

BIDLISIW FOUNDATION
STORIES OF TRIUMPH
GENDER AND ECONOMIC INCLUSION

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MESSAGE FROM THE
President

"The road less travelled features a journey to the uncommon. One has to take the journey not because it is easy but because it is necessary and the right thing to do. We in Bidlisiw Foundation believe and put forward the advocacy of totally eliminating gender-based violence. The very notion has no place in a civilized world; ironically, it is still accepted by many as a part of daily life.

We also affirm our resolve for economic inclusion, that is, providing opportunities and access to employment for the unprivileged and disadvantaged members of the community such as those who have low educational attainment. We have done this through skills training, as well as providing them equal access to opportunities for all in female- or male-dominated industries.

The stories that you will read here are stories of triumph. The message is clear: our aims are achievable... We are doing the right thing."

GLENN G. GLARINO, PhD

President
Board of Trustees



MESSAGE FROM THE
Executive Director

The 2030 Agenda for sustainable development commits to ensure no one is left behind. The issue of poverty and gender-based violence are among the barriers in making this vision a reality. Over the decades, there is a marked improvement in the role of women and LGBTs both in the family and in society. Gender oftentimes is also perceived as only to women/LGBTs. Although priority was given to them because they are the most vulnerable groups, men in many ways also suffer from stereotyping. In the informal sector, men are usually depicted as capable only of muscle work and when performing roles perceived only for women, they become objects of ridicule. This and having lower educational qualification coupled with gender-based violence, make access to opportunities scarce.

During the 31 years of its operation, Bidlisiw continually advocated for economic inclusion and gender equality. It did not focus its effort on empowering girls and women alone; it also included educating men. Community education entailed bringing in the private sector and making people aware of the issue, motivating them to take action and contribute

to combating stigma and discrimination. The private sector is now playing a big role towards achieving this goal. However, though our expectations are great, results are still far from the offing.

The need to document the efforts on economic inclusion is necessary in order to give hope and motivation for people to open doors that this initiative may succeed. We know the power of role modelling. It is important for girls to have someone to look up to among their contemporaries, giving them real life stories of triumph. It is only then that hope and the will to stand for their rights shall be within their grasp.

With this, after two successful compilations of *Stories of Hope*, Bidlisiw has once again brought to life ten stories from among its clientele - this time on *Stories of Triumph*. This showcases the journey towards victory, rising above vulnerability and counter-acting the stereotypes of what girls, women, and even men and LGBTs are presumed to be.

My gratitude to all those who willingly shared their stories and all those who in one way or another contributed to the inspiring lives of these individuals.

L O L I T A G . G A N A P I N

Executive Director

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Prologue

No doubt, Bidlisiw has been a significant albeit unobtrusive participant in community service in Cebu for the past 30 or so years.

When it set foot in Looc in Mandaue City in 1989, it tested the waters first. It studied the avenues by which it could be most helpful to its chosen clientele. This entailed plenty of discernment on the part of the organizers, the Board of Trustees and the community workers.

Community health services were a very fruitful entry point. So was its literacy program which entailed using various approaches to early childhood and even adult education. For all these, Bidlisiw had to work with the appropriate government agencies and other non-profit organizations both locally and abroad.

These collaborations broadened and deepened Bidlisiw's worldview, necessitating its frequent examination and assessment of its targets, objectives and methodologies.

Its recent experiences in the field have all pointed to the necessity of protecting society against the prevailing attacks on the family and the young exacerbated by the uncontrolled accessibility and abuse in the social media.

Although it cannot be denied that sophisticated electronic gadgets have become available to almost everyone, poverty is still a factor that determines the fate of the majority of the people that Bidlisiw is trying to help.

This poverty, this specter that casts its cruel shadow on the majority of our people, is seemingly invincible. Its siblings are many among which are disease, drug dependence, malnutrition, gender inequality, child abuse and many more.

Experience has taught Bidlisiw that these effects have first to be addressed if general social well-being has to be achieved. Thus, while it tries to address child abuse, one of the most prevalent menaces of our present generation, it also has to help mitigate the effects of the extreme financial needs of the families it tries to help.

The young people who have decided to go back to school have to be supported in terms of school supplies, uniforms and projects. Women who have decided to emancipate themselves from domestic violence need help to feed and clothe their children. While Bidlisiw does not foster outright monetary dole outs, it helps in every way it can to respond to the immediate needs of its beneficiaries.

One practical approach that Bidlisiw has found very effective in response to this problem is its networking with institutions which share its objectives. One such institution is the Lapulapu-Mandaue Campus of the University of Cebu. Nicknamed UCLM, it has trained Bidlisiw recommendees towards jobs in the food and hospitality industries.

There are some people who are ready to go into actual employment, except that they need training for specific jobs such as handling industrial equipment. Bidlisiw has recommended a number of people to factories and food outlets.

In this modest volume, a few of its recommendees speak of their journey towards the economic emancipation that they had needed for a very long time, but did not know how to access. If they speak of their deep hurts, it is their way of relieving themselves of what they have borne for years.

But one thing is sure - their gratitude is heart-felt and sincere. They all look back to Bidlisiw and its partner institutions in awe, sometimes in disbelief. Some of them say they never thought there was a way out of the abyss of need that they were born into.

They have awakened to the reality that all they needed was a helping hand.

And Bidlisiw, it was!



M E R I A M A L L O S A D A

With the Whir of a Machine

If anyone calls Meriam Allosada "Wonder Woman," s/he would not be wrong. For that is what Meriam is.

Looking back, Meriam cannot help but smile, slowly shaking her head. She cannot understand why, early in their married life, her husband could not keep a job. She motivated him well, encouraged him and even helped him apply for a place with possible employers. She had to go out of her way to help him because their children came one after another until they had five.

He was also gregarious enough to jump at job opportunities. Once, he was helper to a cook. Then he became a merchandizer. He tried working in two meat companies in succession, ending up as a security guard. From there, he managed to become in charge of production for a furniture manufacturer before he became a delivery man for a water filtration company.

This, of course, bothered Meriam because while he was flitting from one job to another, she had to stay home attending to the children's needs while doing household chores at the least vpossible cost. What was painful to her was that for a very long time, they subsisted on gruel, locally called "lugaw," alternating between sugar and salt for condiments

She encouraged their children to study hard, painting to them pictures

about how they would be able to help their father once they finish their studies. What added to their difficulty was the fact that they did not have electricity in the house so the children could not study and do homework at night.

Unhappy about their family situation, Meriam looked around for opportunities by which she would be able to help her husband as soon as her youngest was in school. She made herself available for activities in their barangay. It was then that Bidlisiw was working its way into the barangay system to assist needy families through skills training for self-sufficiency. Meriam attended seminars and trainings on various aspects of family and community life. She was most interested in trainings that would lead to the financial uplift of her family. Her dedication paid off. When assessment time came for the Generating Your Own Business (GYB) and Starting Your Own Business (SYB) programs, she was among those chosen for assistance. She was given a sewing machine for a start.

She first bought scraps which she sewed into rags. Her husband became her business partner because it was he who sold her products in the streets and sidewalks. Then she moved up into the production of bags and athletic uniforms, pillow cases and curtains. She accepted repair jobs eventually ending up with regular clientele.

Not to be outdone, her husband also looked around for opportunities for himself. Bidlisiw helped him by recommending him to a fast food outlet.



Meriam working on her sewing machine.

