

# Jojo

lesbian, 60, serving a life sentence in  
Mandaluyong Correctional Institute for Women

## Still dreaming of a free and peaceful life.



### Growing Up Lesbian

My childhood was full of pain from my father and older sisters. We are eight siblings and I am the sixth in the family, with an only brother who is the eldest. I started being attracted to girls at the age of six when I had a crush on a pretty girl who visited our home. I was a tomboy and hated wearing clothes for girls.

I studied until Grade Six in elementary school but lost interest in studying and did not graduate from elementary school because I believed my father never loved me. Of all my siblings, I was the only one who got scolded and punched daily by my father. My older sisters would pinch me after the beating. My mother, the only person who loved me, would ask my father and my siblings to stop, but they would not.

My father's reason for punching me was that I did not want to wear my school uniform, a white dress. I remember one time being placed in the space under the stove, where my father continuously kicked me. He had big feet. I remember seeing my mother crying as she could not do anything to stop my father.

At age ten, I earned a living selling water from the poso (water pump) to our neighbors. I would wake up at 5 AM to sell water, go to school at 7 AM, and continue working after class. I continued this work until I was 15. I was living with my partner in my parent's home. She was 17, with two kids. I managed to provide for them by selling water. When I introduced my partner to my family and let her stay with me in our family home, my father berated me, unlike my brother, who stayed with his partner in our home. At age 18, I carried a knife for protection. My partner and I stayed together for two years until she betrayed me for a man.

## **Work Life**

As I had only reached Grade Six, I worked in construction, mixing cement for roads. I also worked for a company, mixing candy ingredients.

Before I reached 18, I became friends with hold uppers (burglars) where I was the lookout for police while my friends robbed bars. Later, I would plan the robberies myself. When I was 40, I started selling shabu (methamphetamine). I was first jailed in 2009 in Cebu for selling shabu and was released after two years in 2011. I told my former boss I wanted to stop selling drugs because I wanted a peaceful life, I was getting old, and it was harder because I was taking care of my mother. In 2013, I was arrested again, although I was innocent. An undercover civilian informer of a police officer wanted to use the house I was living in with my mother and partner as a drug den. I repeatedly refused. During a police raid in our neighborhood, that civilian informer told police that I was one of the drug dealers. The police found drugs in my home, and I was arrested. The drugs were not mine, but police assumed I went back to selling because I had a prior arrest for selling drugs.

## **Housing And Family Life**

My partner, Rose (not her real name) and I lived together for 40 years. I met her in Manila in 1982 when I was 20 years old, and she was 26. In 1984, we left Manila and returned to Cebu to live with my mother in our family home. My family obligated me to care for my mother since they consider me single, although I have a partner. Rose and I adopted my niece when she was an infant after her mother, my older sister, died. My sister's husband was a drunkard and could not care for the child. My niece grew up with Rose and me and is now 28 years old.

Rose was the kindest person I met all my life. She was the only one with regular employment in our family. She was a cashier and, later on, a researcher for a company I can't remember. She never left my side. For the first five years, I was jailed in Cebu, Rose would visit me. In 2019, I was transferred to the Correctional Institute for Women (CIW) in Mandaluyong City in Metro Manila. Rose visited me in January 2020. That was her last visit. We lost contact. I was told that Rose is sick but I am not sure if she is still alive. We are allowed one phone call per week in the CIW. Up to now, she has not answered my calls.

## Ageing In Prison

Nowadays, I usually suffer from urinary tract infections while in jail. I was supposed to enroll in the Alternative Learning System course, but I have difficulty walking to the second floor due to arthritis in my legs.

One of my older sisters used to visit me in prison, but over the last five months, every time I call her, she does not answer. I get depressed when no one visits me. One of the older inmates became my friend and gave me food she cooked in her cell. But she was released from prison, and I now only eat CIW rationed food.

Loneliness is remedied by having relationships with other inmates. For the last three months, I have had a partner in jail. We can only kiss since we cannot be in the same cell. We can only meet between 4 PM and 6 PM, then go back to our respective cells for the headcount, after which, our cell doors are locked.

I am serving life imprisonment. I could not appeal my case when I was sentenced because we had no money to pay the lawyer. I tried my best to seek help from government officials but was told to wait at least 18 years to get executive clemency from the President (of the Philippines).

## Reflections On Growing Older And Future Hopes

I still hope to be pardoned and released from prison. My siblings are poor, so when I get released, I would be older and would not be able to earn a living. But I dream of having a pedicab (bicycle food cart) where I can sell coffee and food.

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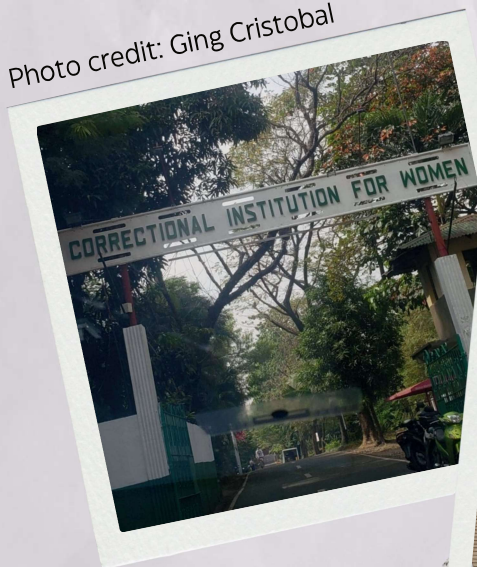


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