

JUSTICE AT THE DOOR:
ENDING DOMESTIC SERVITUDE

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**BACK TO FREEDOM:
FROM SURVIVING TO THRIVING
A PANEL DISCUSSION**

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Moderator

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Survivor

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Ms. Celestin: Good morning everybody, my name is Simone Celestin. I am happy to be with you this morning. It was a long drive here, but I am glad I made it, and I am willing to answer any questions you may have for me. I don't really know where to start. This is my first time speaking in front of a lot of people, except for the Court. So if anybody has questions. . .

Ms. Vallejo: Ms. Celestin would like to conduct the panel in a question-and-answer format, where the questions will come from the audience. I will go ahead and open up with a basic question. Could you tell us a little bit about what happened to you, how did you come to the United States and what happened once you arrived?

Ms. Celestin: OK. When I was in Haiti, they said that they wanted me to come here and babysit a child. When I came here, they decided they would not adopt the kid anymore. I was already here,

so they decided I would do other services. I was at their house and I was cleaning for them, doing everything they want me to do, clean, cook, etc.; it was like that for about six years. I never had the chance to go to school.

After six years, a friend [of Ms. Paulin] came to the house, and asked if I could go to her place to help her out. When I went to help her [the friend] out, she [the friend] had a friend that came over there. When he saw me, he asked what was going on and then insisted on do something about. He told me when I go there [to Maude Paulin's house], just to get my birth certificate and put it in the mail and then they will try whatever they can to get me out of there. And so, that was the process of getting me out. He fight to do that in the end, and that's when they took me to her [Ms. Simone Celestin's lawyer, Sabrina Salomon, Esq.] and then I meet her, and I start talking to her and she understand me like if she was there, like she saw what I was going through. I did not have to talk to her so much; I like for her to, to quickly get what I was coming from and what was happening. And so that helps me, and since then I've been close to her, I always, every time I have a question, even after the case is done, I always call her, and she always gives me answer.

But anyways, after I go to her it was a long process. She kept me with the FBI agent, the investigative department; it was a long process. It was very hard for me, because I didn't want to go through it. I just wanted to be out of there, but I didn't want to go through this whole process, and I didn't know that I would be going through this whole process, but it was good for me to help me to see. Then they helped me. They helped and pushed. They pushed, because if it were for me I wouldn't do it without somebody pushing me and encouraging me. And, so, I went to the Court. It became the time I had to go to the Court. I went to the Court with a lot of tears, because when I had to explain everything that happened to me, it makes me sad and that's why I don't really talk about it to anybody, and I try to fit in the society, therefore, I don't really talk about it. I don't let anybody know anything about that. So, after everything happened, I didn't have a family here, and I didn't know nobody. So, it was totally up to them to help me every way they can, because I don't know where to go. I come out of a place, and I can't stay with

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the lady that helped me out because she was the already there with some friend. So, I can't stay over there, so they have to find place to put me and they don't know anybody. So, I move around all the time. Every time the FBI agent might think they [Maude Paulin, etc.] may know where I am I have to move. So I live many places. I move around all the time so they don't find me. She helped me find temporary house for about six months and then after that I get to go and do everything. That for them to find someone to take me to DCF to find way, to find food, to find place to stay, it was a whole long process to go through and I couldn't do it by myself, because I didn't know anybody. So, they did a great job; they helped me a lot. Now I'm living on my own and going to work and trying to find a way to go to school. Going to school has not been easy for me, because I have so much responsibility that I have to face and so I continue to go to work, but hopefully one day I can get everything I need to go to school. So that's what it is, so does anybody have any question?

Question: How old were you when you came from Haiti?

Ms. Celestin: I was 14.

Question: After going through everything, the whole process, the law, do you feel some sort of justice? Do you feel different?

