

Kept from attending her husband's funeral, one housemaid persevered to earn extra income and educate her children

18 Friday
September 2015

Housemaid entrepreneur puts kids through school

By Ben Garcia

What can you do to extend the life of your dying husband? For Flor Azures, there was no choice but to depart for an overseas job. Her husband was suffering from a heart ailment called cardiomyopathy, or enlargement of the heart. She came to Kuwait when her husband fell very sick and needed proper medical treatment. But after a year of toiling for her husband and family, Flor's world crashed - her husband died.

"My husband was bedridden when I left Manila. I asked him to hold on and told him that I was willing to work hard so he could get good medical treatment and get well. I left home with a heavy heart because I knew I could probably lose my husband while I was gone, but I tried anyway - I loved my husband so much that I was willing to even give my heart to him. I had hope that he would survive the sickness, but he succumbed to the ailment," a teary-eyed Flor told Kuwait Times.

When her husband died, she thought of leaving everything in Kuwait and flying back to Manila at the earliest. "I was working as a housemaid for about a year at that time," she said. Her boss gave her two options - go back and never return, or stay and continue to help her four children. "My employer told me to stay. She said I can send money home and continue working. This way, I could help my four kids and send them to school. I really couldn't hold my tears when I heard that. I cried hard and questioned God why did I have to suffer. If I had wings, I would have flown home right away," recalled Flor.

"My employer was very nice to me. If I had gone back home to bury my husband, my children could have suffered more and starved, because I was the only breadwinner, and they would've stopped their schooling. So I stayed. I was very sad and told myself I would work hard to earn enough money," she said.

Fate

Flor accepted her fate. She spoke to her eldest daughter, explaining to her the consequences if she returned home hastily. "I assured them that I loved their dad very much. The reason why I left Manila and worked abroad was because of him, but I told them that no one will help our family except me. Yes, I will be able to see them and bury their dad if I went home, but what was important to me was their future now. Probably I surrendered the fate of my husband to God, so I told them to bury their dad and I'd visit his grave. It was a hard decision, but I asked my sister to help me and my kids to cope with our loss. My sister stayed with them while I toiled again," Flor said.

When Flor had left Manila, she had borrowed thousands of pesos from friends and some from a loan shark, which continued to accumulate interest. Her husband also had high medical bills

for his heart ailment. The Philippines is one of the most expensive places in the world for hospitalization or medical care. Healthcare spending remains low at only \$7 a person a year, plus government subsidies are being cut.

Flor worked hard day and night to send some money to her children. Her employer allowed her to work and do some side jobs outside the house. She started massage therapy service for women, and cooked and sold Filipino food. She also ventured to sell personal products used frequently by housemaids. "I used to buy undergarments and beauty products in the city and sell them to my friends working in houses. Many of my customers were neighboring housemaids. Sometimes, I sat at a corner in Kuwait City and sold food and knickknacks on the street. Mind you, I used to earn good money at least once a week during my day off," she revealed.



Hard Work

With her salary plus the income she earned from side jobs, Flor not only put her kids through school, but managed to build a house and buy a condominium in Manila. This was due to her hard work and perseverance. After five years, she decided to go back to the Philippines to finally see her kids and visit her husband's grave. "I went home and the first thing I did was to visit my husband's grave. I cried hard and asked for forgiveness for not being there during the funeral. I was like an insane person talking to him after five years. But I was relieved," she said.

During those five long years, Flor was tempted many times to remarry. "I was matched by my employer several times to Kuwaiti men and widowers. But I didn't accept this. I still loved my husband and was living for the sake of my kids and nothing more. I really proved this," she said.

When she returned from vacation, she asked her employer to transfer her visa to Article 18. "I had already served them enough years, so I was immediately released to a private hospital where I worked as a physical therapist. Again, I only worked eight hours a day, so I spent the remaining time continuing my side chores, like personal massage therapy for women, cooking Filipino food and other odd jobs," Flor said.

The fruits of her hard work are not just evident in concrete structures (like her house and flat), but she is the proud mother of her eldest daughter who is now a certified fashion designer. Her second child is graduating with a bachelors' degree in business administration, her third child is a scholar at the 'Pamantasan ng Lunsod ng Maynila', pursuing a computer engineering course, while her fourth child is in senior high school.