Management noticed his good qualities but he decided to leave the company because he felt he was always tired from the overload assigned to him. He is now employed by a utility company where he enjoys all the amenities of a regular employee.

Putting their money together, they were able to have their house repaired. They now have electricity at home. The children are the ones most benefited by these developments in their family life because through Meriam's constant encouragement during the time of their hardship, they developed good work and study habits. They now have balanced meals and have time together as a family on weekends.



Meriam with her family.

When Meriam looks back at their difficult times in the past, she cannot help but become teary-eyed. She does not want those days to return but she says she will not forget them completely because the difficulty she experienced then now spurs her to make the most of the help given them by Bidlisiw.

Seeing Meriam now, even those closest to her admit that she had to be really bold to be able to get her family out of the depth of poverty they were in. Gratitude is what Meriam now harbors in her heart. She encourages others by telling them how Bidlisiw had helped her family. To Bidlisiw on the other hand, her courage to seek help cannot be overlooked. Her hard work and her tenacity are to be reckoned with. These are what make her the “Wonder Woman” that everybody says she is!



DOLOROSA VASQUEZ

Taking the Big Leap

Dolorosa Vasquez is 52 years old. She is married and has five children. She used to be a stay-in caretaker of Subang Daku Elementary School.

Her husband drove a bicycle to which a one-wheeled cab has been attached. It is called "trisikad." The name comes from two notions: the "tri" means it has three wheels; "sikad" is "kick." Because the trisikad is run by manpower, it cannot run very fast. Therefore, the trisikad driver's earning is small, indeed.

Dolorosa's husband plied the North Reclamation route. Life there is exciting especially when the boats arrive. To add to his income, he also doubled as a stevedore.

Dolorosa had always lived in Ouano in Mandaue City, a vast expanse at the North Reclamation area where large trucks pull in and out, carrying or depositing container vans and cargo trucks at all times of the day and night.

That their shanties may be demolished anytime has always been in the minds of these Mandauehanons. All of them fear the day when this would come and while it had not happened yet, they live their lives as informal settlers do. They work for meager wages, spend their money on food and drinks and buy medicines when they get sick. The local elementary school was nearby. That took care of educating their children, a source of hope

that someday, the young ones might extricate them from the rut they are in.

They laughed together and quarreled with one another, sometimes bad enough to send them to the barangay hall for conciliation, and then to pursue life as they had always known for years and years.

One day, however, this dreaded demolition became a reality for all of them. Dolorosa and her family, of course, was not ready for this. It was providential, however, that a group of their neighbors found a vacant lot in Paknaan in Mandaue City. They took their chance at the place. They built their makeshift houses once again, and pursued the life that they had known for years and years.

Their new-found place, however, was not to become a paradise for them. They experienced flooding even at the mere suggestion of a storm. What really hit them hard were the three fires that gutted a number of their houses. The last of these conflagrations was the worst of Dolorosa's experiences. Her fourth child emerged from the crowd with bruises all over his body. He was taken to hospital and Dolorosa's fears were assuaged only when the doctor declared that his wounds were not too deep, assuring her that he would soon get well.

After every flood or fire, Dolorosa's family had to rebuild. Always, they hardly had anything to start from.

Moving to Paknaan necessitated many changes for all of them in the family. Her husband had to look for another means of livelihood. From stevedoring, he had to shift to fruit vending. He bought whatever fruits were available from Carbon Market where he had to go at four o'clock in the morning. He would take a quick breakfast and then peddle his "wares" until he would get to Subangdaku where there were more prospective buyers.

One advantage of their moving there was that their children were able to enroll at the Subangdaku Elementary School where Dolorosa could be with her children at least for a major part of her waking hours.

Dolorosa was seldom home. Her job necessitated her staying in the school because of its many demands - from cleaning the grounds, preparing the classrooms, the comfort rooms and the offices, even running errands for the principal and the teachers. Classes began at 7:00 in the morning and the students and the teachers left at 5:00 in the afternoon. She had to prepare the entire environment for the next day.

She earned P 5,000 a month. Even if this amount was small, it assured her that there was something she could count on when there was a real need for money. Her husband's earnings from his fruit vending was not regular. Long weekends and examinations lessened his income, which meant they all had to tighten their belts some more.

What was consoling was that she saw her children during schooldays and she was very grateful for that. Even so, it pained her when someone informed her that her 13-year-old son had become a drug dependent.

She was devastated when one day, she was told that she was being dismissed from her job because she had become too old for it. This upset her entire family because she needed her salary for the many projects that her children's schooling required. There were other necessities such as medicines and even clothes, although rarely because she had trained them to share their clothing among themselves.

Despite all these difficulties, Dolorosa found solace in the fact that her Jayson, who had learned to depend on drugs during her absence, had begun to receive instructions and rehabilitation from Bidlisiw, an organization that she heard of sometime in the past. She saw that her son was really sincere in his commitment to leave his bad habit. She saw how he would walk from Paknaan to the Bidlisiw offices under the first Mactan Bridge in Looc.

She barely understood Jayson whenever he spoke of Bidlisiw, but she was grateful because she saw that his siblings listened with interest whenever he spoke of his lessons and activities.

Then one day, she found herself in the Bidlisiw offices because she was

asked to participate in Jayson's activity for the day. There were a number of other parents and they shared their heartaches amid laughter and for a few, tears. There, she found friendly faces who showed genuine interest in her plight when she shared with them her family's predicament just then. She was jobless and her husband's daily take was really small.

She was all the more surprised when one of the Bidlisiw staff told her that she might refer Dolorosa to their program named "Enhancing Self-Wage Employment Opportunities (ESWEO)". She did not realize that the person she related her story to was the focal person for ESWEO. That was a turning point for Dolorosa Vasquez and her family.

Bidlisiw helped Dolorosa prepare herself for employment. She had to secure permits and clearances. She was given a cash advance to help her straighten out her documents. She also had to study her new working environment so she could adjust to it realistically.

When she was ready, she was referred to an outlet for a fast food chain. She observes regular working hours. And what's more, she earns a minimum wage, a real boon! She has adjusted quite well to her new milieu, but she is most happy because she now has time for her husband, her children and most of all, herself! 🍌



Dolorosa is now fully employed.

Dolorosa is now fully employed.



HAIDE VILLAMOR

If Only for Her Children...

How many times must one forgive an enemy? The Good Book says seventy times seven. Haide Villamor has certainly overtaken the Holy Bible. Thirteen years and six children after she took up with the man who, she thought, would make good his promises in their youth, she decided to call it quits! She had good reasons for the decision she had made.

Like many young girls in their teens, Haide had many friends with whom she shared her dreams. Their plans were simple. They only wanted quiet lives and after marrying the men of their choice, they would have a few children who later would be the source of their happiness in their old age. Then Haide met this man who, she believed, would be the one to help her fulfill her dreams.

She thought that one day, she would be his wife and he, a loving husband to her and a responsible father to their children. Early in their relationship, however, he showed how unfaithful he could be. Even before their first child was born, he already showed signs of infidelity. She had reasons to be jealous because every one was calling her attention to his flirting with this girl and that in their neighborhood. They had their spats even when she was pregnant with her first child. He was not at all moved by the fact that he would soon be a father. When she thought things over, she concluded that he was not even responsible enough to try to earn more since their expenses would increase because there would be an addition to their family.

