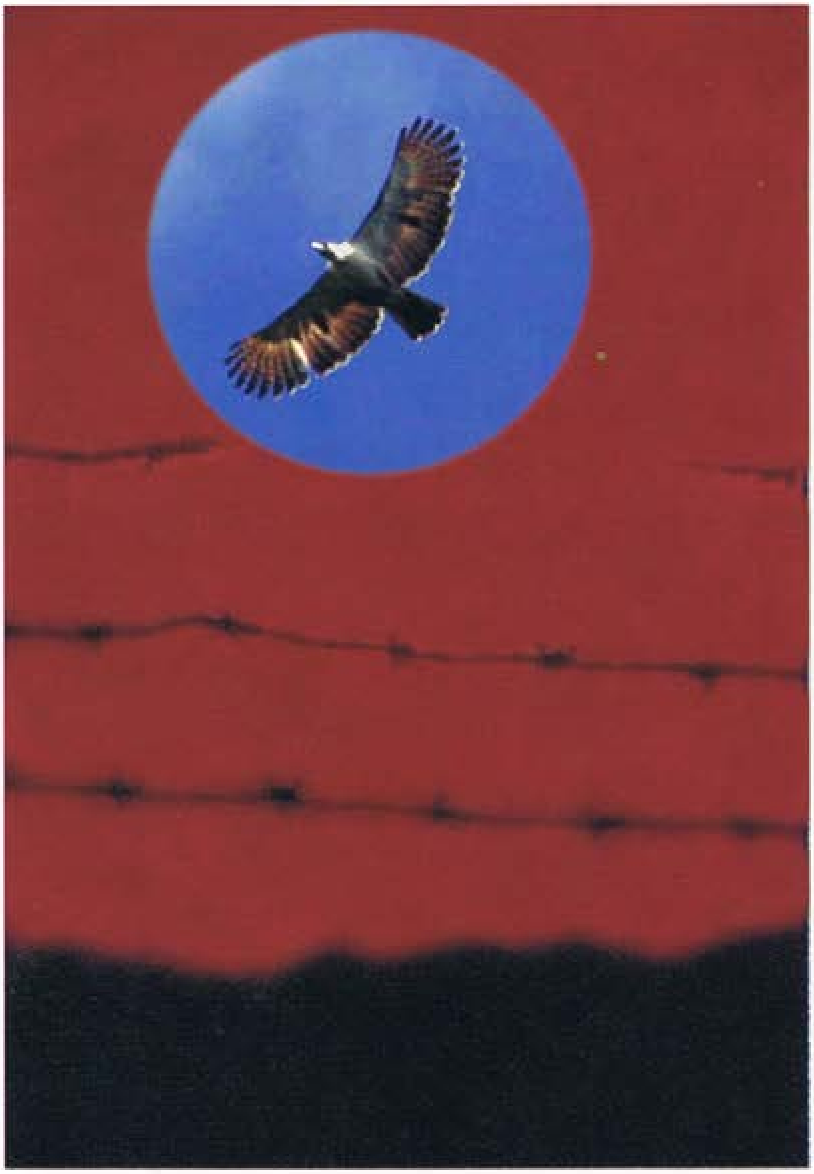
DIGNITY REGAINED

Philippines

From Segregation and Isolation

To Humanity and Dignity…



Editors:

ARTURO C. CUNANAN, JR., MD, MPH, FPLS, CSEE, PhD
MARIA PERPETUA A. ROSELLO

DEDICATION

To the thousands of Filipinos affected by leprosy, who were vanished to live in isolation and misery, to be different in all ways but persevere and endure despite the pains and hopelessness to regain humanity and dignity…

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In collaboration with

Bicol Sanitarium
Cotabato Sanitarium
Culion Sanitarium and General Hospital
Dr. Jose N. Rodriguez Memorial Hospital
Eversley Childs Sanitarium
SASAKAWA Memorial Health Foundation –Tokyo, Japan

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PREFACE

For most of leprosy's long history, the central focus has been on how best to control the disease and with the advent of Multiple Drug Therapy (MDT) in the early 1980's leprosy has been made curable, significantly declining the number of registered cases around the world with more than 16 million people reported cured. Leprosy today is no longer considered a public health problem in the vast majority of countries

Yet even with such chemotherapeutic breakthrough, many people continue to suffer from severe stigma and social discrimination. Leprosy is unique in the way it can strip a person of his or her family as a human being, deprive them of their basic rights and condemn them to the margins of society. In worst instances, people come to be defined by the disease, a label and situation that continue even long after they have been cured.

Combating leprosy is not only a matter of medicine and public health but rather requires social approaches that will improve public knowledge of the disease. It must involve a strong component on how to re-integrate the people affected by the disease into their families, communities and societies on the basis of care, compassion, human rights and dignity in order for them to live dignified lives. Societies need to recognize that leprosy is also social problem as much as it is a physical problem. One of the measures of the success of the society is how well the community treats the people affected with leprosy and those who are physically challenge by the disease, treating them with compassion, empathy, dignity and respect to their basic human rights. People affected by leprosy can live a dignified life when society at large becomes aware of its own shortcomings and commits to change. This requires a dual focus on empowering people affected by leprosy on one hand and changing society on the other. It is said; that how society treats people affected by leprosy tells about the **people themselves,** testing society's capacity to grow and to embrace people with **different needs,** whether they have disease, disabilities or social problems **and every citizen of the** world must rise to the challenge.

Every sector of society **has a role** to play in creating the condition for the restoration of human dignity **of people** affected **by** leprosy and their families, creating an environment where **people affected by leprosy** would be treated as equal members of the society and also for the people affected by leprosy themselves drawing on their courage and aspirations to change their lives. The physical and psychological walls that have separated those affected by the disease from the rest of society must come down.

The personalities presented in this book from the 5 sanitaria are remarkable stories unfold against the sad background of segregation, isolation and misery. The continuing saga of physical and emotional pain and exhaustion, of fear and hopelessness, it is the reality of being alive but being different. Against all odds these people have shown the will to live a life of acceptance amidst the many frustrations and wants, shattered dreams replaced by the reality of physical limitations and the sea and walls surrounding them but despite all the internal and external circumstances they survive to tell their stories on how they maintain their sanity and find peace and solace in their new home, their struggle and survival to maintain their humanity and regained their dignity and self-worth. These are their stories, a source of inspirations that arouses the humanity in each of us blessed to be free of leprosy.

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INTRODUCTION

Any attempt to depict the role of Culion and other leprosy sanitaria in the Philippines should consider besides the sanitary, public health, medical and administrative aspects the social and economic problems of the patients, being greatly affected favorably or adversely by their isolation considering the limited facilities and the difficulties in maintaining them in the colony or leprosaria with sole objective of caring and finding cure.

The immediate objectives in the establishment of the leprosy sanitaria starting with Culion in 1902 at the initiative of the American military government was obviously the aesthetic effect of the removal of advanced cases from the public view and the at the same time a more humane and adequate care of the patients themselves. The last objectives has been an enticing invitation for patients to come for isolation considering the "outcast" status being afforded to them by the outside world, being ostracized by the community and disowned even by their families. The experimental medicines that are available during the early years developed inside the leprosarium as well as the "parole system" for those declared negative or cured has also lessened the objections of patients for segregation and isolation.

The operation of Culion Leper Colony in 1906 increased the hope among health authorities that the constant removal and isolation of bacteriologically positive leprosy patients from the general population would eventually eliminate the source of infection and thus result in effectively checking the further spread of the disease. However these expectations have failed to materialize not because of the erroneous conception of the application of isolation as a preventive measure, for at that the time the health authorities still strongly believed that segregation and isolation of leprosy patients is appropriate and valid. The failure was due to the to over estimating the applicability of the measure without considering the social and cultural aspects of the patients and the disease as well as in the wide gap in fundamental knowledge regarding the transmission and pathogenesis of leprosy.

In an effort to remedy the objectionable features of the segregation of leprosy patients in Culion the Council of Hygiene recommended that regional Leprosaria be established in several strategically situated provinces. The main objectives of such measure would be; a) to overcome the fear on the part of the leprosy patients and their families of a lifelong separation without facilities and conditions for fairly frequent visits and, b) to bring the treatment facilities nearer to the homes of the leprosy patients and thus attract voluntary reporting of cases particularly those having early lesions or disease compared to those isolated in Culion who were mostly in late or in far advance stage of the disease.

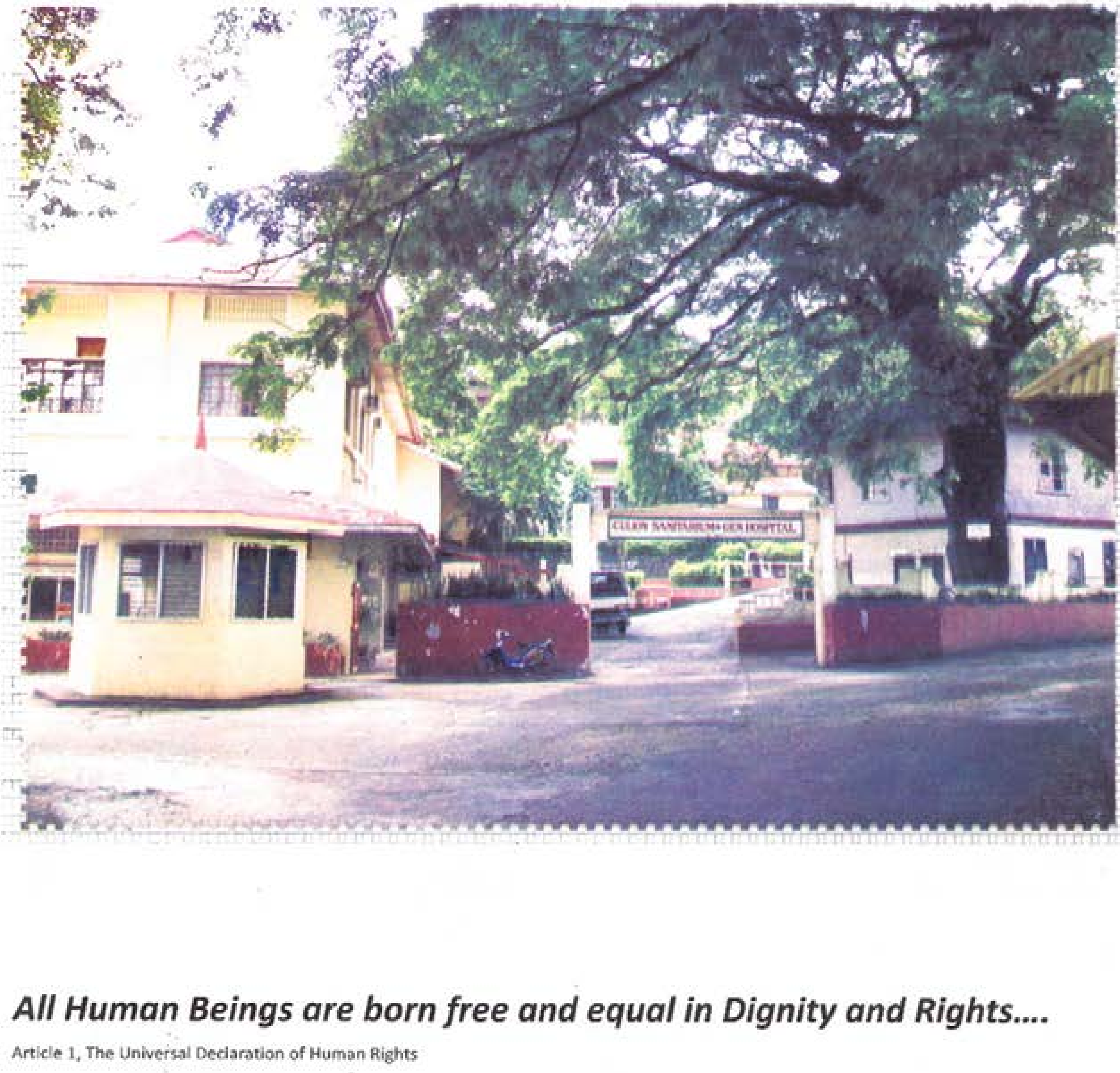
Starting in 1930, there were seven (7) regional leprosaria (Eversley Childs Sanitarium in Cebu , Dr. Jose N. Rodriguez Hospital formerly Tala Sanitarium in Caloocan Metro Manila, Santa Barbara Sanitarium in Iloilo, Bicol Sanitarium in Sepokot,Camarines Sur, Central Mindanao Sanitarium in Posobolong, Zambonga, Sulu Sanitarium in Sulu province and Cotabato Sanitarium in Cotabato province) established in the country in addition to the existing Culion Leper Colony and the Leper Department of the San Lazaro Hospital. With the operation of these regional leprosaria, only the more advanced cases, the unruly patients and those desirous of getting married have been sent to Culion, thus significantly reducing the number of patients sent to Culion setting the pace and tone for "home' or domiciliary treatment particularly in the so called "milder" forms of leprosy. However there was no report or evaluation made regarding the success or failure of the establishment the regional leprosarium.

The social problems of leprosy patients and his/her family have always been the most difficult aspect of the disease. The inevitable stigma and the fear evoked by leprosy generally limit the opportunities of the people affected by the disease for social and economic improvement. Unfortunately no amount of health education during the pre MDT era, regarding the transmissibility and contagiousness of the disease can overcome the prejudice, for such stigma has been deeply rooted in the minds and culture of the Filipino society despite the creation of regional leprosy sanitaria which further deepens the notion that leprosy patients need to be segregated and isolated. This segregation and isolation has contributed further in the seriousness and acuteness of the social problems in leprosy. The disentrancement of families, the separation of spouses and subsequent illegal "unions", the resulting poverty with the isolation of the breadwinner of the family (husband) all leads to the burden of the isolated and segregated patient . It has been found out that the complexities of the social problems of leprosy patients and his family are in largely attributed to the unfortunate social stigma and prejudice attach to the disease and not the segregation law per se. For a number of years till the outbreak of the Pacific war, many "paroled" patients had preferred to stay or return to the leprosarium rather than go to stay with their families or in their home town despite the withdrawal of the "subsistence" and pushing to go back home by the government health authorities.

The public lack of understanding of the disease and false beliefs cause additional burdens on the affected persons. Widespread social stigma has far more serious consequences than just the anguish and trauma of the affected people. Even without the prospect of cure, the people affected by leprosy have launched a long quest for dignity and equalization. They struggled for the authorities to look and include the human face of leprosy, the humanization of leprosy issues, the shift in emphasis for a more comprehensive approach to leprosy control of acknowledging and accepting leprosy as a social problem and by strengthening human networks to advocate and fight for their rights as a person, to negotiate with different sectors of society to transform their living environment into a more humane and caring institution. People affected by leprosy has evolved and endured to be recognized as co-equal human being.

Efforts at all levels in different parts of the world are being made for every person affected by leprosy to regain his or her identity. There have been much monumental and significant forward gains on the human rights issues in leprosy as exemplified by the United Nations Human Rights Council Resolution 8/13 and as leprosy is being eliminated as a public health problem in all countries except two (Brazil and Timor Leste) globally, the quest for dignity and to end discrimination and stigma against people affected by leprosy and their families and the respect for their human rights continues.

CULION SANITARIUM & GENERAL HOSPITAL



All Human Beings are born free and equal in Dignity and Rights….

Article 1, The Universal Declaration of Human Rights

Segregation within a segregated colony. The Culion Leper Colony Gate that separates the *ketongin (*person affected by leprosy) and the *sano* (the "clean" or non-leprosy affected individuals).

The 1930 picture of Culion Leper Colony male ward, many of whom are suffering from severe leprosy reactions and complications.

Despite the disabilities caused by leprosy, the right to have children was enjoyed by the people affected by leprosy in the Philippines.

A common sight every Sunday at the Balala Nursery where leprous parents visits their children who were compulsory separated from them from birth and are allowed to see them only through a glass viewing window.

Culion female leprosy patients in their Filipina dress in 1920's to attend an assembly in Town Hall.

People affected by leprosy becoming partners in health care delivery in the Culion Sanitarium by becoming "Nursing Attendants." Is there a better way to be of service than knowing and experiencing what they are into.

HILARION MAGBUHOS GUIA

THE FIRST MAYOR OF CULION

"I was noticed with symptoms of leprosy
Before I could learn to walk:
Despite the malady and misfortunes in my life,
I Conquer Fate with honor, humility and dignity."

I am Hilarion Magbuhos Guia. I was born on October 21, 1942 to Gil Guia and Maria Magbuhos, both unaffected by leprosy.I was the youngest of the 9 children of whom 6, including myself, were sick of leprosy. I belonged to a family that owned vast agricultural lands in the town of my birth Talaga, Mabini, in the province of Batangas. These lands, however, were disposed off portions after portions to sustain the financial needs for the treatment and medication of the affected with the disease. Eventually, the lands assets were depleted without positive result gained.

At a very young age of 3, I was already an orphan. Left under the care of my grandmother Francisca Gonzales, my childhood days in my hometown was a life of isolation and deprivation. Isolation in the sense that my world was only limited to my home and surroundings where I could only have some fun with playmates, who were innocent that I was with leprosy. The fact that I was denied of the right of education which children of my age enjoyed was in effect of deprivation. The reason was due to the manifestation of leprosy symptoms that appeared on my face since I was an infant.

The promise of schooling and the assurance of getting well in Culion convinced me to part from my loved ones. The separation was heartbreaking. It was very much against the will of my grandmother, only sister and some few sympathizing nearest relatives. But there was no other way but subservience to the fate no matter how painful it was. Together with my 2 brothers, Eusebio and Nazario, with same ailment, I with a heavy heart was on my way of destination. For a week, I stayed at San Lazaro Hospital, Manila, where I met some people, also with disease, waiting for a boat to ferry them to Culion. Thus, on the last day of May, 1950, I arrived in Culion, an island where even in my wildest dreams I never thought I would perform an important role that would shape its history.

Upon release from quarantine, I had my first taste of my passion to be in school. In June 1950, I enrolled at the Culion Catholic Elementary School, the learning institution which was purposely and primarily established by American Jesuit Missionary, Rev. Fr. Hugh McNulty assisted by the missionary Sisters of St. Paul de Chartres for the hansenites "exclusively". In the school, I had shown great interest not only in the academic field, but also excelled on extracurricular activities.

Though in advance case of leprosy, it neither hindered nor crippled my courage to aspire for higher education. Immediately after high school, I transferred to Tala, also a leprosarium in Caloocan, some 200 miles away from Culion to enroll at the Holy Rosary College for a degree of Bachelor of Science in Education (BSE). Similar to my elementary and secondary Alma Mater, the Holy Rosary College is a charity school purposely founded for people sick of leprosy by Rev. Fr. Anthony Hoftee of the Order of Preachers.

While earning my degree, I had to be a working student to augment the free food ration afforded by the government. The experience of hard work might have been the catalyst that opened my consciousness on the value of labor and sacrifices. Bearing the personality of the making of a reliable leader, I have easily won the admiration, trust, and confidence of my professors and peers in college so that from the first year up to third, I was always chosen to represent my class in the policy-making body of the school.

In 1965, I was conferred with the Degree of Bachelor of Science in Education. The day before my graduation, the late Rev. Fr. Maximo David, personally offered me a teaching slot in Culion. Although slated to teach at the Divine Word College in Pinamalayan, Oriental Mindoro, I referred to return to my beloved Culion to practice my profession in my equally beloved Alma Mater, the St. Ignatius Academy.

The opening of the school year 1965 commenced my membership in my Alma Mater's teaching force under Rev. Fr. Ignacio Ma. De Moreta, S.J who assumed the directorship of the school upon retirement of Fr. Maximo David from Culion.

For 40 years, I served my Alma Mater with quintessential proficiency. As president of the faculty for a number of years, I guided my colleagues to a higher degree of professionalism that elevated the name and category of the school as one of the best in disseminating quality education all over Palawan province.

My seemingly insatiable quest to serve my fellowmen compelled me to take part in one of my life's greatest battles. The big challenge knocked on me on May 8, 1995 when Culion, for the first time since it was established more than 80 years ago, became directly involved in the local elections. The day was characterized by the exodus of the Culion electorates to the different polling centers to cast their votes for the first set of officials of the new born Municipality of Culion. The 8th day of May, 1995 marked the final fulfillment of my dream to free my townspeople from the bondage of political deprivation. More so, from thereafter, the present and the generations yet to come can enjoy the blessings embodied in the Universal Declaration that "All Men Are Created Equal." I personally participated in the initial local election in Culion. I aspired for the highest post in the municipal level.

What compelled me to throw my hat in the arena of Culion politics was the sublime interest to prove to the world that anyone with leprosy, even with severe deformities, is not "non compos mentis" to deliver quality services. I wanted to make it known to all that in spite of one's handicaps due to leprosy, I was still very much capable to perform with unquestionable efficiency any task that is assigned to me just as good or even better that those of good health. In the process, out of the 10 mayoral candidates, I was the only aspirant affected by leprosy. After the canvassing of votes by the duly representatives of the Commission of Elections, in the evening of May 9, 1995, I was officially proclaimed winner earning me the very prestigious title, "First Mayor of Culion" my sensational victory that should serve as inspiration to those who suffer social discrimination, rejection, and ostracism due to the stigma of leprosy.

The Will of the Divine Providence is always evident my life. After serving the people of Culion in my capacity as Mayor, the Greatest Architect of the Universe made me one of His "Disciples" to contend the deep-rooted inhumanities and injustices hurled against people with "Biblical" ailment globally. To fulfill His design, I had to manage another milestone in my life. This came to a reality when I was elected First National President of the "Integration, Dignity and Economic Advancement", (IDEA Philippines) by the delegates from different leprosaria all over the country. The convention was held in Cebu City on March 13, 2005. Its goal; is to empower the person affected by leprosy and to regain their place in mainstream of human society.

