

Golden Rainbow

Stories of Pain, Grit, Duty and Love of
Filipino Older LGBT People



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 **OUTRIGHT
INTERNATIONAL**

 **EnGendeRights, Inc**
Asserting Gender Equality

Writers/Editors:
Ging Cristobal
Clara Rita Padilla
Annette Visbal
Grace Poore

**Golden Rainbow:
Stories of Pain, Grit, Duty and Love of
Filipino Older LGBT People**



Introduction

Golden Rainbow: Stories of Pain, Grit, Duty and Love of Filipino Older LGBT People is a collection of stories by and about older lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender (LGBT) people in the Philippines. Their stories highlight intersectional discrimination experienced throughout their lives, including family violence, and the impacts. They also share stories of survival, their contributions to society, and what they want for future generations of LGBTI people in the Philippines.

The 13 storytellers featured in Golden Rainbow are among 103 participants of a survey conducted in 2022 by EnGendeRights Philippines and Outright International with assistance from an LGBTI elders advisory committee. The survey provides an overview of the lives of Filipino LGBTI people ages 50 to 75 years. Storytelling themes in Golden Rainbow come from key issues that surfaced in the survey. Findings of the survey are published in English and Filipino factsheets available on Outright's website:

<https://outrightactionint.prod.acquia-sites.com/sites/default/files/2023-06/Phils%20EGR%20Outright%20English%20FactSheet.pdf>

<https://outrightactionint.prod.acquia-sites.com/sites/default/files/2023-06/Phils%20EGR%20Outright%20Filipino%20FactSheet.pdf>

EnGendeRights Philippines and Outright International gathered the stories in Golden Rainbow through interviews conducted in person, on Zoom and the telephone. Members of the LGBTI elders advisory committee provided language translation for storytellers, did outreach, and helped arrange interviews. All stories were recorded and transcribed with signed consent of the storytellers. The storybook was edited by Outright International. The story collection process included a wellness protocol. Outright International provided a guide on good practices for storytelling with older adults. The Philippine team offered a wellness workshop and arranged access to a Filipino mental health professional trained in LGBTI affirmative counseling and psychological first aid.

Golden Rainbow is part of the LGBTI Elders Advancing Project, funded by SAGE USA. The storybook is published in English and Filipino and available in hardcopy and PDF on Outright's website.

Messages

At SAGE, we are deeply honored to lend our support to this invaluable work. Too often, the voices and lived realities of LGBTI older adults are silenced and ignored. The very act of sharing one's life story, as the contributors of this storybook have done, is thus a tremendous act of power and bravery. The narratives contained within these pages are not just stories; they are profound testaments to the unwavering courage and resilience of LGBTQI older adults, not only in the Philippines but across the globe. Thank you to all who have contributed for offering windows into the past, reflections of the present, and beacons guiding us toward a future where dignity and joy prevail.

In solidarity,

Hannah Yore

Director of International Programs, SAGE

Congratulations to Outright International, EnGendeRights, Inc. and all the members of the LGBTQ Community!

The publication of the storybook entitled “Golden Rainbow: Stories of Pain, Grit, Duty and Love of Filipino Older LGBT People” which tells of all the struggles, survival, aspirations and contributions to society of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and Intersex, brings to the fore of this society’s consciousness, its centuries-long discrimination against and less-than-human treatment of people whose misfortune is to be born different. Come to think of it, we, all, are different.

This book, hopefully, will help usher in attitudinal change, making possible openness, acceptance, tolerance, respect for all in the LGBTQ Community and the realization that, indeed, they are our brethren and as such, have been productively contributing to growth and development in all fields of human endeavor.

The National Anti-Poverty Commission Senior Citizens Sectoral Council, speaking for and in behalf of the Senior Citizens who are one, if not the most, vulnerable sector of the country, joins you in the age-old fight for human rights, justice and equal opportunities. To all our LGBTQ fellow Older Persons, dawn is coming. Laban lang!

Salvacion Basiano

Sectoral Representative, National Anti-Poverty Commission Senior Citizens Sectoral Council

Assalamualaikum.

The Commission, as the country's National Human Rights Institution and as Gender Ombud, welcomes the publication of the country's first storybook on elder LGBTQI persons. The Commission lauds Outright International and EnGendeRights for undertaking this project and for rendering visible the lived experiences of elder LGBTQI persons. LGBTQI persons throughout their lifetimes encounter varied forms of stigma, discrimination, and exclusion, these inequalities are often exacerbated and compounded as one ages. The storybook of Outright and EnGendeRights render visible these experiences through the lives of elder LGBTQI who shared their stories. Alongside stories of discrimination and prejudice, there are also stories of strength and resistance, and rights claiming and solidarity.

The Commission is hopeful that this storybook will pave the way not only for more visibility and recognition of the lived experiences and human rights issues encountered by elder LGBTQI persons, but also for the creation of enabling environment and full enjoyment of rights of elder LGBTQI persons. The Commission stands with the LGBTQI community, and with Outright International and EnGendeRights in continuously working towards a free and equal world, where all persons, including elder LGBTQI persons are able to enjoy and exercise all spectrum of human rights and fundamental freedoms.

Insha Allah.

Atty. Faydah Maniri Dumarpa

Focal Commissioner on Women and LGBTQI, Commission on Human Rights














Acknowledgments

Golden Rainbow: Stories of Pain, Grit, Duty and Love of Filipino Older LGBT People was compiled by Clara Rita Padilla and Annette Visbal from EnGendeRights Philippines and Ging Cristobal from Outright Philippines. The storybook was edited by Grace Poore from Outright International. We are grateful for the grant provided by SAGE USA.

We are extremely grateful to the older LGBT storytellers who generously shared their stories. We are grateful as well to the assisting interviewers, members of the Elders Advisory Committee, and volunteer data gatherers.

We also thank the translators and members of the Older LGBTIQ Persons Activist Circle (OLPAC), Twyla Rubin of the Philippines Commission on Human Rights Gender Equality and Human Rights Center (GEWHRC) for coordinating the visit to Mandaluyong Women's Correctional Institute, and Yeng Gatchalian of MindCare and Psychological Association of the Philippines LGBTIQ Special Interest Group for providing access to free counseling to project participants.

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Rey

gay man, 62, Pasay City, currently working part-time

I am golden, never too late to dream and inspire others. My passion leads me to my destiny.

Growing Up Gay

I was born and raised in Sampaloc, Manila. I have four sisters and four brothers. I am the youngest son.

I have been openly gay since I can remember. I loved to play with my sisters, and loved cooking and playing with dolls and games that girls played, like Jackstones (Filipino version of five stones), Chinese garter (Filipino jumping game), and Piko (Filipino hopscotch). I also had crushes on handsome guys. Boys my age would tease me, heckle me, and call me, 'Bakla, bakla' (gay). This did not bother me because I knew it is true. In high school, I met a gay classmate, and we became very close and did everything together. I would sneak out of our house and go to my gay friend's house, where my crush lived.

In the 1970's, homophobia was very strong, and my family was religious. My brothers would ask me to stop acting like a girl to avoid problems. My father would make me stretch on the bench, and hit me with a leather belt every time I returned from my gay friend's house. My brothers would also beat me, strike me on the back of my neck, kick and slap me whenever they got drunk, telling me that being gay brings shame to the family and that I should lead a heterosexual life so as not to be bullied. But it was ironic because it was my own father and brothers who were abusing me. My mother would defend me from my father and brothers, but I also pitied my mother.



