

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.