As President, I am entitled to represent the country whenever and wherever global conventions, conferences, seminars and workshops are held. My first international exposure was in the cities of New Delhi, Calcutta and Jharkhand State, India, on the vent of the global seminar on "Global Appeal to End Stigma and Discrimination against People Affected by leprosy" on January 27 to February 3, 2006. When the National Forum of the same theme was convened at the Philippines, International Convention Center (PICC) January 29, 2007, my participation was outstanding. Likewise on the 17th International Leprosy Congress on January 30 to February 4, 2008 at Hyderabad, India, I fitted himself among the world's known figures in the elimination of leprosy and its stigma. My views and ideas expounded and expressed with eloquence easily made me favorite object of interviews by no less that the world renowned media networks like British Broadcasting Company (BBC), Cable News Network (CNN), and Associated Press (AP), Aljazeera and Asahi Shinbun to mention some. Rubbing elbows with healthy men and women of erudition, I admit that I also suffer the feeling of self-withdrawal, a complex common to anyone who will never compromise my vulnerability at the expense of my dignity.

In recognition and appreciation of my active and dynamic participation in almost all fields of human endeavors, I received awards from different sectors of society. In fact, despite my physical appearance deformed by leprosy, my birth place in Batangas did not deny nor disown me, instead granted me a very prestigious distinction as "Outstanding Son of Talaga, Mabini, Batangas."

The Celebration of the Culion Centennial in May 2006 left me sweet and golden memories to treasure and cherish for life. On the said occasion, more feathers were added on my cap. My unfailing altruistic devotion for the good of Culion and for the welfare of its people especially those maligned by the malicious tentacles of leprosy honored me with the most coveted awards for "Leadership," "Service in the Field of Education" and for "Pioneering Work."

CRESENCIANO TABORA ROSELLO

I was born on 24 November 1936 to Juan Rosello and Magdalena Tabora, both victims of the most horrendous malady of mankind, Leprosy. They were so young and lonely when they met at the Eversley Childs Sanitarium in Cebu. It was their youth and loneliness that brought them together that ended in their exchanging of "I do's" at the altar.

Parent's love for their children is so powerful that they have to do everything possible just to be near with their offspring. When I was about a year old, my parents contacted a childless couple that lived just outside the barbwire fence of the leprosarium. With a small amount of money and a daily supply of bread from the extra rations of my parents, the couple agreed to take care of me and pretend that they were my real parents. During the day I was under the care of the couple where my parents with their watchful eyes could see me through the holes of the barbwire. During the night, under the cover of the darkness, the couple sneaked me in through the hole of the barbwire, which was cleverly cut out by my father and spent the whole night with them. Just before the sunrise, they smuggled me out via the same hole of the fence. This continued undetected by the authorities for quite a long time. My parents knew that what they were doing had put me in jeopardy to be infected with their malady. But they were unmindful of the consequences, for they were blinded by their love to their only son.

When I was around three years old, the couple that pretended as my real parents transferred to Bacolod City. My parents had no alternative but took me in and tried to hide me from the authorities. As the only young boy in the community, I became the apple of the eyes of the residents. A conspiracy of silence developed spontaneously among them. Nobody in the community leaked out to the health authorities the presence of the healthy 3-year old boy among the lepers of Barrio Sta. Cruz.

When the World War II broke out, the patients of Eversley Childs Sanitarium were permitted to go home. I remembered vividly when my mother arrived home. She was wearing a black dress as a sign of mourning. Her disease was not so noticeable, so her association with us was not a problem to our relatives, which until then it was still a secret from the community. Life then was so hard. We were in constant running and hiding from the enemy. There was a severe lack of food. For several months, we subsisted only in root crops.

Towards the end of 1943, I noticed strange, swollen, and painful red spots on my skin. It was accompanied by fever. When my mother saw it, she uttered a cry, "Oh my God, you got it also!"

She became so depressed. For days she was cheerless and it took a long time before she regained her composure. Being a victim herself, she was too familiar of the telltale signs of leprosy. I did not comprehend then how to be a prey to the grasping tentacles of leprosy. What I remembered was the sad face of my mother and those guarded words that she uttered when she saw the red spots on my skin. I did not understand what she was talking about nor of her sadness. In my fanciful and carefree frame of mind, I just shrugged it off and went on in my childish and innocent way of enjoyment.

After a family consultation, it was decided that my situation be kept a secret. Only the closest members of the family were told about it. My freedom was restricted inside the house. I was permitted only to go out for fresh air after sunset when darkness could hide the betraying red spots. My conscience began to rebel when I was transferred to a small house in the farm owned by one of my uncles, away from my cousins and far enough from the curiosity seekers. I vehemently protested this kind of treatment. They had to tell me the truth, that my sickness is contagious and degrading to the whole family. I had to obey my uncles for the sake of the family, although what they told me was somewhat vague and meaningless to me then I had to stay in that small hut by the farm during the day and back to the big house in the evening. A small room was built in the big house for my mother and me. This was my daily routine, which I religiously followed in spite of my inner resistance, curiosity, and wonderings. My mother couldn't bear all these, so she had to return to Eversley Child Sanitarium right after the war. She brought me along for treatment. She was readmitted and I was admitted as a new patient and assigned to Cottage No. 3 for young boys.

In 1946, my mother remarried. After a mass wedding, a naval boat arrived to bring all the newly-weds to Culion Leper Colony, which at the time considered as the final destination, a point of no return, and a place of the living dead for people ravaged by leprosy. I was with the group brought to Culion without any assurance of good fate but a mark "disgrace".

In 1947, I enrolled in Culion Catholic School, now Loyola College of Culion as a grade 2 pupil. This school was established by the Jesuits and run by the St. Paul de Chartres, two great religious institutions whose tenet of service is "to serve the afflicted and to instruct the ignorant". While in the elementary grades I noticed that my lepra reactions had subsided. It was because of my religious taking of diasone and good nutrition. By the guidance of the Sisters of St. Paul I developed early my ability to lead. I became the president of Don Bosco Boys Association and was in extra-curricular activities like scouting and dramatics. I finished my elementary with flying colors in 1952.

My high school days were so brilliant and challenging, making my sickness overshadowed. And on March 24, 1956, I graduated as the Class Salutatorian.

After the Golden Jubilee celebration I transferred to Tala Sanitarium and enrolled at the Holy Rosary College of Education. This college was established by a Dominican Missionary exclusively for the hansenite victims only. While on my second year of schooling I married Narcisa Bangloy, my classmate who was in Tala Sanitarium for treatment. After our marriage we decided that I had to go home to Culion and teach for year although was still an undergraduate. Narcisa also went home to her parents to wait for our first-born baby.

In 1959, I continued my study at St. William's College in Laoag, Ilocos Norte, my wife's hometown. Even as a neophyte student in St. William's College, I became a staff member of the school organ. "The Williamite" and because of my training and experience in scouting I became an officer of the college Corps of cadets. I graduated in 1961, as a holder of Bachelor of Science in Education. There were several offers for me to teach in Laoag and in neighboring towns with good pay. But at this time because perhaps of the rigor of raising a family and at the same time working for a college degree, my malady which I successful concealed from my friends and schoolmates began to appear as white spots. It was a sign of relapse. I was again facing a great problem. I cannot accept any teaching position with my predicament. But God and fate were so kind to me. Rev. Father Maximo David, S.J., then the school director of St. Ignatius Academy, offered me a teaching position in my own Alma Mater. I readily accepted the invitation. My acceptance was not only motivated with gratitude as the first graduate of St. Ignatius Academy to earn a college degree but of my ardent desire to seek for re-admission in Culion Sanitarium.

I served in St. Ignatius Academy for 7 years. During those years, modesty aside, I had shown brilliance, enthusiasm and dedication in molding young minds. I founded the school's Little Olympic Games and improved the Preparatory Military Training (PMT). I also organized and became the first president of the SIA Alumni Association until the time that the school celebrated its Silver Jubilee in 1976. It was also at this time that I passed civil service exams for teachers, and took further studies at San Carlos University in Cebu City. As a civic and religious leader I became president of the Sta. Cruzan in Rizal District, a community devotion to the Holy Cross began by my mother when she was still alive. By the help of the constituents, a permanent chapel was put up. When the Culion Pastoral Council was organized I became one of the original members. This council greatly influenced the religious, social, economic and political developments in Culion.

In 1967, due to the insistence of the District Supervisor of the public schools, I responded to transfer to Culion Elementary School with the aim that I could be more of service to the children of the leprous patients. As a classroom teacher I manifested several changes and developments that are now enjoyed by the present generation.

In 1982, the Government Service Insurance System granted me one-year scholarship. When I returned to my post as the Teacher-in-Charge, I began to envision a more progressive school.

When Culion Sanitarium was converted into a municipality, I was assigned as the Municipal Head Teacher of Culion public schools. Through the help of the newly elected municipal officials and the cooperation of my Supervisor, Mrs. Esther Ll. Reyes, barrio schools were opened in sitios and islands reaching a total of 19 elementary schools before I retired in 2001. Aside being the Municipal Head Teacher, I was also greatly involved in different civic-oriented organizations like the People's Law Enforcement Board of which I served as its chairman for 3 years, the Municipal Development Council and the School Board. I was also the first to pilot Culion Water District as chairman of the Board, that despite all the ostracism that I received its benefit have been enjoyed by Culion people until today and in the future.

When I was about to retire from the government service, after serving for 42 years as a teacher, I dreamed of a restful retirement, counting my blessings before I cross the Great Divide. To retire as a Head Teacher-in-charge of public schools is a kind of feat to a person who was then positive of leprosy since he was 5 years old. My dream of a peaceful retirement was not realized. When my fellow patients learned that I was retiring, they approached me with the request to spearhead the Association of Culion Hansenites, Inc. (ACHI). They needed somebody to imbue them with new ideas for their economic emancipation. I found no courage to turn them down because this is the association that I helped to put up.

Hand in hand with the MDT treatment were the economic and social rehabilitation of the patients. The MDT treatment was a success; however the economic and social aspects failed miserably. We were cured with the disease, but because of our deformities, society refused to accept us. The stigma of leprosy since time immemorial is still deeply and indelibly marked or rooted in our society. Science won the battle against leprosy, but the struggle to erase the stigma attached to its victims has not been ended. It is still a continuing battle, fought by the victims themselves not in the battlefields but in the hearts of individuals and in the conscience of society.

The first elected municipal officials of Culion made an appeal to the constituents including hansenites long subject to charity and benevolence to actively participate in community building for Culion to become self-reliant, self-sustaining and self-governing- a real community of man. In answer to that call, a group of idealistic hansenites formed the Association of Culion Hansenites, inc. The purpose of this association is to act and get involved for their economic advancement, for like anybody else, the patients and their children have still a life to live and a family to care for. But the patients tortured by many misfortunes in life, which brought great and long suffering caused by their illness, could not by us alone undertake in solving our economic problems. We need a Good Samaritan to help us. Leprosy Control Center and the lead person in the fight against leprosy through the Multi-Drug Therapy we found or good Samaritan in the person of Mr. Yohei Sasakawa, president of Sasakawa Memorial Health Foundation. As of now, the Association of Culion Hansenites has two projects, the ACHI Micro Credit Scheme and the Swine Breeding funded by Sasakawa Memorial Health Foundation and supported by the Culion Sanitarium. With these two projects, the patients, with a combination of enthusiasm and dedication will try to produce an economic miracle from the ashes of Culion reservation, so that we, persons challenged by Hansen's disease and poverty shall raise our level of confidence and lead a productive life leaving behind us the stigma of leprosy, and the undignified "pen-pal" writing and eventually transform ourselves from being recipients of aid into a giver of it.

In 2005, I had the honor to be invited together with Dr. Arturo C. Cunanan, to represent IDEA-Philippines at the Leprosy African Congress, held at the Eskom Convention Centre, Johannesburg, South Africa. There were 23 countries represented in the congress. I was one of the panelists who talked about the subject, "Defending our Rights to Work as an Alternative to Begging." For the first time, an Asian voice of a patient from Culion Sanitarium, Philippines was heard. My presentations were centered on the theme of the panel of discussions that contained in the declaration of human rights, "The Right to an Existence Worthy of Human Dignity." One of the rights included is the right of everyone without any discrimination (including cured hansenites) to work for the improvement of his standard of living for himself and his family. I talked about the perseverance of able hansenite patients to carve out a living. I mentioned their natural love of education and their belief that education is the best legacy they can give to their children. Because of that love, they do everything even in giving in the undignified "pen-pal" writing just to send their children to schools. I mentioned too, about the participation of two NGO's, the Sasakawa Memorial Health Foundation of Tokyo, Japan, and the Anesvad of Bilbao, Spain. They responded to the needs of Culion. By their financial aid, they filled in the gap, covered the lack and gave support to the weak structure of a young municipality. The message that I brought to the convention was not a message of despair, but a message of hope, a mission well-worth along journey to Johannesburg, South Africa.

After three days, the venue of the Leprosy congress was transferred to Robben Island, Capetown, a two-hour plane ride from Johannesburg. Robben Island is a world heritage site. It was aptly suited as the site for the continuation of the panel of discussion on stigma, identity in human rights, because as a former prison for criminal and political prisoners, mental asylum and a leprosarium there have been untold discrimination of people who lost their identity because of their malady and other violations of human rights of one group by another. After hearing my fellow delegates talked about their own banishment and isolation, I realized that we have common experience as victims of common disease. Anywhere in the world, a leprosarium is always a place considered as the last dumping ground of all the unfortunates ravaged by leprosy. It is always associated within great sufferings, separated and isolated from the rest of civilization. Because of fear and ignorance of the disease, a leper is shunned, avoided, feared and abandoned, that only by his neighbors but too often by his own relatives. Even when cured he is usually unable to overcome the stigma that the ignorance and prejudice of centuries have fastened upon him and his disease. As a result, he finds it most difficult to smile, to hope, to pray or even more to love, but a leper's greatest pain comes from the depression and loneliness, almost unbearable that accompany his disease. No other disease causes such repulsive reaction in the community and unhappiness to the patient and his family than leprosy. To add the age-old prejudice against the disease as a curse from God and a type of sin, one has a picture of a complete tragedy in total ruined helpless victim.

This was the picture of a leper and the place where he was banished and isolated. This was during the pre-MDT era when the phase that leprosy is curable was not yet a medical term. Today, there is a great change. Leprosy as a disease is curable. However, the stigma of the disease and the discrimination against cured victims became the disease of the society. The fight still goes on fortunately, there are people formerly affected or still inflicted with leprosy that continue the fight against discrimination. They conceived the international association called "IDEA"; (Integration, Dignity and Economic Advancement) to serve as a vehicle to carry on and continue to fight. They are people who believe in the equality of man regardless of race, creed, social status, and physical appearance. They are persons with dignity who demand respect and equal opportunities to develop themselves to become self-reliant and productive members of the society. It is my great PRIDE and HONOR to belong to this group. I, too, believed that the person affected with leprosy but educationally prepared, economically stable, and intellectually empowered, discrimination has no place. Aside IDEA as an association, there are NGO's and humanitarian individuals who contribute their talent, time and efforts to conquer an ancient scourge. The most towering figure among them, who made the fight for the total elimination of leprosy his personal commitment, is Mr. YoheiSasakawa, president of the Nippon foundation, and Goodwill Ambassador for the elimination of leprosy of the World Health Organization (WHO). The efforts of Mr. YoheiSasakawa reaped worldwide acclaim. The world has witnessed that around 10 million patients had been cured and the number of incidents has declined to less than one case out of every 10,000 population. Mr. YoheiSasakawa even brought the problem of the cure patients to the United Nation Sub-Commission to investigate leprosy as a human right issue. The next generation that is free of leprosy and discrimination will be greatly in-debted to this philanthropist – Mr. Yohei Sasakawa.

Truly indeed, my retirement commenced a journey toward a fruitful mission. The experience, the enlightenment and the vision inspired by the IDEA made me to be more eager and to be more enthusiastic on uplifting the dignity of men once challenged by leprosy.

Yes, I had survived from the fiasco brought by leprosy. Despite being wounded by this malady, I stood up for service embracing humility and love to my fellowmen that made me humble servant to a mission that not all non-hansenites could fulfill. DEO GRATIAS!

CONSTANCIO JAIME ALINSOG

I am Constancio Jaime Alinsog.

I grew up with my grandmother. We are seven in the family but sad to say, our father never took seriously his role as the head of our family, so we had to cling on our mother's care. Life seemed to be quite bearable during my childhood days. When my grandma brought me to Davao, I longed for nothing but my fathers' attention, yet, I still managed to enjoy every single day of my life with my relatives. I used to be a playful kid. My friends called me "Bulik" because of my spotted skin. I never expected that those "spots" were already symptoms of leprosy, but then I enjoyed having them because I always won the contest among my playmates. They could hardly make me cry by their pinch even until my skin bled. Actually, I was able to save much money from pinching competition. But one day, the Sanitario noticed my skin and he advised my relatives to bring me to the Sanitarium for a check-up but they refused. They said, I was still too young to be separated from them, besides I did not even care whether it would do good or bad to me.

After the war, I was forced by the Sanitario to see the doctor in a nearby clinic for a check-up. There I was injected with Chaulmoogra. I did not resist as they convinced me that I would feel better after that. But contrary to what I expected, my spotted skin turned out to be black skin. That was a terrible change that severely lowered my self-esteem. I began to refuse playing with my friends. I kept myself inside our house all day. I detached myself from the people and from the usual happy ways that I used to enjoy, and because of my fear that my condition would get into worst, I volunteered to be confined at the Cebu Leprosarium.

I had mixed emotions the first time I stayed at the Leprosarium. I felt glad to discover that there were also many people who had been afflicted of the disease; I was not alone. I also felt sad to foresee myself with those horrible deformities like those I met inside the Leprosarium. I hated to think of myself being feared by other people because of my deformed body. But then, I had to be obedient to all the doctor's advises so as not to experience those dreadful deformities. True indeed, after several months, I felt better. That was exactly the time when my friend, Martin, told me his stories and experiences in Culion. I was quite motivated till I decided to go to Culion to seek for my fate there. When my relatives learned of my decision, they tried to hinder all my plans but I prevailed. I was then very determined to rebuild my life with my fiancée, Antonia, also a leper, in Culion. We knew in our hearts that there was a good life awaiting us in that place.

Fortune had been so good to me. Right after I arrived in Culion, I found several means to earn. I really enjoyed my life in Culion; I was so amazed in its abundance of [illegible]d's natural resources. I started to earn as a fisherman. The sea had so much to give us that our catch could already be given away free to people when there were so much of a supply in the hospital kitchen. Then later on, I worked as a gratuity employee of the Sanitarium.

On October 16, 1948, I exchanged vows with my ever-faithful fiancée, Antonia. On this very special day, I promised myself that I would carry on with me the great task as the head of the family with all my commitment. I doubled my effort and reinforced my dreams with diligence and enthusiasm especially when I heard the first cry of our first born. We were blessed with 13 healthy children, the sources of our joy that made our living-together stronger each passing day. Except of our first five children, the rest was brought to Nursery. I found no reason to neither refuse nor complain as I knew that all was for the health sake of Antonia and our children. As each one returned to our care, the more that our home became even happier.

True to my promise, I performed my task as a father and a husband to my wife very diligently. Until one day, I discovered that I could no longer move my hands and fingers freely. This was perhaps due to over fatigue and rheumatism. My work as a cook exposed me to heat, and then as I went home, I had to do the laundry. But I did not have any regrets having all these as I had proven myself to the world that my duties were all done with excellence.

At present, I can say I have no other thing I should ask God for. My 13 children have their own families already. We have been blessed with a crowd of 46 grandchildren and 37 great grandchildren. We thank God that they did not inherit the disease, not even one among them. With Antonia by my side, I can enjoy the passing of each day with a smile on our lips and with a heart triumphant in all the trials Leprosy had tested on us.

I hope my life story could be a source of inspiration to people who have passed the same road I took. I have nothing to be ashamed of and am truly blessed of what I have attained in my life and my family. I have accepted my fate; I have fought a good fight and hope to finish my race with high spirit through the blessing of God and the love of my family.

LEONIDA VALDEZ CASTILLO

*"My parents resisted to accept the truth behind what the spots on **my body** signaled to them. They all knew it. Often times I saw them crying – I just wondered WHY".*

I am Leonida Valdez Castillo. I was born in Bungabon, Nueva Ecija on February 22, 1955. We are 9 children in the family. I am the sixth child of my parents, Constancio and Eustaquia.

Living with my family was my most valued experience in my life here on earth. Though affluence was deprived from us, I found the wealth in the loving hearts and hands of my parents and siblings. I thought I would savor it through the rest of my life. Year 1965, I was 11 years old then, when I started to experience numbness in some parts of my body. It was followed by painful red spots all over my left limb. My skin turned shiny and reddish and the pain grew terribly each day. The bright days that I used to enjoy suddenly turned to dark days of pain, confusion and worries. Until one day, through the initiative of my teacher adviser, the doctor from the health center examined my body. But then he gave no diagnosis. He just gave me balm and pain relievers. He advised us to see the "traveling doctor" who would arrive the following week. When the traveling doctor arrived, everybody in our house was examined. I was in a quandary why I was the only one given attention by the doctor. Right after the examination procedure, he gave me the medicines called Diasone and Avlo. I religiously took them not knowing what were those for. I kept asking my parents but they consistently said "for the pain". I had also strict diet of no fish, no meat, and no salty foods. I could see how my parents pitied me and many times I heard my mother said, "I wish I were the one who's inflicted with it!" – That I could not understand before. After a month of medication, I suffered the pain doubled of what I had before. I felt like my body bloated, the appearance that my sister, Shirley, couldn't bear anymore. She brought me to San Lazaro Hospital and there I heard the confirmation of all my doubts. I cried hard. I shouted so loud when the doctor said it was "Leprosy". I recalled what my Science teacher told us about leprosy. I never wanted to be a leper! – Not in my wild dreams! Not me! I even accused the doctor a liar, a fabricator, but I had no way out. My life turned out to be a Calvary of suffering, hate, burden and inferiority. I threw myself out of the world, I secluded myself and I did not even say prayers to God. I was never a hard headed child. I never hurt anyone but why did I have to bear all this?