Getting depressed from the situation, I was forced to leave home. I went to my friend's house where my friend's parents welcomed me. But my father went after me, bringing a piece of wood to beat me. Worried for my friend's safety, I left. I was constantly in hiding, moving from one friend's house to another.

I started to sleep on the street with other gay people who also ran away from their homes. The church's portico became our refuge. The church stairs were our stage, the church garden served as our auditorium for young gays from nearby villages who would join us at play as we imagined ourselves in a beauty pageant. In this tiny space, we were happy. It helped me and my friends get by despite the hunger and cold pavements. We were sad but glad that we had each other's backs through thick and thin.

My friends and I lived as out gays. We did not hide in a closet even if we were discriminated against and abused for expressing ourselves. We were constantly bullied, called names, bad-mouthed for just walking on the street. Men hanging out, drinking on the street and outside bars threw stones at us. Empty bottles would fly from nowhere. Thugs who hated gays would punch us without provocation. Most of the time, we did not fight back. We just ran away or hid because we did not want our family to know that we were in such a pitiful situation living on the streets. We learned to avoid situations like these. We would walk the other way when we encountered a group of drunk men on the streets.



Work Life

My gay friends and I did laundry and cleaned the houses of people we knew so we could earn money and eat. Later on, we discovered that we had talent for dancing and singing, so we made money caroling during Christmas and participating in contests during fiestas. We founded a group called Midnight Sward (Filipino for gay) and were invited by a talent agency to do shows in Japan. I finished two contracts with this agency but I did not go back to Japan because I could not stand the winter.

Instead, I worked in local nightclubs in the Philippines, doing variety shows in Pampanga, Baguio, Zamboanga, Cebu, Iloilo, Cagayan de Oro, touring for six years. I also performed at Miss Universe Night Club in Pasay City, which is famous with Japanese and Chinese tourists. But as our dance group aged, our bodies grew older, and people mocked us, saying, 'Matatanda na, mukhang aswang' (old evil-looking creatures). I then started to work as a beautician and make-up artist for younger women performers in nightclubs.

Reflexology helped me transition from performing to becoming a massage therapist. I offered my massage services on sliding scale fees. I charged 300 pesos for clients who were able to pay and accepted some elderly neighbors for free. I also provided free street massages to people in wheelchairs, free haircuts to seniors, and free make up for graduating students from high school, university, vocation school, beautician school, mixture of all. People recognized my talent and started to give me referrals. Reflexology massage and beautician work became my other means to earn in addition to drag performance.

When I was younger and stronger, I could work more, multi-task, and earn better. When my siblings and friends needed money, I helped them out. I also contributed funds so my nieces and nephews could go to school. On Christmas, New Year, birthdays, All Souls' Day, I brought food for my relatives. Every Christmas, I was like Santa Claus, and my nieces and nephews would line up for my cash gifts.



Housing

In 2015, when I was 54, a friend introduced me to Golden Gays, a group for ageing gay people. It was started in 1975. They used to have a residential care facility for older gay people in need of shelter, called Home for the Golden Gays, owned by Justo Justo, an AIDS activist, columnist, and member of the Pasay City Council (city legislature). The Home was gutted by fire and demolished so I provided housing in my apartment for some of the residents. They stayed with me for five years until 2020.

Intimate Relationships

I had several relationships. One with a student, another one that was very toxic, and several others. I eventually lost interest in live-in relationships.

Covid-19 Pandemic

When the Covid-19 pandemic struck, nightclubs and beauty parlors closed. Moving around was difficult due to travel restrictions and health protocols. It was also difficult because no one would hire us, elderly LGBTI people. I had to be careful with my daily expenses and found ways to scrimp on rice, water and electricity because the salon where I worked was forced to close and I had no income. I endured hunger, eating rice with only salt or soy sauce. I couldn't afford rent for six months. I had no money even for public transport and had to walk everywhere to find ayuda (monetary or grocery aid).

During the pandemic quarantine, in September 2020, a group of us, mostly beauticians from the Baclaran area (in Metro Manila), formed a group of elderly LGBT persons who were indigent with no permanent home and elderly LGBT persons with disabilities. We named our group Golden Bekis. Since we had no work because of the pandemic, we had lots of time. We made video blogs on Facebook and YouTube to earn money. Eventually, people found out about us. Kindhearted people would send us bags of groceries. Students would interview us for their thesis projects and term papers and give us cash donations and groceries as appreciation for our efforts and time.



The pandemic taught me to regularly take medications and keep my health in check. My nephews and nieces helped me during the pandemic but I did not want to burden them since they have their own families to support. When restrictions were lifted in 2021, I went back to work in a beauty salon but it wasn't sustainable because the salon had few clients due to the rainy season. So, I performed at drag queen events that corporations would invite us to perform for.

Reflections On Growing Older And Future Hopes

Although I am earning income from working in the beauty salon, giving reflexology massage, and doing drag performance, I still worry about my everyday expenses like water and electricity. I fear becoming homeless if I am unable to pay rent and my landlord asks me to vacate. I have joint and muscle pain. I worry about losing my strength, my inability to perform tasks well, to climb footbridge stairs, and move as fast as before. I fear I may become jobless and so desperate that I need to beg for help. Who will help me when I am already weak? If I could turn back time, I wish I had continued my studies and earned a college degree so I could get a better job and enjoy a better life.

I envision building a Home for the Golden Bekis, gathering charitable and passionate people together to create a home for LGBTI people who are homeless and unemployed so we could live together and help each other with livelihood so we can remain strong and energetic. Our envisioned Home can also provide support and inspiration to LGBTI youth.

Message For LGBTI Youth

Although I am not rich, I am still able to help friends and other LGBTI seniors in Golden Bekis through resourcefulness, grit, and courage. We all have a right to live in peace and equality. We only have one life to live and one planet to share with everyone so respect and be respected.



Zeny

lesbian, 73, Pasay City, self-employed beauty products retailer

I compare my life to a bamboo tree. When a typhoon or storm comes, it will get knocked down but rise again to help and benefit people.

Growing Up Lesbian

Since childhood, I experienced mocking looks from the public, and people would avoid or bully me. I would just hide my feelings and cry alone. I was in grade school when I noticed that I was drawn to my female friends. I felt good whenever I was with my female crush. I frequently hung out with my male friends. I never wore a dress and preferred short haircuts, shorts and shirts.

When I reached high school, it became clearer to me that I wanted to be with girls. I would hang out with boys who were visiting girls they were courting and joined my male friends during their harana (serenades) at the homes of the girls. My parents would scold me for staying out until the wee hours of the morning with mostly male friends.

I finished my third year in high school but did not finish my fourth year as I was more interested in continuing to hang out with my male friends. Most of the time, I would miss my morning classes. My parents prodded me to marry since I was no longer interested in continuing my studies.



Marriage

In 1968, I abided by my parents' wishes and married a man ten years my senior. I was 18 years old. At the civil wedding officiated by the judge, I wore knee-high shorts and the judge even humored me by asking, 'Where is the bride?'

