

Jutta Michaud

Dembo Fatty

ZIGGY LIONHEART

A
true
story of
flight and survival



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IMPRINT

© 2022 Dembo Fatty, Jutta Michaud

Print and Distribution on behalf of the author: tredition GmbH, Halenreihe 40-44, 22359 Hamburg

Cover-Design: KORRLAY – Iris van Beek (info@korrlay.de)

Cover-Photo Landscape: Anita from Pixabay,

Cover-Picture Lion: Mohamed Hassan from Pixabay

Translation: Briand Bedford, <https://b-spoke-english.de/>

Layout: KORRLAY – Iris van Beek (info@korrlay.de)

Printed in Germany

ISBN (Softcover): 978-3-347-74273-4

ISBN (e-Book): 978-3-347-74274-1

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About the Authors

How this book came into being

Dembo – alias Ziggy – and I met in 2021 at ubs e.V., umwelt, bildung, sozialarbeit (environment, education, social work) in Berlin. ubs e.V. is a youth welfare organization that trains young people for careers in gastronomy in its own canteen kitchens and a pastry shop. I have been on board there as a coach since 2014. I support the trainees with creative and therapeutic methods to recognize their strengths; to overcome crises and to develop visions for a self-determined future.

When Dembo and I met, he was going through a serious crisis. Some time before, he had managed to find his mother again through a Facebook contact. It is important to know that the two had not been in contact with each other for more than four years. Not voluntarily, but because they had not had the opportunity to contact each other for so long.

Dembo learned that his mother was suffering from a life-threatening kidney disease. She would have had to fly to a neighbouring country for the urgently needed surgery, but there was no money for that. Within a short period of time, Dembo had run up huge debts in order to at least provide medication and good accommodation for her. Nevertheless, with every telephone call he could feel her vitality fading. Fear and worry paralyzed him. More and more often he was absent from work. His training

supervisors sent him to me for coaching, where he could talk about his acute worries and needs, but also told me more and more about his past. At the same time we were looking for a treatment option for his mother and were finally able to establish contact with a non-profit organization that operates a hospital in The Gambia. Unfortunately, all help came too late. Mrs Fatty died the day before she was admitted to the hospital.

For Dembo a world collapsed. His mother had been his only relative and the most important person in his life. He felt alone, abandoned, hopeless. And yet he managed to overcome this serious crisis. And gradually resume his education, to talk about his experiences, to think about how he wanted to shape his future. His faith and the courage to face even cruel memories helped him.

All who have met him during his training are impressed by his mental strength; his perseverance and the will to not only continue living despite all odds and terrible experiences, but to want to do good someday. He is ready to forgive the people who treated him badly in the past. And there were more than enough of them.

Dembo's story is only in parts an individual case. His individual story ends when he leaves his home country and only begins again with his time in Berlin.

The intermediate part, the things he experienced on his long journey from Africa to Europe, thousands of refugees have gone through the same or similar. This is especially true for the horror that will forever be linked to Libya for these people. These are inhumane experiences that urgently need to be told so that – this is our hope – something will change. First of all, the attitudes towards the people who have managed to free

themselves from these circumstances and want to build a new life with us. Their courage and perseverance has earned our respect.

Dembo dictated his story in German into the keys of my notebook. At each of our meetings, he narrated almost breathlessly, interrupted only by follow-up and comprehension questions that I asked him in between. Questions and answers have been incorporated into this text without it having the classic form of an interview. In revising the text, I did not change any content, but merely adjusted the language, grammar, and temporal structure. Typical for narrated life are chronological jumps, i.e. the temporal boundaries dissolve again and again similar to the forward and rewind of a film. Of course, I had Dembo confirm these changes, although he himself once said that he was sometimes unsure when something had happened. Nothing, however was added, everything happened as described.

I thank Dembo for trusting me to write down his story for him. During our conversations, I not only learned a lot about his flight and his life, but also much more about African culture than could be accommodated in this book. Also very exciting were the conversations in which Dembo compared our cultures and discovered good and bad in both. He has a very clear idea of what his country would need in order to develop democratic structures and really allow all population groups to participate in a positive change. Education plays a central role in this. Not least for this reason, I hope that as many young people as possible will read his story and understand how important democratic structures are for a dignified life.

The title of the book was inspired by a drawing by Dembo. During one of our coaching sessions, we were working with the concept of the power animal and I asked Dembo to draw his animal. He drew a lion and signed the sheet as Ziggy. The addition of "Lionheart" represents his courage to always start over.

Jutta Michaud,
Berlin, summer 2022

Foreword

My name is Dembo Fatty.

I prefer to call myself Ziggy, in memory of my mother and the life I led before I came to Germany.

My mother gave me this nickname. She especially liked the music of Bob Marley and reggae from Jamaica. In a song by Bob Marley, I don't remember the exact title, the name of his son – Ziggy – appeared. At home I was the DJ, because I could handle the radio better than my mother. But whenever the song "Ziggy" was played, the radio stopped, it never went on. Only when I handed the radio to my mother did the music start again. But when I took it again, it stopped again. My mother laughed about it and said "now you are not Dembo, but Ziggy". At first I didn't like that because she also said, as a joke, whenever I did something wrong. "Are you Ziggy again now?" Later we both laughed about it.

At the present time, telling my story to Mrs Michaud, I am 20 years old. I have been living in Germany for four years. Until I arrived here, I was on the road for three or four long years. I don't know exactly, because in between I lost my sense of time. When I got into the first car that took me away from The Gambia at the age of thirteen, I had no idea where I would arrive. I didn't know that a country called Germany even existed. And now I am preparing to become a chef at ubs e.V. in Berlin.

I come from The Gambia. This is a small country in West Africa, located between Senegal, Mauritania and Mali. This book is about why I left The Gambia, what I experienced along the way, and how my life kept changing.