As the years wore on, Haide had to accept the realities that living with this man would bring. She had to work so their children could eat and go to school. She actually did not have to look far for her to be employed. Her father was a motorcycle mechanic and her mother was a weaver in a *puso* factory in their town. *Puso* is a Tagalog term for "heart." The Visayans have their "puso" which is actually a coconut midrib woven and shaped like a heart. Rice is poured into the packet and boiled. This is a convenient way of cooking and eating rice. "Puso" is a staple among roadside eateries. Prices vary according to the brand of rice cooked in it. The size of the "puso" also matters. It is usually three inches from tip to tip, but it can cost more if it is bigger.) She joined her mother in the "puso" factory but even if she worked hard and long every day, her earnings were never enough.

It is not exaggeration to say that Haide brought her children up single-handedly. Life was very difficult for her. She would leave the house at the latest at 6:00 in the morning when most of the children were still asleep. She would get home at the earliest, at 9:00 in the evening, when most of them were already asleep. She had no time to look after them. This task, she left to her older children. It is no wonder then, that very often, the children would get sick. They were undernourished. They did not have food, the right kind of food. In fact, the children themselves would report to her that they were hungry because the money she left was not enough for food so

everyone of them could eat. That was one of the many things that bothered Haide.

It was a good thing that the factory owners allowed their workers to make cash advances on their wages. Haide got so used to making cash



Haide and her kids.

advances that often, her week's earnings were enough only to cover the advances that she had made.

Her partner was of no use to her and the family. He did not do housework even as he did not give money to support them. Even with him in the house, Haide had to do everything that had to be done. What's more, he had to be served. His clothes had to be laundered, his food had to be prepared for him. Simply put, he was a burden to the family.

Of course, her parents could be of help. The old people, however, were not in the habit of just handing their daughter dole outs. They helped when Haide asked for assistance. Otherwise, they just did not give her a hand even if they could see her difficult situation.

What made life more difficult for Haide was that the children came one after another. While their family was getting bigger, he also became more and more irresponsible. His philandering became more uncontrollable so much so that she had to seek help from the authorities. Many times, she sought help from the barangay because he was very irresponsible and demanding. All that the barangay counsellors could do was advise them after which they had to sign a document that he would do better as a husband and a father. This happened so many times that they lost their credibility in the barangay. In fact, they had become the butt of jokes among the male barangay officials who could not help but tease her, referring to the number of times that they had been to the barangay and the children that they were having.

Their children who were supposed to be in school just did not go anymore because they could not be always present due to their inability to comply with their school needs. Some of them did not go to school because they were hungry.

The burden for Haide was so heavy that she just decided to pack up and leave their shanty one day. After all, he was again with one of his women. She went to her parents' house, informing them that she and her children would stay there for good .

Haide was prepared to go on with her life as it was, wishing that all her children would one day want to go to school again. One of her older

children, Ken, happened to be a member of the Voice Project of Bidlisiw because a friend invited him to join some of their activities there. During a conversations with one of the Ates, he talked about how he pitied his mother. That spelled the difference in Haide's life. The social worker made a thorough study of Haide's situation and in no time, Haide was on her way to a turn-around in her life.

Together, Haide and the staff studied possibilities that were open to her and soon she was being prepared for a job that would allow her to spend quality time with her children.

When in the past, Haide was always in a hurry to and from work while worrying about her family and her lack of means to support them, she is presently employed as a utility person in a fast food outlet where she is paid the minimum wage. She now has time with her children whom she had missed during her difficult days with her partner and her job at the factory.



Haide has more reasons to smile.

She has changed greatly because she has space to enjoy her own life. She is spoken to by the staff whom she enjoys exchanging jokes with. In fact, she says that she feels that she has learned to laugh again, something she had not done for a very long time.

Haide has every reason to be happy. She observes regular hours at her workplace. She hurries all the time because she does not want to be late. She does her work with a light heart. She says she cannot be grateful enough for the changes that have come to her life. That is why she does her work well. She appreciates the fact that with her salary come all the benefits that are given her by virtue of the labor laws of the country.

She moves around like she has come to the realization of what she had

hoped for in the past. Now, she busies herself with her children when she gets home. Not all her children want to go back to school as yet. She says she'll win them over slowly. She knows she will be able to convince them when the right time comes. As of now, she only has gratitude in her heart for what has been given her from On High through Bidlisiw Foundation.

She also has forgiven herself for the indiscretions she had committed.

Now? She is happy looking into the future. With her children.

And Bidlisiw.



JESIEBEL PANUELA

They Laughed at Her

Fourteen, she was!

Seventeen, he was!

And they had a baby!

She wanted a wedding, but the law would not allow it. They lived together anyway.

When she turned 18, they went through the exercise of a wedding. They were together for 18 years and they have eight children from that union.

He was a carpenter who believed that because he was bringing home the money and she only stayed at home, he had the right to demand anything of her anytime he expressed whatever it was he wanted.

It did not take much to arouse his anger. He would get home drunk and if the food she had prepared was not to his liking, he would throw a glass at her. If he did not find the box of nails that he had bought the day before, he would get into a rage. If the children were noisy, he would shout out loud and hurl anything he finds on the table at them. Or if he were tired, he would make the children line up and beat them.

Once, she bled profusely while he was beating her. He had to take her to the hospital only to find out that she was in the seventh month of her pregnancy. She was not aware of her condition then. They lost that baby.

In the beginning, she reported his abuse to the Lupong Tagapamayapa (Mediation Council) of their barangay. They would sign an agreement that he would not do it anymore and for a few days, there would only be silence between them.

Then he finds a reason to lift his hand against her again and they would go through the same shameful process of going through mediation and counselling. They have been to the Lupon so often that the peacemakers got tired of entertaining them. They lost their credibility with the barangay because they did not comply with the agreements that they put together. In the long run, they became the butt of jokes in the community.

Not a few people advised her to leave him, but she had more reasons than one not to follow their counsel. She hesitated to leave him because of the length of their relationship. Then she was afraid of the idea of having a broken family. All the time, she entertained the hope that he would change, that he was not really bad when they started. All her speculations did not materialize. Eventually, she had to leave. But only after her hopes had been shattered and her children had been affected by their never-ceasing enmity.

With the help of a friend, one of their sons became a beneficiary of Bidlisiw's family program. She was encouraged to apply with the DSWD for membership in its 4Ps Program. When she got the first tranche of the assistance, she looked for a house where the children could stay. When she decided to separate from him, they literally became a street family. Where was her husband all these days? He was with someone else!

Bidlisiw helped her improve their lot by giving her a place in the Food and Beverage program of the University of Cebu Lapulapu-Mandaue Campus. She did well and was finally allowed to do her practicum with one of the concessionaires in SM City. Unfortunately, her husband heard about it. He got very jealous and made her stop.

Bidlisiw, taking pity on her and her children, helped her undergo training for massage therapy. Again, he got so jealous that he tore her uniform because she was bringing in a good amount from the tips her clients gave her. He accused her of infidelity, saying the money she was bringing home came from her suspicious deeds.

When she finally decided to separate from him, she went back to her mother who took her in. Her children did not go with her. They got so used to living in the streets that they no longer want to be confined in a house. They are comfortable sleeping on the tiles of the Pasil market stalls. Jesiebel finds time to look for them and they get to talk. No advice or invitation would lure her children to live with her. It pains her, but she does not want to force them to go against their decisions.

