Arcadia University Center for Italian Studies, thanks to the work of their students and staff, wants to make to the memory of Gianluca Congiusta, to the force of his family and all the families of innocent victims of the mafia and to those who, in this Italy besieged by corruption and mafiosi, still believe in a sense of justice that Gianluca reminded us with his own example of courage.

Credits:

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May 24, 2005

It was a gray evening in the end of May, this year one breathed a strange air, the summer was slow to arrive, there was a heavy drizzle and a biting wind that seemed to foreshadow something. That evening I was at a friend's house and while we were under the staircase landing saying our last goodbyes, suddenly, the cruel, bold ring of the telephone broke the serene every day atmosphere. It was that telephone that for a fraction of a second separated sweet ignorance from the freezing discovery that forever changed my life. From then on there was the race, the desperation, the dark end at that tragedy was towards death, yes, death. The woman wrapped up in her black cloak, she made the most cruel and inhumane appointment...

My name is Roberta, I am the sister of Gianluca Congiusta, from childhood I always liked to be introduced as such, I always mark my identity not with my last name, but with my sense of belonging with Luca. I was flattered and proud to do this, and during my story you will understand my reasons why. I write this to you, hoping that the sensitivity that you have always shown can bring attention to this story and this tragedy of a common man, and you can help me. For this help to exceed, I will elaborate a catastrophe that struck my family on May 24 2005, devouring our lives, destroying our ideals, scarring our hearts, our faces, rendering nothing visible to us. Probably you have heard this in the press, not remembering it, because the importance that one gives to this kind of news is normally minimal. The information was absurdly presented with a cold and banal news report title: DEATH. Physical DEATH, Moral DEATH, DEATH of courage, of hopes, of projects, of ideals. But I would have wanted to call it, "As I still have a hard time with its real name": MURDER.

Only today, more than a year ago, I had the courage to lay down the cards, with the hell I have inside, to retell that which happened to me, and how it changed me, permanently marking me. At first, I was terrified even at the idea of talking about this, because it signified that I was aware of the event, admitted it, and realized that everything was real and not only a nightmare in which I was convinced I was in, waiting for an awakening that was too long and cruel in arriving. Today this awakening has arrived, but unfortunately it only confirms the overwhelming

nightmare. It is the end. Only today I go out and confront the reality that I have hidden from myself for months, living as if under a partial paralyzing anesthesia, today I go out to say this: Luca is not here anymore, they killed him...In Calabria before it was defined as an outstanding murder by the Honorable Franco Fortugno, he was consumed by another devastating tragedy that had shaken like never before an entire community, that had pulled aside the curtain in one of the towns of Calabria, that city was my city: Siderno.

I said it *was*, because today notwithstanding I physically am still here, but I have no sense of belonging. Siderno is gone...but for the beautiful beach, for the vivacity of its citizens, for the initiative of all its youth that brought forth projects about culture, tourism, art, who brought progress in to a place that many times is defined as a burned earth. But on the 24 of May, 2005, Siderno was off, and returned to be an earth...”They killed one of us,” this is the phrase that the people of Siderno incredulously repeated to themselves like they had to convince themselves. This is the phrase that continues to resonate in my mind and that in that loud...of sensations, of sounds, of smells, of...and that evening, that terrible evening, in a fraction of a second my entire existence was dissolved. “They killed my brother”, “Luca is dead”, and with him also myself and my family, all that we were was dead. Hour by hour, day by day, I repeated that “They killed my brother”, because other than that inhuman sadness of loss I had to deal with a reality that I lived in a Calabria I didn’t understand. I hadn’t believed it, they had the wrong person, it was an error. Luca no, it wasn’t possible. Luca was one of us. He was one of few young enterprising men, full of life, ambition, full of society and for society, Luca was the city. Even if he was young, Luca was the symbol of change. I made a mistake saying *was*, Luca *is*, because that night change had begun. For the first time, entire cities, adults, children, elderly, sick, rich, and poor began to feel angry against this evil that enslaved, killed, and destroyed: THE MAFIA.

