

# 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.