On January 6, 1966, my parents decided to bring me to Tala Leprosarium. I felt like I was thrown in the place of the living dead. The horror struck me like a lightning. This was the moment I never wished in my life. I had to be confined in the hospital without any relative to assist or care for me. I could still remember the tight embrace I and my mother had before they left. I sobbed deeply. I was so afraid to survive alone.

I faced several trials in my stay at the Leprosarium. I cried every night, thinking of what my future would be. I struggled so hard because during the medication, I couldn't move nor walk on my own. Perhaps some of the effects of medicines. But then, the doctors, nurses and religious sisters were all caring to me, but they had never replaced the longing of my heart. My parents visited me frequently and brought me fruits and other food I like.

When the doctor noticed that I was slowly recovering they persuaded me to continue doing well. Then later, they allowed me to continue my studies until I finished college amidst several times of "relapse".

I studied hard. I strived hard in school because I wanted to prove to the world that there was hope in my misery. The ostracism I received from my cousins and relatives founded my determination to finish a career. The pain caused by being feared of, by being dreaded, and by being out casted made my heart bleeds until this moment. Ironically, it had been a key to my success. I earned a several success when I finished Bachelor of Science in Education. Big dreams started to shine, and I started to regain my lost dignity.

In 1981, I was one of the 6 teachers from Tala who were sent by Fr. Anthony Hofstee to St. Ignatius Academy. I found Culion a very peaceful place. I had no regrets going to Culion. It was also a big blessing that my medication continued through MDT that was guided by Dr. Cunanan. In 1985, I was proclaimed negative of leprosy. I was too exuberant to hear the news about my full recovery – my healing.

It's also Culion where I said "I do!" to my husband. We were not blessed with offspring but we reared a child who brought us charm and made our lives flourished.

I can now bravely tell to anyone that I was once a leper, why? Because people would see me these days could never trace a sign that I became a leper. Thanks to MDT. Thanks to Dr. Cunanan. MDT does not only sweep away the marks but it renews my whole being, my future and my life.

MAXENCIA GONZALES

Leprosy has not been a strange disease to me as my parents were both victims of it. They were arrested in Cebu and were forcibly brought to Culion. Though I lived with leprous patients, the impact of knowing of my own acquiring of the disease was still a strong blow over me.

I was about to enjoy my teenage life when I was discovered positive of Leprosy. At first, my parents in their hearts refused to accept that I acquired the same disease. The white patches that spread on my face were nothing but symptoms of Leprosy. I was first examined by Dr. Casimiro B. Lara who also gave me Diasone tablet which I took everyday... without miss, without delay.

As I finished high school, I received one wonderful gift and that was the pronouncement that I was already freed from the bondage of that dreadful disease. I was even happier when I was granted a chance to study in college in Tala. In as much as I aspired to take up Nursing, I eventually landed in a teaching course as it was the only course offered in Tala. Nevertheless, it became a big consolation to my poor parents. I was then very determined to finish a career so as not to be defeated by the pain brought by Leprosy. Fortunately, after 4 years of my struggle in school, I reaped the fruits of my labor. I worked hard leaving the strands of the malady far behind my goals.

After few years, I said "I do" to my husband, with whom I had one bundle of joy, a baby girl. Filled with excitement and enthusiasm, I faithfully played the role of a mother, wife and teacher. I almost forgot about my sickness. Then one day, I woke up with numb hands and legs. The food I spooned quickly fell on the floor, not on my mouth. This stunned me so much. I now began worrying for my child and for her future. I had to be strong and brave. Through the concern and assistance of my friends, Fr. Hofstee, our school director and Dr. Ruñez, doctor at the leprosarium, I received supply of medicines, vitamins and food. But then my hands gradually shrunk without my knowing it.

It was 1978 when I and my daughter came back to Culion with the memory of my husband. I no longer had the strength to move on. His early death had almost thrown my hope in the wind. Coming back to Culion was a sign of a failure to me. I thought I hadn't won the fight. Coming back to Culion would mean a sequel of the life I had once trodden many years ago. But I was wrong. Instead, I landed a teaching stint at St. Ignatius Academy, now Loyola College of Culion. "I was reassured that whatever had happened, life was still worth living." I rendered service in the school for almost 2 decades, until the time when MDT began its mission in Culion. It indeed procured a lot of roles in the lives of the people affected by Leprosy. This time, I was thoroughly examined by Dr. Cunanan. I should have relapsed, had he not attended to me. I felt so blessed to undergo the MDT treatment, that up to this very moment, I express my heartfelt gratitude. I thought Leprosy would totally shatter my life and my dreams – all is an irony. Just as what is Culion now a days, the brand of the disease had already gone. It has a new face and new life ready for a better tomorrow.

ALI ABBAS

Just as how the Vintas waved their kaleidoscopic beauty, my life swayed colors till I turned 15. Indeed, the island of Zamboanga draws an indelible memory in my childhood that I could still vividly reminisce these days. Never did I dream becoming a leper. Never!

I was first noticed inflicted with leprosy when my parents doubted that the patches on my ears and nose were made of it. I was 8 years old then. I thought they were just allergies and nothing at all. After 7 years, while working as Bangus and Tilapia gatherer at Campo Muslim, the patches that were once perceived as allergies turned out to be symptoms of leprosy. My poor parents, amidst their dismay, brought me to Kalarian Sanitarium for a checkup. There was no rigid checkup but I was given ferrous which I took regularly. A bit of insecurity knocked me but I persisted to live a normal life, as if nothing had changed. Days and months passed and my health seemed deteriorating each day. The patches grew even more visible. Our neighbors began throwing painful stares on me which made my parents worried and burdened. One day, I packed my clothes up and wandered away from our home leaving behind the wounds of ostracism from other people.

I eventually landed at the Leprosarium where I voluntarily submitted myself for treatment. Since I received no food ration yet, I worked as a helper in the market to subsidize my needs, afar from my family. Some of my relatives who learned of my condition gave me alms or food, keeping an eye of mercy on me.

The market was my second home. Later, I was able to put up a stall selling various goods. When I turned 20, the earning became minimal because the consumers refused to buy the goods I was selling. The patches became wounds that appeared one after the other, causing my fingers to shrink and deform. I had almost forgotten what hope was and I kept thinking what would be life for now that the world's most dreadful disease has conquered me? I was in deep anguish gasping for refuge. My heart yearned to go home to seek solace from my parents but my mind hindered me, for fear that they would carry the burden more than I did. I had no choice but to live at the Paso-bulong Sanitarium for 11 years. There I received medical treatment and food ration. During those years, pity had been my comfort, and the assurance of a fruitful life had been but a gripped obscurity.

On November 8, 1989, I left Paso-bulong Sanitarium. Though I knew that leaving the place would not anchor me into the life I had once dreamed, I took the risk. A friend gave me a sketch going to Culion. I was filled with doubts but I faced the journey no matter what. And, I wasn't in vain.

My first step in Culion cast away the fears I had been through. I knew then that I would have a satisfying life in Culion. Quite different from where I've been. The MDT played a vital role in my full recovery. It was Culion where I experienced the concern and care for the lepers; the people don't throw painful stares but eyes of sympathy. The MDT alleviates the trauma created by leprosy and rebuilt our life into a more fulfilling one.

PATRICIA SUMALBAG DUMALAGAN

Leprosy made my father lived in seclusion. We wondered why he had to be distant from us. We could only see his eyes but we could not touch nor embrace him. It was only our faithful mother who, till his last breath, stayed in his side. What we never expected was, all of us his 9 children 'inherited" his sickness.

I was 6 years old when several patches appeared on my skin. Though my mother knew that those were symptoms of leprosy, she still hoped that those were just allergies. Weeks later, my brother and my sister discovered the same kind of patches in some areas of their bodies. Fear began to tremble the family. We were afraid of seclusion. We never wanted to live isolated and being feared of by other people. Our father refused confinement at the Sanitarium because of such reason. After several weeks, the patches became wounds. I myself could not bear seeing the wounds that caused too much pain. My mother, who had been very brave attending to our father, just applied and put on oils in my wounds – but that, was quite intolerable. The wounds made me stop my schooling. I could no longer hold my pen, besides; I couldn't bear the stares my classmates threw on me.

Our gloomy days ended when a friend, who just arrived from Culion, told us to go to Culion for us to receive proper medical treatment. My elder sister was the first one who tried to find fate in Culion. After a few months, she wrote telling us to go to Culion if we wish to be cured from Leprosy.

Year 1950 when we landed in Culion, we left behind the painful memories brought by the desolation. As we stepped on the port, we whispered a prayer that the place would take away the spell of leprosy. True enough, after a week of our arrival and we were released from quarantine, Dr. Lara examined our blood and conducted series of tests on the patches in our skin. He gave us medicines that, according to him, would be the cure to our disease. During those times, I had been very hopeful that we would not experience that same faith my father had. My endurance to the pain from the injection had pushed me to be more determined to be cured. And finally, after 6 months, Dr. Lara declared me "negative" from Leprosy.

Such declaration was a sign of new life for me. I was so grateful that a cure was not denied from us, and so I started to make ways to earn a living and to live independently. I worked as a helper in a bakery, as a cook and as a maid. Though I wished for a better job better that hat I used to, I could not do since I had not finished a high level of education. But just the same, I worked hard and aimed for a better kind of life.

Years after I got married, I started to feel some strange reactions in my body. I thought, Leprosy had to strike back again, so I sought for a treatment and this time under the Multi-Drug Therapy. And I thanked God because it only took 6 months for me to get recovered from reactions. I had been very thankful to MDT and to Dr. Cunanan, for without them, my life now would be miserable, just as how my father had gone through.

These days, I still miss my hometown but with the life that Culion gave to me, I no longer seek for a better place than this.

HILARIO ALEGRE

In 1950, March 14, I was born at Guiapandan, Antique to Purificasion Evangelio and Santiago Alegre. I am the youngest of their 8 children. Father was a farmer who had just enough for our food but not for our education. Belonging to a very big family, I had known poverty even I was yet a young boy. So I told myself that when I grew up, I would work hard and push my way to finish a course.

Nine years after, when I was in Grade III, my mother died and the next year father died too. My world and my dreams started to crumble. Left to care of my elder siblings, I finished my elementary schooling. Years passed by and I was already a young man. I began to realize the true meaning of life. I buried the sad memories being left behind by my beloved parents. With a heavy heart I left my brothers and took the risk of having an adventure in the city of Manila. That was 1992.

Being a Grade II graduate did not help me find a better job. There were days that I had nothing to feed myself, but I was not discouraged. I continued looking for a job. One day, I was hired as a tricycle driver. With my meager income I supported myself. Frugality which I practiced was my maxim that time. That was my only way to fend and save for myself. As a tricycle driver, I met my wife Antonia who bore 7 children. Having a bigger family, I worked harder day and night to support them. From Manila, we stayed in Masbate, my wife's hometown, and eventually went back to Antique where my brothers were.

My elder children were already schooled. I worked double time to be able to support my family's needs, until I became exhausted and sickly. Because of this, the handsome and macho looking Larry before, was now an elderly looking person. Weeks passed by and I noticed patches on my skin which were not normal to me. I went to Manila to see a doctor for a checkup. For the second time, my world crumbled; I wallowed in self-pity, and I pitied my children, when I was found positive with Leprosy.

So hard was my decision, but I chose not to come back to Antique anymore. Before I bounded for Culion, Antonia together with our 3 young children followed me to Manila to see me, only to leave me after she showed signs of abhorrence with my disease.

In 1989, I arrived in Culion. Through Dr. Arturo C. Cunanan, Jr., I was enrolled with the MDT. In six months time, I became negative of Leprosy. I have with me my 2 elder sons who at least help me bear the pain of separation from their mother and our young children. One day, Julie and Jun, my two sons, disclosed to me that their mother bringing with her their youngest brother had gone with another man. Painful as it was, but I tried to accept it.

These days I am happy living with a woman named Marra Asahan or "Inneng", a Muslim lady and also an enrollee of MDT. I fell in love again but this time, it could be forever.

For me, Culion has been the paradise where I found the woman who truly cares for me. This is the place where I am given the opportunity to prove my worth, my talents, and my skills. I am very much thankful for being a leper because it was the way I was able to achieve my dreams.

REMEDIOS ANDRADA

Petite and charming I was when Leprosy inflicted me. Born a Waray from Leyte, I belong to a family that owned vast land of copras. My mother, until her death, had never accepted the fate that I and my elder sister had faced.

I was a young-13-year-old when I noticed the red patches in my left limb. Since I had a mestiza complexion, the patches could not be hidden from my parent's sight. We didn't know about leprosy. We had never seen a leper in our place. I was in second year high school when my elder sister experienced continuous fever and pain. She had patches all over her body. Our curious neighbors could not help but asked what those patches were. My father couldn't find a word to name the disease nor its cause of appearance. No sooner, she was confined at the Eversley Childs Sanitarium in Cebu. My father in his heart and mind refused to accept it was leprosy not until the doctor declared it was so. After 2 years, I began feeling and experiencing the same. Our relatives contended that the disease was already transmitted to me, without their knowing of my sister's plight. Again, our father in his worried mind brought me to Eversley but now, he's hoping I would be spared from it but to no avail. That moment of my confinement, my dreams fell into pieces. It was our dearest mother who suffered so much. She wanted the two of us, her daughters to become professionals like our other siblings. But the Leprosy stole our plans and dreams.

Yet our confinement at the Eversley did not hamper my talents and skills to bloom even better than those outside the Sanitarium. Known as a talented folk dancer from Leyte, I was always on the stage in every activity held in the place. Not only that, I was always chosen to be the candidate whenever beauty contest were held. Men from other towns and from the men's cottages kept coming to visit me. Though flattered, I never took advantage of this since my mind had been filled with "What if's?" brought by Leprosy.

After 3 years of my stay at the Eversley, I married a Boholano with whom I had 7 children. Bearing these children and rearing them to the fullest of my capacity did not affect my sickness. There was no single change happened on my appearance. But soon after I conceived our youngest child, my husband got sick and later died. His unexpected death created unbearable burdens to us. This time, my elder sister, Preciosa, was already in Culion. She advised me to go to Culion and bring my children there. She convinced me that Culion would be a better place for my children's future so I followed her.

In 1974, we arrived in Culion and later we settled in Malaking Patag. Life then, fortunately, had been very promising. There were lands to toil and opportunities to earn a living. So my poor children took ways to utilize the lands and cope with hardships in living a fatherless home.

Those deformities began to appear when I myself had to work in the field especially during the harvest season. Fatigue had tremendously damaged my body. Several reactions occurred making my hands, feet, fingers to shrink. I had not undergone the MDT treatment but I was quite blessed to be given Avlo and Diasone during my severe days. And until these days I receive medical care from Dr. Cunanan especially at time when I have sickness. I also received a monthly subsistence that is a big help on our everyday living.

At present, though my heart aches whenever I look at my hands and feet I realized the beauty of life amidst the green fields and the tranquility of nature.

CONCEPCION HERMEDIA

I am Concepcion Hermedia.

At the age of 7, I was totally an orphan. My father was a casualty of war while my mother died of severe fatigue and hunger. Both of them were victims of leprosy.

I thought life would end when my parents passed away, and left us nothing but poverty. My only brother was brought to Welfareville. The distance had torn the bonding between us. Not long before I required my strength from their loss, I was discovered positive of leprosy. Such was another painful realization. I felt life continue to give me burden at my very young age. I never wished the same fate my parents had. Until these days, it was too unbearable to recall the days when we had to struggle against hunger fangs to beg for food from other people. I could not remember the last time I smiled. What I had in my heart were pity and hatred against the disease and our fate.

Since I had no relatives to take care of me, I was brought to Sta. Teresita Dormitory where the SPC sisters stood as our mothers. There I religiously took the medicines Dr. Lara gave me. The medicines Avlo and Diasone helped me get recovered quickly. My fast cure was inspired by dreams I began weaving when the Sisters sent me to school. Surely, I should be cured because I had this goal that I need to achieve. I was then very determined to finish high school, my parent's dream for me. I also learned different skills like crocheting and sewing which were big help in earning a living.

When I turned 25, I had to leave the dormitory. So I stayed at the "Cinco llagas", the home for unmarried women aged 25 and above. Not long after my stay there, I met a man from Bohol and later we got married. Despite the fear that the disease would again hit me, I took the risk. We were blessed with 8 children and all of them grew up in the nursery. I found no courage to resist as we were afraid that they too would be inflected with Leprosy. After several years, my fear became a nightmare that hunted me every night. I had a severe relapse and had to be confined in the hospital for a long time. It was more painful when deformities had to happen on my face, hands and feet. For the third time, I wept and grieved. I thought everything would go fine and better and happier but I was wrong. This time, it was Dr. Barreyro who attended to me and it was Dr. Ignacio who took care of me, during my most severe condition. I could say it was only when MDT was brought to Culion through Dr. Cunanan that I have finally recovered and declared "negative". It was the MDT that made me feel better until this very moment. The process of healing through MDT was such a friendly process and there we entwined the trust and faith of getting cured fully. Yes, I have lost my fingers, my feet and my nose as these were all consumed by Leprosy, but I have survived the perils, won the struggles and renowned the dignity once shattered by this disease.

Life may not be easy nowadays, but I can say, to survive in all its trials would not be as difficult as surviving Leprosy.

REYNALDO BARTOLOME

People in our place are no different from people in the ancient times who stoned the sinner to death. When our neighbor learned of my condition, stones fell on our roof every night.

Being the eldest child of the six siblings, my parents reared me to be dependable and responsible. I was in Grade 7 when red patches began to appear on my face and body. They thought those were just allergies so they brought me to a faith healer but the patches had just grown even more. Then a curious neighbor took concern and volunteered to bring me to the doctor in Lamitan, Basilan. After a series of blood test, the doctor named Dr. Torres pronounced that I was positive of leprosy. My parents were advised to confine me at the Sanitarium but they refused. They tried to explain and let me understood why my life would be with this disease. I cried every night. There was no moment that I did not ask God why should I suffer from this misery. I had almost wanted to end my life then. My only consolation was the care given by my parents and other siblings. They secured and hid me inside our house, yet I wasn't spared from the ostracism of other people. I felt humiliated. When things became unbearable, my parents brought me to Zamboanga Sanitarium. I was treated with Avlo and Promine injection. I also received food ration there. After several months, the patches disappeared. Then later, I was granted consent to live outside the Sanitarium.

In 1969, I met Aurelia Delos Reyes who became my wife. We were blessed with 5 children. My family had inspired me to work harder and to prove to the world once more that despite my illness, I am a man of capacity. But sad to say, I had regrets because I had never been watchful of my health. My work as a driver had caused me to relapse that eventually resulted to deformities of both hands and feet. It was too late to realize my negligence. What was more painful was my wife took distance after she saw the parts of my body getting deformed. Then we separated, and only 2 of my children came with me. This time, I intentionally forgot everything about a happy and successful family life. I felt like being betrayed by this dreadful disease. So in 1998, I returned to Zamboanga and fortunately, I received a treatment under Multi-Drug Therapy. After a couple of years, I was declared "negative". With my desire to live afar from my wife, I decided to go to Culion through the help of my friend, Arnold Rocha. After a year, I fetch my 2 children in Basilan to stay with me here in Culion. It was another sad faith when my son met his untimely death in Culion. My daughter is now working as Municipal employee after she earned her college degree.

At present, I felt contented with my life. I receive a monthly subsistence and an SSS pension. I believe, this is what God wills for me. Indeed this saying is quite true: "When God closes the door, He opens a window wide."

ISIDRO BULAGAO

I am Isidro Bulagao.

I was born at Madre Kapuli, Zamboangadel Sur, with no memories of my parents who died while I was still a young boy. I am the youngest of the 6 siblings and was left to the care of my elder sisters and finished my elementary schooling at Pagadian, Zamboanga del Sur. My brother brought me to Davao when I was 15.

I could have contacted my disease from a neighbor whom I worked with in Dipolog City when I was 11 years old. He was in the advanced state of Leprosy (I came to know later). I was very close to him as his helper in tilling his field and lending his carabao. By that time, I had a wound on the leg which I kept open and untreated. It might be that, that his disease was so communicable by that time, and I was too frail to contract the disease.

At age 14, white spots appeared on my stomach, which I thought was only "an-an" (a disease caused by fungus). Although I was curious about this spots, I got no concrete answer from those I had asked about and worked in a banana plantation in Davao, and being a young blood, and I was so in love with night life - - - I was I night owl so fond with wine, women and songs. Because of these activities, I lacked the needed sleep and rest. The white spots not only got bigger, they even appeared in my ears- the spots could not sense anymore.

I was 17 and a sophomore high school in Davao, when a visiting school dentist happened to notice the spots on my skin. He cleansed the spots of my leg of its dry and dead skin cells and pricked them with a needle. He asked me "Can this feel?" "It could not". This doctor gave me 2 tablets of different colors - a yellow and violet. When I took these medicines, the white spots disappeared, bit the sensibility of the spots remained. After 2 years, when the medicines given to me were all consumed and when I could not regularly go to see the doctor for my medicines because I have no money for my fare, I thought I had Malaria – I was feverish all the time – still ignorant I had leprosy, I went to the doctor again – He said you has "Ketong" – (Leprosy in the vernacular) which I did not understand. All I knew leprosy was "sanla" (leprosy in my dialec) – and had he said that "sanla" word to me. I could have realized that time that I am a leper.