The Ionic cities dressed in mourning, the shops of Siderno closed as a signal of protest, writing on their windows: “Closed because someone robbed the life of Gianluca”. That day at Siderno you breathed the odor of death, you could feel the silence of the abyss. Yes, exactly this, that they robbed him, they took him away from me one evening in May before I could embrace

him a final time, for the conditions in which they reduced him. One shot, only one precise cold, cruel shot of a shotgun, killed him, but I wonder what were these conditions? What did they say? Why do people rave? What does this have to do with us? We are a normal family of merchants, we worked for three generations in the same sector, we aren't commercially desirable, we aren't in politics, no one in the mafia bureaucratic system had ever skimmed us. We were always honest: in the legal systems, in respect of human values, without any distinction between rich and poor, but only distinguishing the good from the bad. Unfortunately, however, our error is exactly that, considering the bad guys to be a hemisphere away, there was an illusion that they were a long way away from our existence, we listened for years to our local television news, worrying about the terrible news, but we were astonished, because despite everything in my land we lived well.

It was if they still spoken of another Calabria, a Calabria that I didn't know and that I never had wanted to know. For years I was ignorant of the phrase that today is made worse by the shot of a shotgun: "As long as you kill each other!!!" Today everything has changed, nothing which I believed makes any sense. The bad guys live next door, disguised, mingling with good people, wearing jackets and ties by day, and maybe black gloves by night. I don't believe that they kill themselves, but are capable of killing even "one of us" if we don't give them what they want.

Today I hate myself, for there being careless, insensitive, and naïve enough to believe that world of which I had heard speak of only in television did not belong to me, how I hate that before massacres that occur outside of Italy, they say "We are all there!" Italy is a part of the world, like Calabria is a part of Italy, and it is no longer tolerable to listen indifferently to these sterilized Calabrian newspaper columns, taking the only thought: "Summer Holidays We Take Elsewhere". All these people don't have an idea, don't realize this bleak spectacle they have been assisting, the lives destroyed that they concealed behind these daily articles. For me, however, it is not possible to blame them, because unless they see things another prospective, until we limit ourselves to immovable indignation, until you have the will to change your attitudes, until you are directly affected by these events...unfortunately, you will hear the news, but you will not hear the screams of pain.

And it is for this reason that I decided to write, to scream about this horrible event in Calabria, to tell this horrible event to those of my family that will help. When will someone join my cause? When will they realize that special interventions are needed here now, that interventions help the people so much, but if they aren't put in action, if not in those particular defined period of emergency (here the emergency is daily), it is absurd to wait until more blood flows....

There are so many things, the lives that I have to show to you, the pen goes alone, mailed, with the anguish that are not enough words, and with the certainty that my language skills are not sufficient, to describe this catastrophic tale. Exactly for this reason, I accompany my words with copious documentation of photos, journals, videos, organizational writings of these boys "The Boys of Locri" that you will have heard of only after the death of the hon. Francesco Fortugno, but they had existed before that, only before their voices were heard, until one of the cameras of TG3 decided not to show their now famous white banner, labeling them very generically. Behind this common name, there are faces, stories, young enthusiasm and feelings that were broken. There are no flags, no exploitation. I, personally, when I say the Locri Boys, I mean to say the boys that were born and raised in Locri in Calabria and not what we wanted to represent these Boys as. I too am a woman from Locri but not because the media decided but because in Locri I was born and lived, or in the light of the facts it would be more appropriate to say I survived. Many of these boys were friends of my brother, many of these boys already marched, pedaled, demonstrated for Luca, screaming their outrage but unfortunately there had to be the murder of a politician homicide to turn the spotlight on a land in which the lamenting echoes of mothers, fathers, sisters, friends, girlfriends, has never left the confines.

What makes me the most indignant is that my family, for not folding to pressure while living for the day for the sake for a request of truth and justice, has to resort to demeaning ploys to be heard. It is not based on blood, the sacrifice of a life, the various desperate letters my father sent to Ciampi (the President of the Italian) to Pisanu (the Minister of Internal Affairs), the Prefect. Only when we declared to abstain from our right to vote, not having been guaranteed our right to life, and only after we collected thousands of voting cards, given to us in a sign of solidarity,

only after we had received them, only then did somebody give us a hearing. At our house television cameras from Rai arrived, they had been preparing for a new broadcast, and had been reading the news story: Civil Protests of a Family. Someone had been touched or maybe only intrigued by our story. I have no illusions of having aroused people's interests, but I only presume that there were political implications that were sorted out.

