



"PORTRAIT OF AN ARTIST  
AS A WOMAN"

### **An Artist's Journal**

I was born 49 years ago in a scenic town by the shore in Zamboanga — almost half a century ago — but when you are an artist you somehow have an edge over other human beings, of feeling younger than you really are because your craft becomes an elixir. I am an artist and whatever I do, I do as one with the enthusiasm of the young, at least in spirit.

When I was two, the family moved to another scenic place — Inagawan, Palawan. There, I awakened to almost Eden-like surroundings — nature at its grandest. I remember chasing squirrels, porcupines, deer and watching men haul their catch: meters long crocodiles, sharks, dugongs, and huge wild boars. I don't remember learning how to swim. It just came naturally to all of us kids in the neighborhood. Bathing in crystal clear, wide, long rivers, going to picnics and hunting and fishing with my father are part of memories I dream of experiencing again. Our family went back to Zamboanga when I was eleven. There in San Ramon, our house was amid a vast coconut plantation and not too far from the seashore.

Growing up in places like Palawan and Zamboanga was like having picnics every day of my life. Most of all, it provided me with a huge art classroom with free lessons everyday! When you live in places like these and with an innate creative spirit, somehow you don't need a university to hone your artistic skills. Art just becomes the blood in your veins, the air that you breathe, your channel to the Great Source. And then you become luckier when you meet mentors — people who in big and small ways influence and inspire you to grow and evolve.

Education was in elementary schools in very remote Inagawan, Palawan and later in a small town school under the palms in San Ramon, Zamboanga City, then high school and college in pueblo, the city proper of the famous City of Flowers, for indeed Zamboanga City then was abloom everywhere all year round.

After high school, seeing a potential in me but realizing the difficulty of sending me to Manila for a course in Fine Arts, my father sent me to what he thought was the next best thing — a trade school. It was mostly a “boys' courses” school and there were just two female students in my major course. Then eventually only one of us female students graduated. Here, the students, from elementary to college, learned technical-vocational courses besides the usual academic courses, the emphasis being on teaching useful crafts. This

is where I had very rigid training in technical drawing, including hand lettering and perspective that I find very useful now. Here too happened what I could call a streak of luck. My instructors in “Technical Drawing and Drafting” saw my artistic inclination and instead of making me accomplish the regular exercises in machine or architectural drawings, which were very technical as a discipline, I was given a special seat at the back of the classroom and was made to do lessons in cartooning, illustrations, painting and wood carving. I graduated with a degree in Bachelor of Science in Industrial Education with less knowledge in my major subject than my classmates, but richer in the fine arts. Maybe not at par with those with a BFA degree but nonetheless more prepared to be an artist than to be a teacher of technical drawing. But teaching it was for my first job right after graduation and for nine years in the same school where I graduated. Looking back now, I become teary-eyed in gratitude to my mentors. I think they knew what I truly was and believed in me.

If Palawan and Zamboanga were the nurturing cradles, Manila was the place of action. It wasn't easy adjusting to a new place so different in pace and atmosphere with what I had been used to, but the opportunity it offered me to be the artist I wanted to be outweighed the reasons for not wanting to stay, like noise and air pollution and missing the countryside beauty and serenity. In Zamboanga, a career in art was just a dream. In Manila, it became a reality. But even then, as a woman, the realization proved to be slow and a great struggle. By choice and circumstances, I had to set aside, even suppress creative expression and bear some pain in favor of what to me then was equally or more important — motherhood. At the time when the children were very young, motherhood and household chores and earning a living through a “regular” job always got in the way and won out over artistic productivity. These are still frustrating hindrances to many woman artists even in these days, but things have begun to change for me, hopefully, as the children (four, now aged 19, 18, 16 and 14) grew up and now understand

that I need space and time all to myself, away from them when necessary. Well, they will remember that I was in all their homeroom meetings and that once upon a time together we trekked and camped in some countryside. We still plan to do the latter, but I'm not sure they want Nanay to be seen with them in their schools.