Because of this misunderstanding, I went to a quack doctor to alleviate my illness. He said my illness was done by bad spirit. The quack doctor did not heal me, instead I got worst. I was running a fever all the time. Big reddish spots appeared bloating my face. With nothing to calm feverish body, I took Cortal all the time.

I bathed in a public washing well when my neighbors notice my white spots. They might know what malady I had. They shooed me away like a lowly animal. Without finishing my bath, in fear and shame, I went away. I could feel their abhorrence through the words they said against me. When my elder sister knew about the incident, she asked some people what my skin symptoms might be and she was convinced I was a leper. Without any explanation, she began to exclude my personal things and boiled the utensils I used for eating. There was no leper in our family, except me – that she could not accept. Her attitude towards me and my frustration over my situation, prompted me to leave and live alone in a shanty far from my own family. It was so unbearable. A neighbor, who took on me, gave me an address going to the Zamboanga Sanitarium. He even gave me my fare. My family didn't care at all. I left Davao for Zamboanga in 1981.

In Zamboanga Sanitarium, I was interviewed by Dr. Parorong and he placed me at once in a hospital ward. I was so afraid inside the ward where I was because my companions were without noses and some are blind. Why I was infirmed in this room together with horrible faced people when I had still no deformities like them? This I could not understand. All I had was lepra reactions.

For half a year, I took medications but my situation got worst. My body parts were bloated and senseless. I slept most of the time; I was given Diazon, Lamprene and Prednisolone – which made me feel better. The nursing aides advised me to stand up and exercise, but I could not manage, I just slept. The attendants thought I was about to die; they even took my measurement for my coffin. After a year, when my medication stopped, my deformities started. When I took the medicines again, I regained my appetite and felt better. As soon as I managed, I worked as a wood carver inside the Sanitarium. I learned the skill from a friend while I was in Davao. I met Merly, my better half. She was also a leper and was more advanced than I was. We feel for each other and lived together in a house inside the Zamboanga Sanitarium.

In 1990, an employee from Culion Sanitarium, Mr. Benjamin Siason, convinced me to see Culion for good. Leaving Merly behind, I went with him. I went to see Dr. Cunanan and gave him the referral letter I had from Zamboanga Sanitarium. I was enrolled at MDT for 5 months. Merly followed soon and she was enrolled too.

Through the help of Mr. Cunanan, Sr., I worked as a gratuity employee. Up to now I am still working at the Culion Sanitarium and General Hospital as one. Culion has been a paradise for Merly and me. I do not wish to go back anymore to my hometown, everything is still vivid in my mind: How I survived the physical and emotional pains I had during my lepra reactions, how my siblings treated me unfairly, how other people hurt and helped me, and how leprosy perpetuated my fondest dream to be a singer someday. They haunt and penetrate the deepest part of my heart. But finding heaven in Culion – I may forgive and forget everything.

AGNES PABALAN MENDERO

We are 17 children in the family and 10 of us were brought in the Balala Nursery right after we were born. If I have to look back, I would wish I had my parents to guide us while growing up. The nursery was our first home. If not due to leprosy, my childhood would have been happier.

I am Agnes Pabalan Mendero, 48 years of age. I have a spouse and 3 children, 2 girls and 1 boy.

As some of our close relatives say, Leprosy runs in our clan. My grandma and all her siblings were victims of leprosy. They were brought here from Cebu. They lived and died here. I heard no stories about how they lived their lives as lepers. My mother was a leper too, but my father, who was from Calamba, Laguna was never afflicted with disease.

I was 7 years old when I was discovered positive of leprosy. During those times, the students from St. Ignatius Academy now Loyola College of Culion, had to undergo a twice a month checkup with Dr. Lara. As far as I can remember, my ankles were the first part of my body that signaled loss of sensation. The very moment I learned of this, I had several questions on my mind that till today, they were not answered. I wondered how I have acquired the disease when I was quickly taken away from my mother after she gave birth to me. I wondered how I acquire them when during those times, parents were not allowed to hold, hug, cuddle and even kiss their children. I wondered how the thick glass, that our parents used to touch every time they visit us, could transfer their disease to us.

I do not know if my being a nursery child affected my behavior, but I grew up as an independent child. It was also a blessing that my mother treated us fairly, though she had favorites among us. Of course, not the ones who were forcibly taken from her. In my innocent mind, I had to be self-reliant. I remembered I had to raise chickens and sell them to support my school needs. I was in grade 5 or 6 then. I never depended my needs to my parents unlike my other siblings. I also received food ration from the government. During that time, children who were "released" from the nursery received food ration. We had sufficient supply of food like rice, fish, corned beef, fruits and vegetables.

As soon as I was discovered positive of leprosy, I started taking Avlo. I could not deny the fact that the said medicines helped me feel well. But as I entered my teenage life, I struggled so hard fighting against vices. There came a point in my life that vice won over my self-discipline. I learned to drink alcohol and to smoke, and it turned out to be a habit. Little by little, red spots on my face reoccurred. There was a terrible pain I experienced in my body. It continued until I got married. At first, I was so thankful because despite the pain, I had no wounds and no deformities like what other lepers had. But when I conceived our first born, the deformities started to be visible, more so when I began to be a full-time mother. I had to have sleepless nights when my child was sick. I had to change nappies at night. I had to cook our food, to launder out clothes and clean the house. It was but a joyful obligation for the family but I have denied myself of proper medication. Then I woke up one morning and saw my hands and feet surrounded with wounds, and my fingers started to shrink. It was the first time that I felt so much pity on myself. I wanted to put an end to everything. But God saved me from disgrace, and enlightened my mind. "This is what God wills for me", the only consolation I keep on telling myself.

If not with the joy my children gave me and if not with the unconditional love of my husband, I would not have enjoyed life. To deepen my faith, I joined the El Shaddai and became an active choir member of the church. I was also encouraged to work again though my earning is quite minimal. I joined the BHW (Barangay Health Worker) from which I received P100.00 in a month from the Local Government and P150.00 from the Barangay. My husband works as a street sweeper. I also have mini-store that supports our daily needs.

I still have hopes and dreams for my children. I could see a bright future for my only son, Joseph, as he is striving hard in his studies. I know he would attain his goal that makes me proud of my children. And that I'm quite thankful to the Lord for these blessings.

I am so grateful to MDT through the guidance and support of Dr. Cunanan. I thought I could not regain my health, but through his effort and through the care of the MDT, my hope shines. I can now smile and face the world with courage, with dignity and with determination to make my life worthwhile.

I also thank God that He answers my prayer, because my children are free of Hansen's disease. God is so good to me. The only way I can repay Him in all His goodness and blessings to my family is to serve Him as a choir member in our church.

Thanks to Dr. Cunanan and Dr. Evangelista for their guidance, also to Sisters Vangie, Victoria and to all Jesuit Fathers for their spiritual guidance.

INNENG PADERI

Blessed with opportunities to work in a cacao factory in Malaysia, I was able to support my family and to live a contented life. My plans for the future never included the misery that leprosy would give me. Not a single moment in my life that I thought I would be inflected with leprosy.

Our mother passed away during the years when we most needed her. I was 5 year old then. Our father remarried so we have to find a hand to guide us, and we grew up with our paternal grandmother. Life wasn't that hard but when I was 9 years old, patches gradually appeared on my skin. To my grandma's insistence, my uncle brought me to Zamboanga Sanitarium for a check-up, yet the result did not say its leprosy. The patches reappeared while I was at work in a cacao factory in Malaysia. I was 17 years old then. This time, the patches gave me severe pain and fever that were no longer bearable as days passed by. Soon I was forced to go back to Zamboanga. That was the urgent and crucial decision I considered most traumatic in my life, the decision that led me to a revelation of my sickness – Leprosy. It was truly a shocking revelation that caused my dreams to fall apart.

My uncle brought me, for the second time, to Zamboanga Sanitarium. He had a strong suspicion that I had leprosy. The result of the examination confirmed all his doubts. Amidst my grief, I submitted myself for a confinement. After a few months of treatment, my condition had grown worst and severe. My skin had been very sticky and the dripping of blood from the wounds was the sight the hospital attendance could not bear. They wrapped me with banana leaves instead of bandage and gauze. I had almost wanted to end my life then. The absence of my loved ones added to my hopelessness. I couldn't help but think that I became an outcast not only from the society from my relatives as well.

After a couple of years of my stay at the Sanitarium, my uncle came and visited me. The hard feelings have been changed with a bit of hope making me able to smile again. He encouraged me to keep stronger and that was what I did. I recovered gradually until the day that my friend convinced me to come with her in going to Culion. What I knew about Culion was it's a very far and isolated island for the lepers, and nothing more. I acceded not because I longed for a total recovery but I wanted to spend there the rest of my life away from my family.

It was 1994 when I left Zamboanga. I left the place of my birth to a place I had never known with no assurance of a promising life. Soon after 2 days of our arrival, I came to see Dr. Cunanan. Then, we were immediately registered as MDT patients. Each day we would have a meal before taking in medicines which was so different compared to the treatment we had in Zamboanga. Little by little, I started to dream for myself and for my future.

After 4 years, I was pronounced negative of leprosy. Tears of joy flowed from my eyes and a wide sweet smile signified that I never had regrets going to Culion. In Culion, I was saved from the malady. I owed my second life to Dr. Cunanan and to MDT. Of course, I glorify God for his blessing of my recovery and for making Culion His instrument of refuge for me.

At present, I am happily married and having a satisfying life. The scars on my skin are just shadows of the past, not the ruins of my life.

EVERSLEY CHILDS SANITARIUM

"Our lives were such that we could have quietly disappeared from the earth without anyone knowing it."

Anonymous

ERLINDA ALFERAN ALFORQUE

At the age of 15, I made a vow to follow Christ, be a nun and servant of God. But soon after I professed, different trials happened in my life.

I am Erlinda Alferan Alforque. I grew up with ample care, affection and love showered by my beloved parents.

In my heart, I longed to be a nun, and my parents did not go against my desire. So I entered the Augustinian Recollect. It entailed different sacrifices at which I opened myself to and embraced those difficulties for my love for God. But not long after I entered the convent, I was diagnosed of a heart ailment. I was so sad then that I have to leave and be back in the world outside the religious life.

Year 1990 when moving my legs became hard to me. And soon unusual spots could be seen on my skin. I was in distress that my condition seemed to be getting worse each day. The pain was quite unbearable making me agitated. When my nephew saw my plight, he brought me to Cebu Skin Clinic for examination. There I learned that I had Leprosy. Perhaps, my young mind and ignorance about Leprosy helped me not to be very much affected. However, while I was on treatment at Leonard Wood Research under Dr. Wally, I realized that the disease is not simple and ordinary.

My body's resistance collapsed and my grief amplified pity and hopelessness. I could no longer eat and each day, I became weaker and thinner.

Amidst these trying times, it's only Jesus whom I found refuge. I fervently prayed for healing, and surrendered my life to Him without any reservation. True enough, he answered my prayers through the caring hand of my family who never left me until I was able to fight back the attack of Leprosy.

With their words of encouragement, I forced myself to revive the lost strength. I was again learning to walk by myself despite the painful stares of people around. Everytime I heard them call me "zombie", tears roll from my eyes. Yet, I was determined to be cured. And I survived!

These days, I am back again in the society where I started to weave my dreams. I might not have followed Christ by a religious life but I live single blessedness to serve the Lord as the President of the Legion of Mary in our parish. Indeed, a Christ like life is a life of passion and resurrection.

TIMIE DE AQUINO

I am Timie de Aquino from Cebu province. I and my family lived a simple life. We ate three times a day. My parents are farmers. Inferentially, I knew about farming also. I could say that harvests of vegetables, corns and rice were plenty during those days.

I was in high school when I noticed a singular spot on my shoulder. So I went immediately to Cebu Skin Clinic to have myself checked up. It was confirmed to be leprosy. Unfortunately, by that time, there's no sufficient information about the disease, least, the cure for leprosy was not yet discovered.

I was not fully aware of the destructive implication of the disease. Thus, the passage of time aggravated my condition. Little by little, I saw my fingers swelling red, even my face. My whole body experienced unimaginable pain. I lost hope. It's as if I had no more future. My perspective about life became dull and sullen. Because of these, I became pessimistic and in the process, I started to hate myself. For more than six years, I endured all the sufferings that leprosy had inflicted on me. I really couldn't understand how I acquired the disease much more to accept the fact that I was now a leper. Why did I have to be in this humiliating condition? What would be my life now? How would I face the world again? How would I reconnect myself with the community? When would I gather my shattered self together? Too many questions which needed answers. Hence, I began to isolate myself.

I hid from a strange world which seemed indifferent to my pains and sufferings. Until I found myself mailing a letter to a radio station seeking for advice about my disease. Without delay, I was advised to go to Eversley for check-up and consultation. I followed what had been advised of me. I went to Eversley. By that time, my disease was already advanced that I could no longer walk. I asked the doctors if there's still hope for me to recover from the disease. And they gave me an exhilarating answer. They supplied me with medicines. Gradually, a spring of hope started to flow within me. I was resolute enough to recover from the disease.

After some years, my medication and therapy ended. I would have a fresh start. I planned for my future. Despite a little deformity on my finger, I had thought of putting up a small business. Yet after some years, I felt my life seemed purposeless. I had the emptiness within me. There's the inner desire in me to live for a nobler cause. I wanted to serve. So I entered and joined a group of lay missionaries – MARTINIAN BROTHERS. We took care of patients similar to my former disease. By God's grace, I am still in my vocation for more than 16 years. Here I found myself and my purpose in life. I am contented and happy in rearing leper patients especially those with advanced cases. Thanks be to God.

HERMOGENES T. YUNGOD

Leprosy invaded me in my young and active years. I was 26 years old then. I was working in a private firm in Siquijor. My earnings enable me to assist my brothers and sisters in their studies. I was so proud then that I could even tell people that from my hard work, my other siblings could also reach for their dreams in life.

I am Hermogenes T. Yungod, and I was born on Dec. 12, 1952 in Siquijor.

I never thought that Leprosy would cut momentarily all the weaving of my dreams. I was discovered positive of leprosy when we were given anti-tetanus vaccine by our company doctor. I was then expecting to be promoted to a higher position when I learned of the disease inflicting me. The tetanus vaccine reacted in my skin, red patches appeared. Only then the doctor pronounced it as "Leprosy".

I felt enraged with anger to the world. I felt so depressed. I could not bear the thought that it came into the most unexpected moment of my life when I was about to reach my dreams. I said to myself: "I don't deserve this "joke". This is not true! If this is a nightmare, I have to wake up!

But then it was a reality shouting before my face that I have Leprosy! Though encouragement that I could still be cured echoed in my mind, I resist to follow. Depression had made my condition worst. I became very weak, and reactions appeared on my face and entire body. To walk and move around became very hard to me.

My brothers and sisters crying in my dreams awakened me and enlivened my dying spirit to live. I then allowed myself to be conformed in the sanitarium and be treated by MDT. Despite the adverse effects of the medicines in my body, I endured them with the hope that soon I would get cured. And so it happened.

Yes, I had been freed from the bondage of Leprosy. And soon after my recovery, I was employed as a gratuity employee working in the PT Rehabilitation. And now I am in government services as occupational therapy technician. I could not ask for more from the Lord. Truly, He has His great way for every person to savor His goodness and blessings!

ALEX I. SANTILLAN

Hopefully my story will enlighten the minds of my siblings so that I can be with my family again. To the people who do not have sufficient knowledge about the disease called Leprosy, that they may be able to understand well the struggles that people like me have been undergoing. I believe that my voice is nothing but a whisper amidst a great pandemonium, unconvincing as I am but one and alone. So I ask for your help in relating our lives to the community we are hesitant of especially of people like us with deformities. These are our common problems as victims of this disease.

I am Alex I. Santillan, 23 years old from Bantayan Island and currently residing at Sitio Bay-Bay, Maalat, Madridejos, Cebu. I am the youngest among 9 siblings.

Upon knowing that I had been afflicted by leprosy, I simply couldn't accept the fact that I got this much dreaded disease in our barangay. When my condition worsened, my world seemed to stop from circling. Together with this was my dimming perspective towards life. Much more when I entered the Eversley Childs Sanitarium. I became isolated from the world I used to live before.

Painful experiences followed. My wife and child abandoned me not to mention the physical pains and sleepless nights I had suffered with because of the disease. I got tired of calling to God.

There even came a point in my life that all I wanted was to die so that I would be free from pain and heartache.

But my sibling didn't give up on me. They struggled to awaken me in truth, letting me see that star of hope beyond the thick massive and dark clouds of leprosy. They never left me alone. They told me that my life didn't end in my becoming a "leper." There's so much to see in this world. True enough, when there's life, there's always hope.

I endured all the hardships in order to live. I cooperated with the treatment. And when it's done, my normal skin tone was restored. I regained my confidence and enthusiasm to go further in life. I had a happy life in Eversley because I have now an inspiration to hold on.

Still, I have troubles sleeping at night whenever I think of going home to our province. This triggers a reaction which causes redness on my skin.

Jose H. Carredo

I really don't expect this kind of disease called LEPROSY. During my childhood, I used to live a happy life playing carefree with my friends. However, the disease had changed my entire life when I was fifteen years old.

I am Jose H. Carredo and born on November 3, 1981. I am the second to the eldest among 12 siblings.

My family went to Davao City sometime in July 1996 due to personal problem. I was left in Cebu with my aunt and grandmother. I gave up my studies when I was first year high school for they can no longer support me financially. Two years after, there were patches that came out of my skin. I ignored them at first thinking that they were just ordinary patches. Unfortunately, they soon turned out to be symptoms of leprosy illness.

I stayed away from home because my grandmother and my aunt kept on scolding me. I worked hard to survive. Feeling alone, there were nights that I kept on crying, wishing my family was around. For four years, I had been working so hard that my body was getting thinner and weaker, unaware that leprosy was scattering fully in different parts of my body. One time when I was playing basketball, the sole of m right foot got wounded, but I never felt a single pain. It took a year for the wound to be healed; I also noticed that my left hand started to claw.

After 7 years, my family went back to Cebu. My mother noticed that my skin appeared sickly. She brought me into a skin clinic to have my skin diagnosed. The doctor confirmed to us that I had a leprosy disease. After I had heard of everything, I felt my body numbed, I felt so sad and hopeless. The doctor gave us the sketch in Eversley Childs Sanitarium, often termed as "the place of the living Dead". When I arrived at the Sanitarium, I met Dr. Pandillo and Dr. Villahermosa. They made a test on my skin and gave me medicines (MDT, Clofacimine and Dapsone) to be taken everyday.

Two months after taking the medicines, I always had fever. I suffered from sleeplessness. It was said to be because of the reaction. September of 2003, I decided to be confined at Eversley for rehabilitation. The first time I arrived at the place, I couldn't imagine myself being one with them. They looked so different. But when I was confined in the place and become a part of them, I had found a new sense of living, more vibrant, more intense, more resolute, more meaningful I was greatly inspired seeing my co-patients' determination to finish their medications until I found myself determined to finish mine too. They did not lose hope in spite of the deformities they had obtained. There's no reason for me to surrender.

I cooperated well with my treatment up to the last of taking my medicines. I finished the therapy and decided to pursue my studies with the help of Philippine Leprosy Mission (PLM), Social Worker and Sacred Heart Chaplaincy (SHC) and of course, with the consent of the doctors. Now I am second Year College taking up Bachelor of Science in Secondary Education major in Mathematics at Cebu Technological University.

I know, I will never win this trial without God's blessing and guidance. I believe that in every adversity, there is a corresponding solution. And in finding that solution comes learning and passage through a more promising future.

RODULFO Y. PESTANO

Life was simple during my childhood years. I was named Rodulfo Y. Pestano when I was born on January 16, 1945 in Calbayog City. In this typhoon stricken land of Samar, I help with the family's household chores. Nevertheless, it's not that easy.

Just as our place is a frequent route of typhoons, so is my life. I had experienced drowning at sea yet with God's grace I survived. With age, life reveals its intricate pattern and nature. Thus from a simple life, I found myself dreaming of becoming a lawyer. Hence, I studied so hard, always giving the best that I could do.

However fate had really been playful on me. There came a problem that had defied my worth and dignity as a human being. There approached a storm that drowned me into misery and helplessness. At the age of 16, I noticed myself having an unusual skin condition. Red patches appeared on my face. Being worried about my personal condition, I consulted at the nearby health center in Calbayog. To my horror, I found out that I had been afflicted with Leprosy. Suddenly, I saw a dark future waiting ahead of me. I dreaded the day that I would become an outcast, off from many privileges that normal people could enjoy. I was too afraid that I started to lose hope. Could I still achieve my dream? Would I ever become a lawyer? Who could I turn to for help? Who would bother to understand my situation? I felt alone. My friends, my classmates, they evaded me. I was forced to stop from my schooling. Despite my poor condition, I found a safe haven under the warmth love and care of my family.

Eager to regain that dignity and self-worth which leprosy had outstripped from me, I went to Eversley to receive exact medications for my sickness. There I met Rosario, a fellow patient in the sanitarium. She gave me the courage and hope which motivated and inspired me to get healed. We fell in love with each other and got married.

The medication proved to be effective that gave rewarding results to me and my wife. We now live a happy life. My wife and I have three offsprings and two grandchildren. Though I haven't realized my dream of becoming a lawyer, I'm fulfilled and happy with my work as a jail guard in the city jail. We are presently living in the Eversley compound in our very own house. True enough, God has never left me in my most difficult struggle in life.

ROSARIO L. PESTANO

I am Mrs. Rosario L. Pestano. I was born on July 30, 1946 at Ilaud, Inabanga Bohol.

When I was a child, I always helped my parents in doing household chores. I was a loving child to my parents. I used to go to the convent in our nearby church to ask for the left over communion breads or 'hosts' for me and my friends to eat. My greatest dream was to become a nun.