Jesiebel has found another partner. He is a few years younger than she is and so far has shown sincere love for her. Because of her traumatic past, she sometimes experiences fits of self-accusation. She goes into crying spells, declaring herself undeserving of such a partner as the one she now has. Her partner understands her, consoling her while admonishing her to leave her past behind. He is quite demonstrative with his love for her and the two-year old son whom she brought along when she left her husband.



Jesiebel, in her uniform, is free at last.

It is obvious that Jesiebel has learned to smile again. She is at last free from her despotic husband. Then there is her job that is giving her much consolation because with the salary that she gets, she is able to buy things for her children whom she visits regularly in their chosen hide-aways in Sawang Calero. She buys them groceries and she is grateful that she is able to talk to them. She has told them that anytime they want to talk to her, she is just a text away. Now, she can reach out to them.

Jesiebel is on a grand highway to wellness. She is now light hearted and easy to talk to. Indeed, if this can be called success, Bidlisiw has had a hand in it. That is a reason to be happy. Bidlisiw must go on. There are many Jesiebels in the byways of Cebu City. Bidlisiw will find them yet! 🍌



MELQUE SATUA

Between Two Families

We sometimes marvel at why some of us human beings manage our lives the way we do, knowing but often forgetting that nothing is really permanent, that change is a necessary part of life and that we never can be sure of the outcome of even our best-planned undertakings.

Take for example Melque's family. Her parents are not qualified to hold jobs. They have four children. In spite of their poverty, her father has all the major vices - heavy smoking, alcoholism, gambling and drug dependency among others. Because of these, it is not surprising that arguments are a part of their everyday, sometimes ending up in fights that are not uncommon in their neighborhood.

It is Melque's mother who goes out daily, looking for whatever she can do to put food on their table. It is not every day that she succeeds in bringing home a day's wage. She blames it on too much competition. Too many people, but too few openings for non-skilled workers like her.

Melque has been her helpmate ever since she could remember. Melque would be carrying her youngest sibling even as she tried to play with the other children in their neighborhood. She cleaned the house and ran errands for her mother. She was obedient and thoughtful. She even went to school because her mother insisted that she do so; but when she reached the fifth grade, Melque thought that she had had enough of schooling. She wanted to be more helpful to her mother.

She became a "tindera." Her job was to mind the counter of a store set up in the front part of a neighbor's house. On her meager pay, Melque was able to help feed her family.

Melque did not earn much. What can a child really do? In fact, when the neighborhood children played on the street fronting the store she tended, she felt a strong urge to join them, to yell as they did, to laugh as loud as they did. Of course, she could not do any of those things. She had to mind the store, or her family would not have anything to eat.

It was no wonder therefore, that sometimes, during the rare times when she could be alone, Melque would sit in a quiet part of their neighborhood, thinking. What did she think of? Her family. Their life of hardship. Their father's inability to feed them. These thoughts would not leave her.

She did not realize that a young man, a neighbor of theirs, had taken notice of her. During one of her pensive moments, he went near her and engaged her in a conversation. They became friends and before long, they had become intimate. They talked about themselves and it did not take much time for them to decide to live together.

This became quite a problem for Melque's family, but she showed them that she had no plans of leaving them. She continued with her work. She did not stop supporting her family.

But Melque's young age is not to be ignored. Soon, she developed friendships that led her to become irresponsible, all because she wanted to have fun. She stayed out late with her new friends. After all, they had the same problems to talk about, hardly realizing that they were actually moving away from the families that they thought they wanted to work for and protect. Melque found another man who quickly became her boy friend. She thought she loved this second man and she planned to stay with him. That relationship, however, did not last long.

Her original boy friend, instead of shunning her, sought her out, forgave her and took her back home. She was 17 years old when she got pregnant.

It is not really a surprise that her partner's family did not approve of her. They tried everything to separate them, but he defended her. He himself had a job and even if his salary was not that big, he managed to keep Melque comfortable. He loved Melque sincerely.

For her part, Melque soon learned to consider him as her husband and, even if in a common-law relationship, she decided to devote her attention to him and to their child. She still had to support her parents and her siblings, but she began to think in terms of her own budding family.



Melque, at far right, with her partner and kids.

When she looked at her son, she worried about how he would grow up. She still had to withstand the negative regard that her partner's family had towards her, but she kept it from him because she did not want to cause further trouble in her partner's house. Later on, he decided to leave his family altogether. He found a small house where they could live on their own. Then they had a second child.

There was no peace in Melque's own family. Her father would often go wild especially when he was high on drugs. In 2016, her mother decided to separate from him. She found a place for her children in the grounds of the Cebu International Convention Center (CICC) which by then had become a refuge for homeless families. That same year, Melque's father went to jail because he was caught red-handed during a buy-bust operation. After some time, her mother found another man to live with. Melque thought that with another man in their house, things might change for her siblings.

Contrary to what she expected, her siblings' situation remained the same. They were still in need of food, often going to her house to eat.

Whenever they needed money, they asked from her. This embarrassed her very much because she saw how hard her partner worked. She learned to look for signs of disapproval from him, but he showed no such negative signs at all. In fact, he was fond of her siblings.

When her father was released from prison in 2019, he had nowhere else to go but to Melque's. She bears the shame she has always felt because of her father's situation in life and his arrival has been another instance when she had to swallow her pride once more before her partner. She was ready to discuss her problem with him, to apologize to him, if need be, but she did not find the occasion or the reason to do so. He took the old man in as he would welcome a father.

Melque is up to her neck in problems, but she cannot tell herself how grateful she is, that this man found her and is treating her and her family in ways that are beyond her imagination.

All these happenings in Melque's life did not escape the eyes of the barangay social workers assigned to the CICC area. When they recommended her to Bidlisiw Foundation, she did not waste a minute to seek help. That was in 2017 when she trained as a member of the Saraban Goodies and Catering Services, a Bidlisiw project which, by then was already making a name in the food service industry. Some time later, she thought she would earn a little more in an E-Bayad Center but on account of her delicate pregnancy, her third, the company asked her to rest.

When she became healthy enough to work again, she returned to Saraban and is now part of its service crew. Her partner was taken in as a chorizo maker. It is an advantage that they work together.

Because of her scanty educational background, Melque had always looked down on herself. She found it difficult to mingle with people who she presumed have no regard for her. Working in Saraban, however, gave her some sense of self-respect because she sees that the group is successful and she has a contribution to its accomplishment.

While in the past she spent much time brooding over her family's situation, chatting with her neighbors most of whose backgrounds were similar to hers, she now has no time for small talk because she has to keep up with the busy Saraban schedule.

Like her companions in the outfit, she has acquired a forward-looking attitude because she has ambitions for her children - that they may not grow up in poverty and hopelessness as she did and that they may find a good place for themselves in the future. She is assiduous about influencing her siblings and she is glad when she is told that they work on their assignments on their own.

Her father now putters around the house to help out with her children, his grandchildren, of whom he is proud. While in the past, he was grumpy and irritable towards his own children, he now shows signs of affection towards her little ones. He never fails to surprise her.



Melque, at far left, with her co-workers from Saraban.

Melque cannot help but admit that with what they have learned from Bidlisiw, they now look to a future full of hope. And if they continue what they have started under the tutelage and guidance of the staff, she is sure that her siblings will be a different breed of citizens because they have confidence that the kind of future they will have is dependent on how they now work for it - by themselves! 🍌



WELINDA BATULAN

Her Friendly Way

Welinda Batulan has had two partners. These are her husbands in common-law relationships. With the first, she has two children. With the second, her present partner, she has five.

