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# Manila Women's Forum

A Network of Women Professionals

February 2012

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## Turning Trash into Livelihoods for Women

By Poonam Dhavan and Lisa Kircher Lumbao

**A**n artist with a bold vision and compassion for the less fortunate has created an organization called "INVISIBLE Sisters," a social initiative that trains poor women in Manila to crochet discarded plastic shopping bags into fashion accessories such as purses and tote bags. American artist Ann Wizer founded the organization, but was out of the country in December so INVISIBLE Sisters Director Aimee Gloria and Development Advisor David Jay Green (who is also Ann's husband) spoke during the MWF meeting last December 5.

Ann began creating art pieces from trash when she lived in Japan to raise awareness about our relationship with the environment and the volume and type of garbage we produce on a daily basis. She then moved to Manila when David began working at the Asian Development Bank, and had her first art exhibit at the Thomas Jefferson American Center in Makati in 1990. She became an environmental activist,



*Each week they trickle in . . . settle down, we chat, joke around, share snacks, and then get to work. Stitch after stitch, they share ideas, encourage one another and learn.*

making costumes out of garbage and getting involved with environmental groups in the Philippines.

When David was temporarily posted to Indonesia in 2000, she started a nongovernmental organization (NGO) called XSProject that works with waste pickers and small micro-enterprises to

make products out of trash. Although relatively successful, Ann worried that XS would easily fall into the trap of making "sympathy" products: you don't like them very much; you just buy them for charity. She felt one solution was to bring the art back into  
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**FEBRUARY MWF Meeting** ■ **When:** Monday, 2012 February 20, 6:30 p.m. ■ **Where:** Home of Mary Garlicki, 1679 Dasmariñas Avenue, Dasmariñas Village, Makati. ■ **What:** Mercedes Zobel, artist, philanthropist, and trustee of Women for Women International in London, is in Manila to help connect women and children's charities, NGOs, and various advocacies with a website she has launched. Come and learn how you and your cause can connect with many others around the world. Mercedes will explain the concept, mechanics and possible leads to funding opportunities. ■ **Bring:** Something to share for the potluck dinner. ■ **March Meeting:** Monday 2012 March 19.

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 this type of effort. When they moved back to Manila in 2005, she created INVISIBLE Sisters. She provided urban poor mothers and grandmothers with weekly skills training workshops so they can earn income from crocheting

and knitting waste into new creations. They use computer wires, used plastic bags, hard drives, mother boards, cassette and video tapes, and a random variety of unseen factory waste to make bags and purses in styles that retailers and customers like. They produce

different standard products for retail markets but also strive to come up with one of a kind, beautiful items.

Aimee became the Director of INVISIBLE Sisters a year ago. She has the distinction of being the first female pilot in the country, having flown for Philippine Airlines for 10 years until the 1998 strike. She then became active with NGOs that work with malnourished children and livelihood programs in some communities, such as making useful things out of foil and newspapers (bags made from woven newspapers are now being sold in SM Kultura). Aimee is especially interested in the environmental aspect of Invisible Sisters' work.

INVISIBLE Sisters provides handmade bags to several stores, including SM Kultura, Silver Works (jewelry) and Figlia (shoes). They try to partner with companies that have a similar philosophy as theirs. They have bins in Ayala malls where people can put their used plastic shopping bags for recycling, which has been very successful.

They have opened a training center and showroom in Taguig in partnership with Gawad Kalinga and are working to start a similar center at De La Salle University. One goal for 2012 is to meet the eye care needs of the many women who are working with the group. In 2012 they also plan to do surveys of companies to assess what wastes they have so they can determine which ones they can use to

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**Ann Wizer**, visual artist, activist, environmentalist  
*"I work with garbage—because there is just too much of it."*



*"We need to understand our world has reached a tipping point. We need to make a pivotal change in how we consider and manage all of the stuff of life. We're seeing that there is no 'away' in throwing away and what you toss in the ocean comes back with the next tide.*

*As an artist, I examine all kinds of materials for their properties, resilience, inner stories. In doing so, I have chosen to work with debris. If you listen, trash speaks of our values; each object and substance speaks of its origin. We need to listen, as our landfills (which have exceeded their capacities thousands of times over) have become virtual cities unto themselves."*



# A Revolution in Eating

By Victoria Hoffarth

*Kitchen  
Revolution  
owner and  
“chief  
vegetable  
whisperer”  
Marie  
Gonzalez*



**A**re we really what we eat? Last January 16, Marie Gonzalez, owner and “chief vegetable whisperer” of Kitchen Revolution reminded us that we are indeed what we eat. She gave a talk entitled “Vegan in 30 Minutes” which covered both vegetarian and vegan philosophies and diets. She believes that animal products are hazardous to the environment and one’s health and that a plant-based diet promotes healthy, disease-free, long lives.

AHIMSA, a Sanskrit term meaning non-harming or non-injuring, preaches reverence for life (i.e., all sentient life), hence the abstinence from animal products. It encourages integrity of

thought, word, and deed. Above all, it searches for understanding and truth, promoting a mastery over oneself and compassion for others.