In the year 1968 when I was in the second year college, red patches appeared on my face. It was confirmed to be leprosy.

Suddenly, it seemed that the world dropped on me. I was thinking of hurting myself but I came to realize that it would not solve my problem. I went instead to Sto. Domingo Church and talked to the priest there. I felt good after listening to his advices. God would never forsake me.

When I reached home, my grandmother told me not to go out from the house so that my friends and neighbors would not see me. My grandmother decided to bring me to Eversley Childs Sanitarium. I felt really sad and afraid. Red patches and painful reactions became frequent. Doctor Retardo administered MDT to me while Sister Germaine took good care of me.

One day, I had a hard time walking and there was a guy who helped me. He soon became my husband. Somehow, I was happy to know that I had kept myself strong. My mother who was a teacher never failed on telling me the importance of prayer. I got married in the year 1970. We had three offsprings. I continued my studies until I became a teacher in Leonard Wood Elementary School. I am now 63 years old and a retired teacher.

I thanked God for all the blessings I received. I had passed all the trials of being a leper patient. I found faith in God and got the strength to move on.

MARIO LENDIO

At home in Lanao del Norte, farming was the family's business. My childhood always reminded me of my elder brother who often scolded me for not helping in the farm. The sun's heat was simply painful to my skin. However at the age of ten, I learned that I had leprosy. I was only grade 4 then when my legs became numb, accompanied by red patches.

I am Mario Lendio, 45 years old and born in Maigo, Lanao del Norte.

I had once dreamed to become successful in the future to uplift myself and my family from poverty. How I wished that someday, I would be a farmer no more. But fate became my enemy when it let me be afflicted of the disease I had never expected and wanted in my whole life. Now, my dream was pointless, obscured. I became very disappointed.

The landowner of the land we were cultivating helped me went to Cebu for consultation. I was admitted in the sanitarium. The doctors of Eversley Childs Sanitarium gave me MDT treatment. The social workers kept on encouraging me to continue my studies and to work as a gratuity worker in the hospital. These were all parts of the rehabilitation program. I worked as an electrician aide in the power house of Eversley Childs Sanitarium and later on pursued my electrical studies. I landed on a job outside, in Ayala group. I had completed my therapy there and was released as a patient.

When I learned that the sanitarium electrician had retired, I applied for the position. Luckily, I got the job.

I am now working here at the sanitarium as an electrician. I now live happily with my own family in my own built house.

ORLANDO JUMANOY

When I was a child, I had dreamed of becoming a teacher. But a much dreaded disease had intruded my life, destroyed my dream and wasted all my efforts and hard works.

I am Orlando Jumanoy from Masbate, Cebu City, married but not blessed with a child. I am a Roman Catholic by religion. I grew up in Cebu City but I was born in Bohol.

I was about 20 years old when I found out that I had been afflicted with leprosy disease. There were red patches on my face. Curious about the full nature of leprosy, I read some books regarding the illness and I learned that it was contagious if not treated. I was like paralyzed for I could not move; all my nerves were so painful. Reactions were coming out all over my body. I began to lose hope for I didn't know how I could realize my dream of becoming a teacher.

I went to Eversley and submitted myself for treatment. I was administered with MDT drugs. My condition was really very disgusting and very disappointing. But because of my family who heartily supported and helped me in my difficult struggle against my illness, I did not give up. I gathered my strength and took good courage to be transferred to Tala Sanitarium to continue my dream of becoming a teacher notwithstanding my disease.

It was in the year 1986 when I enrolled to one of the universities in Manila. After all those years of sacrifices and boredom, I came up successful. I earned the degree in BS Education major in English.

Long after I decided to enter the brotherhood of Saint Martin de Porres' lay brothers, I decided to return to Cebu when I felt idleness within me despite my busy life with the brotherhood. Something was missing. I pursued my field of endeavor and was able to land a job. There, I met my wife.

I am now one of the teaching forces in Leonard Wood Elementary School within the ECS Compound.

CRESILDA F. CUEVA

Why me? This was all that I could ask after I learned that I had leprosy.

I am Cresilda F. Cueva, born on October 8, 1975 in Tacloban City, married and a Christian by religion. I finished the course of B.S. Education in the University of the Visayas in the year 2005. I am currently in the work force.

We were a happy family despite my parents were separated. Alone, my mother assumed both the duties of a mother and father to us. Hence, there was a moral obligation for us, her children to help in earning for the family. This set-up made our family relationship even stronger. This was my most unforgettable episode in my life.

As a child, I had dreamed of becoming a teacher. I remembered when I was only 7 years old, I and my friends imitated little 'classes'. I always played the role of a teacher and my friends as my students.

Childhood proved to be a happy age of my life but it was also during this stage that I experienced my greatest disappointment in life. I felt numbness on my legs. Later on, red patches started to appear all over my body and face. I consulted to a private doctor in Tacloban and I was misdiagnosed to have a simple skin allergy. I received medications for skin allergy but to no relief. The pain persisted until I graduated in high school.

I noticed now that I had foot drop. I could hardly move my right leg. My condition worsened every day until I found out, I couldn't walk anymore. I always stayed on my bed. I was so thin. I didn't want to eat and couldn't even sleep well at night.

My mother couldn't stand anymore seeing my poor condition that she brought me to Tacloban Health Center. There, I was diagnosed to have leprosy disease. The announcement was a big blow to me. I was very disappointed. It was very depressing on my part. I kept on asking God WHY. There were myriads of people around the world, why should it be me who would suffer from this disease?

My mother and sisters convinced me to get myself admitted in the Sanitarium of Cebu. That was the darkest part of my life. I feared about my future. Still, I submitted myself for admission in Eversley. My years there were like living in hell.

At first, all I could see was the miserable environment I was into. All I thought about was myself. I only thought of my pain and misery. I kept on complaining. Until, I just woke up one day and opened my eyes to reality. I saw my co-patients whose conditions were far worse than mine. They were suffering from severe reactions, deformities and pains. Yet, I could feel even from their silence the determination to get healed. They were patiently struggling and waiting for their recovery. One truth became known to me. They learned to accept their fate and didn't lose their hope. This was my realization that I had not gotten yet. I felt ashamed to myself.

I realized that I was still lucky enough for I had my mother and sisters who had always loved and cared for me, not to mention the doctors, nurses, and fellow patients who had inspired and given me the encouragement and moral support that I needed. The desperation and helplessness I felt eventually became my reasons to have the courage and be strong, to fight and to move on.

I tried my best to get up and reclaim myself. I decided to continue my studies in college with the help of the Social Workers here and with the encouragement of Sir Estong Cabanos who also shared his life experiences as a victim of leprosy also. I came out of my shell with a new strength to face the discrimination from other people especially in the school. With the help of the PLM scholarship program, I successfully finished my Bachelor's degree in Education and passed the board exam. Now, I'm living a normal life together with my family, my husband and my handsome son.

Leprosy totally changed my personality and outlook in life. I became humble yet strong and brave. I learned to love, appreciate and embrace life no matter what color it may be.

JEOVANNIE NAZARENO DE LA VICTORIA

God is good all the time.

I'm Jeovannie Nazareno de la Victoria, 27 years of age, born on February 16, 1983 in Manticao, Misamis Oriental. I'm the sixth among eight siblings in the family.

My childhood days were full of ups and downs. I was thankful that I had my loving parents, brothers and sisters with me. I lived a low-profile life. But still, I found myself afflicted with leprosy illness. I really knew that God had a purpose of giving me this kind of disease. And yet, I couldn't help but ask God why He allowed this affliction to happen to me. I had been faithful enough to Him and His commandments.

The disease affected my personality. I became rude and hard to my parents to the point that I shouted at them. I hated everyone even God. I lost hope. I viewed life as void and meaningless. My friends, they were all gone for they evaded me.

Still, it was my family who never gave up on me. They had rendered their perennial love and concern despite my rough behavior. They said word of encouragements to persuade me not to lose hope. With the assurance that they would always be there to help me, I renewed myself.

We went to Cebu to submit myself for treatment. In the hospital, I was given MDT treatment. There, people would not stare at you from head to foot. There, slowly, I regained my dignity and self-worth. I asked God's forgiveness for whatever sin I had caused Him. I realized that I was only human and everything I had- fame, good look- would not last forever. I was nothing without Him. I considered my affliction not as a lost on my part and I accepted my disease with open arms. Yet, I would rather die fighting than surrendering to the illness. I did believe that life did not end in my becoming a leper. I may be an outcast but still I'm human at all points. I have the right to live, to love and be loved, to be taken cared of and be treated equally just like a normal person. Now, I'm recuperating and hoping that I can go back to my home place victorious, all because I survived!

CLINT ALEX ANABIEZA

I'm Clint Alex P. Anabieza, 29 years old.

My experiences of isolation and separation came when I was diagnosed with Hansen's disease. I was diagnosed in 1994 after my graduation from secondary education.

At first, my family and I cannot accept my illness because of the people who knew about my situation, there will be a problem of discrimination.

There was even a time when I got my regular medicine some jeepney drivers did not allow me to ride on their vehicle because of my situation. I understood the drivers but I got hurt when I observed my relatives and friends and neighbor's treatment changed when they knew that I have Hansen's disease. I was frustrated. The stigma came, that's why I decided to isolate myself by not living with my family. I lived alone in the house beside the seashore. I did not go out during day time. At first, my parents, my brothers and sisters brought me food. But later on I was the one who managed to get food.

Almost six years that I lived in that house. My reason was, I was afraid to face the society, to avoid troubles and discrimination. Then the stigma also penetrated my mind that the persons affected by leprosy are hopeless in this world. I was very hot tempered during that time, and had no plans about my future. I felt hate for my ancestors because whenever I heard that Hansen's Disease is hereditary and communicable, I blamed them.

I was insecure with people who can act as normal person. I felt lonely and I had self-pity. There was even a time that I planned to commit suicide.

Later, I realized that this is not the end of my life. The Lord has a purpose why He gave me these trials. When I was confined at the Eversley Childs Sanitarium in 1999 due to reactions, I heard that there's an education program sponsored by Philippine Leprosy Mission in partnership with Eversley Child Sanitarium, Sacred Heart Chaplaincy and Martinian Brothers. After my recovery, I was blessed because I am one of the scholars of Philippine Leprosy Mission.

I earned my degree in Bachelor of Science in Elementary Education in 2004. This time even if there's a problem in applying for a job because of competition, and I have no work experience yet, to add the over qualifying age due to self–isolation, I put in my mind that yesterday made me what I am today...and what I'm doing today is what I'll be making out of my future.

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Golden Place Hotel and Suite Cebu city
Cebu, Philippines

DR. JOSE N. RODRIQUEZ MEMORIAL HOSPITAL

Persons affected by leprosy and their family members should be treated as individuals with dignity and are entitled to all basic human rights and fundamental freedoms under customary international law, relevant conventions and national constitutions and laws…

United Nations Human Rights Council, Resolution 8/13: Elimination of discrimination against persons affected by leprosy and their family members.

OFELIA NAGUIT

This is how my life story began being a victim of Hansen's Disease. During my teen years, I was too industrious which adapted me to sleep always late in the evening. I did it because I wanted to help my parents to earn additional income for our family. We are twelve and I am the 4th among them. This had pushed me to work while studying. Actually, my parents didn't force me to work but it was through my initiative that I felt happy to work and offer my earnings to my family. My main purpose was to help them.

It was so touching to recall when I do washing, ironing of clothes and even became house helper and a worker on packaging spice items like pepper, vetsin, oregano, laurel etc. during those years.

I remembered the last time I worked before I was detected of my disease; I was then working as a retailed supplier of smuggled goods like cigarettes, canned goods, etc. I was given a certain percentage of money depending on how many goods I was able to purchase from PX. It was where smuggled goods could be bought.

As a person, even in my younger years, and in my persevering efforts I could be of help to my family. I didn't care what people would say for I was not ashamed to work. Until the time I had already noticed some unusual symptoms on the inner parts of my skin. I even came up with reading medicinal books just to know what this swelling I felt from my skin was. I was afraid then so I kept everything secretly to myself because I didn't want my parents to be affected. Frankly speaking, when I read the book, I already had the prediction that it was Hansen's Disease and I was correct from that.

Although, I knew it was what I sensed, still I kept everything to myself and did not tell anyone, not even my relatives.

Later, I got sick and became weak. My resistance turned low which triggered the disease to come out. Allergic spots on my skin started to appear all over the parts of my body. It was too painful that I could not help anymore and eventually lost my appetite. My weight had decreased up to 80lbs.

That was the very incident that made my parents to be worried. Later, they accompanied me to have my check-up at San Lazaro Hospital. There I discovered that I was suffering from Hansen's disease and also found out that my father was also stricken of the disease based on the family history.

Knowing that, I was shocked of course, although, I had known the symptoms previously but still I was hoping it would not be.

Soon I was given a prescription by the doctor attending me. He advised me to have a weekly consultation aside from weekly claiming of medicines in the said hospital.

Since I was only 15yrs. old that time, I have in mind that if I would take more medicines, the more I would be sure that I would get healed. But I was wrong then, it made my illness got worst instead. More lesions and eruptions were seen on my skin. I also chilled a lot even though the weather was hot. My body temperature was too high that if you would touch me, you would get burned. I began thinking that sooner or later it would be the end of my life.

Because my illness became worst, I was then advised to move to Tala Leprosarium. When my parents had already planned to take me there I came to accept that sooner or later I would die. My sisters and brothers already bid goodbye and they even asked forgiveness from me as if I was already dying. The worst thing in my experience during my treatment period was that I couldn't sleep or sit in normal position because the eruptions and lesions on my buttocks were too serious. I have to sleep sideward, facing back, Father Hofstee often called me then as "Dyesebel". He was the Parish Priest in

Tala who offered most of his life for the patients. He preferred to live with the patients rather than going to his family in the United States.

Having treated in that hospital made me realize that if I would only be strong I would eventually survive. Some of the elders, who were my companions there, told me the more I cry the more my illness would become worst. I was really sensitive because I couldn't accept what happened to me. So from what they said, I followed them and became strong. Six months after, I eventually recovered and was boarded to the cottage where my ration became raw. This taught me to cook food on my own.

During my stay there, I learned that there was a school college foundation offering free education for the Hansenites. Since I was the kind of person who was so studious and really loved education, I did not have the second thought to enroll and grab the opportunity. Until finally, I was able to graduate with a degree of BSE.

There were lots of memories I had experienced when I studied in that institution. I was the one who attended all my personal needs since my parents were living far from me. I stood by my own just to cope with my studies. Early in the morning I needed to cook food so that when I go home in the afternoon I already had my food for lunch. Imagine, my food for lunch was also the same food for dinner. I practiced myself eating that way even it was not hot anymore because I need to sacrifice so that I could cope with the time I have to be in school.

Of course with my perseverance, I was able to finish my course and able to find a job. It was also sad to note that I was not lucky with my marriage. It lasted only for 2 years that I got separated with my husband. Many women got involved to him even if they would discover later that he is a Hansenite like me, as he was really handsome.

During our five years of separation, I took all the responsibilities of supporting my children. I tried to earn additional income to aid what I earn from my job as a public elementary grade teacher. During my off periods, I did tutoring opposite my official time. I also enrolled in Post Graduate Studies taking up a Master's Degree in Marikina Institute of Science and Technology. I studied there during Saturday s with my goal to uplift my professional growth. Again, luckily, I was able to finish my Master's Degree.

I was so fortunate that my supervisors were so vigilant and recognized the competence, dedication and commitment I have on my career. This is why I became a Grade Chairman, a Science Coordinator, a School paper Adviser, a GSP Coordinator and later became an Assistant to the Principal. With my 8 years of assistantship, I earned an award in Academic as one of the Outstanding Public Elementary School Teachers of Caloocan City and ranked 4th among ten. Although my co-principals know my disability, they are good to me.

Right now, I am promoted to Principal III. This is the best time to prove that Hansenites could be successful in some ways. It is not a hindrance but rather an opportunity if one has a strong determination that behind disabilities there is hope and this is what I am now. My acceptance and the perseverance to the traumatic experience I encounter had ultimately made me a strong woman.

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EDUARDO N. PANGILINAN

When I was a kid, I was terrified with the situation I was involved in, a condition where no one would want to happen even in their wildest dreams. I was diagnosed to have this fearsome disease called leprosy.

But this affliction taught me to be strong and not to give up. It's my battle and I had to fight and win. Thanks to the Father Almighty, to the nuns, doctors, nurses, to my beloved parents and to my fellow lepers who supported me all throughout my struggles.

I am Eduardo N. Pangilinan and this is my story.

In July 20, 1951, I was born with the hands of my faithful family in Tala, Caloocan City. I was the only boy in the family of Pangilinans and I was a loving son back then. I often played with my playmates in our place where I grew up. I was just a normal child back then, carefree of worries and problems of the world, least of the problem of leprosy illness.

I was talented in drawing and I was specialized in sketching houses which were actually big, as big as my dream to become an architect or maybe an engineer too. My parents were proud with me and my plans for the future, but then the doomsday of my life came around.

One day, I sensed numbness in some parts of my skin. I was eight years old then. I wondered why my playmates didn't want to play with me again. I felt rejected, still unaware of my real condition. To my surprise, it was now my relatives who didn't want me to come to their houses. I was rumored in our barrio to have a contagious disease. And they were all saying that I had leprosy. People didn't want to come near me. Some even requested to take me away from our place to avoid contamination.

Alarmed, my parents didn't know what's the best thing to do. I felt helpless as a child, totally dependent to my parents. They sought for advices but all of them pointed me to one direction. Even it was a tough decision for my father to make, he sent me to Tala Leprosarium.

It was worse than hell for me. I felt that I was carrying the world on my back. Everyday, the struggles were doubling up, I never uttered a single word during my first stage of staying there. Every night, I couldn't help myself but cry deeply under my pillows. It hurt so badly. The pain, the helplessness, the feeling of desperate loneliness, were leaving me like dead. I lost everything. I kept on cursing the disease and I never said a single prayer.

When my eldest sibling died, I went home to see him. But the scenario was even more humiliating on my part. My own family welcomed me with cold hands. They didn't want to see me anymore. They didn't talk to me. Least, they never took the initiative to offer me something to eat or drink. It tore my heart apart; and it added up to my grief. I kept on crying by myself without them knowing it.

However, all those things were altered when the nuns opened my world to the light of Jesus Christ. They helped me understand that things happened for a reason. Finding a new light to course through, I took my first medication sometime in 1985. Dapsone then was the only medicine known to cure leprosy. After months of medication, my sickness slowly left my body. I was able to return home to Pampanga where I met my spouse, Nanet. There, I worked in constructions for making houses was my forte.

But my disease came back in the year 1978, and I was thrown back to Tala Leprosarium. This time, I was administered with Multi-Drug Therapy (MDT), a combination of Dapsone, Clofasimine and Refampicin. I was very grateful to the doctors and nurses who never got tired of supporting me in my second confinement in Tala Leprosarium, most especially to Dr. Cesar J. Viardo, former director of the hospital.

My body gradually recovered from the disease. I am now a happy person with a happy life and a happy family. I am a nursing attendant here in Tala Hospital and at the same time a member of the Board of Trustees in Asia Leprosy Mission, an organization which helps people afflicted with leprosy.

I have no regrets about my past, for without it, I will not be the person who I am today nor will I be in the place where I stand right now. I may not have been given the chance to attain my dream of becoming an architect and an engineer but the thought of recovering from the painful past leaves me contented and satisfied. For me, it's enough.

I can say that I am proud that I am once a leper for the sickness has opened my life in the path of Jesus Christ Who has been my source of strength and determination to carry on with life. Trust in Him and He won't lead you astray. The love and support of the people behind my recovery will be something that I will never forget throughout the days of my life.

LETICIA CORPUZ-TORRES

Having a family to identify and to belong with is a treasure to keep. I had enjoyed being with my family even for a very short time, or should I say, in 1/16 of my life.

I am Leticia Corpuz-Torres and this is my story.

We were happy before. But when my father died, my mother left us and married another man. I and my siblings were left in charge of our remaining land properties.

That was also the time when a dreaded disease often regarded as curse started to crawl on my nerves and skin tissues. I got leprosy. And the humiliation that followed was simply unbearable. I was the one who made the first move, I restricted myself from communicating with other people. I couldn't even go out to buy something from the nearby store. My situation was far worse-than an eagle jailed in its cage. I had many questions but I only found vague answers.

Our mother used up all we have left, thus leaving us no money for our expenses. During those times of paramount hunger, we resorted to eating root crops just to fill in our rumbling stomachs. Every night I cried and cried until I fell into sleep when my body suffered from pain and only Dapsone relieved my condition.

After the war between Christians and Muslims, my soldier brother returned home. He advised me to go to Tala Leprosarium for medical consultation. With strong faith and conviction that the leprosarium would help me heal my sickness. I rode a ship going to Manila and searched Tala on the map. Luckily, I was admitted by the help of Mrs. Serafica and Mrs. Loredo.

I got married in 1992 at the age of 35 and was blessed with two kids. After my full recovery, I became a patient assistant and now a regular employee of Dr. Jose N. Rodriguez Memorial Hospital. With a smile, I looked forward for a brighter tomorrow as I tried to forget my wounded past.

ALEXANDER R. BATUNA

During my childhood, my ambition was to finish elementary and high school education. We were very poor that it was highly impossible for my parents to finance my studies in college.

I am Alexander R. Batuna, of legal age, married and a resident at Barrio Sto. Niño,Tala, Caloocan City. I am the fifth among 9 siblings in the family.

After I graduated in high school, I went with my friends to Manila. I worked there as a Security Guard for almost a year. But I was homesicked that I resigned from work and went home,helping my parents in farming instead.

I was 26 years old then when I noticed a reddish spot on my face. My parents advised me to see a doctor. To no avail, the doctor told me that it was only an allergy and gave me medicine.