In these days there arrived faxes and letters of solidarity from all of Italy, from so many friends of Luca, a few who even pushed to suggest the establishment of an award for anyone who provided useful information to the investigators, but, my father who after the tragedy developed an exaggerated sense for the legal system was against the idea, only for food for thought. While I write, on the television, a local network continues to show a broadcast of the pictures from the "March of Silence" that was done in honor of my brother several days ago, a year after his disappearance. Silence was a sign of protest against the silence of investigations, against the silence of those who know but are afraid of speaking. There were around 3,000 people, but there were others, the spectators who closed their mouths in the security of their homes, furtively peering through the slots of their shutters.

There were many white balloons with "Ciao Gianluca" written on them, there were representatives from anti-mafia associations, the people of 'Locri' a white banner that led the march denouncing the Mafia: you are without dignity, you have offended a city. There was the widow Fortugno, the daughter of the judge Scoplliti arrived from Rome to scream in silence an anger repressed for years, the family of victims of the mafia united in sadness, there were so many children, and there was the same deafening silence a year ago. I observe the pictures, and again I can't believe that this is us, our faces streaked with tears and I shudder. The procession can be glimpsed only from television cameras from local tv stations or from little boys that had known Luca and wanted to recapture the emotions that they were able to feel even now, a year after his murder. Death is no longer news to us, the boys of Locri have gone out of fashion, the information of the State isn't saying anything more, they wait for the next suitable homicide, or the next useful anniversary or an exasperated gesture from a destroyed family. All of this is not acceptable anymore.

And the paradox is that we in our misfortune feel fortunate because, even if there were only a few of us we were able to make our voices heard. The force of desperation made our protests, albeit civil, disruptive, for this earth where silence is a virtue, but it drives me crazy to think of all these relatives that had a similar tragedy but couldn't go out to ask for help, from resignation of because they were consigned to tiny villages. I would like, whatever the cost, to represent the life and death of my brother, I would like everyone to know Gianluca, I would like everyone to know that in a small town of Calabria, there lived a special person, a brilliant young man, only capable of conveying an unrestrained desire for life at a time when you only needed a little, but on a whim he was squandered and his life thrown away. I would like our rebellion, our battle to not be only ours, but all of civil society that is in Calabria, and I want redemption. Today this young man, Luca is no more, they killed him, they stopped him, they killed a friend of everyone, but they are under an illusion if they think they had won, because even today Luca continues to be a driving force that was not allowed to physically live. Luca is missed by us all, Luca is missed by the city, even missed by those who had never met his eyes, his smile, but only passed in front of his shop. The newspapers called him a young man with a contagious smile. He was one of those people that from childhood have a particular light in their eyes, who even then realized their existence is special, and so it is in life as in death. Several times, almost like a warning, a warning to live an intense life, we risked losing him, but all the times his great physical strength, his seriously ironic life had won against a destiny that today, in light of what happened seems to be making fun of us, but not of him. He felt he had always known life, he lived in every moment, every relationship, every experience like it would be the last with a transcendental intensity, HE and only HE had known the value of life. On the contrary, we hid behind our intolerance, behind our daily banal concerns, blaming life for our frustrations, not realizing that there were our riches, the riches of life. Now it is too late to enjoy these stories that HE tried daily to tell us: LIFE. He had a special gift for seeing the world with different eyes, and seeing differently. A tramp, a gypsy, and a mentally disabled boy for HIM were first before all people, with a story, a life from which one can always learn something. He wasn't content with many acts of charity to clean the conscience, HE had to go in see their background, he had to understand, he had to solve.

There is a young man in town, Ciccio, that first met Luca when he was an outcast. Today it is not so. Luca didn't strengthen his misery, giving him alms, Luca didn't dismiss him, but he wanted to understand the reason behind his request for help. It was a simple request of affection. If all of us with little gestures tried every day, to look in the face of the most weak, and do something about it, I am sure that it would be a better world. I say this not to sound saintly, but because I saw at the end of May 24, 2005 with a person, my brother, who had made this theory a basic rule of life. It was as if for him the time he was allowed to live was not important, as long as he lived the best life for himself and the others, leaving a mark of its passage. With enviable naturalness, Luca proposed to Ciccio to come and volunteer that weekend in our shop, making him feel useful, important to somebody, even if Luca hadn't needed those little jobs done. Luca went over, wanting to know the story, the family of this young man who paradoxically made him smile about his condition. Today Ciccio is no longer the outcast, but the friend of Luca.

