

Mary Ann

When I reached 8 years old I realised that my parents didn't love me. It was hard to accept but I had to forget it so I could concentrate on going to school and what was happening around me. I thought that if I changed we could be together again, but I was wrong.

I went back to my parents and was treated like a dog. I ate my parent's leftovers and sometimes before I ate I was sworn at, hit or kicked. I would cry in secret and wonder why God let this happen to me. Both my parents had vices – my mama drank and my papa used drugs. When my father wasn't high, he beat me, bruised me and handcuffed me. I felt so sorry for myself and had so much anger about my life. My dreams were shattered.

I ran away and stayed with my friends for a long time. Luckily, they stuck together, were loving and God-fearing, even if they had been through so much. I was jealous that they had that, even if they didn't have parents. I had parents but was so unhappy. Some of them were left by their parents and others had been kicked out. I cried when I heard their stories. I realised I wasn't alone and there were others like me. I felt sad that so many of us children had experienced abuse at the hands of our parents. We are people too.

We were hurt and looking for love from our parents but didn't experience this even once. I started being an "asset" for the police just so that I could get money to pay for the house me and my friends rented and so that we had something to eat. Even though I knew I shouldn't do it at 10 years old and sometimes just because I was bored, I started using drugs and drinking. I sometimes went far away and looked for drugs so I could get high and forget all my anger but the effect of the drugs made me so angry I wanted to kill someone.

I was still happier in this life than when I was just being abused all the time. There came a time when I forgot my family and only thought of my friends and my drugs.

One day I saw a van and lots of happy looking children. I sat to the side and wondered why they were so happy. Then a stranger came up to me, touched me on the shoulder and introduced herself as Ate Sarah, a social worker of Bahay Tuluyan. She answered all my questions about Bahay Tuluyan and I started to understand why the children were so happy. Over the next few days I didn't go back to where the van had parked even though Ate Sarah's words were going around and around in my head. Suddenly my dreams started to come back to me and so I decided to go to Bahay Tuluyan. They accepted me and understood my situation. From then on, slowly, I started to achieve my dreams. I finished Grade 5 and then they moved me to Bahay Tuluyan where I improved even more.

I was able to grade from Grade 6 and was so happy. I wouldn't have been able to do this without the love and guidance of the mothers at Bahay Tuluyan. This is where I have really felt the love of a true family, even if we are not blood-related. I was so happy to finish Grade 7 and start Grade 8. And then one day my mother died.

I felt heartbroken because even though I hadn't felt the love of a mother and I hadn't told her I loved her, even though she had treated me like that I had to accept that she was gone. Bahay Tuluyan helped us to bury my mother and this made me stronger, even if it was hard to remember the past.