One time, my eldest sister who was a member of spiritista, a religious sector, came to visit me at home and told my father that she would bring his group to pray over me. So one afternoon, they came and surrounded me. While praying, one member of the prayer group suddenly got chilled, put his hand over my head and said to me, "Brother, you should go to Manila to be electrified and within nine months you will be cured." The group then instructed me to follow the voice of 'God's angel'.

The following day, a neighbor talked to my father telling him that I should get myself ready for I would be brought to Manila and had me confined in Tala Leprosarium. There I was examined by the doctors on duty and they confirmed that I was positive of leprosy. Tearful of the unlikely effects of the disease, I let myself be confined at the leprosarium and had myself treated. Despite the unwholesome setting as I saw my inmates with deformities of varying degrees, I took my medicine religiously to make my healing faster.

Nine months of confinement passed, I had to be re-examined again. And I was very happy to know that I was now negative from leprosy. It was then that I realized that the advice of 'God's angel' was true. As I was now free of the disease, I took the advantage to apply as government security guard. Fortunately I was accommodated as a regular employee. This coming November 14, 2010, I will be retiring at the age of 65 after the 20 years of service in Tala Hospital.

NORBERTO KAHANO

My whole life was bundled with misery, and until now the wounds of the past were not completely healed. I experienced how it was to be rejected by the society and even by my own family. I didn't blame anyone for what happened to my life, not even God. There had to be a reason for this sickness, I just didn't know what it could be.

I am Norberto Kahano and this is my story.

Being born in Novelita, Cavite on November 14, 1979, my eyes were opened at the mocking face of poverty. I am the youngest of the 7 siblings.

I was 12 years old then when my parents died, leaving us on our own, in – charged of each other, I was forced to work at an amoral farm to contribute for the family's daily needs. I was dedicated to my job as I knew in mind that it was the only choice I had in my hands that time. A life of a poor is a life of struggle from womb to tomb. Who would wish to be poor? Thus whenever I touched the skin of the animals, it was as if my dream of a wealthy life really found its way to come out in reality. But all of them were mirages. All were my delusions.

My dreams totally disappeared when a disease came unexpectedly on me. I felt numbness in major parts of my body. White spots were appearing with painful wounds inside. I didn't have an inkling of what these spots were all about. More days passed by, and my condition continued to worsen. Wounds grew bigger and bigger and insects were attracted to them. I was apprehensive having the idea at the back of my mind which I never wished to be true in my case. It's a seven – letter word of much dread – leprosy.

I worked harder not only because of my family but also because my masters abused me. They even threatened me that if I would not do good in my job, the whole barangay, would soon know my sickness. Albeit afraid of what was going to happen, I chose to escape and I was successful.

I returned home to my family with a single thought that I was welcome to them still. The pain and misery I felt when I escaped were doubled up when I returned home and learned that my very own family wanted to get rid of me. They didn't want me anymore. They didn't even talk to me nor ask how things went on when I was away. Everything seemed different, altered. I felt like a stranger within the fences of our own house. It was no better than hell.

But thanks to my brother, the only one who cared about my situation. But, it's a very big BUT. His wife treated me like an animal infected by some contagious disease which might plague or contaminate the other breed. It hurt me so bad, but I couldn't do something about it, I felt humiliated and degraded. I decided to separate from my brother and live a life on my own.

The next chapter of my life was spent at a yacht. Yes, it was a yacht owned by a very good – hearted person who is now living with Jesus Christ in heaven. I lived there for five years, and I functioned as a scavenger. The excess food of the visitors in the beach sustained my life for five years bearing the underneath poverty with it.

Finally, the wrath of God was lifted from my shoulders as a concerned individual advised me to entrust my condition to Tala Leprosarium, I didn't think twice about the proposition, I wanted to be healed. I wanted to recover from the wounds I was enduring for so long.

My brother helped me to get there. But after I was admitted, he eventually left me without a trace. That was the last time I saw him. My condition was severe. The administration of the leprosarium decided to isolate me from the others; but it was done in a gentle manner so as to avoid offending me. During my recovery phase, it was Nurse Presy Ladera who gave me strength to hold on and the power to move on. And after a long struggle with the disease, I got my price. I got healed.

My life story was featured in the ABS-CBN's program of Maalaala Mo Kaya with Ms. Charo Santo-Concio as anchor/host. The TV station paid Php25, 000.00 for my story which was deposited on my bank account and was used for my wedding with Zenaida Dechavez, my wife who gave me a very loving daughter.

After it was shown on TV, it was the only time when my relatives came out from their shells who were once afraid of me. Too bad, I was now the one afraid of them.

SUSAN NAVARRO BLAS

I am Susan Navarro Blas, 70 years old and was born in Manila on July 16, 1940. I am the eldest among 9 siblings.

Childhood had been a happy age of my life. I had a very close relationship with my cousins and other relatives. We usually hang out in our house. And as time went on, I began dreaming of becoming a good pianist, which happened during my high school days.

But it was also during high school that I was discovered to have an unusual skin disease. My dad brought me to Goiti, Building along Sta. Cruz, Manila to meet Dr. Plantilla. After some diagnostic procedures, the doctor confirmed that it was a Hansen's disease. When I learned about my illness, my life went normal as it had been. As a matter of fact, I only found difficulty with my foot drop and occasional numbness of my right knee down to my right foot. More than that nothing happened on my upper limbs.

Unknown to me, my parents were the most affected with my situation. Amidst my agonies and griefs, they never ceased from helping me. They didn't leave me. They let me felt their unconditional love and care which motivated me to recover from the disease. Throughout the period of my high school life, I didn't feel any rejection for my parents hid my real condition from our neighbors.

I let myself be admitted at Dr. Jose N. Rodriguez Memorial Hospital (formerly Tala Hospital) way back January 23, 1986 at the surgical ward. I felt aloof on my co-patients with deformed hands and feet and ruptured skin throughout their bodies. Fortunately, I had no any deformities nor skin discoloration because I was treated early, only that I walked with my foot drop. My doctor gave me dapsone and refampicin.

My husband and my four children inspired me to recover from my illness.

There was indeed a big difference in staying in the hospital and in living in the dormitory. Then I found out that leprosy is a blessing in disguise. These days I am very grateful that I have been granted a small unit under GawadKalinga Project of CFC. Don't get me wrong I prefer not to be afflicted with leprosy. Nevertheless, this illness had widened my horizon on the flowing river called life. Hopefully this story of mine is enough to show the gratitudehat I owe to people which helped me overcome my disease.

TEOTILO G. DE LEON

I couldn't imagine how I became affected with leprosy. It was hard for me to accept it. How come a cheerful child like me would suddenly be drowned to misery and desperate loneliness?

I am Teotilo G. de Leon, born in Dagupan City, Pangasinan. I am the third among 8 children of Remedios and Rodrigo de Leon.

I was a cheerful child until I turned 12. Red spots came out of my skin. They were itchy and painful at times. Many people were telling different opinions and hearsays about my disease. Life went on as I continued my elementary years at Bulacan Elementary School in Dagupan.

But then my condition got worse as red marks became numb. Then I remembered that my father experienced the same as he also suffered from leprosy. My hypothesis was proven to be true when I was examined by our school doctor.

It was hard to accept at first. I didn't even think of it. Friends distanced from me. Worst, my relatives turned their back on me. They were afraid of the disease.

My uncle helped me go to Tala where lepers were given proper medications. Thus in February 1974, I arrived at the leprosarium. I was lonesome, afraid and worried as I saw lepers whose conditions were far worse than mine. But then I got used to my new environment with the passage of time.

I was admitted at Quonset 6. Wherein we were being taken cared by the Franciscan Missionaries of Mary (FMM sisters) in the person of Sister Consagrada.

Avlo sulfone was one of the medicines being supplied to us monthly. We took it daily. We were being tested and examined so as to see if there's any development. Multi – Drug Therapy (MDT) was tested to me and others too. We took the medicines religiously. After two months of medication, I noticed some improvements until eventually; I was diagnosed negative of the disease.

I continued my studies, finished my high school and even a vocational course at Holy Rosary College. I also met LonizaRadam who soon became my wife. She is a public teacher as well as 4 our two children.

It was in 1984 when I worked as a gratuity worker in Central Luzon Sanitarium, now known as Dr. Jose N. Rodriguez Memorial Hospital. It was only last February 19, 2009 when I was hired as a Contractual worker of the hospital where in I was a housekeeper and messenger assigned at the Director's office headed by Dr. Eduardo S. A. Javellonar.

For me, the illness became a blessing in disguise, because the best things in my life happened when I became a "leper".

EDWIN VALDEZ

I am Edwin Valdez. This is my life story.

During my childhood, I was happily living with my mother who worked as restaurant helper owned by my Lola in Pasay City. I was enrolled in a Catholic School during elementary level, but was transferred in a public school. The public school was just near the restaurant. It was a walking distance and I had some companions on my way to school. Though I had a thin built, I was happy with my girl friends. I looked sickly because I ate more meat and less vegetable.

When my grandmother's restaurant was burned my Lola decided to close the business. She went home to her children. My mother on the other hand left for Bicol to her first family. And I was entrusted to her brother. This uncle of mine supported me in my studying with the help of my Ninang. They treated me like their own son. My Ninang's children were so kind to me especially in my schooling until I finished high school.

When Ninang transferred to Parañaque, my mother came back from Bicol and we lived together. I graduated high school in 1977. I decided to take up vocational course, hoping to find a better job.

I got sick the following year. I was confined to a hospital where the doctor and my mother told me that I was positive of leprosy illness. I felt so lonely. I had no choice but to accept the truth about the disease. My mother and I went back to Bicol. Our family and my half-brothers helped us there. They brought me to a faith healer. After two months, the symptoms seemed to disappear. I continued my schooling in college as a working student. Unfortunately, I was able to finish my third in college. I was forced to stop as red spots began appearing on my skin. I transferred from one place to another to find a living. Until I settled at the market and worked hard to earn money. I confided to some of my friends and relatives about my problem with my mother who chose to stay in Bicol.

Red spots worsened during my work at the market place. I was bedridden. My friends called up my Ninang who then immediately brought me to the nearest hospital. The hospital in turn gave us a referral letter to the Tala Hospital.

There I encountered so many trials. I found out that most of the leper patients confined are much worse than my situation. Everyday, a patient was most likely to die from the disease. I saw faces like "chicharon" while my face had so many wounds. My whole body was blasted.
I met sister Pillar. This nun was so kind to us. She helped me in taking a bath, gave me clothes and tended to my other needs. I also met some gratuity workers who were kind to us lepers. Martenian Brothers gave me the inspiration by teaching me music.

My Ninang and my mother were very supportive of me. They always found time to visit me every weekend. These two women were my inspirations for me to recover from the disease. I was transferred in Cottage 10, a dormitory for rehabilitation. More years had passed and I recovered fully from leprosy illness. The hospital continued to educate us regarding health education, music and our own health care. I learned a lot.

Year 1990, I was hired as patient assistant in the hospital. After a year of working as patient assistance, my relatives from Bicol asked me to go home because my mother was sick and in serious condition. I went home right away. I saw my mother in a dying condition. I cried. More minutes had passed, she died. She just wanted to have her last glance at me.

July 23, 1992, I was promoted from patient assistant to being a nursing aide. I was so happy because my dream of becoming a government worker came true. This was because of my diligence and hard work. Still, there was a part of me who was longing for my mother. If only my mother was still alive, she would be proud of me.

It was in the year 1993 when I married a woman who was 4 months pregnant (from the other man). She gave birth to a boy and we lived together for five years. With matrimonial blessing from the church year 1999 when we separated and she left the child with me. I treated her son like my own. He is now 17 years old and in first year college. The two of us are living happily here in Tala Hospital.

Presently, I am assigned in OPD section. I am happy to share my life story as a leprosy patient so as to give hope to others with a disease similar to mine.

VICENTE T. VALENCIA

I am Vicente "val" T. Valencia, 56 years old and one in a million who luckily got the sickness called "leprosy". This is my story.

I was born in Talisay, Negros Occidental. I am the youngest among 9 siblings in the family.

Leprosy stroke me when I was in grade VI. However, it soon disappeared. Yet, this turned out to be temporary. The red spot reappeared when I was 17 years old. I just finished my high school then. I took my medicines from the Travelling Skin clinic. Our sanitarium inspector did the monitoring on my medicines.

It was in the years 1971 – 1972 that my ailment became worse. With the help of my sibling from America, I was brought to Central Luzon Sanitarium, Tala. The director at that time was Dr. Artemio Ruñez. At first, I felt so lonely. But as days went on, I found myself mingling with co-leprosy patients. That made me happy and comfortable inside the Sanitarium. I took avlo Sulfone, Lamprene and Remactane, simply called MDT. In the year 1986, I was totally cured from leprosy and was luckily chosen to work as patient assistant. My allowance then was Php 2.75 per day.

With the help of Carmelites and Franciscan sisters, the fear from Stigma of leprosy was gradually eliminated to us. I worked so hard until I met a woman now already my wife. Even through we're childless, we are still happy.

Year 2004, I was given recommendation from Dr. Francisca Gayete as regular employee here in Dr. Jose N. Rodriguez Memorial hospital.

I am thankful to all people here in Tala for helping me to recover from my ailment. To other leprosy patients, don't lose hope. Stay with the Lord and put your trust in HIM.

MA.LIEZEL BERNARDO CASTILLO

Don't lose hope, everything will soon fall in its right place. This is what I believe and this is my story.

I am Ma. Liezel Bernardo Castillo, born on November 1, 1979 in the hands of my God-fearing parents at Bulacan.

When I was a child, I dreamed of becoming a policewoman. But when I was in my first grade, my mother dead and my father left and entrusted me to my Lola. I loved my Lola so much. She continued building up my personality – my positive views about life. I thanked her so much for that.

When my Lola died, I was left with no one to depend on. I was alone; I decided to work for me to live. I promised in front of my Lola's grave that our plans for me would come to reality someday. I worked until I reached 19 and the n the wheel of fate let me met my husband. We had two children to whom we dedicate our lives.

One day, I felt numbness and pain on my right leg. I ignored them at first but the pain grew stronger that I could no longer bear it anymore. My husband and I let a dermatologist checked my condition. A series of tests suggested leprosy. My world seemed likely to explode. It hurt me so bad, knowing that leprosy might steal my future with my family.

We were advised to see the doctors of San Lazaro hospital but they in turn referred us to Tala Leprosarium. We followed what had been instructed. The first doctor who admitted me in Tala Leprosarium was Dr. Melisa Padugod followed by Dr. Cruz in Dermatology section. I had also known the people whom I considered my mentors in life. They were Ma'm Rose, Ma'm Lydia and Ma'm Cora. I'd also known KuyaJhany and KuyaJosep together with the nursing attendants. Thanks to them.

My inspirations to pursue in healing myself were my children. My husband abandoned us. I remembered my child saying "Ma, pagaling ka na ha? Kasinami-miss ka na namin."("Ma, please get well soon for we badly miss you.") I cried that night as the voice of my child re-echoed through my ears. That was also the beginning of my recovery.

I took MDT for months, but another news had doomed my world. My youngest child was missing due to carelessness of my husband. He got another woman. I was shocked.

Then my recovery did go on. My full recovery was dedicated to those people who never gave up on me. I work us a caregiver now and under my hands was TatayFlorenzoPlaza's lesson and that is trust the lord. Give to God what is due Him. He is our Savior and Protector. When you have nothing left but God, you'll find that God is the only one you need.

BICOL SANITARIUM

Leprosy is a condition shrouded in mystery, legend, religious fanaticism and centuries of vilification of its victims around the world. By the sheer accident of Mycobacterial infection, its suffers have been condemned to exile, imprisonment and even the imputation of moral taint, as if illness itself were a punishment

Tony Gould

RICARDO LONTO

Humiliated by how other people treat me when they learn of my disease, I couldn't help but isolate myself.

I am Ricardo Lonto from Daet, Camarines Norte.

Living a fatherless life brought me anxiety and insecurity. No amount of effort could help me reach my dream as poverty gripped me tightly. At a very young age of 13, I worked as a houseboy to feed myself.

My longing to own a family came to a reality when a lady accepted me to be his husband. I was 22 years old then. Luck knocked on my door when our togetherness was so blessed with very understanding and loving people. My in-laws have been very supportive and generous to me.

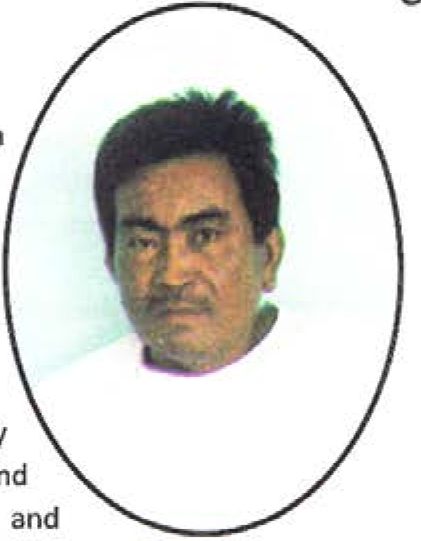
In 1997, a strong blow of trials hit me when I noticed an unusual spot on my skin. Since I had no idea what the spot was, I hurried to a faith healer. According to him, it was done by a bad spirit. I was so uneasy then. That could not be true. My fear doubled when I saw cockroaches coming out of my body. And after the healing, I got well. However, after a year the same spots reoccurred. I thought I have been played again by bad spirits but before going to a faith healer, I consulted a doctor. To my surprise, he advised me to go to Bicol Sanitarium for a skin check-up. Worries started to haunt me eve in my slumber. At the back of my mind, I have doubts and wished they are not true. Yet, after several skin check-up, I was pronounced positive of Leprosy. The moment I heard the doctor said it, I felt my whole world collapsed. No! Not me! Not me! My fear came from the thought of how my family would accept my illness. I have been aware that the sickness goes with ostracism.

True enough, all that I feared of happened. Whenever I passed by people gathered, I would hear them say, "What a stinky smell!" what a bad smell! They might not have addressed it to me directly but I knew from my heart, it's me that they mean those words.

One time, I was at a videoke bar when barangay authorities approached me and like a criminal, they held me and brought me back in the Sanitarium. There were so much resistance I displayed but to no avail. From then on, I ex-communicated myself from the world and confined myself at the Sanitarium.

Despite my loneliness, the doctors at the Sanitarium became my pillar of strength. They helped me recover fast. No sooner, I realized that I was getting well. Thank God that though other people abandoned me, I found His rescue in the hands of the doctors and nurses inside the Sanitarium.

Renato Rivera



A loving wife and 5 healthy children are my treasures in my life. They are my blessings that God bestowed on me. They are enough, I can't ask for more.

I am Renato Rivera from San Agustin, Pili, Camarines Sur. I was born on January 4, 1970.

I could say, for many years my life revolves around my family. They are my source of joy, strength, and comfort. I find consolation during down moments to my children's hugs and embrace. Their giggles and tantrums make my being a father more meaningful. I thought these would be forever.

One day, while staring at myself in a mirror, I noticed unusual spots on my face. My physical appearance seemed to be changing, not because I was aging but it might be due to something else. I hurriedly looked for a faith healer but it just made the condition worst. Soon my mother have noticed it. It's she who brought me to Bicol Sanitarium, an institution that I knew the first time. There I was told to be afflicted with Leprosy. Upon hearing the doctor's declaration, I felt my entire body trembling with fear.

Sadness enveloped my life. I was in quandary whether to bravely face my illness or hide myself far from my family. But God has been very merciful. He enlightened my mind & made my heart determined to be cured. Though the process of healing entailed more pain and sacrifices, I faced it with so much hope for a new life.

These days, I could say I am winning the battle! With my fervent prayers and strong faith in God, I know going back into a society is soon to happen.

ILDEBRANDO MARCAIDA

For a family man, losing a job is losing his dignity and worth. It's from his job that he makes a living, sustains his family's basic needs and finds meaning in his existence.

I am Ildebrando Marcaida, 37 years old from Manawan, Camalig, Albay.

Getting some parts of my body deformed gradually is such a confusion in my mind. I had no idea why this happened. Curious what caused deformities, I voluntarily visited a doctor and only to be stunned by doctor's declaration, I am positive of Leprosy. Quickly, he referred me for treatment in Bicol Sanitarium.

Accepting my sickness had not been that easy. It took me many nights of shock, uneasiness, tears and worries. Along with those sleepless nights were advertently skipping of meals making my body thin and weak. Thanks to my family who stayed by my side urging me to hold on and keep hope in my heart. And for their sake, I did.

While inside the Sanitarium, the doctor gave me effective medicines for my treatment. The MDT played a great role in my fast recovery. Though I struggled from a temporary separation from my family, the victory had been mine as I got cured in a short period of time. I know I would have my complete recovery the soonest.

Indeed, God has his own reasons for everything, and I do believe that He tested my faith by giving me this disease. All that I have been through will just be part of my life history. If this would affect my future, it will be a bastion that would make my life better and a more fulfilling one.

RICARDO MAGDASOC

Leprosy may have taken my appearance away from me but not my self-respect.

I am Ricardo Magdasoc, 62 years old. I was born in Hollivar Albay.

Reared by God – fearing parents, I take life as a blessing not by accident but by will of God. I grew up with positive outlook, being very grateful for whatever comes in my life, be it simple or abundant.

I was 30 years old then when fate tested me. It began when numbness frequently happened in my body, followed by swelling of my skin. At first I composed myself hoping that they were caused by fatigue. But later on, I learned it was Leprosy after the doctor examined me. Though I felt so confused and burdened, I begged the Lord for enlightenment. During those moments, I found comfort in the Lord.

