

Magnolia

transgender woman, 57, Pasay,
currently working part-time as a laundry woman

**Let us paint the world with
goodness, joy and love.**



Growing Up Trans

I was raised by a single mom who worked as a domestic helper. As a child, I lived with my mother and a sibling in Pasay City. From the time I was young, my mother did not approve of my being a transgender girl. My mother would scold me, pull my hair, and always tell me not to act feminine. She said I would be bullied and teased for being bakla (gay).

I was humiliated on the streets and in school while growing up. There would always be hecklers calling me, 'Bakla! Bakla!' to spite me. My teacher in fourth grade pulled my hair and said I should cut it short. I did not want to follow the crew cut school hair policy for males-assigned-at-birth. I dropped out of school twice because I was being forced to cut my hair short. I was forced to miss my grade school graduation because the school wanted me to cut off my shoulder-length hair which was in Whitney Tyson's hairstyle (Filipina actress, singer and comedian).

At some point, there was simply not enough money for me to enroll in high school. My mother could not afford to pay for food, uniforms, school projects, and other expenses. I myself was not keen on attending public high school because of the school policy on crew cuts for male students. I would have liked to go to a private school which allowed long hairstyles for boys but my mother did not have enough money to send me to a private school.



Work Life

Instead of high school, I did laundry, hand washing clothes for friends and neighbors to earn money and help my mother with daily expenses. On the side, I did manicures and pedicures. Some laundry customers would discriminate against me. I would hear them say, they will not entrust the underwear of their children or husbands to someone gay.

Most of my young life was spent on the streets with friends, flirting with foreigners in Nayong Pilipino Park near the airport. I would sometimes engage in sex with strangers. I received cash from foreigners who had sex with me. There were times when the park security guards would chase us, and parkgoers would shout at us, saying, 'Bakla nagsimula ng HIV!' (Gays started HIV.)

One time, the police suspected us of selling drugs. We were brought to the police station, interrogated, forced to undress, and detained. A police officer derisively told me, 'Pa bra ka pa' (you're even wearing a bra). The police officer punched me in the chest, stole my earnings from doing laundry, and forced me to have intercourse with him. The police officer also forced me to clean up the comfort room (toilet). The next day, the police released me for lack of evidence. Since they stole my money, I had to walk home. It took me from around 9 AM to 2 PM.

Introduced To Activism

I met the organizers of K2BGay at Nayong Pilipino Park in 1992 when the organization conducted discussions on HIV prevention. I attended their seminars and they asked me and my friends to perform our acts during the events. It was then that I felt my worth in the gay community. I was finally doing something good. Later on, I became a member of K2BGay and was hired to do laundry by Population Services Pilipinas Inc. (PSPI), a national NGO providing reproductive health care services. Later, I was hired as one of the clinic's community organizers. I helped organize community discussions with women on family planning and reproductive health.



Intimate Relationships

I had a series of boyfriends who frequently asked me for money. In my twenties, I was beaten by a boyfriend who was jealous and because I had no money to give him. When I was in my thirties, I lived with a boyfriend who was addicted to shabu (methamphetamine). I worked hard to earn money to pay for my boyfriend's vices. He used drugs daily and would demand money from me to pay for them, and beat me up if I did not have enough money. I lived with him for two years. After this, I had another boyfriend who only visited me once or twice a week and avoided walking with me in public. He asked me to pay for his and his friends' meals and alcoholic drinks. This relationship lasted for more than a year.

At some point, I lost interest in having boyfriends and in living with men because it was just a cycle of short-lived relationships marked with abuse and unfaithfulness. I was exhausted from entering relationships. Now that I am an older transgender woman, I realize that I felt used by men I loved and cared for. I never had a satisfying or ideal relationship. I always felt I was at the losing end, as a bakla.

Reflections On Growing Older And Future Hopes

At this point in my life that I am in my late fifties, I have no savings, not enough money for basic needs, and there is even a possibility that the house I live in will be demolished. I still do laundry for friends and old acquaintances and clean their houses two or three times a week to make ends meet despite my aching and ageing body. I earn about 500 pesos a day (about 10 US dollars at present exchange rate).

Looking back, I should have finished my schooling, had a good job, and saved for my older years instead of wasting my hard-earned money on my boyfriends.

At the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, I was not able to receive government support because I was single. I was only able to get financial aid in 2021 by including my nephew and niece as my family. The government should extend monetary aid to elderly people who are single.





Message For LGBTI Youth

Study well and don't be consumed with having fun or the bahala na (come what may) attitude. Think about your future. Youth never comes back. No one will help those who have no money, even your siblings, relatives or friends. People look at an elderly LGBTI person with no money as a burden. I learned that no one will love you except yourself, no one will take care of you except yourself.