Her present partner is a house painter. He used to be part of a construction team who did projects on specified time frames. For the team to profit, it had to finish projects as fast as the workmen could so they can move on to another project. That ensured continuing earning for the team. Job contracts, however, are hard to come by. Luck does not always come out "good" even as everyone wants it to turn up that way. The same is true for Welinda's partner.

Welinda trained herself at manicuring to contribute to the family upkeep. With seven children to look after, she could not keep a regular job. Her earnings depended on her agreements with her customers because their availability did not always jibe. Usually, she could accept jobs only after lunch. By then, her older children would be in school and the younger ones would either be sleeping or playing nearby. This always kept her on edge because her income was minimal and there were few among their neighbors that needed regular manicures. At the most, she could attend to two customers in a day. Seldom did she get a tip. Tipping is not the style in her side of town.

Put together, their combined income would often get to the vicinity of ten thousand pesos, but that was never enough to meet their needs. It had been like that as far back as she can remember, and she could only wish better times would come.

Because she went around the community, she knew what went on in her neighbors' houses. What she knew was often preceded by a warning that she keep them to herself. She was careful not to reveal her neighbors' secrets. Of course, she did not want to lose her customers. Besides, she did not want to be the cause of trouble in the neighborhood where shouting matches and hair pulling bouts were common happenings.

With her becoming a sort of "community confidant," she could not help but learn about what went on in their barangay. Once, she was told that a business opportunity seminar would be held in the barangay hall. She cocked her ears. She dropped all calls for manicure and pedicure in favor of the seminar. She told herself that this could be a big break for her.

Indeed, it was, but it was not that easy to achieve what she needed. Her ultimate need was money to help sustain her family, but the organization conducting the trainings, Bidlisiw Foundation, was not the kind that distributed easy money. She almost got fed up listening to the word "training." But with the prospects that the staff talked about, she could not just give up. The more she listened to them, the more her hope was whetted.



Welinda in high spirits, enjoying the outdoors.

She attended the training for caregivers, but she thought she was not meant for that kind of job. There were seminars which, at the outset, she thought were useless (like the United Nations Convention on the Rights of

the Child, Improving Husband and Wife Relationship and Family Dynamics, Parenting and Managing Children's Behavior, Gender Sensitivity Trainings for Husbands and Resource Management. But she gradually warmed up to these seminars, even to the point of inviting her partner to attend most of them. At the back of her mind, however, was the fact that her family needed money if they were to send their children to school in the future.

One day, they were told of Enhancing Self-Wage Employment Opportunities (ESWEO) at the Pusok Livelihood Center. She asked about her chances of undergoing training through the program. The Bidlisiw representative was encouraging, so she signed up for the training. Little did she know that her decision was the key that would open the world of opportunity for her.

She learned the parts of the machinery they would have to handle, something really new to her. She had to memorize their names and remember how to use each of them.

She had to develop manual dexterity lest she sew her hand, instead of the material assigned to her. They were tested on these every step of the way. Fortunately, she passed all the tests. This really is no surprise because as a manicurista, she had to be extra careful to cut only her customers' cuticles and not their fingers.

At the same time, they were taught the value of interpersonal skills. Their trainers emphasized the importance of working together because they would accomplish more if they worked as a team. Well, she was also on the safeside in this area because she had to train herself to get along with her former customers who confided in her even their most intimate secrets. Before long, she was chosen leader of their batch.

Since there were openings in the factories in the Mactan Export Processing Zone, she was among the first hired. She is now a full-fledged sewing machine operator- working at regular hours (which helps her as a mother to seven) and earning a good salary with the benefits guaranteed by the Labor Code.

No, she did not leave her partner behind. While she was undergoing training, he helped her by doing his share of the house work and seeing to it that the children did their school work. In spite of all these, he also looked around for job opportunities. He is now able to use his own skills because he has found a place in a company that specializes in house repairs. He is also well-paid and cared for by his employers.

All the seminars and trainings from Bidlisiw which, for a while, Welinda thought were irrelevant to her desire to make money, have proven very useful. She needed them all, she now says to herself.

She and her partner are very grateful that they persevered in attending them. They are now happy and contented because they see themselves and their children moving forward; not



Welinda Batulan with her family and friends.

only because they now have substantial earnings, but because their quality of life has improved. More than they ever thought they would!

The relative comfort they are now experiencing has allowed them to think of the future. Welinda hopes that "future" would not be too far away.



JANEMARK ANTONIO:

The One Nobody Knew

Sawang Calero is a barangay (village) in central Cebu City. It is the location of the main fish port that supplies the kitchens and the tables of the city and its surrounding municipalities. It is a very busy place because of the constant arrival of boats that bring in their catch from fishing areas that stretch up to the farthest ends of Mindanao in Southern Philippines.

Fisherfolk and merchants come and go in the port and so do folks that depend on the jobs, big and small, that are corollary to the business. Among the very young people who are affected by the goings-on in that part of Cebu is Janemark Antonio. As a child, he ran around and played among the huge fish baskets and the blocks of ice that the bigger men chopped to cover the fish with. Every now and then, he would pick up a piece of ice to cool his throat. He liked playing there because sometimes, he was lucky enough to be given a share of the fish that the men divide among themselves when the supply is bountiful.

Janemark also spent his early days in the market because his father was there everyday. No, he wasn't a vendor. The vendors sought him out because he was a lender of money to the small fish vendors. He charged an interest and this income sustained the family's daily needs and the children's schooling.

That was income, indeed, but it did not assure them that there would be money everyday. Sometimes, business among the vendors was slow.

Sometimes, the sky would be full of black and gray clouds and that meant fewer boats would arrive and there would be less money for the family. When storms hit Cebu, it was zero income for his family. Sometimes, too, a borrower would just not show up when it is time for him to pay up what he borrowed. The whole family would have to tighten their belts.

Janemark just played in the market every morning. Before noon, he and his siblings would go home for lunch after which they went to school.

This was routine for the children, but not for Jeanmark. Even when he was little, he sensed that there was always something that bothered his parents, although they kept their voices low when they spoke to each other. His mother was the pensive type. She was always thinking of the future—where food for the children would come from, whether they would be able to continue their studies and things which to her, were important. How she dreaded the thought of anyone of her children getting sick!

Janemark knew that his father's business was not stable. He concluded for himself that they are poor and that he had an obligation to help his parents.

Unconsciously, he assumed responsibility for his siblings. When he thought he was old enough, he did whatever he could do to help his parents. He became the youngest adult in the market. He carried baskets and chopped up ice blocks just so he could hand over some money to his mother at the end of the day. He tried his very best to help because he saw how helpless his father could be, no matter how much the old man tried.

All of the children were sent to the nearby public school, Sawang Calero Elementary School, but when they reached high school, they went to St. Mary's Academy. They had to spend a bit more for this, but his mother believed that it would be best to send the children to St. Mary's which was literally a stone's throw from where they lived. Their mother thought that the children would be better off in the Catholic school, even if she had to write promissory notes every grading period just so the children would be able to take their tests.

Part of the responsibility that Jeanmark assumed was showing his younger siblings how important it is to do their best in school. He himself studied very hard. Of course, he had his share of fun with his friends, but to Jeanmark, family was first.

Bidlisiw found its way to Sawang Calero because this is one of Bidlisiw's areas of operation. As soon as the office was set up and the staff had settled down, they immediately made their presence felt, getting acquainted with the families they had targetted for assistance and letting them know that the organization was there to help.

