

## MAKING HERSTORY IN LOCAL POLITICS

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Such was my concern for the people around me that, even in my younger years, I was already slowly but inescapably being drawn into civic work. My father was an elected *Teniente del Barrio*, and on seeing him totally immersed and dedicated as a public servant, I gradually nurtured the seeds of compassion for other people. This was the feeling that would someday push me headlong into the field of public service. I remember well how my father was respected and regarded in our barrio, and in the true *bayanihan* spirit, he was able to build a church for the local folk.

In the 60s and 70s in Barangay Oranbo, Pasig, Rizal, where I chose to reside with my family, the succession of barangay captains involved only men. For many years, there was hardly a perceptible change in the day-to-day existence of the barangay. The streets were not safe at night. Drug pushers and users were everywhere. There was no barangay hall. So much had to be done. "Why?" I asked myself. "Why must this miserable state of affairs be tolerated? If no man will venture to effect badly needed changes, maybe a woman should." Around that time cause-oriented groups were urging me to run for an electoral position. Since I felt it my duty that I should start in my own barangay to initiate long delayed changes, I chose to run for the position of municipal counselor.

It was here that I felt challenged to assert much needed changes. I slowly found myself being enmeshed, and willingly, too, in barangay civic work. I initiated the formation

of several civic organizations which were instrumental in securing donations for the benefit the people in my barangay.

Then came the so-called EDSA Revolution. I was involved up to my ears as a street parliamentarian. I had a taste of tear gas, got bruised from barbed wires, heard the deafening roar of tanks. Nuns, housewives, girls proved to the world that women power was a part of the EDSA Revolution, just as I felt in my surging blood that I, too, was a real part of the Revolution.

In 1989, a different barangay election was held. All candidates ran for the position of barangay councilors, with the topnotcher being named the elected barangay chairperson. At the urging of concerned citizens, I ran in this election with some apprehension. Campaigning was difficult and was fraught with danger. There was always the risk of bodily harm to the campaigners. The opposing camps were fearless mavericks, and a mood of tension pervaded the locality. In one previous election, the electric power was sabotaged during the counting. I lost the top position by a small margin and landed in second place. Looking back, this was perhaps just as well, for I was able to continue with my civic work with even more strength and vigor, and from my position as a barangay councilor. Even the incumbent chairman came to recognize and accept my role as a councilor, and in time frequently sought my opinion on important matters. Eventually this chairman was murdered, and I was named to the chairmanship, being the councilor with the highest number of votes.

From here on, it was muscle-and-knuckle work for me without letup. Happily, progress leaped forward. A barangay hall and health center were constructed. The local chapel was renovated. The Barangay Elementary School gained a new four-story building.

Peace and quiet reigned in the barangay; streets became safe and peaceful even in the later hours of the night. Slowly but with determination, we stirred the youth into an awakening of moral values, and along with this, instilling proper manners and respect for their elders. We held dialogues with suspected drug users with as much compassion as a loving mother would have for her son. Lately, Barangay Oranbo was cited as a drug-free barangay.