Ms. Celestin: Yes, I feel justice was served, as I hear people say, and I do feel different because I get to live and make decisions of my own. I get to choose where and what kind of life I want and don't want. I know wrong from right; therefore, I try to stay away from the wrong part. I try not to put myself in a problem. I feel good. You know, being out of there is one process, but not in my mind; my mind is still there, I still have nightmares about it. Sometimes, they say, when you have nightmares about something it's because you think about it too much, and I don't think about it. I just sleep and it comes; I try not to let it bother me, because I try to fit myself in the real world. I don't know if that answered your question.

Question: What do you plan to be if you go to school?

Ms. Celestin: I have a little kid, and if I leave her with the babysitter it's hard. Therefore, I plan to work in the kindergarten of her school to be like an assistant so I can have a set schedule with

her. So that's my plan.

Question: Do you have any advice for kids or anybody that may be in the same situation?

Ms. Celestin: No.

Question: How did Maude Paulin get in touch with you?

Ms. Celestin: They used to have an orphanage, and so they took me from there, because it was some sort of business, when I was there I didn't know that. They take kids there, so one time my dad wasn't around; my mom wasn't around, only my grandmother. So they took me, but I never knew none of these things because they took me when I was small. When I was around eleven years old, they decided that she [Maude Paulin] wanted a kid, because Maude Paulin's parents owned the orphanage. She decided she wanted a kid to live at her house and that they were going to adopt a kid, and that she needed a babysitter, too. So her dad chose me, he knew that I would like school so he said that when I come over here I would be able to go to school so it wouldn't be so bad. But the same year I come here, he died, he passed away, so therefore, I never got to go to school or anything, but that's how Maude Paulin catch me, because the orphanage, her parents own it.

Question: If you were to get the chance to talk to young children in Haiti that are now of the age you were at the time you were brought to the U.S., what would you tell them?

Ms. Celestin: If I get a chance to talk to them I wouldn't try to find out too much about what is going on and what kind of life they're living because as soon as they talk to me I will understand because I was there. If they have a good life I would know, and if they have help sent for them and they received it, I would know, they don't have to say too much to me.

Question: When you were involved in testifying in the criminal case, what was the best part and what was the worst part of the experience?

Ms. Celestin: The best part is to know that it's just a process and when you think the emotional pain and all the crying; I know that someday I'm going to be free from this. The worst part that I experienced is going to Court and knowing that my life is not safe

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because of these people. Because when she got to go to jail, even if now she is in jail, I don't know when she is out, what will happen, so it's not that my life is in danger. It is facing them again that brings emotional things and that makes me cry when I was in the Court, to explain everything again. That was the worst part, going to Court.

Question: Hi, good morning, since the case was resolved, have you been able to get in contact with your parents back in Haiti and resume some type of relationship with your original family?

Ms. Celestin: Yes. I met this girl and she was pretty much in the same situation. Not [exactly] the same situation, but similar, very similar, and then she saw my birth certificate and I told her that I didn't know my family. She called one of her assistants and she gave the information that was on the birth certificate and they go there and look for it. So that's when they found out I have a lot of brothers and sisters and my father's in the Bahamas and they were looking for me all this time and they couldn't find me.

Question: My question relates to your coming to the United States, I know you were only 13 at the time, I'm sure you didn't know, what, if any arrangements did they lawfully make to bring you into the country, but do you know if you were surreptitiously brought in? Have you found out if they arranged some sort of temporary visa for you?

Ms. Celestin: Yes, papers.

Question: What type of visa would that have been, do you know?

Ms. Celestin: No, I don't know.

Ms. Salomon: If I may, she traveled from Haiti to Germany to here, and she was never given that passport. She was thirteen so she has no idea really, actually how she got here.

Question: I just didn't know if she was smuggled into the country or if she was brought in legally.

Ms. Salomon: She came by plane through the airport. That's the extent of what she knows and the legalities of how she got here.

Question: This question may be more for your lawyer, do you know if this orphanage in Haiti is still in business or did some kind of investigation occur?

Ms. Salomon: A lot of orphanages in Haiti have been closed. I don't know about this one because it was in the northern part, a more remote area. But, I do not practice law in Haiti so I really have no pull there to do anything, so I wouldn't know. There is an association of orphanages if you want to inquire at the end, you can give me your contact and I can put you in touch with them.

