

I AM CARLITA REX-DORAN, INVENTOR

Carlita Rex Doran

I am Carlita Rex-Doran, inventor. Local as well as international organizations have recognized me as such. However, what is recognized is not all of what I have invented. Which is just as well. For, as the editor of the RWS said in the course of our discussion on how I will rewrite my story for this issue, it should be Carlita Rex-Doran herself who should give recognition to the most important of her inventions — the woman who has invented herself as an inventor.

In my original story I omitted large chunks of my past. I picked only those happenings which I thought were the only ones important enough to comprise a woman's history, such as my breakthrough in entering the upper world of men by winning in science and technology competitions. I glossed over events, mostly those that took place in the private sphere of life, the so-called 'women events', such as running a household while in the process of inventing a product and creating a market for it, and the conflict with family members which my work often has generated. Apparently, while there is the acceptance of the work I have been doing as inventor and entrepreneur, my family still expects me to be the traditional woman, that is, one who will always subordinate her own purpose in life to those of her husband and children. Before rewriting my story I did not know that it is precisely these events which need to be recorded if women are to have a history of their own.

As suggested I went over my life again and realized that it is indeed a mistake to be looking for only big events because no matter how you look at it, the inconsequential are connected

to the consequential, and the achievements to the failures. In the process of rewriting my story I saw what my life had been so far. It is the life of a woman who can say without boasting in the least: I am truly an inventor. I am one because I always look for solutions to problems be these personal or otherwise, and ever in the look out for new ways of doing things. Moreover, I do not allow obstacles to prevent me from inventing what I have to.

How did I become an inventor? Did the timing of my birth have anything to do with it? I was born on July 22, 1940, in Ilaor Street, Oas, Albay. In less than two years after my birth World War II broke out. I was thrown into a world of uncertainty. Perhaps it is the memory of an insecure world which has driven me to do something, anything, if only to make me feel that no matter what happens I am still the master of my fate.

The war years were certainly difficult for my parents. How they coped are now beyond recalling. But what I do remember vividly are the postwar years. I grew up in a household where not to be resourceful and inventive is to give up on life. You see, my parents, though both scions of landed families, were far from being rich on their own. However, despite their economic situation, they begot not one or two or three but all of nine children. As the third eldest of this large brood I was exposed to the daily struggle for existence. My father was an elementary school teacher. Needless to say, his salary was far from adequate to support all of us. My mother had to augment the family income. How she contributed to the family coffers attests to a woman's capacity to reinvent the traditional role of housewife. Well aware of her duties as wife and mother, she thought of ways and means to earn without leaving home. She converted part of our house as a beauty parlor. In no time at all she was in business. In my original manuscript I called her a 'mere housewife'. I take that label back. It is insult-

ing to call one who had worked so hard to keep our family alive and well despite overwhelming odds. Without her I do not know where her children would be today, and, more importantly, where I could be instead of where I am now. I owe a lot to her.

As far as I can remember, I had always wanted to improve my life the best way I could. My parents encouraged me in my endeavors, and said that without a doubt I would succeed if I placed myself in God's hands, and worked very hard. In grade school, it occurred to me that if I relied on the money my parents gave me for my *baon* (daily allowance) I would not be able to buy what I needed and wanted for self-improvement. And so I decided to go into business. I sold peanuts near a movie house owned by an uncle. Later, while in high school, I persuaded him to hire me as an usherette. The job enabled me to sell more peanuts, meet all kinds of people, and get exposed to other forms of life while watching movies for free. Above all, the job gave me a sense of accomplishment, which inspired me to go for IT. IT meant leaving my small, sleepy town to pursue life on the bloom in the bustling capital city of the Philippines. And so, after high school, I went to Manila with the ever present thought that I cannot possibly fail. All that I had to do was to trust in God and be inventive in facing life's challenges.

My parents wanted me to become a nurse so I could go abroad. The life of a nurse earning dollars in the USA appealed to me at first, and so I enrolled in a nursing course at the Far Eastern University. Realizing that while I wanted the dollars but not the nursing job that will have to go with it, I shifted to another course. I enrolled in a chemistry course at another university, the University of Sto. Tomas.

It took me several years to get hold of a college degree because of my experimentations with life. I was involved in all sorts of activities. I was a student leader in various organizations, notably the Student Catholic Action. I was an activist and

joined rallies. To round out my education, I also joined a dramatic guild, a dance troupe, and a sorority. Due to my heavy extra-curricular activities I incurred failing grades in many subjects. Naturally my parents were very disappointed in my academic work. One day I received a letter from them, informing me that I was not the only child they had to send to college, and money did not grow on trees in Oas. "If you want us to continue financing your studies," the letter stated, "you better concentrate on your academics and forget about extra-curricular activities." But I could not disassociate myself from the extra-curricular activities. They were my source of information for the life I had envisioned for myself. Getting an academic degree was the least in my priorities. My main priority was to know myself, and to do this I preferred being with young people who wanted a better society. And so I invented myself as a self-supporting student. I did all kinds of work just to keep me afloat. Once more I asked my uncle who owned movie houses to hire me as a supervisor. He gave me the job with the condition that I would get a college degree. In 1964 I finally graduated, not from UST but from Feati University where I transferred.