Today Ciccio feels responsible for that which remains of Luca: his family. He spends whole days with us or spends time with his friend in the cemetery. His death changed our shadow, it changed our faithful friend. We had to search for him after the death of my brother, but Luca always knew who were his real friends. It is the smallest people who teach you the great things. I will try with that little strength that I have, after months of anger, of humiliation, of suspicion, of desperation, to tell you of his life, until that last gesture of unspeakable insanity, done by unknown assailants, who broke him at the peak of his youth, at 32 years.

Even today we do not know who, and more importantly why. I will try to make people understand just how devastating the suspect, though they may hurt the curious eyes of the other people whose inhuman sadness of violent loss.

Luca was born on December 19, 1973, to a normal family of merchants. My mother, Donatella, who despite of the death of her heart continues to smile, for the name of that broken smile, always managed a studio of wedding dresses. My father, Mario, a man today hardened from pain that lives due to a constant struggle with the legal system, was the proprietor of an electronics shop that was handed down from father to son, and in the years, thanks to the initiative and the intuition of Luca, became the area leader of telephones, working and giving luster to the street of Siderno. Luca went to a Linguistic School and had a particular predisposition for languages and

sports, in all of his events. My father made him travel alone from the time he was eight, for vacation, studies, or for sport's meetings, maybe because like all or mostly like all the fathers of Calabria, he hoped for his son a brilliant future in another land. He was aware of the fact that here the seeds of destruction grow, or grow cultured from other fruits of your work.

But Luca wasn't the young man who was content to be maintained by his dad for his studies, HE had to do, had to live, had to build, had to frantically run as if there was never enough time. It was outrageous to close your eyes and go away, for what would be left in Siderno if everybody left? Today I regret that he never finished his studies or went to work on projects benefitting the earth, because that same earth swallowed him.

Before becoming the clever young entrepreneur that everyone knew, during the last years of school he had to fight against a tumor for the first time, maybe less treacherous than what would kill him fifteen years from then. He was only 16 years old, and they told him he had a month of life, even if the whole community unceasingly prayed for HIM. Mom and Dad moved to Bologna, gave up their assets, even in this case their savings to go to via da Siderno. It was as if the life of the Calabria people had less worth, since here there was not adequate equipment and today there is still not. In Bologna with my parents and with Luca, he started the trial, a pilgrimage to different hospitals first to identify the disease: a form of fulminant leukemia, they told us. I was young, but not enough to not understand it. For two years I lived with my paternal grandparents, on my own, tensely and temperamentally awaiting his return. I went to Bologna during school breaks, but I suffered terribly from seeing him fade away, and finding out from time to time that my mom was breaking, not existing outside the hospital room. Here in the city, family and friends turned to famous mystics, Natuzza Evola or Fratel Cosimo, asking for help for their children. At the same time however they watched me with pity and fear due to their ignorance. The story of my brother scared them, since he had one of the first cases of leukemia in the city, and it was a disease nobody understood. The people watched me curiously and furtively, like I could give it to them. Yet already Luca had proven his determination, and his desire for Life had won against Death.

Yet already, my mom, a young woman of fifty and a half, she anchored herself to him, fighting the sickness with love, going against all the medical advice (other than the therapy, obviously), following her own instinct, curing him with a medicine that today is difficult to find: unconditional love. Mom fed him, massaged him, helped him read, walk, even if the doctors advised against it, continued to give him what felt like a life, regardless of the diagnosis every else said. For around two years, my mom's house was a cold seat in front of a sterilized room of the hematology department of the Saint Orsola's Hospital of Bologna. Even today, doctors and nurses remember this young girl and her mom, bringing her for an example. Even there the course of Luca was woven from a seemingly divine plan, with the lives and the deaths of so many poor people, of babies who were in worse condition than him, and didn't know their diseases were different, but for that reason they didn't have the right support and the power to fight it. Luca had that, against everyone and everything, against every expectation Luca won, and that experience made him even more of a man, and because of it he was kind, imperfect, and complete. Myself in those years lived far away from them, through the telephone wires I heard the comforting words from my mom who never hid or changed her tone of voice when she told me otherwise.