I was not happy in my marriage and did not feel love for my husband. We never had children. My husband just let me be and, later in our marriage, I believed that my husband finally accepted that we were not meant for each other and that I wanted a woman in my life. My husband died at the age of 50. I was 40 years old. I was in the marriage for 22 years. I left Bulacan (city in Central Luzon) where I had been living with my husband and relocated to Pasay City (south of Manila).

Work Life

Since I was an out lesbian, I had a hard time finding jobs offered to female applicants such as sales ladies in department stores because of my so-called boyish appearance. The stores preferred applicants who were typically feminine looking, wore dresses and make-up. Eventually, I landed a job in my aunt's printing press as an agent for made-to-order plastic bags for stores.

When I moved to Pasay City, I met Justo Justo or JJ as he was fondly called. He was the chairperson of the barangay (community local government unit) where I lived. I had gone to the barangay to get financial assistance. I introduced myself to JJ and told him that when I was 23 years old, I had performed a song in a show he used to produce and host on Channel 11 television. That started our friendship. JJ asked me to work for the barangay, running errands and sweeping the streets. Later, I joined the barangay tanod (night village watchers who patrolled the streets and provided security). I worked there for 11 years, earning an allowance of 500 pesos a month.



When JJ became the Pasay City Councilor, his mother took over his position as the barangay chairperson. JJ's mother trusted me so much and treated me as a family member. I would represent her in meetings whenever she had a scheduling conflict. Doing this task, I was exposed to discrimination. For instance, in the Parent-Teacher Association (PTA) meeting, women teachers would avoid me. They would not talk to me or sit near me. I felt as if I had some kind of contagious disease and ended up bursting into tears, saying to myself, 'Tao rin naman ako' (I am also human).

Housing

Deprived of job opportunities as a young lesbian, I was not able to maintain a regular job that would allow me to purchase low-cost housing.

When Home for the Golden Gays opened in Pasay City, I felt I had found a home and a family. The Home was established by Councilor JJ in his own home. Around 150 LGBTI old and young people would gather in a four-floor building to sleep, eat, and hold shows. Some homeless LGBTI people who were thrown out of their homes or had left their families, found refuge in this place. It gave LGBTI people visibility. We held events at the Bonifacio Elementary School covered court on Saturdays and Sundays and people in the community saw us.

When Councilor JJ died, the property was claimed by his relatives and the Home was closed. The homeless LGBTI people were forced to live in the streets again, some lived with their friends, and some built makeshift homes in vacant lots with other informal settlers in the city.

COVID-19 Pandemic

During the height of the pandemic, it was immensely difficult for me. I received 1500 pesos on my birthdays from the local Office for Senior Citizens Affairs. I received one-time cash aid of 6,000 pesos from the Department of Social Welfare Development. Friends of Golden Bekis and some NGOs gave me bags of groceries.



Reflections On Growing Older And Future Hopes

Now over 70 years old, I have no stable income, no savings, no state pension, and I live alone in cramped makeshift housing that is noisy and located in an unsafe community. I have high blood pressure and diabetes. At my age, I really find it difficult to work. I strive to pay for my daily needs and maintenance medication by selling lipstick and make-up. Sometimes I ask friends to give me money so I can buy medicine. At times, I receive cash gifts when I offer prayers during funeral wakes.

I used to be happy-go-lucky, but now I am careful with my decision-making. Faith has been a great help to me along with hard work to overcome trials. I look back at the days of our Home for the Golden Gays with much happiness and longing. It has never been the same since we lost our Home. I have a strong desire to be part of the establishment of another home for older LGBTI people. I hope that Pasay City will help us establish a new home for older LGBTI people that is large enough for a minimum of 50 people. As a senior citizen, I believe there is an urgency to extend assistance and care for us.

Message For LGBTI Youth

I have learned that it is important to be humble, courteous, kind, and generous. I hope young LGBTI people will not run away from home. While their parents are paying for their education, they should study hard so that when they grow older they will have their education to hold on to and they will not live a life of poverty.



Jojo

lesbian, 60, serving a life sentence in
Mandaluyong Correctional Institute for Women

Still dreaming of a free and peaceful life.



Growing Up Lesbian

My childhood was full of pain from my father and older sisters. We are eight siblings and I am the sixth in the family, with an only brother who is the eldest. I started being attracted to girls at the age of six when I had a crush on a pretty girl who visited our home. I was a tomboy and hated wearing clothes for girls.

I studied until Grade Six in elementary school but lost interest in studying and did not graduate from elementary school because I believed my father never loved me. Of all my siblings, I was the only one who got scolded and punched daily by my father. My older sisters would pinch me after the beating. My mother, the only person who loved me, would ask my father and my siblings to stop, but they would not.

My father's reason for punching me was that I did not want to wear my school uniform, a white dress. I remember one time being placed in the space under the stove, where my father continuously kicked me. He had big feet. I remember seeing my mother crying as she could not do anything to stop my father.

At age ten, I earned a living selling water from the poso (water pump) to our neighbors. I would wake up at 5 AM to sell water, go to school at 7 AM, and continue working after class. I continued this work until I was 15. I was living with my partner in my parent's home. She was 17, with two kids. I managed to provide for them by selling water. When I introduced my partner to my family and let her stay with me in our family home, my father berated me, unlike my brother, who stayed with his partner in our home. At age 18, I carried a knife for protection. My partner and I stayed together for two years until she betrayed me for a man.

Work Life

As I had only reached Grade Six, I worked in construction, mixing cement for roads. I also worked for a company, mixing candy ingredients.

Before I reached 18, I became friends with hold uppers (burglars) where I was the lookout for police while my friends robbed bars. Later, I would plan the robberies myself. When I was 40, I started selling shabu (methamphetamine). I was first jailed in 2009 in Cebu for selling shabu and was released after two years in 2011. I told my former boss I wanted to stop selling drugs because I wanted a peaceful life, I was getting old, and it was harder because I was taking care of my mother. In 2013, I was arrested again, although I was innocent. An undercover civilian informer of a police officer wanted to use the house I was living in with my mother and partner as a drug den. I repeatedly refused. During a police raid in our neighborhood, that civilian informer told police that I was one of the drug dealers. The police found drugs in my home, and I was arrested. The drugs were not mine, but police assumed I went back to selling because I had a prior arrest for selling drugs.

Housing And Family Life

My partner, Rose (not her real name) and I lived together for 40 years. I met her in Manila in 1982 when I was 20 years old, and she was 26. In 1984, we left Manila and returned to Cebu to live with my mother in our family home. My family obligated me to care for my mother since they consider me single, although I have a partner. Rose and I adopted my niece when she was an infant after her mother, my older sister, died. My sister's husband was a drunkard and could not care for the child. My niece grew up with Rose and me and is now 28 years old.

Rose was the kindest person I met all my life. She was the only one with regular employment in our family. She was a cashier and, later on, a researcher for a company I can't remember. She never left my side. For the first five years, I was jailed in Cebu, Rose would visit me. In 2019, I was transferred to the Correctional Institute for Women (CIW) in Mandaluyong City in Metro Manila. Rose visited me in January 2020. That was her last visit. We lost contact. I was told that Rose is sick but I am not sure if she is still alive. We are allowed one phone call per week in the CIW. Up to now, she has not answered my calls.

