



The Run with Chameleon

BY GLORIA CONCEPCION H. MORALIDAD

Frail innocence runs out for help, however, the persons whom she knows and trusts are more often the people causing her sorrows – leaving innocence lost and marred for life. And still, innocence struggles with all her might against the shadows of crime.

The Philippines saw more than 5 million children engaged in economic labors of which the majority expose themselves to life-threatening operations. Sadly, these millions have yet excluded the numbers of the abandoned, neglected, physically, emotionally and sexually abused and exploited children. Many of them do not tell anyone about their state, even to their own families. Some never tell at all. How could they when most of the time it's their own family who abuses them?

“Street children. Jailed Children. Children, victims of abuse.” These predicaments moved the then 18-year old, French national, Laurence Ligier to help children especially young Filipino women who have suffered physical and sexual exploitation. She witnessed these plights herself when she visited the Philippines more than a decade ago. Seeing the conditions of the country, Laurence returned to her homeland and redirected her studies to the field of development and humanitarian action. After a diploma in sociology/ethnology, she enrolled in the International Business School and obtained a diploma in International Studies of Development Management. Laurence, then, left France and embarked to Iloilo, Philippines to build an abode for children, thus Chameleon Association was founded – this in the year 1997.

Chameleon Association Inc. battles with the shadows that these young Filipino girls have suffered sexually and physically by giving back the innocence of these

She was locked in a room for a month, starved and force-fed drugs and alcohol to ensure she was addicted and could be more easily controlled. She was often beaten unconscious for refusing to have sex with the customers.

-16 year-old girl, Subic Bay 1988 Investigation

PHOTO FROM RESURRECTION BLOG (OPENING PHOTO)



Since 1997, Laurence Ligier and the Chameleon Association has been dedicated towards helping children escape abuse and putting their lives on a better path.

PHOTOS FROM CHAMELEON ASSOCIATION INC.

children through healing and integration, guiding them to fulfill their hopes of a brighter tomorrow. The organizations have two centers in Iloilo in which these girls can enjoy being children: to laugh, smile and play – their right of childhood.

Chameleon likewise offers the girls services like educational support, counseling, medical assistance, legal support, values development and sports and artistic activities that are adapted accordingly to the situation of each girl. The children are sponsored, in which they have regular communication with their benefactors to not only know each other's state but also to form a bond which is part of the child's therapy and intervention. Because of these sponsorships, the girls have the opportunity to finish their education, up until the completion of their college studies.

After a maximum of three years or more in the center, the girls are returned to their families and reintegrated into the community. The reintegrated girls continue to be monitored by the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD), Chameleon and their sponsors until their schooling is completed. The girls are accompanied by Chameleon's social

workers who coordinate with local social workers in the vicinity where the children live. When the organizations find out that the perpetrators are within the family, they wouldn't dare to return the child to her home and risk their safety again. There are cases when the victims have girl siblings, and Chameleon pulled them out as well, because the children are likely to be abused themselves.

As a non-profit, non-stock humanitarian association, Chameleon also grants the less privileged, yet deserving children, both boys and girls, to continue studying through its Community Development in the neighboring municipalities of Passi, San Enrique and Bingawan. They also provide education fees, school uniforms, transport to school, healthcare expenses as needed. Not only that, Chameleon renders assistance to all its beneficiaries and their family through Skills Development program. This program is to empower and improve families' living standards by making them capable to become economically independent later on. Trainings on Family Relationship, Parent Effectiveness Seminar and Parents' Counseling are also conducted to educate them on parental

roles, and provide moral support, to improve the family relationship and create a healthy environment for their child. Chameleon raises awareness among the Filipino communities and authorities about child abuse and domestic violence using various channels such as the media, shows, lectures, seminars and publications.

THE VISIT

Message from the Organizers

"The fourth year BS Advertising and Entrepreneurial Management students of Central Philippine University held a one-day 'Fun Run' and exhibition fair entitled, I-RUN: ONE RUN CAN GIVE HOPE. The venue was held at the Iloilo Provincial Capitol on March 10. Our batch wanted to organize an event that would not only promote health and wellness, but also have an event that would be able to affect the lives of other people. We wanted a Fun Run that would be purposeful and meaningful for the participants and the beneficiaries as well.

This event promoted the advocacy of CHAMELEON ASSOCIATION, INC, a non-government organization, which provides comprehensive rehabilitation programs and services for sexually abused girls from Western Visayas, ages 5 to 17 years old. Their centers are located in Passi, Iloilo and they also have a dormitory which serves as a halfway house in Iloilo City. This activity aimed to raise awareness in people who were oblivious to the knowledge that there are girls who have lived under the shadows for so long. Our vision was to motivate people to take action. One run would bring hope and have the girls realize that there are people who still care."

On February 10, the team woke

up at the wee hours of morning to catch the 6:30 bus ride to Passi - though, in truth it was a bit delayed and everyone ended up taking off at a quarter to 8am. However, the two-hour drive did not wear off the spirits of the team as they reached their destination. Upon arriving at Chameleon's headquarters, there were audible, indistinct gasps of "oohh", "aahh", and "woow" from among the class members as they started rolling their cameras for the ad campaign to be made for Chameleon (featured in GMA Arangkada). Every wood and stone there oozed with serenity and every view got you closer to Mother Nature.

Everyone was greeted by Miss Gen Ceralvo, and the tour had officially started. Miss GC showed the class around the Chameleon compound while revealing the history, procedures and programs of the association. They even have a mini-shop where they sell necklaces, bangles and textile accessories.

