

## Elly Danica Speaks for Herself

Elly Danica is an extraordinary woman who writes about her difficult life story. In her book *Don't: a Woman's Word*, she dares to deconstruct the past trauma of her life. She demonstrates the raw and hurtful realities that she has had to overcome in order to empower herself today. Danica presents her story through the use of stream-of-consciousness and returns into her past to express her feelings and her experience with incest, pornography, rape and verbal abuse. While reading this work, readers acknowledge that the author is no longer holding back the pain she kept inside for such a long period of time. For as long as she can remember, she has been silenced in many different ways and she has finally been able to take her life into her own hands. The authority figures in her life disempowered her and made her feel unworthy of the fondest things in life. By writing a book about her experiences, she proves herself a true survivor.

Danica's difficult life began at a very young age. In *Don't: a Woman's Word*, she takes the reader back to when she was a child and to the awful way her father treated her. When looking back on her life, she cannot find many fond memories of her past. She states that "[she] had no childhood. [She] woke up one morning forty years old." (70) Her father took everything away from her and made her feel worthless. It was only when she reached a mature age that she began to free herself of all her negative experiences. The incidents of incest with her father began when she was four years old and, even though she pleaded for him to stop, he would tell her one of the most common phrases that is told to children who are being abused: "Don't tell. Your mother. She doesn't understand. Our secret." (8) Her father would threaten to use violence upon her to prevent her from having the desire to speak out. Over time, she had been convinced by her family that she was nothing but a liar. She was told that "[she has] imagined everything" and that she was "crazy" (70). Therefore, even though

she had the desire to tell people about her pain, she felt no one would believe her. She had been brainwashed into believing the saying: “Once a liar, always a liar” (30).

Before her father began to prostitute Danica, his acts revolved around incest. As a little girl, she could remember her father touching and hurting her. Unable to deal with the pain inflicted upon her, she told her mother about the situation even though her father had posed many threats about her speaking out. Her mother seemed to be in disbelief about this situation; however, she sent young Danica off to her grandmother’s home in Amsterdam. This new situation could have stopped all of the pain and freed her from her miseries; nevertheless, it did not. When she returned to her family, her situation only became worse. In *Don’t: a Woman’s Word*, she describes how when she was eight years of age, her father began to use his camera again to take nude photos of her. (16) Even though the female authority figures in her life were aware of what was being done to her, they were disempowered by Danica’s father and never spoke out about the injustice inflicted upon the young child.

In her life, Danica was often left to fend for herself. Her mother was of no help for she felt threatened by her husband and was led to participate, to a certain extent, in the acts of rape. “[T]he night of [her] death” (51) occurred when she was raped multiple times by various men as well as her father. This act was performed in the father’s house and partially in the presence of Danica’s mother. Throughout her life, the author was silenced; however, she was not the only one for her mother was muted as well. “My mother will not meet my eyes. My mother walks away. My mother knows. She knows. She always knows.” (9) Her mother knew and yet she never tried to find a solution. Therefore, Danica tried to find ways to cope with her situation. She began to objectify herself in order to distance herself from the pain. She told herself, “I am no longer myself. [...] A body sits here naked.” (53) She tried her

hardest to make herself believe that when the mind is not present during the act of rape, the body will be disconnected and the pain will subside. This way of rebelling helped her to escape her situation although her body had no choice but to remain present.

Many of Danica's memories were blurred for she had no desire to remember them. "After all [her father] did to [her]. After all he gave [her]. [She] only hate[s]." (9) Therefore, she never found herself pleased in the presence of men. In order to get away from her father and her dysfunctional family life, she married a man who she did not love and had a child with him. Having a child was forced upon her; something that was difficult to accept. She felt like a failure. Danica states, "I failed my childhood. I failed my marriage. I failed being a mother. I failed school. I even failed suicide." (86) Thus, this notion was the breaking point of her existence. She decided to leave the life that she had such a difficult time coping with.

In conclusion, Elly Danica proved herself to be a survivor of the difficult life that she was forced into and which she had to deal with. She wrote a second book which describes how she made a life for herself. Thus, in *Beyond Don't: Dreaming Past the Dark*, she continues to tell the truths of her life which she was forced to withhold for so many years. By writing this book, "the child abuse [is brought] much closer to the surface" (25). She finds her voice and describes her life in a strong and unwavering way. Because she was called a liar, like so many survivors of incest, she proves that she has something to say and brings other incest and rape survivors together in order to share the traumas that the patriarchal figures of their lives forced them to endure.

## **Bibliography**

Danica, Elly. *Don't: a Woman's Word*. Charlottetown: gynergy books, 1988.

--. *Beyond Don't: Dreaming Past the Dark*. Charlottetown: gynergy books, 1996.