After graduation I decided to embark on a new experiment. I wanted to find out whether a non-relative would hire me for a job. I applied at McCann-Ericsson for the job of market researcher and I got it. The job gave me what I wanted: meet all kinds of people, learn a thing or two about the market, and the satisfaction that I could really support myself. From this job I went to another. I entered the field of promotion work. I was a promo girl for consumer products, and later, even became a campaigner for a politician running for office. After four years in promotion work I decided I had enough. I was hired as a consultant by a company that was engaged in preventive maintenance. It was while on this job when Rogelio Doran entered my life. He was a supplier of

chemicals to the company I worked for. Before long, I married him. Thus began my domestication. No longer did I work as a paid employee who had to leave the house. I stayed home and kept house for my husband who was later joined by a first, then a second, and later a third child. It was during these years as housewife when I invented SIROCA, the name I gave to my canned solid alcohol used as cooking fuel. What drove me to produce this product was the memory of Bicolanas sweating it out in the kitchen over firewood-fed stoves that made cooking a major operation and an unpleasant job, as well as my own experience with the frequent brownouts while cooking meals for the family. I told myself that if the Manila Electric Company could not assure me of uninterrupted cooking so that my family could eat on time, I would do something to help myself, as well as other distressed cooks like me.

With the help of my husband, a sister-in-law, and household helpers I produced a few cans of SIROCA at night when I was through with domestic work and the children were asleep. These were marketed in the immediate neighborhood the next day. I was right about the product. Housekeepers who were given samples immediately placed orders, not to mention the names of others who, my neighbors thought, were likely to patronize the product. Before long my market expanded. Restaurants and hotels also placed their orders. Emboldened by local patronage I sought markets abroad. This meant leaving home for long lengths of time in order to promote my product. I joined international fairs and technology exhibits to get international recognition for SIROCA. I got it in the form of orders from Japan, Singapore, and Kuwait, not to mention the 3rd Prize I got for it from the Philippine Invention Development Institute during the 1981 inventors' fair. Then the problems began: A local big corporation claimed rights to solid alcohol because it alleged that it was them that first developed the

product. I was threatened with a lawsuit if I did not desist from producing and marketing SIROCA. It was like being told that a baby I gave birth to was not my child. Fortunately I had my patent papers to disprove the company's claim, but just the same I was at the losing end. My time, instead of being utilized in something productive and lucrative, was dissipated in consultations with lawyers. On top of it all, money had to be spent on lawyers which a starting business enterprise could ill afford. And these were not all the problems that I faced. Because I devoted so much time and effort in the production and marketing of SIROCA, my husband and children were no longer happy with what, in their eyes, I had become — a woman who had no time for her family because she had become money-mad and hungry for recognition as an inventor and entrepreneur. I must confess that I nearly fell apart due to the pressures I got from the home front. What prevented this from happening was my belief in the reasonableness of my husband and our children. If I explained to them why I had to succeed because like them I have my own life to lead, they would put up with my hectic schedule. Thus began my habit of explaining myself to others in a very convincing way. I was at a loss for words at first, but before long I somehow succeeded.

The downside of my SIROCA experience did not daunt me at all. My husband and I decided that since we were already in it not only as husband and wife but also as business partners, we might as well continue with our venture. Thus was CRD International, Inc. born. The idea behind the naming of the company rests on the proposition that I, Carlita Rex-Doran or CRD, will not fail because my company will always engage in continuous research development or CRD. The fusion of the two CRDs is etched in my mind. It is what keeps me going.

CRD International, Inc. certainly has gone a long way. No longer are our products 'cooked' in the kitchen of our house

but are now 'produced' in a laboratory; no longer are the products that are meant to be sold on a Tuesday produced all through the night of a Monday as a measure to be taken for rolling capital fast enough to keep us afloat; no longer did my husband, sister-in-law, and myself have to peddle our products from house-to-house for now we have already a well oiled local and international marketing system; no longer do I have to be defensive against the detractions hurled by competitors, for by this time I have already been vindicated by several awards for my inventions: The Most Outstanding Woman Inventor of the Year Award bestowed on me during the 22nd Philippine Inventors Week in 1989; an award for the best in the use of indigenous raw materials given by the Department of Science and Technology for my Forest Magic beauty products and herbal teas in 1990; the Great Achiever Award given to me during the US-Philippine Expo '96 held in New Jersey, USA; a silver and bronze medal I garnered during the 24th Salon International Exhibition of Inventions held in Geneva, Switzerland in 1996 for my underarm deodorant made from alum, natural laundry granules, herbal teas, and a food supplement made from ampalaya (*Momordica*) for the prevention of HIV infection; a silver medal I won during the 25th Salon International Exhibition of Inventions in 1997 for my Bioneem, an insect repellent made from the neem tree; and, of course, the Achievement Award the National Centennial Commission-Women Sector conferred on me in 1998.

All that I have accomplished in my professional work are nothing compared to what I have had to do as a member of my family. I am proud to say that despite my family's demands on me which, more often than not, have been major sources of stresses and strains for me, especially during my reproductive years, still I have managed to preserve family solidarity. Why not? I am after all Carlita Rex-Doran, inventor!