

## ANITA'S JOURNAL

Just call me by the name Anita. I'm an Ayta, a victim of the Mt. Pinatubo eruption and presently living in one of the resettlement areas in Botolan, Zambales.

I am 35 years old with eight children—three boys and five girls.

I am the fourth in a family of eight children—four boys and four girls. I am the second among the girls. I just finished Grade 2 because we're poor and we had to help our parents.

My sisters also finished Grades Two to Four only. Our male siblings are luckier because they reached a higher rank in their studies. In fact, both my elder brothers finished Grade 6. Because my father said women would just eventually stay at home, it's Ok not to study very well.

Even when we were still young, we were already helping with the work at home and in the field. At the age of eight years old, the men were either helping get the firewood from the hills or work at the *kaingin*. On the other hand, the young girls wash clothes or take care of their younger siblings. They also rely on us to fetch water although our male siblings also help.

I really wanted to study but *Nanay* always fetched me in school so I could take care of my siblings every time she went with my father in the '*gasak*'. *Nanay* diligently goes to the field because there are now so many of us depending on her. The

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<sup>1</sup>Translation of a slightly revised version of a taped audio-visual presentation prepared by Maria Teresa C. Dominguez as part of the course requirements in WD 230 under Professor Rosalinda P. Ofreneo, Second Semester, 1998-1999.

only time she stays at home is when she is about to give birth up to the time the baby gets weaned from her breast.

The popular game when I was a child was called '*kawayan*' that could be played by both girls and boys.

I was happy when I was playing but just like my *Ate*, when I reached 10 years old, I couldn't play anymore because my parents were always taking me with them to work in the field or else, they were asking me to take care of my younger siblings.

In the field, I help pull weeds and plant vegetables and other stuff. I also rented out my labor in planting sugar cane. For a child like me, I get paid PhP6.00 a day. My brothers were not obliged to take care of our younger siblings, that's why they can roam the river banks or the forest to catch small birds. They bring home their catch to augment the entire family's food.

My work in the field and at home continued up to my adolescence. At home, I take care of my siblings while my *Ate* cooks. In addition, I was also tasked to help sell vegetables, cook bananas and what not in the public market of Botolan.

I also dreamed of reaching other places that's why in 1976, at the age of 13 years old, I decided to work as a housemaid in Project 7, Quezon City and in Mandaluyong. I worked for PhP50.00 a month and I persevered for one year far away from Botolan.

When I learned that my mother got sick, I went home immediately. But even after she recovered, she didn't let me go back to Manila.

Two of my sisters also worked as maids in San Narciso, Zambales and Manila. My three brothers worked as a herder of carabaos and cows in Botolan during the 80s. The wages for one year included a carabao and free food and lodging.

Then one carabao cost PhP2,000.00. Now one carabao could cost as much as PhP7,000 to 8,000.00.

After two years, I also got married. I was only 16 years old then. Perhaps you're wondering why I married early. It's because my husband was able to kiss me, that's why my peer group said I had to marry him because I had been touched. What a pity! I had two other suitors then! My husband is two years older than I am and he's also from Villar.

One of the Ayta customs is the payment of the "*bandi*" to the family of the woman before the parents of the woman agree to their marriage. Some women have *bandis* reaching up to PhP10,000.00. With me, my parents merely asked for PhP500.00. I am in favor of this amount so that my husband would not hurt me. The "*bandi*" is also a huge help to the girl's family because this can be used to buy food.

In the early days of my marriage, I used to play and go with the ladies to play sungka. I also used to go home to eat with my mother. Even while I was pregnant, I was still playing.

I had wanted to stop bearing children when we already had four but my husband would not let me because we only had one male child. Our two oldest are girls. My husband wanted male children so somebody will carry his name. We did have three male siblings but the girls also increased.

At the start, two years would pass before I would become pregnant. However, as time passed, this became only one year. As you can see, my two youngest children are still suckling. Now that some of my kids are already grown up, I can again plant rice and accept washing every Saturday and Sunday because my eldest girl is old enough to take care of her siblings since she has no classes. She's now sixteen years old and still in high school.

I get paid PhP70 or PhP100 a day for planting depending on our negotiations — PhP70 with merienda. If PhP100, I bring my own food. Men and women get equal wages since women possess the same high degree of planting skills. I also earn PhP100 every day for washing.

If I have the money, I buy bananas, vegetables and other items to sell at Iba, Zambales every Saturday and Sunday. I go around the various barrios to buy vegetables and unripe bananas. I let the bananas ripen before selling them at Iba.

My husband is a mechanic in Botolan. He earns PhP80 a day and the food is free. He still gets drunk like before but he does not hurt me because this is forbidden among Aytas. He's just noisy when he's drunk.

One of my daughters is also a big help. She works as a housemaid in Manila. Even though she's only 14 years old, I permitted her to work because she does not want to study. She earns PhP1200 a month.

Life is difficult then as now but now, you need to have money every day unlike before when we had abundant vegetables and fruits planted everywhere.

If my word were law, I would prohibit "*bandi*" for my children because life is so difficult nowadays. The man cannot pay the "*bandi*" so they just live together even if they're not yet married. For me, I would much rather that they prepare for their marriage instead.

My dream is to be able to have a small business if only somebody could take care of my child every day and if only I had some capital.