When the Bidlisiw staff made it known to the Sawang Calero community that there was a forthcoming training for people who would want to earn through massage, Janemark readily signed up for it. They were made aware that the training was free, but they would have to shoulder their own allowance and their transportation expenses. This was a setback for Janemark because that meant extra expense. He doubled his efforts in the market and his mother encouraged him by assuring him she was ready to back him up if need be.



Janemark, enjoying one of his hobbies, motorbiking.

Janemark invited his friends to take advantage of the training, but it was only he who really pursued the course with all his might. He was assigned to a local spa for his on-the-job training. He applied his learnings so well that at the end of his term as a trainee, he was immediately given a regular position in the spa.

His salary was not something that would enrich anyone, but he got tips from satisfied customers. Some of them told management that this young man had strong hands and a happy disposition. That encouraged him very

much. He tried to maintain his efficiency with his clients. He made his mother very happy because he gave her whatever was extra after he had deducted his transportation and food allowance during pay day. That meant very much to his mother who always had to juggle the small amount that she had been accustomed to receive from her husband.

Jeanmark could have been happy with his earnings, but something in him kept saying he could do much more. He kept thinking about moving on in life. The exposure he got from his work in the spa strengthened his ambition to strive harder.

When the chance came for him to look into enrolling for a college degree, he took the opportunity. He signed up for a slot as a working student in a local maritime school and as Fate would have it, he passed. He registered for the









Janemark in his college uniform.

marine engineering curriculum and his parents are very proud that their son has made it to something they never knew he was thinking about. He is in his sophomore year as of this writing (2020) and is very optimistic about being able to finish. The lockdown that the whole world has experienced certainly was a setback, but this young-man-in-a-hurry is patiently waiting for everything to get back to normal. He has gone a step upward, but he still has his younger siblings in mind. He wants all of them to go to college. He never passes up a chance to encourage them, although he knows they have a long way to go and many more struggles to encounter. He shyly admits that part of what he does, he aims for his siblings to see as an example.

These days, it is seldom that one meets a young person like Jeanmark. He looks back to his parents in gratitude while taking care of himself. At the same time, he is thinking of his siblings- so they would not experience too much hardship in the future.

His own future, he says, will come. And whatever will happen then will; be very much up to him. As of this time, he says he is busying himself with helping his parents improve their present situation. His main concern in life is still his family.

Many in the neighborhood look up to Janemark. Mothers openly tell his mother that they envy her for having a son like him. Janemark takes comments such as theirs quietly. He reminds himself always that he has a family to look after. He must not renege on this promise to himself. 





IAN ANDRADE

Herself...Found!

When Ian Andrade was simply that high, he knew he was different from the boys around him. He wore the clothes that were given to him, but he did not feel comfortable in them. He was told to do things that did not appeal to him. Because of all the things he was expected to do, he was very unhappy. Besides, there were people who dealt with him in ways that were not pleasant and acceptable to him. They laughed at him. They ridiculed him. They called him names.

His parents had many problems between them and quarrelling seemed to be their favorite pastime. This made life miserable for Ian and his 10 other siblings. They were always caught in the crossfire. Young as they were, the children had learned to stay out of the way whenever their parents quarrelled. This made them unhappy. They did not know what sparked every argument or shouting bout the two old folks had; so the children learned to stay out of their way. This was one reason why they were always out of their house. They felt that sometimes, they quarrelled because they, the children, did wrong things. That added more to their feeling of always being in a state of fear. They simply wanted to disappear. They did not want to take sides in their parents' controversies.

One day, their mother just walked out of the house. They learned later that she left them to live with another man. The eleven children felt really insecure. Their mother had taken care of them when they were little and they felt sad that she had gone. At that point in their lives, they could not

put into words the fact that they needed her, but that was the truth. They were also grateful that she had taught them a few things. Besides, they felt that they loved their mother as well as they loved their father. That day, Ian really felt very sad.



The former Ian.

Soon after that, Ian made the decision to accept the fact that his body was masculine but his soul was feminine. That day, the date of which he could no longer remember, Ian declared himself a woman. And that is what she is now.

Ian, just a little over 10 years old when those drastic changes took place in their lives, needed all the guidance from adults. She had no access to righteous adult company because her father was very busy earning for his big family as well as living a life of his own.

Their relatives were far away. Their neighbors did not do anything but gossip about her parents. She felt very bad about what they were saying against their mother. She had no one to turn to for consolation. Much less for direction.

So, Ian was left to fend for herself. She had to keep her body and soul together. She had to eat. There were her other siblings who were also fending for themselves, and she could not help but extend a helping hand to them in terms of whatever she could produce every so often.

One thing that Ian had to contend with was the ridicule that she got from the community she moved around in. She had to assert herself. That was difficult enough for a young person who, at that time, was still assailed with doubts about the many mysteries that life was throwing at her, mostly about herself.

She knew people were laughing at her.. They were talking about her at

They were talking about her at her back, often within her hearing distance. They ridiculed her in her very presence. She had to bear with all these, for the sake of her survival and for the sake of peace. If she paid attention to their banter, she would have enemies all around her.

She accustomed herself to wearing a smile in public even if she was hurting inside. She applied for a job in a beauty parlor which doubled as a barber shop. She was just learning the trade then, but she had to leave because what she got as her wage was not equivalent to the work she was putting into the job. Besides working on the customers' needs, she was also the all-around errand girl of the other employees in the shop.

While she went around looking for work, she fell into indecent, unkind company. People took advantage of her ignorance and of her innocence. Men, stalwart and respectable-looking, led her into lurid acts which she, curious and wanting to earn money for bare survival, fell into their trap.

She found a job in a bar in a nearby city which paid her a percentage for every bottle of beer or liquor that her customers consumed and another percentage for the table that they occupied. That was what she did at night.

During the day, she was a room girl in a motel nearby. She did the upkeep of the rooms assigned to her. She changed beddings, cleaned the whole room- windows, walls, floor and washrooms. Sometimes, she got a tip from the customers. More often, she did not.

She was earning some money, all right, but all these did not go to herself alone. She also had to shell out some of her earnings to some of her siblings who also had to make do. Beyond the smiles that the thirteen-year-old was sporting, there was a lonely, misguided Ian who was trying to make for herself a place in the world of equally self-serving adults.

She was fourteen years old when she decided to move to San Francisco on Camotes Island where her family is originally from. She worked in a well-known watering hole there and, earning P275 per day, she thought she found her place in the sun.

Seven months later, her father got sick and all fingers pointed to Ian as the person who should look after their by-then helpless, penniless father. So she had to relocate herself once again and while looking after her old man's necessities, she had to earn, earn, earn or else, they would both starve.

While Ian was struggling in the world, it was not all too grim for her. Truth to tell, she also enjoyed what she learned from her experiences. In fact, where she is now, she looks back to her past with some guilt because, truth to tell, she was also entertained and sometimes she still yearns for the worldly enjoyment that she once experienced. She admits that she had had relationships with both young and elderly male pervers, in actual life and in cyberspace. He acceded to indecent acts in the disco joints that she went to, in the cities and in the barrios. She looks back to all these, most of the time with repentance. But she also admits that she still has her weak moments when she longs for them. That, she is still working on.