When my relatives knew my condition, they distant themselves from me. I would be fool if I say I wasn't hurt but I sought relief from my own family. Without my knowing, a deep sense of acceptance toward my sickness sprung from my heart. Constantly I consoled myself by saying; "This is just a trial, I can't blame anybody. I know God has plans for me."

With a grimacing look, I faced people without inhibition. I submitted myself at the Sanitarium with a firm hope that I would be cured there. True enough, the institution have rendered me the care any victim of Leprosy is looking for. It assists us and joins us in our battle against the malady.

Thanks to my immeasurable faith in God. He uses generous people to save us from helplessness and hopelessness.

SALVADOR BOLANOS

Being a son of a fisherman, I learned fishing at my tender age. There was so much joy I felt whenever a catch was big. My father used to tell me – you have good hands, strong and firm.

I am Salvador Bolanos. I was born in Rapu – rapu, Albay.

A lesion on my face and extremities startled me one day. My only way to know its causes was to see a doctor. I must admit, a cloud of doubts covered my entire being. And so I sought solace from my neighbors. They accompanied me to a doctor. With a pounding heart, I readied myself for the doctor's diagnosis. It was Leprosy! I wished I could change his declaration, I wish it could not be me!

Little by little, I accepted my sickness. I was already determined to submit myself in the Sanitarium for confinement and treatment as well. While inside the sanitarium, I was overwhelmed to receive ample care and concern from the doctors and nurses. The MDT has saved me from this painful malady.

These days, I can say – Leprosy might have caught me helplessly, might have destroyed my hands and fingers but not my strong conviction towards the beauty of life.

IBO HUFANCIA

A 5-kilometer walk everyday from our house to school never made me to give up in my hunger for knowledge. But the real test my life had to conquer was my acquiring of Leprosy.

I am Ibo Hufancia of Caramoan, Partido, Camarines Sur. Though not blessed to own a child, I am happily living with my very dear wife, Erlinda.

In a Peñafrancia Fiesta, a sister of one of the Bicol Sanitarium employees took notice of the reddening of my skin. I didn't know her as it was the first time I met her. She approached me to say that I have to go to Bicol sanitarium for my skin to be examined. Hearing the word Sanitarium stunned me. Keeping myself composed, I paid her a nod. I thought I might have jumped into something untrue. Not long afterwards, I found myself being examined by a doctor, and true enough, I was positive of Leprosy. It terrified me but that was momentarily. I regained my senses and decided to submit myself for confinement. This time, I had to be strong and I was so sure of myself that I could withstand all the pains Leprosy could bring me.

The hospital became my shelter. Caring hands and encouraging worlds to make a victim of leprosy hopeful were all at the four corners of the Sanitarium.

Healing became very fast to me. Indeed, there are many ways and strategies to conquer different forms of trials. With a brave heart, and deep faith in God, one can have a surefire of winning.

BENJAMIN DERIT

Leprosy shattered not only my dreams but the future of my family.

I am Benjamin Derit from Sorsogon, Sorsogon. I was born on January 1, 1925.

Year 1942 when leprosy hit me. At first, I was in denial. I'd rather see a faith healer than visit a doctor to examine my swelling skin. That was because of fear not for myself but for my family. I hated to imagine a scenario where my family suffered from my incapacity to work for a living. I'd rather end my life than to see them drowned in poverty.

As my condition worsened, I had no other option but to go to Rawis, Albay for a check-up. Afterwards, I was advised to be confined at Rawis Sanitarium for treatment. I was about to refuse when my wife expressed her worries about my skin getting darker and redder each day. Thanks to the doctors whose hearts were for us unfortunate victims of Leprosy. They made us feel that hope could ever be there to a person determined to be cured. Though deformities plagued my being. I felt assured of healing.

I am 85 years of age now, and I am still alive saving all the goodness of life. Though my wife had left me eternally, her memories would remain the most joyful in my life as she inspired me to be strong and brave against any battle, including Leprosy.

COTABATO SANITARIUM

Even if my skin is insensitive, my heart and my soul are not.

Olivia Breitha, Hawaii, USA

Maguid Santiago

I was enjoying my high school life then, full of hopes and determination when Leprosy pressed me into the brink of hopelessness.

At first, I wanted to keep my sickness secret to everyone. Yet, it spread in the neighborhood and could not be kept nor denied from those around me. People started to pay a sharp stare on me making me pity myself even more.

My mother, who is my sole and constant guide, stayed by my side throughout my struggle in pain. Truly it was on these trying times that she let me feel the warmth of her caring heart.

I was admitted at the Sanitarium, and that was the most painful separation I had experienced. I could not accept the fact that I would be all alone battling against this malaise, without my mother but with people I never know. My life became miserable when while inside the Sanitarium I could no longer move my feet nor do the usual activities that I used to. Added to my sufferings was the humiliation I received from other people. "You are useless! You don't have hope anymore!"

It seemed that the hurt endlessly echoed in my mind. Several times I attempted to end my life. The occasional visit of my mother enlightened my depression I knew I deserve to live and I am strong enough to bring my life's pieces into whole again and so I did.

With the help of the doctors in the hospital, I gradually regained my health. I followed religiously and patiently all their advices for each of those enable me to see a ray of hope.

These days, I can say I am already free of Leprosy! With humility, I am proud to tell people that if I hid myself and my disease, I would not attain the happiness and pride brought by the fruits of my labor and hard work. I have already established myself in business and I could say, the Malady pushed me to strive for success.

DOMINADOR SABADO

The death of my mother when I was 5 years old had actually shattered my life. I was very young then to understand life's deprivation. My father's work could not sustain the needs of his 5 children. A good catch of fish was just enough for a 2 or 3 day meal while the next one was undecipherable. And more often than not, we skipped meals. Poverty had been with us long before I opened my eyes to the world.

I am Dominador Sabado, 56 years old. I was born on July 28, 1953 in Laabayong Sultan Kudarat. I am the third among the 5 siblings.

Learning to survive was the first thing I mastered than the ABC's in school. I had been in the streets from sunrise to sunset, and sometimes it was my shelter where I ate and slept. However my father longed to keep me in his arms and sight, he could not. He too was weakened by my mother's loss.

In 1976, I was admitted at the Sanitarium, 6 years after I was pronounced positive of Leprosy. I voluntarily submitted myself for confinement since I had no one to turn to. My body started to swell and the pain is no longer bearable.

I was so desperate then after I was given 1 month of a vacation, I didn't come back. I found a job in Quimba but my condition was worsened instead. In 1984 I had no other way but to return to the Sanitarium and undergo treatment. This time, the healing proved to be a triumph over the Malady.

Now it feels that Leprosy had instead gave me life's direction. I found life's meaning after my suffering. The street is no longer my shelter but it reminds me that once in my life it allowed me to see what lies ahead after going through the different trials.

Josie Delicana

Waiting patiently for the rice seeds to ripe was a part of our life's routine. This would mean preparing ourselves to work as harvester. In every rice field in our town, I and my mother could be seen there. There we got our food from a meager share we acquired from harvesting. Life was then so hard for me and my mother.

I am Josie Delicana, 46 years old. I was hailed from the province known as the Rice Granary of the Philippines, Cagayan Valley. My father was a carpenter whose income had never sufficed our needs. My parent's togetherness did not last long making us their children suffer more in poverty. I intentionally chose to be with my mother for I know that she could not bear living alone. Soon after their separation, my auntie relocated us to Mindanao where we permanently reside there.

I was 7 years old then when Leprosy struck me. It all started when patches all over my body appeared. Through desperate to accept my fate, my mother brought me at the Sanitarium for treatment. This time, another separation happened, a painful separation. No matter how hard I resist to be taken away from my dearest mother, I was in vain. I also fear the thought of not only losing friends but an opportunity to explore the world while growing up.

While inside the Sanitarium, I learned to survive alone. Different trials tested my being and founded my determination to get cured. After several years of undergoing MDT treatment, I regained my health. It was such a sweet victory that could shield me from any possible attacks of difficulties.

To this date, I am happy and contented with my life and I feel so honored to serve my fellowmen as Treasurer of Barangay Pag - asa Cooperative.

Indeed, life is like rice seeds. It takes waiting to get ripened for other to enjoy the harvest.

MARIA GAMBOA

I personally do not believe in the saying: "History repeats itself" but not after I realized that my life story seemed to evolve in this way.

It was poverty that urged my parents to entrust me to a couple for adoption. I was too innocent and helpless then to refuse my parents' decision. True to their promise, my second parents showered me everything. They sent me to an exclusive school run by the priests and the nuns in our town. Despite all these acts of concern and love from them, deep in my heart, I was still longing for the warm embrace of my real parents.

I am Maria Gamboa, 74 years old from Katinog, Iloilo. I dreamed of becoming a school teacher but had never came into reality when Leprosy defeated me. At first, I ignored the red patches that appeared on my skin thinking that they were just caused by too much exposure to the sun.

I got married at the age of 22. On my second pregnancy, I gave birth to a twin. A sudden twist in my life happened. The attending doctor noticed the unusual swelling of my skin and immediately referred me to another doctor for examination. My in-laws brought me to a hospital in Cotabato, only to find out that I could not return home anymore. I felt Leprosy betrayed me and stole all my happiness from rearing my twins and my first born.

Healing seemed very hard and impossible to happen as day in and day out my heart cried to see and to touch my children. The absence of my little darling's created deep wounds in my heart. No matter what I do, the pleading remained voiceless and unheard.

My stay at the Sanitarium seemed endless, and the bleeding of my heart could not stopped unless I rejoined my family. The hurt became much more unbearable when my husband left with another woman. It was my in-laws who took the burden of responsibility over my growing children.

My life reached its daybreak when cure set in through MDT. I got a chance to work as Family Planning Motivator. For me this work opportunity could somehow enable me to earn and to save money for the schooling of my children. This work would renew my life's perception and help me in putting the pieces into whole again. And that had actually happened.

I was adopted all because of poverty and my children were in other way grew up with their grandparents all because of Leprosy. But whatever have God willed for me, it's His great plan that always prevails.

Reynaldo U. Eluna

I thought the darkest misery that I could experience was the loss of my dear father. He died when we were about to celebrate my graduation day in elementary. With full of excitement we went in the tailoring shop to get my "barong" for graduation. As we crossed the road, a jeepney bumped and hit us. That made the early death of my father. In my grief, I realized my father had saved me.

I am Reynaldo U. Eluna, 41 years old I was born on August 29, 1968 in Dipolog City, Zamboanga Del Norte.

I always dreamed of becoming a soldier or an engineer. I had this strong desire to serve my countrymen. The reason why I kept my studies my utmost priority. But then in January 1993 while I was writing my thesis in my senior year in college, I was discovered to be positive of Leprosy.

My mind resisted. I felt as if heaven and earth struck me. The only words I uttered was "why me?" This discovery had made me irrational, down and apathetic. It made my whole body numbed and I deprived myself from people around me. What's more painful was when my family disowned me all because of Leprosy. While isolating myself, I had several attempts of suicide, the last thing I thought good to do to escape and eternally forget the malady but to no avail.

The death of my father and my dreams brought me strength to stand again and face these trials. I voluntarily submitted myself to Eversley Childs Sanitarium for treatment. There I regained hope and this time I allowed God to move in my life. I entrusted everything to Him.

With the aid of Multi-Drug Therapy, I received healing. The care of the doctors added to my will to fully recover. I am also grateful to my grandparents and my friends who stayed beside me and made me even stronger in my battle against Leprosy.

The joy and jubilation brought by healing was much more than the grief I felt from the discovery of my illness.

I've defeated my disease. I was prized with a wife that I met and loved in the Sanitarium, I have also finished my Education course and passed the Board Exam for Teachers. These are more than what I prayed for. Truly, everyone has his own path to walk on and along this path are the different struggles to test one's faith and determination.

This time, I could say: God has prepared a road for me and He was there with me when I took the journey.

ELMA MOHAMAD

Their doors were always closed for me. My relatives would shoo me away before I could reach their door step. What have I done to them? I never wished becoming a victim of the most-dreaded skin disease, Leprosy. If they only know how devastated I was to have contracted this disease.

I am Elma Mohamad, 41 years old. Since my childhood days, I wanted to become a teacher. Yet, I was in vain.

I was 14 years old when my father brought me to a doctor. He had this strong suspicion that the patches all over my body were due to Leprosy. Never did I think that the check-up would mean my reclusion at the Sanitarium. And so my father went home alone, eyes welling with tears while I outrageously pleaded him and the doctors to just allow me bid goodbye to my siblings.

Apprehension engulfed me tremendously making me deliberately uncooperative to the doctor's in the hospital. However, after a period of time, acceptance of the disease set in which eventually resulted into progress for my healing. The doctors, seeing that I was quite going well, allowed me to visit home. Full of excitement, I hurriedly returned to our place, but to my despair, our reunion did not happen the way I figured it while I was on my way home.

It's heartbreaking to realize that my dear ones whom I longed to be with again each day have already forgotten me all because of Leprosy. I felt so shattered and broken. My family had alienated me and that collapsed the last strand of hope in my heart.

It took several years before I was able to rebuild my life. With the constant assistance I received from the doctors and MDT, little by little. I succumbed the difficulties.

The promise of my doctors of utmost healing through MDT proved to be a true prophecy. These days, I could say, Leprosy had made me a better person who treasures life more than anything in this world.

Kado Indal

When I was a child, I wanted to finish my studies and make a difference because we're poor. But I failed. I wasn't able to finish elementary. I stopped after fourth grade.

I am Kado Indal, one of the leprosy patients confined and healed in Cotabato Sanitarium. I am 46 years old, born on June 1, 1964. My father is a farmer. I'm the sixth and the only boy among 8 siblings.

I was 25 years old then when I had leprosy. It was a painful disease despite the resulting absence of feeling or sense of touch. It was a hard life to be a leper. People loathed at my poor condition. They evaded me. Nobody came near me except my family and some close relatives.

With the help of my brother-in-law's sibling, I was brought to the Cotabato Sanitarium in December, 1986. I never lost hope. I always believed that I still had the chance to get cured. The way to my recovery was not an easy one. I had to endure the pain and loneliness that I felt. And in the process, I won over the disease and found a new hope to continue living. Now I had a job. I met my wife, Elma Mohamad and we were blessed with two children. I was regretful at first that I had not finished my studies, but the thought of having my children finished studies always made me feel elated, contented and satisfied.

My life indeed is a story of struggle and victory over leprosy. And God has always been with me all throughout those years.

APPENDIX

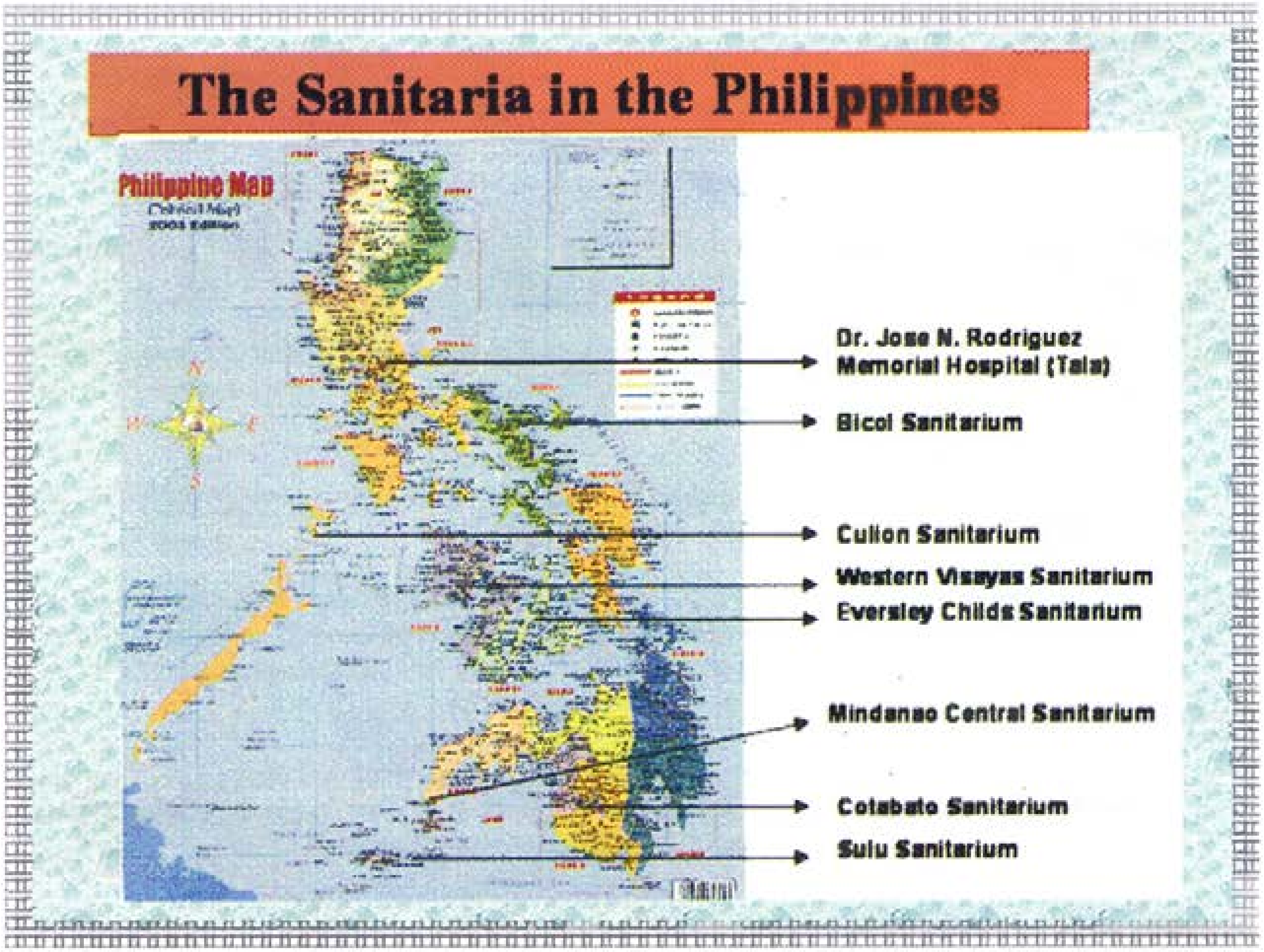
The struggle for humanity and dignity...

The "leper" collecting trip, the rounding up of people affected by leprosy in the archipelago as part of the segregation Law.

The arrival in Culion, the start of a long struggle of isolation, Culion Leper Colony becomes their home, their destiny and their grave.

The arrival in Culion shores after a long journey, fearful and apprehensive of what life would be in the colony.

Patients, have to be placed on quarantine for 5 to 7 days upon arrival in Culion, the start of the physical, social and emotional struggle for identify and dignity.



The Sanitaria in the Philippines

Dr. Jose N. Rodriguez Memorial Hospital (Tala)

Bicol Sanitarium

Culion Sanitarium

Western Visayas Sanitarium

Eversley Childs Sanitarium

Mindanao Central Sanitarium

Cotabato Sanitarium

Sulu Sanitarium

PHILIPPINE DECLARATION 2007

Leprosy an ancient but most dreaded and misunderstood disease thought to be extremely communicable has instilled fear causing patients to be abandoned, segregated, forced to live in isolation and discriminated against as social outcasts.

Leprosy can result in severe disabilities if not detected and treated early, perpetuating social stigma of people affected, however with availability of MDT (Multiple Drug Therapy) which have cured millions of patients worldwide such disabilities could be prevented.

That despite the elimination of leprosy as a public health problem in many endemic countries worldwide, people affected by leprosy still continue to experience discriminations, prejudices and social stigma.

