



Changing Colors

By KRISTEL DACUMOS-LAGORZA

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To put it bluntly, Laurence Ligier is nothing short of a saint. At 18, Laurence joined a missionary and left France for the Philippines (Ligier initially wanted to be sent to South Africa). For over 20 years, Ligier has been rescuing girls, ages five to 18, from physically and sexually abusive situations, caring for them as a sister, mother and aunt. At the Chameleon Association, the haven she built for the children in Passi City, Iloilo, Ligier educates, feeds and helps these girls rehabilitate and recover from their traumatic experiences.

“I named the haven Chameleon because a chameleon has the ability to change. With the girls, there is a change, a transformation that you see in them after their years with us. You will not only see a physical change, but their whole outlook in life has changed for the better. They go to school, they finish college and become working professionals,” Ligier shares with great pride.

Her exceptional efforts earned for Ligier the Most Outstanding Woman of the Year award in 2005 by Clarins, a civic-minded beauty company that recognizes and supports the philanthropic work of individuals. Ligier was undoubtedly overwhelmed by Clarins’ recognition and support. “I was surprised that Clarins named me Woman of the Year. At that time, I had lived in the slum area for many years and I wasn’t even using Clarins products!” she laughs. Ligier was also given the Presidential Award by President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo in 2008.

Though far from her homeland, Ligier has found family in Passi, Iloilo

But doing good is not an easy task, Ligier realized, as she found herself, her kids and the association under constant threat and scrutiny. “It was not only limited to the verbal threats,” she reveals. “But there were those who posed physical threats as well.” Ligier pulls up her sleeves and shows the scars on her arm that mark the two instances she was assaulted in Passi.

Ligier admits to having been utterly shaken when she was attacked. She was forced to ask herself, “What is my limit? Is Chameleon worth it?”

After much thought, Ligier admits, “It’s not enough to have passion for your job and to love children. The work I do takes big commitment, a lot of sacrifices. It’s full-time work. No vacation. No overtime pay. I’ve been in the Philippines for more than two decades. That’s time away from my family, my friends and my country. But I don’t regret it. I have to be responsible for them (the children), because their parents were not. The children really trust you and they entrust you (with their lives).”

With the support from institutions such as Clarins, Ligier has been able to spread awareness and expand the operations of Chameleon. “In a year, we now have about 420 children that walk through the doors of Chameleon. That is good because we are able to help more children, but on the other hand it is also bad because that means that there are still many children who are being abused.”

Ligier admits to being tired but nonetheless happy with her calling. “I didn’t choose the Philippines. I didn’t choose Iloilo. I didn’t choose to stay 20 years... but I’m thankful I was placed here and I’m happy.” ■