Bringing hope to sexually abused children

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Last week, I received a call from my sister Marisa who was in Iloilo for a mission: to check out Chameleon, a child abuse center in Passi City, Iloilo. She had a lump in her throat and was rendered speechless at the sight of 50 sexually abused children, five to 18 years old.

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passed the phone to Ivana Tocis who helps the center. Laurence Ligier, the French founder, was in Iloilo. He spent some time with the children, who also gave me some literature to educate me on the many kinds of child abuse, but specifically sexual abuse.

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Afterwards, my sister told me, “I had to compose myself. I saw a five-year-old who was raped by her father. The children looked helpless, but I saw a glimmer of hope in their eyes. They felt secure being at Chameleon, away from their predators!”

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There are many kinds of child abuse. While physical abuse is shocking because of the marks it leaves, other kinds of abuse are not obvious, such as emotional abuse, neglect, and sexual abuse, leaving deep-lasting scars. But regardless of the type of child abuse, the result is serious emotional harm. Emotional scarring has long-lasting effects throughout a child’s life, damaging a child’s sense of self, ability to have healthy relationships and ability to function at home, at work, and at school.

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Chameleon deals mostly with child sexual abuse, which is the most complicated form of abuse because of its layers of guilt and shame.

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While stories of sexual predators are constantly in the news, what disgusts me to the core of my being is the fact that the abusers are usually someone the child knows and should be able to trust—a father, a brother, an uncle, a stepfather, a neighbor. Young boys are also sexually abused, although they are left unreported due to shame and stigma. Sexually abused children are tormented by shame and guilt and oftentimes, they are made to feel responsible for the abuse or somehow made to think that they brought it upon themselves.

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KidzArt holds summer camp

Case in point: Dress designer Ito Curata was asked to judge an art contest in Marilao, Bulacan, a center in Alabang for abused young girls. An 11-year-old pregnant girl, who was raped by a stepfather, came forward with her artwork. After looking at the child’s sad interpretation of her artwork, Curata delved into her case and found out that the child’s mother sided with her rapist husband and claimed that her daughter was to blame for seducing her husband! This young girl is now traumatized not only by the rape but by the scorn her mother shows her by siding with her rapist.

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The shame of sexual abuse makes it very difficult for children to come forward, so if a child confides in you, don’t turn a blind eye and take her seriously. Bring her to a center that will take care of her and nurture her.

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Chameleon was founded by Laurence Ligier, who came to the Philippines as a missionary with the Associate Missionary of the Assumption. She was assigned in Barrio Obrero, Aklan for six months in the squatters area and lived among the squatters. Ligier said she was able to discover that there were many things the people needed. The people asked me if I could help them uplift themselves. I experienced their struggles and saw their need. I promised them that I would be back, that I had to go back to France to seek support and financial aid.

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When she came back, she travelled all over Panay to look for the center she wanted to put up and she met Mayor Jessy Palma of Passi City who offered her 3,000 sqms of land to put up the center. She has been doing work in the center for 15 years, living with the kids, learning Tagalog and Ilonggo. Unstained by serious death threats she receives, she still runs the center with Ivana Tocis. Chameleon is dependent on financial funding from abroad and among the locals.

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The objective of the organization is to change the emotionally wounded sexually abused children and make them adjust and respond to the challenges in life, to change their skin of the wounded past and view life positively. Most of the girls are empowered in their outlook after their rehab program at Chameleon.

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Interested donors may contact the center at Ivana Tocis ivana.sw@gmail.com.

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To celebrate 15 years of tireless involvement in changing the lives of more than 600 abused children, Laurence Ligier announced that the foundation will be hosting an anniversary gala on March 1 at the Manila Polo Club. World-famous French-born American chef Jacky Robert will fly in from Boston to create a delightful Filipino-French fusion menu especially for the occasion. The evening will be co-hosted by Chameleon’s godmother, KC Concepcion, and the Viscountess Corrine de Longuevadour. To raise awareness and funds for Chameleon’s valuable work, internationally renowned Filipino artists have donated several artworks for the cause. The pieces will be presented during the gala dinner and form part of a grand auction entitled “Important Filipino Art” to take place at Salcedo auctions the following week.

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For tickets to the gala, call 817-3081, 920-1293.

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For more information, visit www.chameleon-association.org.