Ageing In Prison

Nowadays, I usually suffer from urinary tract infections while in jail. I was supposed to enroll in the Alternative Learning System course, but I have difficulty walking to the second floor due to arthritis in my legs.

One of my older sisters used to visit me in prison, but over the last five months, every time I call her, she does not answer. I get depressed when no one visits me. One of the older inmates became my friend and gave me food she cooked in her cell. But she was released from prison, and I now only eat CIW rationed food.

Loneliness is remedied by having relationships with other inmates. For the last three months, I have had a partner in jail. We can only kiss since we cannot be in the same cell. We can only meet between 4 PM and 6 PM, then go back to our respective cells for the headcount, after which, our cell doors are locked.

I am serving life imprisonment. I could not appeal my case when I was sentenced because we had no money to pay the lawyer. I tried my best to seek help from government officials but was told to wait at least 18 years to get executive clemency from the President (of the Philippines).

Reflections On Growing Older And Future Hopes

I still hope to be pardoned and released from prison. My siblings are poor, so when I get released, I would be older and would not be able to earn a living. But I dream of having a pedicab (bicycle food cart) where I can sell coffee and food.

Photo credit: Ging Cristobal



Photo credit: Ging Cristobal



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

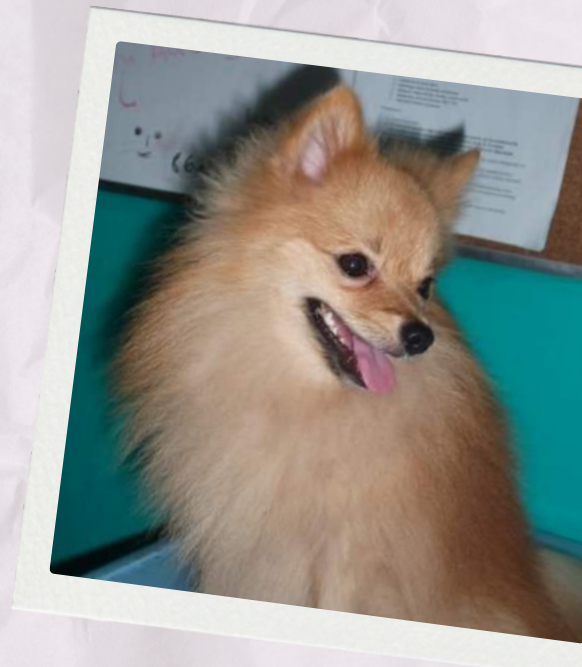
Study well and don't be consumed with having fun or the bahala na (come what may) attitude. Think about your future. Youth never comes back. No one will help those who have no money, even your siblings, relatives or friends. People look at an elderly LGBTI person with no money as a burden. I learned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



Iman

gay man, 61, Manila City, currently employed

We deserve a wonderful and meaningful life.



Growing Up Gay

I became aware of my sexuality when I was in Grade Four, ten years old. I was under my grandmother's care. I grew up in her house. I was molested at a young age by our neighbor. He was a soldier, older by about 20 years. At first, it was innocent. He told me stuff I did not question. But he started requesting more. Since I was a child, I was clueless. I did whatever he told me to do. He told me not to tell anyone and I told no one about it. It stopped only when the guy was deployed somewhere far away. When he left, I realized that I liked everything that guy and I did with each other.

My family assumed that I was gay from the way I moved and acted. My siblings teased me for not acting masculinely. As my body grew, my mind matured. Only then did the pain from my siblings' insults vanish.

I never told anyone explicitly about my sexuality. I only truly came out verbally to my mother. It was a nerve-racking experience. My relief doubled a thousand times when she said, 'No matter what you are, you are still my child.' Aside from her, I never told anyone, including my classmates and peers. I did not act gay in school. I never outed myself in school. I did not want to be bullied. When I won Mr. Junior during our prom, no one knew I was gay.

Work Life

I worked as a seamster for women's clothes in the Philippines, where many of my co-workers were also gay. I continued working in the clothing industry when I went to the Middle East, making gowns and garments for Saudi people. My workplace mostly consisted of women and other gays, so I felt comfortable enough to stay for eight years. It was hard work, but I really enjoyed it. I felt that I fulfilled being gay only when I went to Saudi Arabia. When I came back to the Philippines, I randomly decided to get a medical check-up and found the most life-changing surprise I never thought would happen to me. I tested positive for HIV.

Life with HIV And Activism

Distraught and feeling lost with the news that I was HIV positive, I did nothing for six years. I never returned abroad. But when the calendar hit 2002, I started becoming an HIV activist. I came to know the organization that I am a part of now. I told myself I could do something while I still had time.

Intimate Relationships

When I was young, my longest relationship was six years. Now at 60, I have a friend with benefits with whom I've been in a relationship since 2016. My companion is a fellow HIV positive friend. I chose to have this kind of relationship with someone in the same situation because I do not want to hide anything and, being the same status, we would be able to understand each other's struggles. When he was newly diagnosed, I was the one who guided him through it. When his job was unstable, we lived in the same house. Now he has a stable job in a bank.

I call him companion and not partner or boyfriend because he is 39 years old and I am 60. There is a big age gap. He might meet someone closer to his age and he might live longer than me. This is one of the reasons why we are in an open relationship. Sometimes we cannot prevent jealousy from coming between us but still, we have a friendship.

Reflections On Growing Older And Future Hopes

I do not have many regrets, only that I was not careful enough and got HIV. But I did many good things. I have been an activist for 20 years, raising HIV awareness. I had many friends, older HIV positive individuals who had no support system like I did, and who died ahead of me. I have had HIV for 27 years already so the Lord did have plans for me, or I would not live this long.

My next project is building homes for older LGBTIQ+ and seniors living with HIV. I will retire after finishing this job with a wonderful and meaningful end. Once I retire, I will buy a rocking chair and enjoy the fresh air in the countryside while reminiscing about the good old days of young Iman.



Message For LGBTI Youth

You really have to enjoy life while you are still young. Do not make your sexuality or sexual orientation a hindrance or a barrier. We have to fulfill the life that we are given because we will only be given a single chance.



Photo credit: Ging Cristobal

Donnah

gay man, 50, Sorsogon City, currently employed

I believe we have to be kind all the time while being courageous to face all challenges in life.

Growing Up Gay

I grew up with my four siblings in a chaotic, messy life. I grew up playing with girls, cooking, and playing Chinese garter (Filipino jumping game). My family never acknowledged my existence, treated me as if I'm not part of the family. I lived with my loving and god-fearing grandmother from age 11. She did not reject me for being effeminate and gay. She accepted that I was a gentle person and told me I could be myself as long as she was around. She was my teacher in life. She guided me to be a good person. She taught me to go to church and pray the rosary. Unlike most kids my age at that time, I enjoyed it and loved attending Mass.

In Grade Five or Six, I was sodomized by my godfather. It happened when I was living with my grandma. I did not tell anyone, not even his wife and children. He kept visiting my grandma and me and gave me money and gifts. We were like hidden boyfriends. He stopped doing things to me when I entered college.