Question: I know the media depicts traffickers as being a part of organized crime rings or being typically men and so forth. You mentioned that Maude Paulin had connections to an orphanage and if I remember correctly she was also a schoolteacher, in the Miami-Dade public school system, could you talk a little bit about that?

Ms. Celestin: Yeah, she was a teacher and she didn't want me to go to school, because she said that I don't know English or anything like that. Then her husband was insisting, he said, "no, I got to go to school," and then she said, well since you're the one that wants her to go, you take her yourself. Then he took me to the school, and then the school said they had to do home schooling for a few months, and then we come back. Then one night when she came back from work she said, you see what I was talking about I knew it wouldn't work out, and so since then I haven't gone back. She was a teacher but she would just go to work and come back.

Question: You might be too young to know this but you know there is a situation in Haiti, you know, a lot of young kids have been *restaveks* in Haiti. Compared to what you have been experiencing here and knowing what is been going on in Haiti, can you compare anything between what is going on to the kids in Haiti, and what you have been experiencing, please?

Ms. Celestin: The only difference is that I was living in a nice house but pretty much everything to me is the same. I don't go nowhere. I don't see anybody. I don't get to do anything; I just stay in the house. It was only close friends that knew I was here in the United States. If someone is not close to Maude Paulin, I could not be seen at all, I had to go hide somewhere. So pretty much it's the same thing to me that only thing that's different is the environment. I was sleeping in a better house because in Haiti, in an orphanage you don't really live a nice house like the United States.

Ms. Vallejo: Sabrina, can you please elaborate a little bit about

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what is trauma informed and culturally competent legal services, what does that mean and how can the students benefit from learning more as they look into how to provide services in this area?

Ms. Salomon: What happened is that, being Haitian, I was very aware of the practice of what's called *restavek*, but beyond the practice knowing about human trafficking laws and putting it together is what helped in this case. What Simone said initially when we met, she didn't have to speak too much for me to understand where she was coming from. I think that's in big part what she was referring to. I didn't have to ask her specifically what she did in the morning, what she did at night. She gave me the big outlines initially and I could relate to her and she was comfortable, she knew that I understood what she was talking about and that allowed her to open up.

It took a long time. It didn't happen that Simone came, and then Simone turned to the Department of Justice and the case was brought forth. It took a long time to get Simone to come forward and contact the Department of Justice for them to start an investigation, and she hasn't mentioned at all the investigating stage of the whole process which was a really long, and involved at times because they were coming back with accusations towards her. She was taking a personal beating and she had to find a way to cope with that and it was my understanding of the Haitian culture that helped put the pieces together so that she got the help she needed. She did mention therapy, it took a while to get her to a therapist that was able to work with her and really provide her the support and the help she needed to cope with what had happened to her. But I don't want to give the impression that you have to be from the same culture to be culturally competent to represent a survivor. That's not what I mean. But if you're not from the culture you have to have an interest in learning about the culture. So that you don't do things that will either hurt more or that would turn away the survivor from what you're trying to do.

Question: You had mentioned that you were concerned about what may happen after Maude Paulin comes out of jail and I am wondering, what was the ultimate outcome of the case? Is she in jail now and if so what's the term? Also, was there a criminal restitution

order that was granted to you and was it paid?

Ms. Celestin: Well, everything is not quite done.

Ms. Salomon: Yeah, she was given a term of seven years and there was a criminal restitution order, and no, it has not been paid.

Question: If you're comfortable talking about it, during the investigation were you still staying at her house or did you move out and have someone to stay with?

Ms. Celestin: No, I had not been at her house since the time the friend helped me out and the only time I saw her was in Court.

Question: Having gone through the process, Simone, where do you think that the government or agencies could have helped you better?

Ms. Celestin: Where I think they could help me better is going to school, because without school I don't have a way. If I'm in school I know that [I have a chance]. If I had gone to school or have a career or anything, have a license, anything, I can do what interests me, knowing that I have to do that on my own.