As the pieces of the jigsaw puzzle that was Ian's life fell into place, her father's illness brought to his bedside a gay cousin who, at that time, was on his way to rehabilitation with the help of the social workers of Bidlisiw. This cousin spoke of the activities he was involved in with the other Bidlisiw clients and Ian, wide-eyed and all ears, secretly envied her cousin. In the middle of her cousin's recounting of the Bidlisiw activities, Ian asked him to remember her when there is a chance that she might have the same opportunities that he was enjoying then. Without batting an eyelash, her cousin said he would be more than willing to take Ian along with him.

They made the necessary arrangements so Ian would be free to go to Bidlisiw. What Ian is undergoing now is not simple social or group activities as the on-looker might imagine them to be. What Ian is undergoing is part of a therapeutic program that the specialists in Bidlisiw have programmed for cases like hers. There are many sessions Ian is still participating in - thanks be to the social scientists, the psychologists, the social workers and the therapists that Bidlisiw has put together to help its beneficiaries get over the monsters that had ruled and ruined their young lives. Ian is proud and happy to say that she is undergoing rehabilitation.

Bidlisiw encouraged Ian to participate in the course that the University of Cebu Lapulapu-Mandaue Campus has put together. Under its Community Awareness and Relationship Enhancement Services (CARES) program, Ian and her companions are learning more than what textbooks teach young people about life. The modules are written in English, but understanding that Ian and many of the other participants barely finished elementary schooling, the trainers have translated their lessons into Cebuano so that all of them would understand both the theories, the skills and the values that the trainees have to embrace, making them a part of their everyday life.

Ian chose to be part of the hospital-ity management program and her on-the-job training is with Bidlisiw's own Saraban Baked Goodies and Catering Services. So far, she is occupied enough because Saraban's clientele is growing, thanks to its clients who spread the good news by word-of-mouth.

Now, Ian is able to say, "For the first time in my life, I feel decent. I am earning an honest pay and I feel fulfilled because I know I am able to cooperate with my companions with a happy disposition. towards my own salvation."



The new Ian.

Nope, Ian is not contented yet. With butterflies in her stomach, she is waiting for the National Certification Level II (NC II) which she hopes would be administered soon after this pandemic season is over. She is crossing her fingers while she is full of hope that she would make it.

The way is now clear for a brand-new Ian Andrade! 🍷



EDUARDO MANCAO

The Handsomest One of All

Eduardo Mancao is employed by a clothing manufacturer in the Mactan Export Processing Zone (MEPZ) where he has been declared "The Handsomest Employee in the Department" by his workmates. He enjoys the title (in fact, sometimes, he encourages their teasing).

Young as he is (20, in 2020), Eduardo has a broad experience in the painful realities of life. He looks back to a life of hunger and he considers himself a veteran in the deprivation that had seemed to be part of his being. His mother has always been away because she is a domestic helper who can go home only on her days off. His father was a construction worker whose weekly pay cannot meet all the family needs.

Eduardo's schooling is scanty because he did not have the money to buy materials for the projects that seemed to multiply as he went up the grades.

He has many friends who enjoy hanging out and singing their days away. While they are at their favorite hang outs, they seem to be very happy and confident in themselves. Eduardo envied them because they talked freely about their problems, their escapades and their plans. Eduardo had fun with his friends, but when he got home, he had to face the difficulties that seemed so natural in their house. He no longer remembers the day when he told himself that he had to do something about their family situation. And from then on, he thought of ways by which he could

change the life of poverty that they were experiencing.

He was barely out of his short pants when he joined a construction team. He was assigned to paint. The job was dangerous because he had to climb high beams and structures. He was afraid most of the time but he ignored the butterflies in his stomach because he knew that at the end of every week, they would be replaced by the food that his earnings, though small, would bring. He stayed in the job only a few months because he was not happy about the salary he earned. The other men received much more than he did when they did the same work and he, chosen to do the more dangerous aspects of the work, earned much less. When he quit, he found a job as an industrial machine operator, yet another life-threatening position. He did the work, but he was not comfortable doing it. His working papers did not include provisions for compensation for his family in case he met an accident or anything untoward while performing his duties. His instincts told him that he was not given what was due him because the company officials saw that he was young. He told himself that they probably thought they could get away with disobeying the law. He did not really know what law it was that was being circumvented, but he thought he should be given better treatment.

His parents' situation set him thinking. They work very hard for others, but their earnings are not enough to ensure their own well-being, much less their children's upkeep and future. So, while he was doing his duties as machine operator, his mind kept wandering. He kept on thinking about improving his lot.

During his free days, he went around looking for better job opportunities. Once, he was in the vicinity where some of his relatives lived. He thought of visiting them on his way home. He found out that one of his cousins had become a drug dependent and was undergoing rehabilitation. Since it had been sometime since they last met, Eduardo thought of sitting down with his cousin to ask him why and how he had turned to drugs.

That was a long visit that he had with his relatives because his cousin had a sad story to tell. Poverty was one of the reasons the young man had

become what he was. Eduardo sympathized with his cousin, but he was surprised that the young man was not morose or despondent at all. In fact, he seemed jovial and full of hope. That enticed Eduardo to talk with his cousin and before long, the young man revealed to him the kind of rehabilitation program he was undergoing. This intrigued Eduardo no end because he had a different idea of what drug dependents undergo during rehabilitation. Some of them are locked up in dark rooms and that scared Eduardo. But his cousin's experience was different and Eduardo was so intrigued that he stayed to listen to his stories of Bidlisiw and its other programs.

Later, Eduardo asked his cousin if someone like him would find a place in Bidlisiw. Although he is not addicted to any drug, he thought Bidlisiw might be able to help him in other ways. His cousin brightened up. He was generous enough to invite Eduardo to the Bidlisiw offices just so he could meet the *Ates* and the *Kuyas* there.



Eduardo Mancao, the office hearthrob.

That was a big turn-around for Eduardo. He went to Bidlisiw in Looc just for a look-see one afternoon. The atmosphere that prevailed surprised him. Everyone was busy, but the *Ates* and the *Kuyas* had time to talk to him, ask about himself and, in the course of their conversation, he found out that there was an opening for a trainee in the Industrial Sewing Machine Operators program (ISMO). He was told about the conditions for work and since it was at MEPZ, the compensation program would be fair both for the employees and the employer. That part of the visit

spelled a big difference for Eduardo. He signed up for training. He was encouraged by the Bidlisiw staff and he underwent the training.

What Eduardo did not anticipate was the fact that the participants in the training course were all women! That was to be expected since the

training was for persons who would sew clothes, mostly for women. That did not intimidate Eduardo at all, because he has had some experience at running industrial machinery. Besides, he did not mind sewing clothes for women. Actually, he saw that the compensation was good, he would get protection as a worker and in case of any accident, his family would not be neglected because Bidlisiw is there to see that everything is done in a fair manner.

During training, Eduardo had difficulty controlling his hands. Having been doing tough jobs, they had become too stiff, thus exposing him to danger. He was so determined that he tried his best to produce fine work and he did! When he was tested, the results were satisfactory.

Bidlisiw recommended him for the position he is now occupying and enjoying, He goes to work regularly and is receiving good pay. No doubt his parents are very happy with what has happened to their son.

For his part, Eduardo cannot but be amazed at his workmates in their department- what with the multiple hats they wear. They are wives, mothers, daughters, sisters, cousins, friends and factory workers!