First came the teasers: did you know that watermelon relieves mental depression? That lettuce cures alcoholism and tames lust? More broadly, Marie informed us that a plant-based vegan diet is 100% cholesterol free, is low in fat and high in fiber, and contains a large amount of anti-oxidants. Among the many diseases it helps prevent are cancer, obesity, cardiovascular disease, kidney and gallstones, and osteoporosis.

As to the issue of where a balanced diet could come from, she reasons that protein need not come from meat—that tofu, beans, and nuts are likewise good  
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produce products that the company can then use (and be proud of).

To learn more about INVISIBLE Sisters, visit their website at [www.invisiblesisters.org](http://www.invisiblesisters.org) or contact Aimee at [acgloria17@gmail.com](mailto:acgloria17@gmail.com). ■

*“We started in my garage with a pile of colored wires from computers, used dry cleaner bags, and the supply of old plastic bags.”*

*Below left: INVISIBLE Sisters founder Ann Wizer and Director Aimee Gloria*



*(A Revolution . . . from page 3)*  
sources of protein. These are also rich in fiber, calcium, and iron—add raisins and cashew nuts to that. Leafy green vegetables, walnuts, and flax seeds are especially rich in omega 3 fatty acids. Carbohydrates can come from whole grains, vegetables, and sweet potatoes. Marie says that we need to get our nutrients from food, not supplements—eating more plant-based food definitely means consuming more nutrients.

She explained the importance of maintaining the right pH levels in our bodies, so we become neither too alkaline nor too acidic. Acidity promotes a breeding ground for bad bacteria, fungi, yeast, and hence, sickness; unfortunately, it is much easier to become too acidic than too alkaline. Acidic food includes red meat, eggs, shellfish, cheese, soda, beer, sugar, grains, beans, and legumes—and anything processed or fried.

On the other hand, alkaline food includes vegetables, fruit, fruit and vegetable juices, seaweed, mushrooms, miso, and tea.

Then came the “Do’s and Don’ts.” First the Don’ts, as follows: meat/meat products (e.g., pork, beef, all forms of dairy products—milk, cheese, ice cream, yogurt); poultry (e.g., chicken, eggs); fish and seafood.

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*Marie: “I have a passion for good food that tastes amazing, nourishes the body, and is gentle on the earth. . . . I share recipes . . . and tips on eating that will benefit you, the planet, and the animals.”*

**MWF Newsletter**  
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Then the Do’s, as follows: fruits; vegetables (all kinds of colors); beans; nuts; mushrooms; tofu; coffee and tea; wine; rice and cereals (so long as they are not mixed with milk or eggs).

For those of us who say, “Yes, the spirit is strong but the flesh is weak,” Marie gave the following tips:

- Don’t do it all at once: first, go vegetarian for one meal a day, then two meals, then all three. Give yourself time, say, three weeks. And keep eating certain foods you think you can’t do without until you feel ready to drop them.

- Research appetizing recipes: check out vegetarian cookbooks and/or check online for ideas, e.g., [www.theppk.com](http://www.theppk.com); [www.vegweb.com](http://www.vegweb.com); [www.fatfreevegan.com](http://www.fatfreevegan.com); [www.compassionatecook.com](http://www.compassionatecook.com) and Marie’s website, <http://kitchenrevolution.ph>

- Make your dishes look attractive; create a salad that wants to be eaten using the colors of the rainbow: red sweet pepper, orange squash, yellow corn, green string beans, white onions, red beets, and purple aubergine

- Green leafy vegetables are the most nutritious among the vegetables, so eat these in abundance

- If you’re too busy to eat your vegetables, drink them (we were all treated to a drink of mixed fruit and vegetables from Sugarleaf, which was truly one of those things you write home about!)

Marie ended her talk by giving us a clue as to what a day in the life of a vegan is like.

Breakfast: Banana oat pancakes with

muscovado syrup and walnuts; soymilk and coffee

Lunch: Salad of romaine, carrots, singkamas, tomatoes, avocado, mango, and sprouts with black beans and lime vinaigrette; slice of whole-wheat pita bread

Dinner: Tofu vegetable stir-fry over brown rice; hummus dip with carrot, cucumber, and singkamas sticks

Marie teaches cooking classes, which you can learn about on her website: <http://kitchenrevolution.ph> or visit her on Facebook: [www.facebook.com/kitchenrevolution](http://www.facebook.com/kitchenrevolution).

## Manila Women’s Forum

**Manila Women’s Forum (MWF)** is a cross-cultural network for women. It provides opportunities to build friendships, talk to women of various cultures, and 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; **Julia Holz**, Treasurer and Membership; **Beulah P. Taguiwalo**, Newsletter; **Lisa Stuart**, Message Board Moderator; **Evelyn Mendiola**, Membership; **Shari Virjee Tañada**, Message Board; **Caroline Wright**, Message Board; **Camille Dalmacio**, Message Board.

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 P50 for non-members. For more information about MWF, please contact Lisa Lumbao at Tel. 813-0168, or at [lumbao@mozcom.com](mailto:lumbao@mozcom.com).