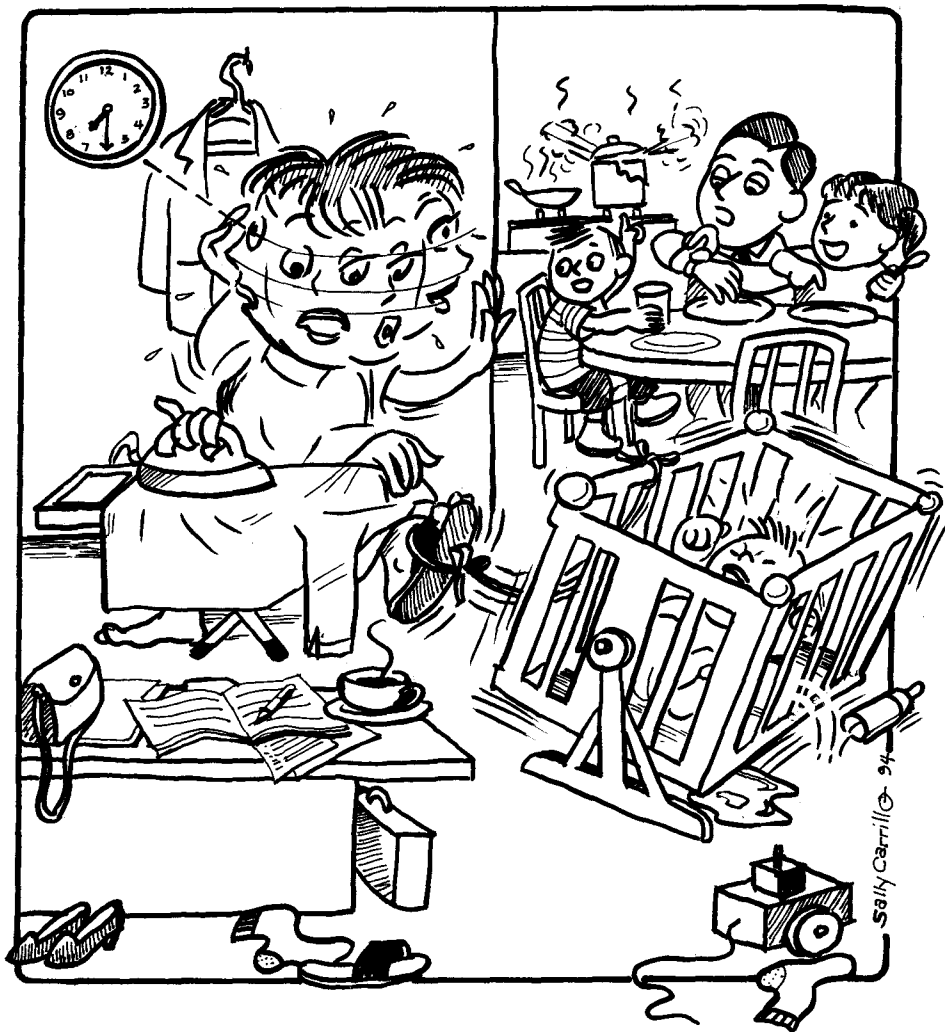
In a way, because of some limiting circumstances in the life of an artist as a woman, I became a "late bloomer," but no regrets really for everything was contributing — both the joys and the pains of a woman artist have become for me stored treasures, filling a chest full of ideas from where I derive my subjects.

I am glad too that I found KASIBULAN (or KASIBULAN found me), a sisterhood of women artists. Working with other women artists for projects aimed at advancing the causes of not only women artists but women in general is another fulfilling experience.

At this point in my life, I do not want to center my energies in feeling sorry for the lost time, for the late blooming. I have always thought of artists as special persons, for indeed they are, like in how they can be creative in turning pain into lines, colors, forms and eventually finding happiness in having created something not only visually beautiful but, above all, spiritually liberating.

**SALLY CARILLO**





BEFORE GOD... AND MEN...



\* SPELLED P-O-W-E-R

