

## Josephine

For as long as I can remember I have never lived with my Mama. I was always being moved between my aunties and uncles.

I experienced a very difficult life. I would get up early to start to scavenge. I would hold onto the back of trucks so that I could try and grab the trash, even in the middle of the day and heat of the sun. I sacrificed myself for my brothers and sisters waiting at home, I kept going because I was thinking that they needed to eat.

I experienced selling drugs because I was ordered to do so by my uncle. That's one of the bad things that I had to do. If I went home without any money my uncle would tell me to leave because I was not helping anyway.

There came a time when my Mama went to work in Isabela. I was so sad because it would be a long time until I saw her and my siblings again. I used to see them from time to time, but now I would be left behind and would not see them at all. I had no one to hold onto. I thought I would kill myself. Other times I thought I would just get married early. But neither of these would solve my problems. Thank God I didn't go through with either of these plans.

I started to live on the street and looked after myself. I had no one else to turn to.

My life was sad, painful, difficult and I did not know how I was going to achieve my dreams. All I knew was how to collect trash and scavenge. I was an expert at that. At least I was an expert at something, right? How was I going to achieve my dreams? Dreams? I had dreams but I could not even eat three times a day.

Something that happened to me that I can not forget is when I was hit by an SUV van. I felt so sorry for myself. Then I thought about my Lola who was alone in her house because my Lolo had left. I forced myself to get up even though someone was telling me not to move. I said I had to as my cousins had nothing to eat. I was lucky that the driver that hit me paid for my medical expenses and my injuries were not too serious.

And then one day one of my friends introduced me to Bahay Tuluyan. They said that they were giving away lugaw. I thought Jackpot! A free meal! When I got there, we were asked to do a drawing. I said wow, this will be my first time to hold a pencil, can I join in? I got to know Ate April, Ate Diana and Ate Abi. They helped me to get back on my feet and find hope. Because of them, I started to think that maybe I could achieve my dream of becoming a teacher. I joined the activities of Bahay Tuluyan's Mobile Unit regularly.

One day, before the activity ended I approached Ate April and asked her if I could go with her to Bahay Tuluyan. She asked me lots of questions and talked to another social worker. Then they talked with Mama and she let me go to Bahay Tuluyan. I was so happy because I thought it was really true, there was a way for me to achieve my dreams.

At BT they told me I could call them 'Nanay' and that they would be my second family. It felt so good when I was taken to my own room, complete with everything I needed. I was so happy that I could finally be like other kids.

Since then, many things have changed, now here I am – ok, clean, going to school. Here I experienced a family ready to understand, love and give attention and, more than anything else, they taught me my rights as a child. Back then I was the one being taught, now I am one of the ones

doing the teaching - teaching kids like me. I have learnt good manners and values. I owe so much to Bahay Tuluyan because if it wasn't for them I would not be here to write this.