



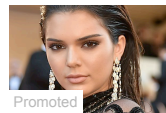
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Pangasinan proud of own 'Cinderella'

By: [Gabriel Cardíñoza](#) - @inquirerdotnet Philippine Daily Inquirer / 12:30 AM May 14, 2017

LINGAYEN, PANGASINAN—Rebecca Bustamante could be described as a modern-day Cinderella, and not because she had a fairy godmother and a prince to save her from a cruel stepmother.

Rather, like Cinderella, Bustamante was able to rise above her circumstances and live happily ever after.

Bustamante's grit and determination helped her become a leading business leader in Asia.

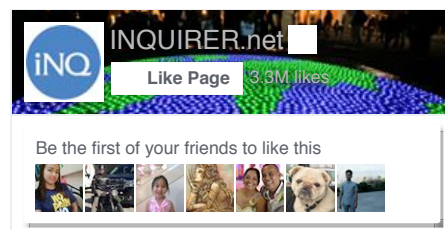
"I am where I am now because I knew my goals and I had the passion to achieve my goals," said Bustamante, 51, president of Chalre Associates, one of the leading recruiters of managers and executives for multinational companies in Asia and the Pacific.

She is also president of the Asia CEO Forum, a regular business event in the Philippines.

Bustamante, who grew up in the coastal town of Dasol in Pangasinan, was the guest of honor during the recent 437th Agew na Pangasinan (Pangasinan Day) celebration here.

As a young girl, Bustamante said she sold "pan de sal" each morning so she could buy a kilogram of rice.

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“We were 11 [siblings], and I’m the seventh [in the brood]. My elder brothers did not have proper jobs. They drank, they smoked, they fought. That’s what they used to do every day,” Bustamante said in her speech during the commemorative program.

“This was what I saw when I was a child. But it did not matter because I wanted to help my family, especially my younger siblings, who were very young. We never complained, even if our father was a drunkard,” she said.

While in Grade 5 at Dasol Central School, Bustamante said she worked as a maid for a family.

“I cleaned the house and worked as saleslady in their store. I learned many things about business from them,” she related.

After completing high school at the Don Marcelo Jimenez Memorial High School in Dasol, she worked at a factory in Bataan, where she attended classes at the Polytechnic University of the Philippines there.

She was forced to quit and go back home when her mother fell ill.

“This was the first turning point in my life. My mother was sick and we didn’t have money,” she said.

With the help of Dr. Edgar Espinosa, Bustamante’s mother was taken to a hospital in Dagupan City. But a doctor soon told Bustamante that her mother did not have much time left.

“I ran to the [hospital’s] chapel. That was all I could do at that time. And I asked help from God Almighty. I cried for an hour. Then I went back to the room and told her: ‘Mommy, the doctor said you’re now okay. Let’s go home,’” Bustamante said.

It was a grueling 90-kilometer tricycle ride from Dagupan City to Dasol.

On her death bed, Bustamante’s mother made her daughter promise to look after her younger siblings.

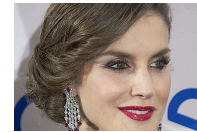
“I told her, ‘Mommy, I will do everything to take care of them.’ When I said that, she rested in peace,” Bustamante said.

After her mother’s burial, Bustamante worked at the Rural Bank of Dasol as a janitress. She also became both mother and father to her younger siblings aged 15, 14, 9 and 6.

“Then I found out that our house was mortgaged for P25.000. with



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interests already reaching more than P100,000 at that time. And I was only making P800 a month,” Bustamante said.

“But what should I do? Am I going to complain or am I going to find solutions? That’s when I decided to work in Singapore as a domestic helper,” she said.

She would leave for Singapore a year later, spending money she borrowed from her boss at the bank.

While in Singapore, Bustamante decided she wanted to be the best

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“I worked hard. It was tough, but it was a domestic helper [in Singapore] for four years,” she said.

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She then attended college at the Open University of Singapore Institute of Management and finished a course in accounting.

Bustamante moved to Canada after three and a half years to work as a nanny. “When I reached Toronto, I had a goal again: To be a nanny for two years. It’s because you need to work for two years before you get your permanent residence or open permit,” she said.

Because she was allowed to do part-time jobs, Bustamante said she sold kitchenware, among other things. She also pursued graduate studies in accounting and marketing at the Ryerson University in Toronto.

Bustamante was 27 when she married Robert Mills, with whom she has two sons.

“At that time, I already had a business, my siblings were already in Canada, and I had paid off all our debts. I was also able to build a seven-bedroom house in Dasol,” Bustamante said.

She said she and her husband decided to establish their company in the Philippines because she wanted to help the country attract more investors.

“We started the Asia CEO Forum. We had two goals: The short-term goal is to make the Philippines a business hub in Asia. And as you can see now, the Philippines is No. 1 in business process outsourcing in the world,” she said.

The long-term goal is to make the Philippines a first world country before 2030.

“We can start this by doing what needs to be done to be successful. Do it for yourself, do it for your family, do it for your town. If all of us are successful, the Philippines will be a first-world country even before 2030,” Bustamante said.