Time caught up and took my grandma away from me. It was never easy after that. In the streets, people would yell at me, Bakla! Crucify him to a cross! After a while, I got used to it. I accepted the idea that when you are gay, you must always be ready to get bullied. There were times, however, when I fought back. I really fought back. I threw punches whenever it was necessary, and the bullies would stop.



Work Life And Activism

I have a BS (Bachelor of Science) degree in Education. I did not plan on becoming a teacher, but back then, in our province, Sorsogon, there were only three courses as options—education, commerce, and secretarial. I taught for six months at a private school but quit.

While studying in college, I lived with a group of older gay friends who owned salons. I was like their baby, and they taught me how to cut hair professionally. When I was 25, they invited me to join a salon and be a hairdresser. From then until now, it has been my profession, my livelihood.

When I was in my 30s, I was elected to serve three terms in the barangay (local government unit) in my community. I served for nine years. It was then that I really proved that gays have a place and purpose in the community and in society. I earned people's respect by being a trustworthy individual fighting for what is right.

Intimate Relationships

My last relationship was three years ago. My ex-boyfriend got a girl pregnant and married her. When I found out, I was utterly heartbroken. I sobbed for a whole night. But I chose to forgive and let go. I was invited to their wedding and became the godfather of their child. I have been single for a few years now. I am not afraid of being alone. That is how I think because I have already experienced all there is to experience and all I could want. What's left to do?



Reflections On Growing Older And Future Hopes

If given a second chance, I would still choose to be a hairdresser. Because without the people in my life whom I had met through hairdressing, I would not be who I am today. I try to live a healthy life by staying away from stressful things. I minimize drinking and staying up late. I enjoy the company of my friends and have been saving up for rainy days. It is good that after the COVID-19 pandemic, our regular salon clients are returning.

I fear old age. When I reach that age when I have to hold a cane to walk, I think I will be depressed. Sometimes I have thoughts of ending my life if I reach the point of not being able to take care of myself. Praying really works because I am someone who tends to keep to myself. All the negative thoughts and feelings fly out the window the moment I step into church, close my eyes, kneel, and put my hands together. I do not easily trust people because I have been betrayed many times. But the only one I have faith in with all of my heart is God. My faith led me to financially help my estranged sister when she had a stroke and to accept relatives in need with open arms even if I am never reciprocated.



Melay

transgender woman, 57, Sariaya Municipality, Quezon Province, currently works as an entrepreneur

Be a beauty queen in thought, word, and deed.



Growing Up Trans

My love for beauty pageants was influenced by my mother. She liked Miss Universe, and we would watch it together on our television. I would observe and watch as my mother applied makeup on herself. In elementary school, I wore a blush-on and confidently went up on stage to receive my Grade Six certificate, looking pretty with pink cheeks.

When I was in Grade 5, I knew I was gay. I did not like going to the men's bathroom and preferred female friends. Fortunately, I did not experience discrimination. I did not have enemies or experience bullying when I studied at a coed elementary school and even at an all-boys high school. They liked me because I was not loud, lousy, messy, or flirty.

In high school, I went to San Sebastian, an all-boys school during my first year, where teachers would tell us that acting gay and being soft was not allowed. It was 1980 at the time. Everyone was closeted and kept to themselves. I discovered four gay classmates in the same class, and we became friends. We were not bashed by our fellow classmates. Instead, they found us amusing.

While studying, I would secretly join beauty contests. In 1982, when I was 15, I won the Miss Young pageant, my first ever pageant. I used my real name instead of a celebrity name as my stage name. I hid my beauty contest trophies in my cabinet behind my clothes. My parents found out when my sister showed my mother a picture of me in one of my pageants. They scolded me.

During one of my many gay pageants, I was discovered and invited by entertainers to go to Japan. At 17, a few days after high school graduation, I left for Japan. My father, a lawyer, tried to break the contract but eventually agreed to let me go. I did not like my life in Japan. It was endless rehearsals and shows. Maybe I was too young for that life because I still watched cartoons and hugged stuffed toys to sleep even as they put make-up on me.

When I returned to the Philippines from Japan, it was never the same with my family. The significant change in my body and appearance was an issue for my family. They told me that they accepted me but preferred that I not dress up like a woman.

Work Life And Activism

I chose to live by myself and rented an apartment in Pasay City. Because I was not able to go to college, I became a regular performer in gay bars in Metro Manila, worked at a beauty salon, and became a make-up artist in a bar along Roxas Boulevard until I had my own salon business. I also worked in an ad agency.

When I was in my mid-thirties, I ran a salon business with eight branches together with my cousin. It was mentally and physically taxing so we eventually closed six branches.

In 2013, I became a member of Sariaya 13hundred, the first gay association in Quezon Province (Southern Luzon). Sariaya 13hundred is turning 50 years old in 2023. We implement projects for LGBTIQ persons and provide services to the whole community. During the COVID-19 pandemic, I coordinated the distribution of food packs (rice, canned foods, coffee) to LGBTIQ people.

In 2022, I joined Golden Bekis through Rey, one of the founders. I wanted to support his advocacy, his vision, and dream of building a shelter for LGBTIQ elders.



COVID-19 Pandemic

When the COVID-19 pandemic happened, I had only two branches of my business left. I tried to save them but to no avail. The economy was really low. Eventually, I had to let go of my two salons.

In 2021, I went to Manila to care for my ailing father. I stayed with him for ten months until his death at age 96. During that time, I also had personal health issues, gastritis and gallstones. My Social Security benefits (SSS) application was rejected, and I had to pay thousands of pesos for gallbladder surgery.

Reflections On Growing Older And Future Hopes

Currently, at age 57, I live a simple life at home, away from the bright lights and fast-paced city life. I prioritize my health and my well-being. I do not smoke or drink. I did not expect that I would grow old alone. I have regrets about not finding a partner sooner. I have regrets about being too picky. Now that I am older, I realize that having someone in your life is better than no one. When I was in my 30s and 40s, I should have looked for a Filipino husband, but I did not think of that.

Message For LGBTI Youth

The memories of our youth should be reminders that time has gone, things have changed, and we should learn to adapt to the new chapter of our lives. We have to lessen the bad in order to maintain the good and preserve what needs to be treasured.



Donna

transgender woman, 52, Cabanatuan City, currently unemployed

Love makes a family.

Growing Up Trans

I was assigned male at birth, but I knew that I was a girl at age seven. My family accepted my gender identity, but I left our home at age 13 because of the punishments my siblings and I suffered from our father. One time, my father entrapped my brother and me and drowned us until we admitted to stealing 20 pesos. We were close to dying.

Work Life

I worked as a make-up artist in entertainment places and eventually became a dancer, female impersonator, and drag performer at gay bars along Roxas Boulevard in Manila. Using a fake passport, I went to Japan when I was 14 to work and earn more. I came back home to Manila every three months for vacation. I had an African American boyfriend who supported me having an operation (gender affirmation surgery) in Japan, but during the screening, the doctors said that I was too young. A few years later I had top surgery done in Japan.



Family Life

On one of my vacations in Manila, I met Gina (not her real name), who became my life partner. Even if I already had my top surgery, I pursued Gina. I did not care if I looked and felt like a woman. Back then, they expected me to be attracted only to men. I did not care that we were both of the same sex (Gina is a cisgender woman, Donna is a transgender woman). I was confident of winning her heart. I was not ashamed of who I was. Eventually, we started our family. Our children never had problems because their papa looks like a woman or because I was a dancer and female impersonator.