Ms. Vallejo: Sabrina, during the Paulin Maude case there was something very interesting that happened in the Haitian community of lawyers. Can you talk a little bit about some of those challenges that you faced as an attorney?

Ms. Salomon: Well, you heard us talk about the practice of *restavek*, which is a practice in Haiti where someone who has very limited means is placed in the home of someone with more means, not necessarily rich, but someone of more means to serve at that household. The reality is that it depends on the host home how that person is going to be treated, because someone is *restavek* does not mean that the host home is abusing that child.

A lot of *restavek* children do get to go to school, they have a better treatment. However, because it is a practice well established in Haiti and Maude Paulin being Haitian and being a teacher in Miami, some of the Haitian community thought that she needed support from the community. I remember being part of the Haitian Lawyers Association at the time and they were approached about filing a letter of support on behalf of the family. It was conflicting to me because I was coming from the other side. I had to explain to

them why it was they could not, in good conscience, help somebody that was not only breaking U.S. laws but was doing something that was also unconscionable. And I was very vocal about it in that aspect, so of course I got calls also from teachers who were peers of Maude Paulin asking why is it that she is being prosecuted here for a practice that is well-known and accepted in the home country. So I had again to do a lot of advocacy for those children that are not only *restavek*, but are basically enslaved and abused in those homes. So, I was fighting different fronts at the same time. And fighting that front, I never expected it to come from fellow attorneys and teachers or so-to-speak professionals in the Haitian community.

Question: Simone, I just want to thank you for coming here and speaking to us today because I know it's hard to share your story. Sabrina, piggy-backing off on what you just said, I work on immigration law in Texas and I work on T-Visas and oftentimes we have problems getting certifications from law enforcement for domestic servitude cases. Can you talk about educating law enforcement about this topic and that whole process?

Ms. Salomon: Sure, we talk about partnership and we talk about collaboration, the thing with working with law enforcement is that you can't wait until you have first a case to make the first contact, because a lot of times it doesn't take you anywhere. If you have the resources to make those contacts beforehand, knowing that there is a possibility that one day you may, because like Ana mentioned in the beginning I did an intensive training with law enforcement, but I didn't have a case yet. One important resource within law enforcement, I'm not sure how it works in Texas, but here in Florida we have victim advocates who serve basically as a bridge between the community and their actual law enforcement agencies. Accessing those victim advocates is key. Also, being part of groups that regularly meet on the issue of human trafficking. The department of Homeland Security itself has information about the T-visa and information about release available to new survivors so you can always refer them to that literature if they are not taking your word for what it is.

Ms. Vallejo: Also, if I may add a few things. Immigration and Customs Enforcement also has a campaign to raise awareness against

human trafficking. They have victim advocates, who can really be your best allies in trying to get a certification from Immigration and Customs Enforcement. If you needed to get it from the prosecutor who handled the case then there is a victim advocate within your office as well. You can also keep in mind that you can file a T-visa without a certification, and in many cases, especially cases of domestic servitude where the victim may have escaped and come forward many years after the trafficking, where there may not have been a prosecution at all it might be harder to get a certification. But you can file a statement indicating how many times you attempted to get law enforcement involved in the case; if there is a civil case going you might be able to indicate that in your T-visa application as well. Getting creative on how you meet that standard of proving cooperation is key.

Question: Have there been any other prosecutions that have stemmed from your case?

Ms. Salomon: No, the family only had the one child and the fact that Maude Paulin is presently incarcerated.

Question: What about other children from that orphanage? Has there been an investigation of who adopted other children and brought them to the United States?

Ms. Salomon: Not that I know of, but an investigation like this would probably not fall under U.S. law. The DOJ did investigate the orphanage, but I don't know if there was a follow-up or other cases in the U.S.

Ms. Vallejo: The family was prosecuted, correct? There were three perpetrators that were prosecuted and sentenced for human trafficking and forced labor.

THE END