

Manila Women's Forum

A Network of Women Professionals

February 2008

Reaching Out to Those in Need

By Maud Franssen

Our speaker (and host) on December 3 was long-time MWF member Jenny Wallum, who talked about what became her "project of life." It started 16 years ago, when Mt Pinatubo was a beautiful, lush green mountain. The Aeta tribe lived among the thick forests and worshipped the great mountain as the home of their god.

Then 15 June 1991 arrived: green turned into grey, tranquility to terror as the sleeping volcano awoke after more than 500 years. Pyroclastic material shot 25 km in the air, over one million people fled to evacuation centers. Wide rivers of lahar engulfed towns and villages and continues many years later after every heavy rainfall.

After the eruption, Jenny had the feeling that she had to do something! So she started a foundation, the E.V.A. Charity Foundation (standing for Entrepreneur Volunteer Assistance Charity Foundation). It started with one pumice stone from Mt Pinatubo, placed in a bag and sold as a souvenir, an opportunity for hundreds of people in need to help themselves.

The Aeta tribe once lived by foraging and hunting, but after the eruption they learned other livelihood skills. Jenny raises funds for livelihood loans, scholarships, and schools

through donations from individuals and groups in Manila and overseas and through microfinancing programs. These microfinancing programs involve EVA paying special needs groups to produce unique and environmentally friendly products all over the Philippines. The handicrafts

include beautiful boxes made from natural materials by the Muntinlupa Livelihood Training Center, handmade scrolls made from fine cogon grass and abaca made by the Cupertino Centre in Quezon City, and pottery with Mt. Pinatubo ash glaze made by Studio

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MWF members were treated to a heartwarming performance of Christmas songs and dancing by the Children's Cultural Group of Kanlungan Sa Er-Ma, an organization that helps children in the Ermita and Malate area.

NEXT MWF MEETING ■ **When:** 6:30 p.m. Monday 2008 February 18. **Where:** Paula Schindeler's home, 27 Cabildo Street, Urdaneta Village, Makati. **What:** Christine Dayrit, Chairperson of the Cinema Evaluation Board and international film festivals in the Philippines and a producer of several films herself, will speak about Philippine cinema, how films make the grade for international release, and recent changes in the industry. **Bring:** Something to share for the potluck dinner. **March meeting:** Mon, 2008 March 17.

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Potters in Antipolo, handmade cards and other items. These products are sold by Jenny in the small store she has at her home in Dasmariñas Village, Silahis in Intramuros, the American Embassy gift shop, the ADB bookshop and a few other small outlets.

Jenny didn't only help these people with a new way of earning money, but invested in education. Scholarships have allowed numerous Aetas to finish college, something unheard of in the past. The first Aeta lawyer is a woman, who is now working for the government to help improve conditions for indigenous people. She also started fundraising to build schools for the children affected by the eruption of Mt Pinatubo. Now there are 40 TOEs (Traditional Origins Ethnic Education Schools) where more than 4,000 children are helped to get a good education. EVA raises funds for school construction and also supplies, including indigenous language books. Hundreds of elementary school children have graduated since the project started in the year 2000.

The foundation, with the help of hundreds of volunteers and donors, has become "quietly" successful, as Jenny keeps her focus on the people in need and maintains her policy of having no paid staff. This has kept its efforts small, but very focused. Several years ago Jenny's hard work was recognized by the Queen of England, who named her a "Member of the British Empire" (MBE). And EVA was recently given a "Best Practice" award for "its outstanding

contribution towards improving the living environment" by the Dubai Municipality and the United Nations Human Settlements Programme.

Nowadays Jenny goes at least twice a month to one of the TOEs and welcomes volunteers to come along. Please check the website: www.evacf.org if you want more information about the foundation, and how you can help!

Kanlungan sa Er-Ma Ministry, Inc.

To bring some Christmas cheer to the MWF meeting, we started it off with Christmas carols sung by the Kanlungan Children's Cultural Group. The Kanlungan Sa Er-Ma is an organization founded 19 years ago to help children in the Ermita and Malate area who are abandoned, lost and live as street children. This organization has a mission to serve, protect and develop children and families-in-need through a holistic approach to improve their well-being and quality of life. This center has been a great support to a lot of children. Jenny is a long time friend of the group, since she began volunteering with the group in 1989 and continues to support them.

One of the activities of this center is a dancing/singing group. They have performed an original musical in which they show how they feel, think and act. It also demonstrates their life in the streets as well as their aspirations, their need for love and to be cared for. These children gave a very heartwarming performance of singing and dancing Christmas songs. The

choreography and the singing were very good.

If you want to know more about this organization and how you can help, go to their website:

www.kanlungansaerma.org.

It was a lovely evening, thanks to Jenny and the children of Kanlungan. We were inspired and impressed by their success, and wish them all the best. We also congratulate Kanlungan Sa Er-Ma on its 19th anniversary. ■

Manila Women's Forum

Manila Women's Forum (MWF) is a cross-cultural network for women. It provides opportunities to build friendships, to talk to women of various cultures, and to share information about resources. Our meetings are intended to provide intellectual stimulation and lead to personal and professional development. All women are welcome to join. The current officers are **Lisa Lumbao**, Chair, Programs, Treasurer, and Newsletter. **Shari Virjee**, MWF Membership Message Board and Assistant Chair. **Cecilia Leung**, Programs. **Lisa Stuart**, MWF Membership Message Board Moderator. **Beaulah P. Taguiwalo**, Newsletter, Website.

Cost of membership is P300 per year. Members receive a copy of the current mailing list in addition to the newsletter, which is also sent to non-members. A contribution is collected at each monthly meeting: P20 for members, and P40 for non-members. Please contact Lisa Lumbao at Tel. 813-0168, or at lumbao@mozcom.com for more information about MWF.

Visit our website – a work in progress
www.geocities.com/manilawomensforum

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