One of the pictures that remained indelible in my mind was when, entering into the room of the hospital with due precaution to sterility, I saw in that bed a person that I didn't know was my brother. The disease had transformed him, his curls were fallen, his eyes were hollow, he was pallid. Apparently when I entered I was under the illusion that this was a sign of recovery without understanding that his new appearance was due to the effects of cortisone. The leukemia changes your spirit and body. That day next to him there was a priest. Why is he here, I wondered? And I didn't dare to ask the question aloud because I didn't want an answer. Luca however, with his usual humor saw me and exclaimed: "He came to give me communion", making his visit appear a normal thing so I didn't understand the urgency. One of Luca's most precious gifts was to reconsider problems even when they appeared unsolvable, and face them. I continued to stare at him all the time I was allowed to be beside him, always too short for a sister aware of the fact that each day could be the last. He impassively never showed his fear, his

fragility, he remained immobile there without yielding, with his English book in hand and his ironic smile, it felt like he wanted to challenge death.

He won, after around two years of chemotherapy, of experimental interventions, after the removal of bone marrow and its replacement, Luca returned to Siderno, returned to me, to Alessandra, the youngest of our siblings, he returned to his friends. The city celebrated, at my house which was bustling with family, acquaintances that wanted to personally ascertain Luca's condition, and wanted to see with their own eyes that Luca had done it. Yes, it was like this, Luca hadn't only won against the disease but also in that condition he hadn't wasted an instant of life. He learned, devoured books, studied as much as he could (when the effects of the chemo allowed him to) so he could regain the years of school he lost and prepare for college. From his return to the town, his life was a succession of challenges, even when it wasn't destiny that presented them, it was he who had to continually get in the game.

At the beginning of his university courses, he was aware he could not finish them because his family needed him, but he had the firm conviction that even this experience, however brief, could be useful. After a year of going to university at the Faculty of Political Science at Messina, without stopping to work, he returned definitively home to start a project for him, for his family, and for his earth. It was a volcano in continuous eruption. At home he found a familiar situation and commercial bankruptcy, but this did not discourage him. He took the reins of the business from my dad and with the power of his commercial intuition, in the course of two years created the "GC" company.

Three Tim Centers, one in Siderno, one in Locri and one in Marina di Gioiosa Ionica, town of the Ionian coast connected to one another. He became a Master Dealer for Tim (the highest level attainable in the field of mobile telephony), and created twenty sub-affiliates in places ranging from Reggio Calabria to Soverato. I, too, in the years after abandoned my studies to contribute to the recovery Luca entrusted me with. The management of the store in the Marina di Gioiosa Ionica, my father took care of the Tim Center of Locri, while Katie, his fiancée, was beside him at the store in Siderno, the headquarters. In a short time, taking advantage of the fame of his

brand, Luca became a promoter and sponsor of each event and initiative of development and tourism in Locri, always managing to give added value to each initiative: the donation. His attention was directed in particular to the children, to the disabled, to the disadvantaged, in that parallel world is often ignored for convenience, the world of the weak. Nothing to Luca had to be an end in itself, woe to consider a commercial activity only as a mere source of income.

He collected trophies and plaques of gratitude, which are worth more than any other trophy in the sporting or professional fields. His shop had become a point of reference, a meeting place for adults and children that turned to Him for various reasons, from organizing a basketball tournament to a simple piece of advice for a first date, to the vents for misunderstandings with the professors, to requests for mediation with the parents to get permission for a study holiday. The people did not enter into his shop just to purchase things, but to see him and to start the day with a smile with his ability to be seriously fun. He had a special charisma, an enviable self-control, an addictive vital charge. Luca was the friend of all because he could make every meeting, even the most occasional, special. He could live life how it should be lived with passion, enthusing himself for and with the events and not allowing himself to simply be carried by them.