And he? He has happily accepted the title of being "The Handsomest Worker in their Department." Because he is the lone male sewer of women's apparel in their factory! 🍷



JULIET PLATERO

Despite the Rain

A song popular many years ago says, "Into each life, some rain must fall, But too much is falling in mine...."

Who does not experience rainy days in one's life every now and then, anyway? In a few cases, however, it seems like it is the rainy days that are more plentiful, making the sunshiny ones a rarity altogether.

Juliet Platero is an example to reckon with. Her childhood was one of uncertainty. She remembers the loneliness that seemed never to leave her when she was growing up. She did not grow up knowing her father because her parents parted ways soon after she was born. She says she knows who he is and that if she tries hard enough, she would find him. The initiative, however, does not seem to get to her. So that part of her life is still shelved, as far as she is concerned.

Her focus now is on her own two children, both girls, who are fast growing up. She gets along very well with her partner and together, they are trying their best to secure their future which, they are both determined should be better than the growing up that they both experienced.

He has a job as a contractor and she is occupied by her involvement in Bidlisiw's Saraban Baked Goodies and Catering Services. She feels very good about her role in the formation and the development of this program that, people are saying, is indicative of the thinking and the concern that is

characteristically Bidlisiw.

It all sprang from a need. Every so often, Bidlisiw would have guests. The Board of Trustees and the staff always want to entertain their guests, particularly those from abroad, with indigenous dishes so that when they go back to their countries of origin, they would take along with them impressions and memories of Philippine cuisine, native delicacies enriched with local spices and herbs.

In the beginning, the staff would go to the malls and the supermarkets for native food stuff for the guests. Later, someone suggested that Bidlisiw develop its own version of our native delicacies. That idea was novel and after some brain storming, the staff came up with a new project.

It took some time and plenty of experimentation before what is now known as Saraban Baked Goodies and Catering Services took shape. Many of the Bidlisiw beneficiaries then wanted to be beauticians, factory workers or utility personnel. Juliet was quiet about her choice although she knew she could cook. As usual, she was shy about volunteering to do the work but when the need for it arose, she told the staff that she wanted to try her hand in the kitchen.

The rest is now history. First, Juliet and her companions cooked lunch for management and the staff who became the official tasters of her trial recipes. They had to be very critical and truthful because they saw catering as one area where local talents could be utilized, besides its possibility of becoming a source of income for them. It is no surprise that her "Lutong Bahay" repertoire clicked right away.

Juliet turned out to be very resourceful, besides having the natural talent for discrimination as to tastes and flavors. Of course, she could not do all the work by herself. There were other people in the roster of clients who could do kitchen work. Suddenly, there was a new undertaking for both the staff and the beneficiaries from the various communities.

That was when human nature came into the picture. Juliet, unknown

to many then, is strict at planning and execution. She likes everything lined up before she starts any task. Her main problem was finding somebody she could trust with regards precision at measurements and punctuality and dedication in the performance of duties. She soon found out that such a person is difficult to find. She learned early enough that if she wants anything done to her specification, she should do it herself; and if that is too difficult, she should stand at the back of whoever is assigned to the task.



Juliet with baked goods from Saraban.

Management looked into the possibility of professionally training people from the beneficiary community for a new source of livelihood. This need was answered when Bidlisiw found out that the Lapulapu-Mandaue campus of the University of Cebu (UCLM) offered Hotel and Restaurant Management as a course and that catering was in its curriculum. The Bidlisiw trainees learned waitering, bartending and even skirting. Of course, Juliet was one of the first trainees Bidlisiw sent to UCLM and did it serve the foundation well!

Its coordination with other non-governmental organizations brought in new customers. "Saraban" is now quite popular among those who need services for family affairs. And Juliet's lasagna, whether meat or vegetarian, is among their favorites. Saraban has become a concessionaire at the UCLM cafeteria. That is a major accomplishment.

Saraban is supervised by one of the senior members of the Bidlisiw staff. It is with her that Juliet discusses orders, costing and other needs. The kitchen in Sawang Calero is now better equipped, says Juliet, because the Department of Labor and Employment (DOLE) granted it some assistance for the purchase of kitchen equipment and utensils.

One of the problems that Juliet has to contend with is the fact that some of their clients do not seem able to make up their minds as to their plans. Some cancel orders at the very last minute while others add to theirs when there is very little or no more time to go to the supermarket for additional ingredients. Juliet says these really upset her, sometimes making her want to go into a major tantrum. But the initial training and the constant updating that Bidlisiw has given her and the kitchen staff make her go back to earth reminding herself that while everyone wants to raise their earning capacity, they must first be mature members of the human community.

With the growing demand for her ability, it is easy for anyone to presume that Juliet is now floating on Cloud Nine. Far from it! The clouds in her sky are dark, that's why there's plenty of rain in her life. Dear Juliet comes from a brood of ten, of three different partnerships. And being eldest, she has assumed the responsibility of looking after all of the nine after her.

She lives separately from her siblings because most of them are married. But even if they are married, they all look to her not only for advice, but also for financial help. So Juliet, even if her salary is now a far cry from her earnings when Saraban was at its infancy, still says she is always in need of money. She cannot stand seeing a sibling leave her house empty-handed whenever he or she goes to her with a sob story. Juliet, she says of herself, is still very Filipino. What makes her stand out is her filial piety. Her Lola, her grandmother, looked after her when her father left her mother. She now looks after her Lola whom she loves very dearly.

In spite of her difficulties, Juliet only has gratitude in her heart. She feels she is blessed in many ways. Her partner is very understanding of her family and is very affectionate towards their daughters. They have many plans for themselves but for Juliet, their personal plans can wait because her family is problematic and she can only hope for the day her siblings would be self-sufficient, no longer dependent on her. At the rate things are going, however, she sees no sign of it in her horizon.



Juliet with her family, strolling around a mall.

Juliet says she has many more recipes and cooking styles to learn. When she has the time, she looks for new dishes in the internet. She tries them out and when she thinks they are

worthy of the dining table, she presents them to management and the staff for comment and if they approve of it, they challenge her to prepare it for the next meeting of the Board of Trustees.

That, to Juliet, is a real challenge. No, she will not go into a major tantrum for that. After all, the Bidlisiw Board of Trustees is one of her favorite clients! 🍷



Epilogue

If the subjects of these stories were to dwell in their past, they would surely be depressed. For while they were there, it seemed like there was no way out of their situation. They thought they were stuck with their difficulties.

All of them simply went about life the way they thought it was meant to be lived - in destitution, ridicule and need. All of them say that after they were first interviewed, they felt a difference in their person. They felt light. The feeling was strange. They do not know how to name it exactly, but they guess that was hope. When the staff told them that they needed to be trained, that they had to attend sessions, that they had to go into practicum, a few of them wanted to shout, some wanted to cry. Some actually did, but all of them felt they were, at last, free!

When asked what they would suggest to those who are in the state they used to be, they have a common advice:

"Be obedient to the many trainers, lecturers and facilitators who will help you. Never lose your trust in the Lord. He is your final and only recourse. Learn to express your gratitude to everyone who will help you. Be generous to those who will need your help later on. That will be the way you can thank Bidlisiw."

HORTENSIA MAJALALELLE B. VILLA

Chronicler
Vice President
Board of Trustees



COVER ART + LAYOUT

Dearie Escalona

[instagram.com/daaawie](https://www.instagram.com/daaawie)

artistsconthe@gmail.com

[facebook.com/artistsconthe](https://www.facebook.com/artistsconthe)



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