I started having health problems when our youngest son was born. We already had three children, but my son wanted a baby brother. Having four kids, I had to work harder. In addition to being a drag performer and dancer, I sold processed meat and did make-up and hairdressing to earn more for my family. I developed gout in my knees. They got swollen, making it painful to walk and dance. It became harder and harder to work.

I was too focused on financially supporting my family and was away from home most of the time. Gina became unhappy. She became aggressive and abusive toward me. I learned that she was having an affair with a man. I was so mad, confused, sad, and guilty all the same time. I blamed myself for neglecting her needs but I could not accept that she loved this other person. I was looking forward to growing old with her. When we broke up, I fell apart. I was diagnosed with heart failure. I lost hope of living. For three years, I could not move on. I was physically in pain with gout and emotionally drained from betrayal. I became depressed. I attempted suicide twice.

My two older kids went to college while my two younger kids stayed with my mother-in-law in the United States since I could not care for them or myself. Until today, my kids are with her, but we maintain communication on birthdays, and they visit me when they are in the Philippines.

In April 2021, my father died. My brother died in June. Both from heart enlargement, the same condition I have. I am now staying with my mother, youngest sibling, brother-in-law, and nephew.

Reflections On Growing Older

After years of being estranged, Gina and I are now friends. My children are so supportive and proud of me. I love them dearly. My kids would fight anyone who insulted me and my gender identity. Hopefully, I will be a good grandmother to my two-year-old grandchild.



Cora

transgender man, 66, person with disability, Quezon City, currently employed as part-time security guard

My disability is not an obstacle to face life challenges because I have the ability to live.

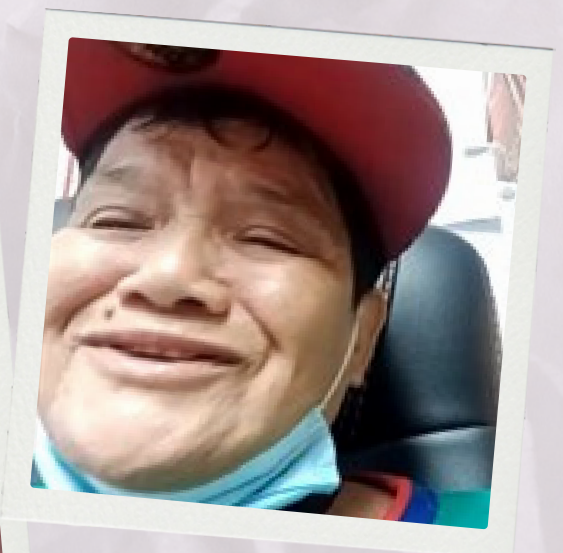


Growing Up Trans And With A Disability

We were 13 siblings and I am the ninth. My parents worked as caretakers in a public cemetery. I learned that I am transgender in my teens when I had a crush on one of my female classmates in high school. I was a tomboy and would get scolded at home. My father got angry if I was wearing a dress. My mother hit me if I was wearing pants. My relatives viewed me as odd.

When I was young, I was stricken with polio which caused one of my legs to become short. In school, I experienced bullying because of my disability. My classmates would tear up my test paper, trip me, and cause me to fall. I ended up in fights at school. At home, my brothers would beat me for fighting in school.

I only finished high school. I was not able to go to college because my parents could not afford to send all 13 of us to college.



Work Life

When some of my friends told me that I should take a secretarial course with them, I said no. I really wanted to be a mechanic. When I informed my parents that I wanted to be a mechanic, they said that I would risk being hurt since I had limited mobility due to my disability.

At age 32, I started earning a living by collecting bets for community-based gambling. I also peddled vegetables, fruits, clothes and household items. I used my earnings to pay for the expenses of my nephews and nieces.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, it was difficult to travel and earn a living because of the lockdowns. Eventually, I was employed as a village security guard for 1000 pesos per month (about 20 US dollars at current exchange rate). I am still working as a guard to the present.

Intimate Relationships

At age 36, I had a relationship with a woman. My family did not approve and my father and siblings threw me out of the house. My partner and I separated in 1997.



Reflections On Growing Older

My job as a security guard does not provide enough income and I find it difficult to find other means of income as a transgender man with a disability and an ageing body. I do not have enough money to pay for my basic needs, not even to buy food. At times, I eat only one meal a day. I struggle to pay my electricity and water bills and the cost of transportation to go to the clinic for medical check-ups. Sometimes, I do odd jobs for the barangay and get paid 300 pesos.

I also experience financial discrimination as an older transgender man. For instance, during the height of COVID-19, when monetary aid was distributed by the government, I never received any financial aid or social pension as a person with a disability or as a senior citizen.

All my life, while earning a living as a bet collector, I could not save for myself because I contributed to the daily needs of my nephews and nieces. In hindsight, I should have ensured that I have savings.



Ibrahim

lesbian, 57, Davao City, currently working

You have to care and give back to your family no matter what.



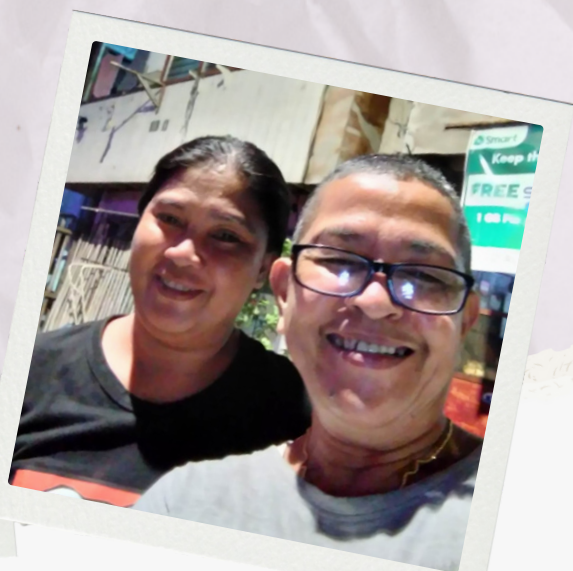
Growing Up Lesbian

Since Grade Three, I knew I was a lesbian. Now that I am 57, nothing has changed. I was already out to my family and friends at a young age. It was not a surprise to my family because I was a tomboy ever since they knew from how I moved and talked.

I am the ninth of ten siblings. Since my father was the only one earning a living, his work could not support the whole family. My mother was always sick and could not walk. During high school, my father and siblings assigned me to care for our mother, being that I was second to the youngest. I do not know if it is because I am lesbian, and they assumed I would not get married. But I had no choice. I stopped my studies and took care of my mother.

Work And Family Life

When I was older, I left Davao City and went to Manila, and worked as a janitor. The work entailed lifting heavy objects, and after only a few months, I quit and went back home. I preferred my province to the city. Manila was crowded and noisy everywhere. When I returned to Davao, my niece had a baby. Since I was taking care of my mother, I was asked to also take care of the baby, who became my grandchild. I then stayed home for good.