There is a prayer, the prayer of a father, Douglas MacArthur that seems written for him: "Give me a son, O Lord, that is strong enough to acknowledge his own weakness and brave enough to face himself in front of fear. Give to him the strength to stay on his feet, after an honorable defeat, as well as the strength to remain humble and simple after the victory. Give to me a son, O Lord, in which the desires do not replace the actions, a child who knows You and knows how to know himself.... Make that he travels, I beg of you, not the path of wealth and of comfort, but one of effort and of challenge in the fight against the difficulties. Teach him how to hold himself right in the storm but to have compassion for those who are weak. Give me a child who has a pure heart and a higher ideal, a child who knows how to control himself before wanting to dominate others, a child who knows how to laugh without forgetting how to cry, without forgetting the past. And after all this, Lord, give to him, I beg you, a sense of humor so that he lives with seriousness, but is able to look without taking at himself too seriously. Give to him the

humility that one should always remember the simplicity of true greatness, the open mind of true wisdom, and the sweetness of true strength. And then I, his father, I will murmur I have not lived in vain."

His life was a carousel, a swing between unbridled work, social commitments and sports, lots of sports. Running, cycling, swimming, tennis, horseback riding, football.... Even if there was not the sufficient practice for only one. He had to experience, he had to prove himself to the extreme. In the interval from work devouring kilometers until exhaustion, as if to prove his freedom. Freedom from disease, freedom from pre-established patterns of life, freedom from prejudice, from low preconceptions. Freedom, in a land where often the freedom of thought and of work has too high a price to pay: life itself. After the first few years of commercial freedom, they began the rumblings of a social context that perhaps we underestimated, or perhaps Luca had consciously wanted to challenge. At the Tim Center of Locri, we suffered the first armed robbery, a total of three in the course of one year.

We do not bow down with the orders of closing or of paying protection money, and my father responds by going into the store escorted by the Carabinieri that flank him throughout the course of the workday. This state of things could not last long, however, whereby after a few months we try again and reclaiming of our time, of our shop we resume charge of our lives. Those people, however, do not forget and do not give up, after yet another threat to we closed definitively the business in Locri. It is unacceptable that in Calabria a tradesman should pay taxes twice, the State and to the Anti-state. It was not our resignation, but realism and survival because as long as you will be alone denouncing, protesting and disdaining them, you can never win against Them.

Since that year, we decided to concentrate our energies on the other shops in Siderno our city, and in the Marina di Gioiosa Ionica, the home country of mamma, reassured by the fact that for many years there, we had never any form of extortion or any kind of corrupt power subjugated against us. Perhaps because there, they had seen Luca grow up and fight for life, perhaps because that its spontaneity, that its cleanliness, that its emotional charge had also conquered Them, and until that moment he had been spared.

Them I do not know who they are, I do not know the individual faces, They, the mobsters that very generally can be indicated by the surnames of the families that historically belong to these uncivilized forms of association, but who has the certainty that one or the other of your countryman is at their side?

For years we have believed in Siderno and in the Marina di Gioiosa Ionica you could live and work well, there was no comparison with Locri which, although only four kilometers away presented a social, commercial, scenario completely different. A closed-minded, retrograde, founded on the legacies of a primitive mob, where risks of losing life if not from the precedence, where your only guilt is not knowing who you have in front of you.

For years we deluded ourselves having overcome that parenthesis of abuse, we saw our city, Siderno, progressing and we were proud to be part of that growth, but unfortunately it was a mere illusion. Even Siderno was controlled by some form of occult power that only was exercised in a different manner. That of Siderno is a more modern mafia, a mafia "cultured", a mafia to which does not serve to make any noise because it is aware of its own economic power. Even here in Siderno but you are allowed to live only as long as your profession, your interests, your private life, will not clash with them. Still today we cannot know who and especially why. After years of sacrifice, of work unrestrained, entrepreneurship of brilliant, after years of aid, of solidarity, that He gave away unbeknownst to all of us (the letters of appreciation reached us after that cursed date) after years passed to build brick by brick, everything has been erased, annihilated with a single inhuman gesture, one shot struck the heart of our family destroying it forever. Like all his life, even his own death has been different, unnatural. On May 25, the newspapers headlined: young businessman murdered, execution typical mafia. He was not a young entrepreneur, he was the young entrepreneur, he was my brother, and he was my life. In the days following that bloody night, whose memories are overshadowed, as both a form of self-defense from the pain, and through the various sedatives you take, maybe raving. I wanted to convince you that Luca also conquered them, with his ability to be man and child. This belief arose from the fact that the manner of his murder had the peculiarities difficult to understand for those who do not live in Calabria.