Upon entering in one of the rooms, the team was greeted by a smiling 9 year-old girl. Gently, with tactfulness, some of team conversed with the child,

**"Crime butchers innocence to secure a throne, and innocence struggles with all its might against the attempts of crime."
Maximilien Robespierre**

asking basic questions like, "What's your name?" and "How old are you?" It was learned later that her other siblings were under the protection of Chameleon as well.

As the tour continued, the group gradually encountered some of the girls of Chameleon, and each started conversations with the children. The association's pet dachshund, Insoy, also seemed to paw itself into the hearts



Through events such as I: Run, the Chameleon Association encourages individuals to remold better future for maltreated children.

PHOTOS FROM COUNCIL OF ADVERTISING PRACTITIONERS

of the team. As the tour set off to the front yard where the playground was situated, a lot of jolly girls greeted the class, and the students even dashed off to play with them. Swing. Slide. See-saw. What truly amazed the Advertising and the Entrepreneurial students was the fact that all the girls were happy. The children wore smiles that reached their eyes and had tinkling laughter that was just so real. That wasn't improvisation, they were not being told to do so – it was just them, au naturel. These children would hold your hand, hug you, hop or skip with you and call you their “Manang.” One could even think that all of those plights didn't happen – but reality says otherwise.

Miss GC led the way to Chameleon's Butterfly Sanctuary which is lavished with luscious greens, flowers obviously, fishponds, and little bridges. There were butterfly picture booths on the corners where one can pop his or her head into and flash a shot. Out of the Sanctuary lies a grove of trees headed towards a clearing. When on the way there, a metal rustle caught the attention of many. Chameleon also has a pet monkey! Probably alarmed and frightened by the number of guests in the compound, the

monkey did not extend any “hospitality.” As the team emerged from the trees, a very mesmerizing creek beckoned them. Its blue-green waters were filled with life as little tadpoles and schools of fish sometimes jotted out of the water. Beyond the creek was Chameleon's Gymnasium where they held their sports and other artistic activities.

The Gym also serves as a circus school where it helps children to overcome their traumatic experiences and rebuild their self-esteem. There were unicycles, tella, flying trapeze, and other circus materials and equipment found there. Two girls from Chameleon showed the team how to juggle while riding a unicycle at the same time as well as sharing some moves and tips on performing circus on hoops that are above the ground.

Afterwards, everybody treaded on to a cozy, reddish stone house which serves as the dwelling place for volunteers. On a certain wall, there hangs a picture of each child taking residence at Chameleon, to which Miss GC told the team the reasons why the girls are with Chameleon – rape, incest, lasciviousness.

The roundabouts in the compound ended there, and the team moved to

unload the love-food for the association. All the Chameleon girls, staffs, House Mothers and the team gathered around the dining room to say grace. Heavy Thanks you's and goodbye's resumed as the students packed up and say “adieu” for the time being.

Dr. Lenny Rose P. Mucho stated that the team's aid to Chameleon did not only coincide with the upcoming event but as would continue in the years to come, because hopefully the two departments shall collaborate and continue to support Chameleon for all time.

Advertising student, Julienne Crispe, the Event Chairperson for I:Run, said in an interview that it would be nice to see schools, especially Central Philippine University, support Charity Institutions like Chameleon or re-introduce the concept of “Chivalry”, so that men will understand their responsibilities as protectors and keepers of order and purity.

The event followed a month after the visit with Coach Rio de la Cruz, high speed road-runner and running coach extraordinaire, to lead the race.

I-RUN: ONE RUN CAN GIVE HOPE

“It's not about winning. It's about helping Chameleon and getting fit at the same time. And look! There's Coach Rio to lead the run.” remarked by a student, known only by the name, Julie Anne.

On March 10, Saturday, as early as 5 o'clock in the morning, runners and walkers trooped to the Iloilo Provincial Capitol for the 3km Fun Run. The event attracted 300 participants (from as far as Bacolod City) and more as early joggers decided to join. Organized by the Event and Exhibition Planning Management by Dr. Lenny Rose P. Mucho, Advertising and Entrepreneurial students alike joined forces to raise funds and

donations for Chameleon Association. The organization put up their own booth to sell pieces of jewelry handmade by the girls themselves. Donation boxes were stocked up as people contributed usable clothes, children's books, educational materials and more.

An hour later, Coach Rio fired up, signaling the start of the race.

Exceptionally, five minutes afterwards, a certain Jerson Agravante dashed off to the finish line first followed by his mates, Mark Jagnao and Nolibert Sibonga respectively. In a short interview, they mentioned that being a topmost runner was their dream and all of them have heard of the event from their trainer and decided to take part in the race.

Subsequently, participants held on to their race tickets as a raffle draw also ensued on the spot. Beside of the Capitol, a photo booth was put up as runners flashed their smiles with Coach Rio.

Miss GC and some girls of Chameleon hurdled up to express their gratitude to the team for “helping spread the association's advocacy, to Coach Rio for supporting their cause, and to the runners for taking part in it, waking up at the holy hour of five o'clock to run with them, to run with Rio, to run against child abuse.”

Author's note:

You may also help the Chameleon Association by: sponsoring a child or project; volunteering for Chameleon; or even by donating cash/ usable clothes, books, educational materials and more.

You can contact them through:

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Telephone/Fax: 311-55-75

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