

Donnah

gay man, 50, Sorsogon City, currently employed

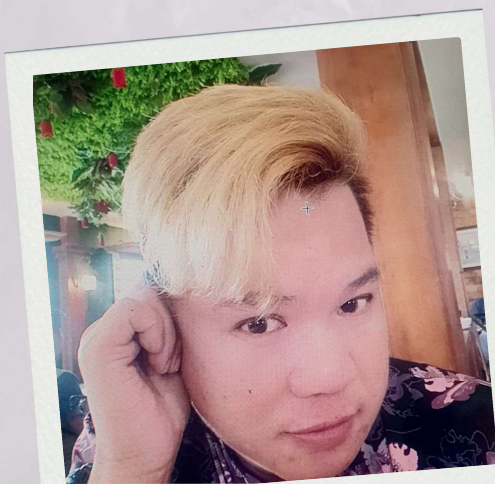
I believe we have to be kind all the time while being courageous to face all challenges in life.

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.