The 'Ndrangheta, kills, disfiguring, scarring, depriving you of your identity as a human being and in the unpunished murders of the last 32 years, the methods were nearly identical. Never less than three or five shots to carry out to the end their missions of death. Not for Luca, though, I kept saying, trying to convince myself, that he had not felt the pain, hoping that he had not realized that on the way home that night there was the devil waiting for him. For Luca, it was different, it was a single shot, maybe they managed to shoot only one because even in that moment his gaze had them stuck. It was as if this inhuman act, carried out who knows how many other times by those killers, for Luca was too much. Not because my brother's life was worth more than that of all the other victims, but for me, obviously from a sister, from a sister in love with him. Maybe, I'll never know why, maybe I'll never know if Luca went to his death consciously, by choice, by choice of values, choice of liberty, because you are not bent, or if whether, paradoxically, it was a mistake of the person, that is the only plausible thing in the madness of the first moments. That which I know for sure, unfortunately, that is what I live daily from that night. My eyes only see darkness, everything is over, dissolved, all that mattered before now is nothing, it is trifle. You wake up, you walk, you work, you eat, you smile at people, but you are no longer you.

Every smell, every sound, every image, every stupid word of a simple conversation takes you back to that instant, in that moment when you are notified that the person you love most in the world is gone, and not because it was written in the stars but because someone has assumed the right to decide of his life and as a result of your life. From that moment, regardless of the time that is given to you to live, even only tomorrow seems too much without Him. From that moment, the overwhelming realization that nothing will taste the same again, destroys you. You weep, you despair, you wait, you rave, but you try to struggle, even if weakly batches for the only thing that you have left: Justice, Truth. Day after day you try to build yourself a new stability, but it is only apparent: each member of my family in their own way is waging a personal battle against faceless men and against the pain. I dare not imagine what is today at the heart of my parents, because if it is true that losing a brother in that way is unbearable, it is equally true that to survive a child is unnatural.

Summer 2006. What we are today is hard to explain what and how they have become, all the people whose lives revolved around Luca, it is equally demeaning to describe. Unfortunately, you are alone in suffering, your own pain is not sharable, no one can understand except those who have been amputees in the same way of a love. As far as our efforts are made to explain it is not verbally narrated. I do not say this presumptuously, but simply because I also in my previous condition of normality could not know ...

One year before the death of Luca, my dear friend, Simona, lost her father, not by the will of another human being, but with the same suddenness. In the evening she gave him a kiss good night, she fell asleep, and in the morning, he was gone, struck down by who knows what form of a heart attack. Then, I did not know about the pain, but I tried with all my being to understand, to immerse myself, I stood nearby her day and night, I also asked the Lord to give me some of her pain to lighten the load on her heart. Perhaps my prayer was heard, but it was really too much. Today I can say that despite my best efforts I could not imagine...

It is pain in the purest state, it is physical pain that paralyzes you, it is a stranglehold that squeezes your heart and shows no signs of letting go, and it does not let up except when the anger and fear allow you to sleep. You are a prisoner in your own home because if only you try to go out, every corner, every street, every face, every sign of the stores that were your stores, they scream what you were and what you've become. After the death Luca, I and Katia, his fiancée, were alone to manage the stores, we decided to close almost immediately, it was a painful choice, but a choice that was probably guided by Luca. Not having a culprit for us, they have all become potential culprits. In these conditions, with that anger inside, you cannot stand behind a counter to bestow smiles, feigning a state of normality. Inside a store that still no one knows if it was the cause of our ruin. We tried to channel the anger and the pain towards a conduit that leads to something positive, that will bring a change that makes it aware to as many people as possible, the weed that has always existed. This weed will continue to grow if we do not realize that it should be fought and not endured and if we do not realize that attitudes must be changed, and the mentality has to change. We believe that if voices are raised in unison maybe something it will succeed to obtain, if not justice at least annoyance to those who would act

otherwise undisturbed. We are going to set up a foundation dedicated to Gianluca, which will have as principal prerogatives, solidarity and support to the most needy and to children, and the promulgation of law and culture, because without them you can be easy prey for crime. Despite everything, however, in spite of everything, you try to create a new reason to live, despite the good intentions, you wonder if it's worth it, if your efforts will actually lead to a change.

