

Over fifteen years ago I met Vicki Tan at the Wholistic Women's retreat held in Santa Barbara, CA. She was a dynamic and committed woman. Her goal in life was to serve the women and children of her native island of Cebu. Her passion and commitment was the spiritual and emotional foundation of Women, Development and Earth Foundation (WODEEF).

Each year for the next ten years, Vicki and I would meet at the women's retreat. She would bring clothing, jewelry, and cards made by the women of Cebu to sell at the retreat. Each year our friendship grew a little more and her stories of the struggles of these women tugged a little more on my heartstrings.

In February 2000, upon the invitation of Susan Maloney, SNJM and Catherine Ferguson, SNJM I traveled with four other women, to visit the St. Euphrasia Center in Cordova, Cebu to meet the women of Cebu face-to-face. As soon as my feet entered the Center, I felt like I was home! I will never forget the joy of meeting the women whom I immediately considered my sisters: Corletta, Suzette, and 50 others. We smiled, talked, hugged, ate, prayed and danced together. The spirit of love was bouncing off the walls and each other!

I'll always remember:

- Corletta coming up to me and thanking me for supporting her daughter with a scholarship, and asking me to continue to do so. I remember holding her daughter's hand for a long time.
- Visiting my sisters in their poor, wooden homes. With much pride they showed us how their piglets were growing and where their sewing machines were tucked away in a little corner of their already small home.
- Seeing the fisher folks standing in the water all day and bringing back so little fish to live on. We meet in their lodge, and the leader sang so proudly about the history and stories of the many generations of fisher folks.

My journey was a very moving and humbling experience to me. I have been blessed with so much and to see all that poverty was overwhelming at times! Today, when I wear the clothes or jewelry that my sisters made, I feel very connected to them even though we are thousands of miles apart. I feel proud that my husband Richard and I have supported WODEEF all these years. As the internationally known, Mother Teresa said,

“We can do no great things, only small things with great love. Together we can all make a difference in this world.”

I encourage each of you to contribute to WODEEF/USA and join in our efforts to help and support the lives of many families.

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