Intimate Relationships

At age 22, I had my first serious girlfriend. She was from a well-off family, unlike me, who was poor. Both our families were against our relationship. It was the first time my family disapproved of something I did. My girlfriend's family was against me because I was a lesbian, and they reasoned that my girlfriend would gain nothing from our relationship. I had no work when I was dating her. I had not finished high school. I felt her parents were right. My parents and siblings discouraged me from continuing the relationship. Hence, we ended the relationship. I let her go. I believe that family comes first. Being with and taking care of my family was my purpose in life.

Reflections On Growing Older

At age 56, I am now hearing impaired. I minimize drinking alcohol and try to live healthier. The grandchild I took care of is now a teenager. I also take care of my two older sisters. They all live with me. My two older sisters received a small pension from the government when they reached 60, but the money they received did not cover their maintenance medicines. My niece, the mother of my grandchild, works abroad to send us money. Aside from her monthly support, we have a small store in the house. The store keeps me busy.

I am a member of a lesbian group called Lez Be Friends. We shop, go to the market together, give and receive advice from each other, and even do charity events. I am very comfortable with the group. It's almost like a second family where I feel I belong and can be happy despite my home responsibilities, challenges, and problems. Because of my group, I learned to be humble and get along with everybody, and to remember that wherever I go, there is a friend.

Message For LGBTI Youth

We should be fair and honest to other people. We may not be the luckiest, but we have friends that will be worth more than a thousand things. We must not forget about God, who gave us life, good health, strength, and what we have. We should have faith and be good people.



Thyra

transgender woman, 68, Quezon City, currently unemployed

Life is a rainbow of love and hope.

Growing Up Trans

People would heckle me for expressing myself as a transgender girl but I ended up keeping the pain to myself. I was consistently beaten by my father for being effeminate.

Work And Family Life

At age 12, I was forced to leave my parent's home in Surigao to escape the constant beatings from my father, and live with my relatives in another province. I worked at a bakery to support myself. After about seven months, my mother reached out to me, saying she missed me, and she convinced me to return home to Surigao.

At age 15, my parents told me to go to Quezon City with my siblings because of dire economic circumstances. In Quezon City, we lived with an aunt. She told us that we would just eat their leftovers, so I left and went to Angeles City (in central Luzon) to live with another relative. I found work at a bar where I entertained guests.

I met a Black American military officer who asked me to be his girlfriend but I refused because I could not speak English. Eventually, I had boyfriends and I ended up spending my money on their food and drinking sprees, leaving me with no personal savings.



At age 43, I returned to Quezon City. I met a city councilor and found work as a cleaner at her office. At some point, I became a regular employee and I was earning about 7000 pesos a month (about 140 US dollars at present exchange rate). This stint lasted about seven years.

After the office cleaning job, I never had any paid employment. I ended up caring for my nephews and nieces without receiving a salary. I was given money just for my day out. I still live with a relative in Quezon City and rely on donations from relatives, family, church, barangay, and gay friends for ayuda (aid). At times, I hear hurtful words from relatives because I do not have money.

I do volunteer work in church and at the barangay (local government unit office), and in return I get free rice and vitamins. I joined the senior citizen activities of our barangay to keep myself busy and allay my loneliness and fear. At times, I also get to see my gay friends.

Reflections About Growing Older

In hindsight, it is important to have your own savings, own a house, and get along with others so they do not refuse you when you ask for a favor. One should be open to accepting difficulties as life is not always rosy, there is also sorrow. What is important is to do good for yourself and your family.



Jean

transgender woman, 59, Cebu City, currently working

Strive to have a good life.



Growing Up Trans

Life was tough, coming from a poor family. On top of that, I was not accepted as a transgender woman. The discrimination and abuse I received weighed heavily on me all my life, which caused my bitter outlook on life and love.

My father worked as someone who carries passenger luggage into ships. During Martial Law (1972 to 1986 under former president, Ferdinand Marcos), we lived at Plaza Independencia, near the pier. During all the chaos and battles in the country, our house was demolished since we used to live with informal settlers. We had no choice but to move elsewhere. No matter where we lived, it was still the same. I was not welcome. I was not accepted.

Since I was ten, when I identified as a girl, my siblings and my father never liked and accepted that I was different. They forced me to be a man, whatever 'man' meant to them. My siblings would order me to punch the trunk of a banana tree because, I guess, it would show my masculinity. Whenever we had visitors who were also gay, they teased us, ridiculed us, and blatantly expressed their abhorrence for people like us. They hated us because they said being gay was ugly.

Once, my brother and his friends ran after us with an axe, threatening to kill me and my gay friends as if scaring us would prevent us from being gay. Another time, my siblings asked me to go with them to the sea to catch shrimp, which is what they did for a living. They would always leave at midnight or before sunrise. They took me with them and abandoned me. That was one of their many ways of teaching me how to be a 'proper man.' Whenever they were unsatisfied with what I did, the consequence was a punch on my cheek. They would beat me sometimes for reasons only they thought were reasonable.

Years of abuse and discrimination led me to have many issues. Maybe that is why I had my first serious relationship late in my 40s. My siblings did not like my partner because they felt the guy was financially taking advantage of me, which meant no money for them. I often left home and stayed at friends' houses. They gave me free meals and I helped around the house. Honestly, home was anywhere but the house my family lived in. I liked my friends more than I could ever like my blood ties.

Work Life

Eventually, I started working as a house help at different houses with a salary of 15 pesos every month. I encountered different kinds of people and some were not that kind. Having no savings, I often went back to my family.

I gradually moved out of my family's house to carve out my path through hairdressing. My gay friends taught me how to cut hair professionally. I owe all of what I have now to my talented gay friends. I went around cutting hair and had about ten customers a day. It was during the 1980s, so people paid me three pesos for a haircut. It was fine at that time because expenses were still at a low price.

One day, my sibling, a welder in a company, won 200,000 pesos in a contest. He shared 5,000 pesos (about 100 US dollars) with each of our brothers and sisters, including me. With this money I bought equipment to start my hairdressing career. Then I saved money to build up my business.



COVID-19 Pandemic

During the COVID-19 pandemic, I lost everything. I tried to make money by providing hairdressing home service to my regular customers but I had no money to buy cellular load for my phone and couldn't get to customers' houses during lockdowns without a quarantine pass. The captain of my barangay issued an order that only house owners could receive COVID relief aid. I was not even allowed to register for the social assistance program of our barangay. Thankfully, the barangay officials who knew me well gave me 6,000 pesos cash aid twice.

Reflections On Getting Older

I am now 58 years old. I live in a small shanty with no running water or electricity. None of my relatives contact me to know how I am or if I am still alive. The only thing that makes me happy is my grandchild who lives with me. The mother is my niece who had an unplanned pregnancy.

In Pardo barangay, where I mostly live, there is an LGBT group encouraged by the barangay captain. It was not until after the pandemic that I chose to join. My friend in the LGBT group has a foundation for the elderly which I regularly join for fun, especially when there's free food and transportation. I give haircuts and style the hair of the elderly. When I am too old to do anything else, I hope to live comfortably at my friend's foundation.

I have long given up on finding a partner. I often ask myself why the Lord made me male, when deep inside, I know I am a woman. I have accepted that I will be alone.

Message For LGBTI Youth

Work hard so that your life will be good.
Do not always depend on your parents.
Strive on your own. You only have
yourself to rely on until the end.
Treasure yourselves more.