When you close the door of the house, when you stay alone with your pain, with your memories, when you're not compelled to smile for not being heavy, you realize that everything is an end in itself, everything is indifferent to you, you feel different, changed, I do not know whether in a positive way or in a negative way, these tragic experiences can make you wicked, brutalize you or perhaps better sensitize you. I have been engaged for fifteen years with a guy that ironically bears the same surname, Congiusta, everything seems to have been written. If I ever get lucky enough to have a child it will be named after my brother, Gianluca Congiusta. Maybe this is not the right motivation to hope to have a baby, maybe I'm wrong, but is an attempt to survive, a child could give me back the will to live, a desire that does not exist today, there is only fear, fear of living, there are only phobias due to the fear of suffering still, the fear of losing another loved one, to the terror of not resisting. All you do, live it quietly, observe everything that is filtered, when you walk, when you talk, when you work, when you simply assist in normal scenes of everyday life, you have a slide in front of you, before you see all the rest, see Him. His eyes, his smile and you feel guilty because you're breathing and Him? Where is he? I tried to hold on to everything, perhaps to the crazy idea that in some way I could get in touch with him, I tried to hold on to faith, but when there is anger inside of you it is not possible to find comfort.

It is more than a year that he is not alive, that he does not exist. Roberta stopped there that night, in front of the scene, the person that continued to interpret her role I do not recognize. For my efforts I can not get out, I do not go making simply an expense, as not to feel observed, pitied, judged, but, I decided that a meaning must have come out of all this suffering, it must lead to something positive, if not for us than to others, to prevent that from reawakening similar tragedies. It hurts me to warn of the feeling that perhaps for other people, to strangers, we have become heavier, because our existence or non-existence revolves around Him. For me, it is a

vital need to name him in all of my stories, or talk about it in the present, but I realize that for someone who has not experienced this, or who is not a part of the family it is overwhelming, perhaps because people always prefer to pretend that everything is fine and with us it is no longer possible to pretend...

September 2006. Who are we? - My mother, who like Luca has an enviable temperament, is clearly dead inside. She continues to live for me and for my sister; her existence has become a form of collateral. She must know the truth, she has to look into the eyes of the murderer of her son, he must see us peaceful if ever it will be possible, and then his reward will be to be reunited with Luca. Katia, the fiancé of Luca moved to Milan, her hatred of this land that devoured her love was stronger than the discomfort of living alone in a big city, without friends, without relatives. My sister Alessandra, the littlest of us, was a person of uncontainable vitality, despite her of deafness problem, today I struggle to make her get out of bed, now she also is lifeless inside. Her way of putting an end to it is, to isolate herself into the world of memories is to turn off her hearing aid and take refuge in a deafening silence clenching to herself the clothes of Luca. My father spends his entire day in front of the computer in continuous contact with anti-mafia associations, with the boys, with the young "gladiators" who help him in constantly updating the site www.gianlucacongiusta.org. He parked the yellow beetle of my brother in front of the court that has already become a symbol. It has become a calendar that keeps track of the time that has passed since Luca is gone, while his murderers are still free. The only form of redemption that I have, the only way to try to prevent other tragedies, to try to understand through our experiences that we must fight not with the sword but with the word, with the dignity of the individual, is to make known to everyone, even outside the confines of my country, a modern hero, my hero, my gladiator, Luca.

I am convinced that every life is unique; I know that every form of life, every experience, every human path is a special path as was that of my brother. Perhaps this outburst serves more to me to take even further consciousness of what happened, to become aware of life and of death, but I hope that reading my experience, my tragedy, makes them feel less alone those who have suffered the same amputation.

The killer of my brother fired the first shot, the indifference of the people continued to kill us.

Roberta, the sister of Gianluca Congiusta.

Donating a smile makes my heart happy. It enriches those who receive without impoverishing who gives it. It does not last more than an instant but his memory remains a long time. No one is so rich as to be able to do without nor so poor as not being able to donate. A smile creates happiness in the family it gives support in the work and it is a tangible sign of friendship. A smile donates relief to those who are tired, it renews courage in trials and in sorrow it is medicine. And if then you meet someone who does not offer a smile to you, be generous and offer to him yours:

Nobody needs a smile so much as he who cannot give it.



www.gianlucacongiusta.org



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