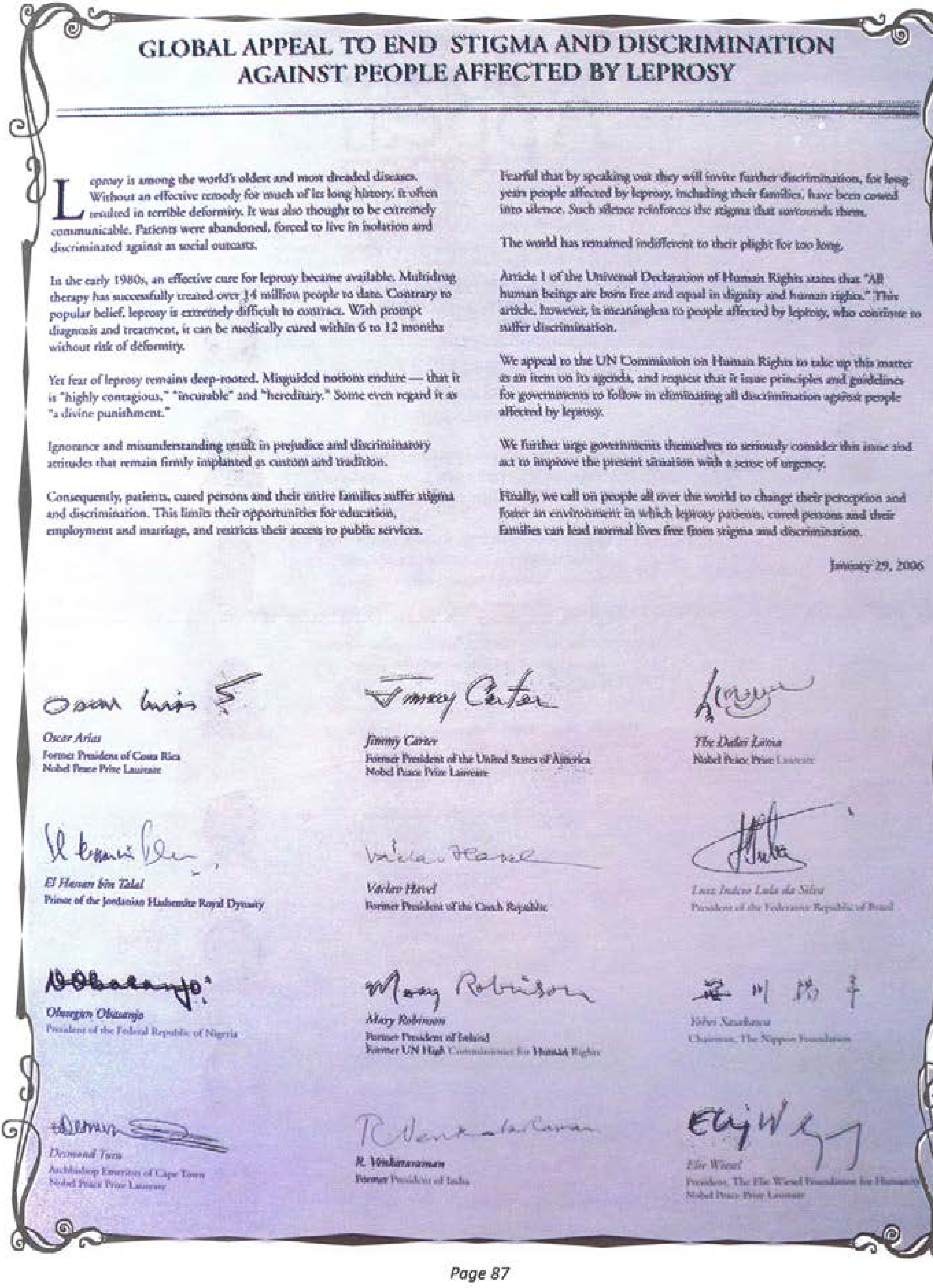
Whereas, the Preamble to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights recognizes "the inherent dignity and the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family" regardless of race, creed, social status and physical appearance, as the foundation for freedom, justice and peace in the world; As such, We declare that:

> People affected with leprosy are persons with dignity and demand respect and equal opportunities and protection of the law.
>
> We believe in the dignity of work and if provided with opportunities and become empowered, people affected by leprosy will strive to develop himself / herself to become self-reliant and productive members of the society.
>
> We advocate and support early diagnosis and treatment of leprosy, for leprosy is curable and MDT treatment is available in all health centers and free of charge.
>
> All government agencies and NGO's, the community and society in general should resist and desist from calling people affected by leprosy names like "lepers, Hansenites, Ketongin," which are derogatory, humiliating, discriminatory and prejudicial, for first and foremost , people affected by leprosy are "persons" who are God's creatures like everyone else.
>
> We urge national and local governments, NGOs, religious, business and people's organizations to consider and act on these issues and together with the people affected by leprosy bring about new perspective and understanding of living in a world in equality with dignity.
>
> We call on the Filipino people and citizens of the world to change their perception, belief and practices and create an environment in which people affected with leprosy and their families are treated as co-equal and can lead normal lives free from stigma and discrimination.

Therefore, We, the participants of the National Forum fully support and endorse the Global Appeal to End Stigma and Discrimination Against People affected by Leprosy do hereby bind and commit ourselves to join together and affirm the dignity and rights of the people affected by leprosy, to work and build together a world free of leprosy complications, discriminations and stigma.

So, in support with this declaration, we affix our signatures,

Done on the 29th of January 2007 at the Heritage Hotel, City of Manila, Philippines.



GLOBAL APPEAL TO END STIGMA AND DISCRIMINATION AGAINST PEOPLE AFFECTED BY LEPROSY

Leprosy is among the world's oldest and most dreaded diseases. Without an effective remedy for much of its long history, it often resulted in terrible deformity. It was also thought to be extremely communicable. Patients were abandoned, forced to live in isolation and discriminated against as social outcasts.

In the early 1980s, an effective cure for leprosy became available. Multidrug therapy has successfully treated over 14 million people to date. Contrary to popular belief, leprosy is extremely difficult to contract. With prompt diagnosis and treatment, it can be medically cured within 6 to 12 months without risk of deformity.

Yet fear of leprosy remains deep-rooted. Misguided notions endure — that it is "highly contagious," "incurable" and "hereditary." Some even regard it as "a divine punishment."

Ignorance and misunderstanding result in prejudice and discriminatory attitudes that remain firmly implanted as custom and tradition.

Consequently, patients, cured persons and their entire families suffer stigma and discrimination. This limits their opportunities for education, employment and marriage, and restricts their access to public services.

Fearful that by speaking out they will invite further discrimination, for long years people affected by leprosy, including their families, have been cowed into silence. Such silence reinforces the stigma that surrounds them.

The world has remained indifferent to their plight for too long.

Article 1 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights states that "All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and human rights." This article, however, is meaningless to people affected by leprosy, who continue to suffer discrimination.

We appeal to the UN Commission on Human Rights to take up this matter as an item on its agenda, and request that it issue principles and guidelines for governments to follow in eliminating all discrimination against people affected by leprosy.

We further urge governments themselves to seriously consider this issue and act to improve the present situation with a sense of urgency.

Finally, we call on people all over the world to change their perception and foster an environment in which leprosy patients, cured persons and their families can lead normal lives free from stigma and discrimination.

January 29, 2006

Oscar Arias
Former President of Costa Rica
Nobel Peace Prize Laureate

Jimmy Carter

Jimmy Carter
Former President of the United States of America
Nobel Peace Prize Laureate

The Dalai Lama
Nobel Peace Prize Laureate

El Hassan bin Talal
Prince of the Jordanian Hashemite Royal Dynasty

Václav Havel
Former President of the Czech Republic

Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva
President of the Federative Republic of Brazil

Olusegun Obasanjo
President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria

Mary Robinson

Mary Robinson
Former President of Ireland
Former UN High Commissioner for Human Rights

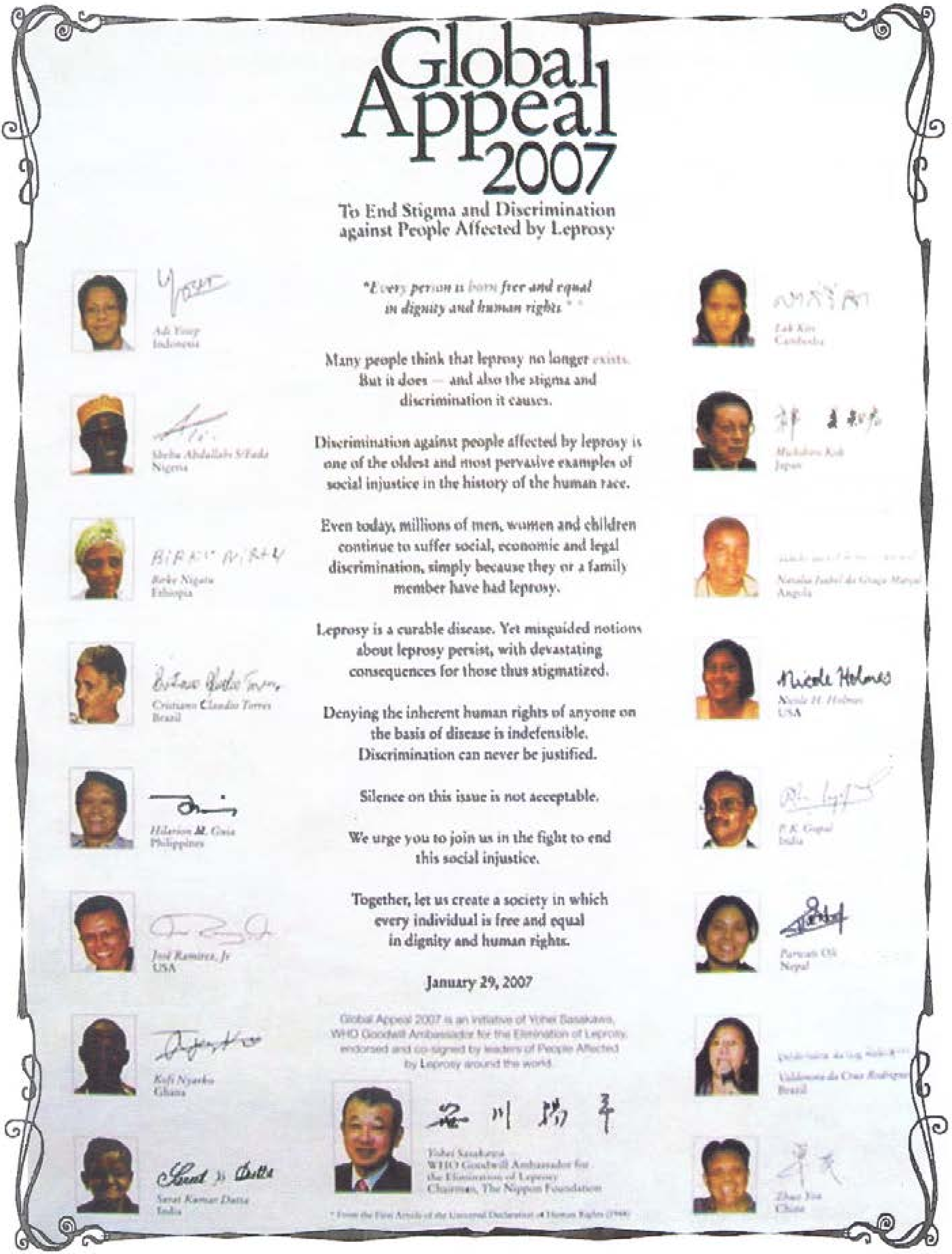
Yohei Sasakawa
Chairman, The Nippon Foundation

Desmond Tutu
Archbishop Emeritus of Cape Town
Nobel Peace Prize Laureate

R Venkataraman

R. Venkataraman
Former President of India

Elie Wiesel
President, The Elie Wiesel Foundation for Humanity
Nobel Peace Prize Laureate



Global Appeal 2007

To End Stigma and Discrimination against People Affected by Leprosy

"Every person is born free and equal in dignity and human rights." *

Many people think that leprosy no longer exists. But it does — and also the stigma and discrimination it causes.

Discrimination against people affected by leprosy is one of the oldest and most pervasive examples of social injustice in the history of the human race.

Even today, millions of men, women and children continue to suffer social, economic and legal discrimination, simply because they or a family member have had leprosy.

Leprosy is a curable disease. Yet misguided notions about leprosy persist, with devastating consequences for those thus stigmatized.

Denying the inherent human rights of anyone on the basis of disease is indefensible. Discrimination can never be justified.

Silence on this issue is not acceptable.

We urge you to join us in the fight to end this social injustice.

Together, let us create a society in which every individual is free and equal in dignity and human rights.

January 29, 2007

Global Appeal 2007 is an initiative of Yohei Sasakawa, WHO Goodwill Ambassador for the Elimination of Leprosy, endorsed and co-signed by leaders of People Affected by Leprosy around the world.

Adi Yosep
Indonesia

Shehu Abdullahi S/Fada
Nigeria

Birke Nigatu
Ethiopia

Cristiano Claudio Torres
Brazil

Hilarion M. Guia
Philippines

José Ramirez, Jr
USA

Kofi Nyarko
Ghana

Sarat Kumar Dutta
India

Lak Kin
Cambodia

Michihiro Koh
Japan

Natalia Isabel da Graça Marçal
Angola

Nicole Holmes
Nicole H. Holmes
USA

P.K. Gopal
India

Parvati Oli
Nepal

Valdenora da Cruz Rodrigues
Brazil

Zhao Yu
China

Yohei Sasakawa
WHO Goodwill Ambassador for the Elimination of Leprosy
Chairman, The Nippon Foundation

* From the First Article of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948)

GLOBAL APPEAL 2008

To End Stigma and Discrimination against People Affected by Leprosy

"To many of us, worse than the very disease is the prejudice that comes along with it." *

Leprosy is one of the world's oldest diseases.

For much of history, it was incurable.

Countless millions suffered its disfiguring effects.

Today, leprosy is easily treated with multidrug therapy.

Since the 1980s, over 16 million people have been cured worldwide.

Diagnosed early and treated promptly, leprosy leaves no trace.

Far harder to remove is the age-old stigma.

Based on ignorance and fear, society continues to discriminate against people affected by leprosy, even after they are cured.

This has devastating consequences for them and their families.

It limits their opportunities for education, employment and marriage, and it restricts their participation in community life.

Defining a person by his or her disease is unacceptable.

We appeal to society to understand the facts about leprosy.

We call for actions to end the stigma and discrimination.

We join people affected by leprosy in affirming the right of every human being to live with dignity.

January 28, 2008

* Francisco A.V. Nunes, Brazil, founder member of MORHAN (Movement to Reintegrate People Affected by Leprosy)

Irene Khan
Secretary General
Amnesty
International

Nicholas Howen
Secretary General
International Commission
of Jurists

Bryan Dutton
Director General
Leonard Cheshire
Disability

J W G J
Julio Wilfredo Guzman Jara
Chairperson
Disabled Peoples'
International

Eugen Brand
Director General
International
Movement ATD Fourth World

Elly Pradervand
Executive Director
Women's World
Summit Foundation

Richard Blewitt
Chief Executive
HelpAge
International

www.helpage.org

Barry Clarke
Chair
International
Save the Children Alliance

Yohei Sasakawa
Chairman
The Nippon
Foundation

Global Appeal 2008 is an initiative of Yohei Sasakawa, WHO Goodwill Ambassador for Leprosy Elimination, Japanese Government Goodwill Ambassador for the Human Rights of People Affected by Leprosy and Chairman, The Nippon Foundation

Global Appeal 2009 to End
Stigma and Discrimination
against People Affected by Leprosy

GLOBAL
APPEAL
2009

Global Appeal 2009 is an initiative of Yohei Sasakawa,
Chairman of The Nippon Foundation

Leprosy is a disease as old as human history.
Its disfiguring effects struck fear in people's hearts.
Patients were ostracized for lack of an effective cure.
Now a cure exists, and it's available free of charge.
Diagnosed early and treated promptly, leprosy leaves no trace.
But mistaken beliefs about the disease persist.
They perpetuate social and economic discrimination.
This discrimination causes emotional and psychological pain.
To conquer this age-old stigma, drugs alone are not enough.
All of us must be part of the social healing process.
People affected by leprosy and their families have a right to a normal life.
Denying basic human rights to someone because he or she once had a disease is wrong.
Let us all join hands to eliminate fear, discrimination, and social stigma wherever they exist.
Let the healing begin today.

His Eminence
Ammar A.
Al-Hakim

His Eminence
Archbishop
Istrinsky Arseniy

Vicar of the Holy Patriarch
of Moscow and All Russia

Sant Shri Murari
Bapuji

His Eminence
Cardinal Javier
Lozano Barragán

President,
Pontifical Council for Health
Pastoral Care, Vatican

His Holiness
The 14th Dalai Lama
of Tibet

The Very Reverend
John Robert Hall

Dean of Westminster,
United Kingdom

His Royal Highness
Prince Hassan bin
Talal of Jordan

President Emeritus,
World Conference of
Religions for Peace

The Reverend
Dr. Samuel Kobia

General Secretary,
World Council of Churches

The Reverend
Dr. Stavros Kofinas

His Eminence
Archbishop
Yukei Matsunaga

His Eminence Rabbi
Yona Metzger

The Chief Rabbi of Israel

His Eminence
Gaudencio Borbon
Cardinal Rosales

Princess Beatriz
Schulthess

His Eminence K.H.
Sahal Mahfudh

His Holiness
Tep Vong

The Most Reverend
Desmond Tutu

Yohei Sasakawa

GLOBAL APPEAL 2010

TO END STIGMA AND DISCRIMINATION AGAINST PEOPLE AFFECTED BY LEPROSY

People affected by leprosy often say that dealing with society's attitudes toward the disease is harder than dealing with the disease itself.

Leprosy is curable,
yet the problems brought on by leprosy don't end when the treatment is complete.

Many people with the disease remain marginalized
because stigma and discrimination restrict opportunities for education, training and work.

We believe that people affected by leprosy have the same rights as everyone else,
and deserve the same opportunities as everyone else.

We support the principle of social integration and economic empowerment of
people affected by leprosy.

Mr. Roger Agnelli
CEO
Vale

VALE

Mr. Mukesh D. Ambani
Chairman & Managing Director
Reliance Industries Ltd.

Reliance

Sir Richard Branson
Chairman
Virgin Management Ltd.

Mr. Philippe Camus
Co-Managing Partner
Lagardère SCA

Lagardère

Mr. Chang Zhenming
Vice Chairman & President
CITIC Group

Mr. Fujio Cho
Chairman
Toyota Motor Corporation

TOYOTA

Mr. Keshub Mahindra
Chairman
Mahindra Group

Mahindra

Mr. Mikio Sasaki
Chairman
Mitsubishi Corporation

Mitsubishi Corporation

Mr. Louis Schweitzer
Honorary Chairman and President
Renault

Mr. Ratan N. Tata
Chairman
Tata Group

TATA

Mr. Kan Trakulhoon
President and CEO
The Siam Cement Group

SCG

Mr. Tsuneji Uchida
President & COO
Canon Inc.

Canon

Dr. Daniel Vasella
Chairman & CEO
Novartis AG

NOVARTIS

Mr. William C. Weldon
Chairman & CEO
Johnson & Johnson

Johnson-Johnson

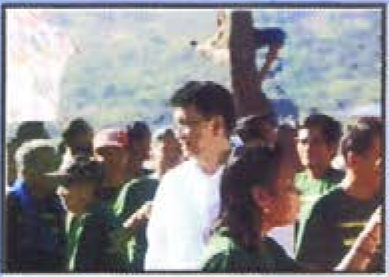
Prof. Muhammad Yunus
Managing Director
Grameen Bank

Yohei Sasakawa
Chairman
The Nippon Foundation

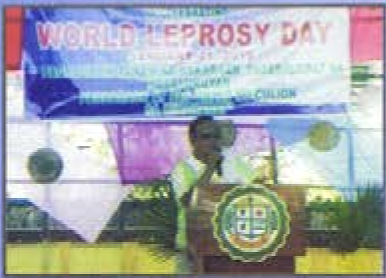
The Nippon Foundation

Launched in Mumbai on 25 January 2010, Global Appeal 2010 is an initiative of Yohei Sasakawa, WHO Goodwill Ambassador for Leprosy Elimination, Japanese Government Goodwill Ambassador for the Human Rights of People Affected by Leprosy, and Chairman of The Nippon Foundation.

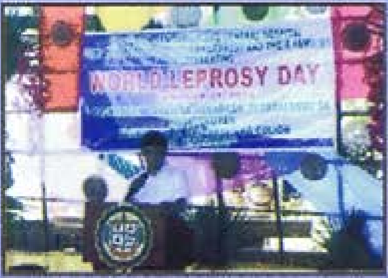
WORLD LEPROSY DAY
January 31, 2010
Culion Sanitarium & General Hospital




CULION


WORLD LEPROSY DAY
CULION


CULION


WORLD LEPROSY DAY

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

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a) Dr. Edgardo SA Javellonar - Chief of Sanitarium III, Dr. Jose N. Rodriguez Memorial Hospital (former Tala Sanitarium)
b) Dr. Edgardo Sarmiento - Chief of Sanitarium II, Bicol Sanitarium
c) Dr. Primo Joel Alvez, FPSP - Chief of Sanitarium III, Eversley Childs Sanitarium
d) Dr. Abdullah B. Dumama, Jr. – OIC, Cotabato Sanitarium/ Regional Director
e) Ms. Maria VanetteEverlast Try
f) Ms. Kay Yamaguchi
g) Ms. Hoshino NaoHuffmnan

For the inspiration ...

MR. YOHEI SASAKAWA -- Chairman, The Nippon Foundation
WHO Goodwill Ambassador for Leprosy Elimination

For funding this book project – Dignity Regained Philippines:

Sasakawa Memorial Health Foundation

The Nippon Foundation

THE EDITORS

Dr. Arturo C. Cunanan, Jr. currently Director of the Culion Sanitarium and General Hospital and Head of the Culion Leprosy Control and Rehabilitation Program which is responsible for the elimination of leprosy as a public health problem in Culion. He spearheaded the establishment of the Culion Museum and Archives and coordinates scholarship and other support projects of the Sasakawa Memorial Health Foundation in Culion. The adviser and coordinator of the Association of Culion Hansenites, Inc. assisting in the fund sourcing and management of livelihood projects of people affected with leprosy. He is also the past president of Parents-Teachers-Community Association of Balala Elementary School and Culion National High School.

He is a member of the National Technical Working Group in leprosy, has conducted several researches in leprosy and public health, a short term consultant in leprosy in the WHO Western Pacific Region since 1998, actively associated and involved in the global effort to end discrimination and social stigma against people affected with leprosy and their families, involved in the Global Preservation of Leprosy History and helps organized IDEA-Philippine Chapter an international association for Integrity, Dignity, and Economic Advancement of people affected with leprosy and their families.

He has given lectures on leprosy at National and International level and conducts trainings and evaluation of leprosy control programs in different parts of the Philippines and in Asia Pacific

Dr. Cunanan earned his Bachelors' Degree in Medical Technology – Cum Laude and Doctor of Medicine at the Pontifical University of Santo Tomas, Masters in Public Health and Hospital Administration at the University of the Philippines – Manila College of Public Health with Honors and PhD in International Health at the Nuffield Institute of Health, University of Leeds, United Kingdom as an International Ford Foundation Fellow.

He is a recipient of various local, national and International awards and in 2009 was awarded The Outstanding Filipino Awards (TOFIL Awards) in Public Health and Ten Outstanding Physician in 2009 by the JCI Senate Philippines.

Maria Perpetua A. Rosello, a graduate of Bachelor of Arts in Literature from Loyola College of Culion (LCC). She has taught Literature subjects in Tertiary for more than 10 years in her Alma Mater. She's now a candidate for a Master's Degree in Education major in Administration and Supervision.

At present, she's the Principal of the Basic Education Unit (BEU) of LCC.


WELCOME
BARANGAY LIBIS
WELCOME
CULION