King

transgender woman, 63, Quezon City,
currently not employed outside the home

**A simple life is much
happier if there is
work and savings.**



Growing Up Trans And With A Disability

I lived in Quezon City with my family my whole life. I am the fourth child in a brood of ten. At five years old, I was fond of playing games with girls. At seven years old, I was wearing my sister's dresses so I knew then that I was a transgender person. I am very thankful that my family accepted me as I am.

I have a disability, having been afflicted with polio when I was young. I did not finish high school due to my physical disability. The walk to school was long, I found it difficult to wear shoes, I could not go to school wearing slippers, and I always felt dizzy during classes.

At age 16, I dropped out in my fourth year of high school when my mother decided not to send me to school anymore. She asked me to help her sell dry goods at her small market stall. People in the community praised me for being a big help to my mother with her business and household chores.



Work And Family Life

In the late 1980's, when I was in my early 30s, I landed a job as an assistant cook at a fast food eatery in Quezon City. My gay best friend who was the cook offered me the job. After a three-year stint in the eatery, my mother asked me to stop working so I could attend to chores at home and cook for the family (in the Philippines). She was already living with my older sister in the United States. My three siblings had families of their own. So, I took the role of caregiver for my five younger siblings, two of them in high school and two in elementary school. I prepared their food, did marketing, and cleaned the house. In the 1990's, my gay best friend set up an eatery and catering business, and he employed me. This was my source of income for eight years until my best friend died. I fell into a deep depression and stopped working for about 20 years. Three years before the COVID-19 pandemic, when I was 57, my cousin hired me as a cook at another eatery and I worked there for three years.



Intimate Relationship

In 2000, I met a guy and he eventually lived with me and my family for 16 years. They accepted us as a couple. But we had to part ways in 2016 when I learned that he got a woman pregnant. I never had a relationship after that.

Reflections On Growing Older

When I look back to my younger days, I was happy because I had work and income, but now I am a bit sad because I do not have employment or income. I am now a senior citizen but I do not receive support from the government as a senior citizen. During the COVID-19 pandemic, I lost my job when the eatery closed and I found it difficult to pay for my daily expenses. I did not receive government aid as a senior citizen or a person with a disability. I only received emergency aid given to people affected by the pandemic.

I was not able to save money because almost all my earnings went to buy food for my family. I was a huge help to my family then. I allotted just enough money for my transportation, going to and from my work.

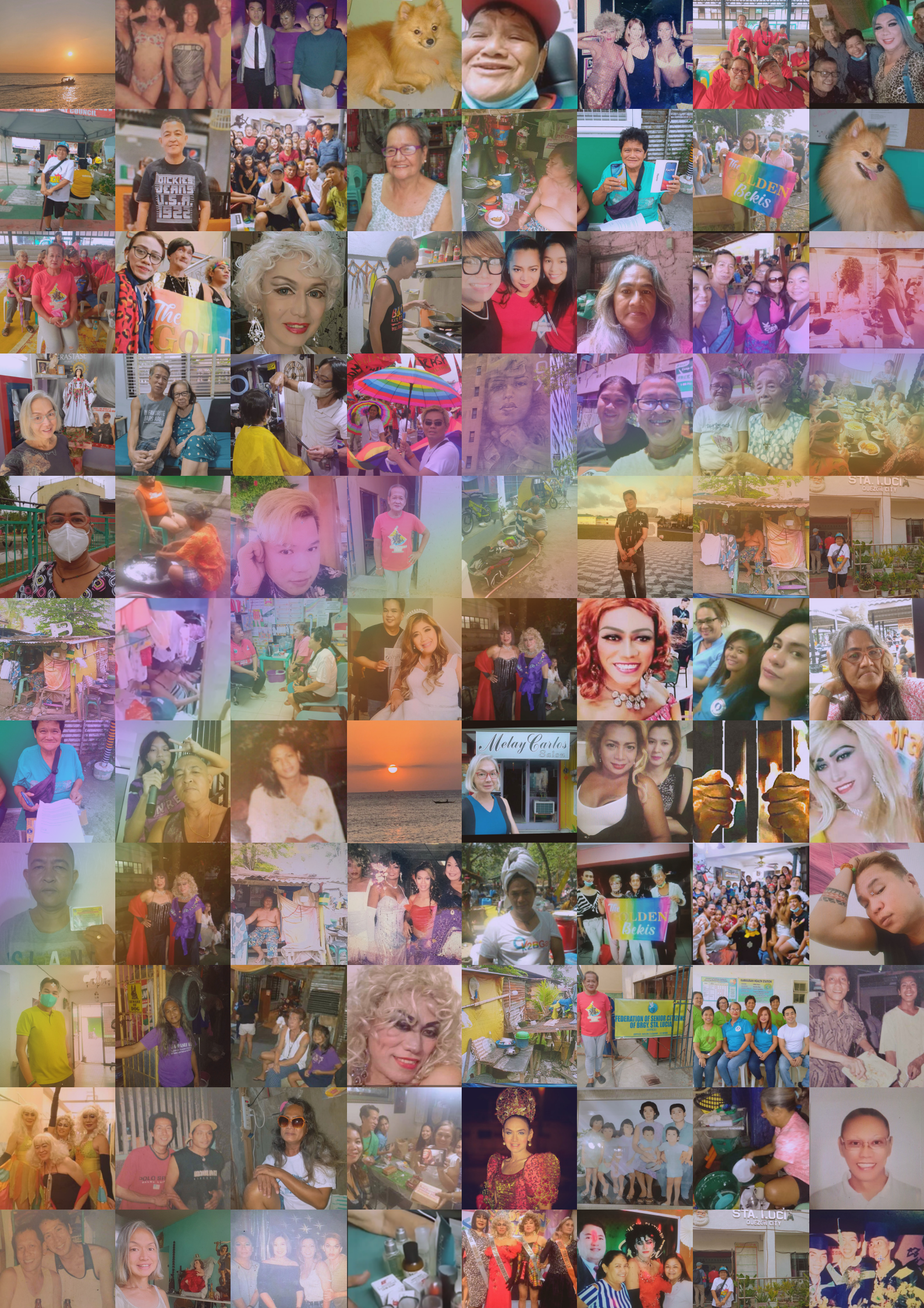
I am busy now taking care of my 84-year-old mother after she returned to the Philippines from the US. Although my mother receives her pension which we rely on to support both our daily needs, this will not be reliable in the future. I have difficulty walking because of my disability and I have cardiovascular disease and hypertension. I am worried about my health especially since I do not have money to buy my maintenance medicines.

I do not have a smart cellphone, Facebook, finance accounts with GCash/Cebuana, or a bank account. I joined a senior citizen group but I am not a member of any LGBTI group. I am very thankful for this project (with EnGendeRights and Outright International) because I was able to connect with LGBTI organizations and the Quezon City Social Services Development Department.

Message For LGBTI Youth

As I look back on my youth, I wish I started saving money when I was young. It is difficult to grow old with no savings. My advice to young people is to study well so that you have a good future.





**Golden Rainbow:
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of Filipino Older LGBT People**

Writers/Editors:

Ging Cristobal

Clara Rita Padilla

Annette Visbal

Grace Poore

