

## Tuberculosis made me blind

My name is Louie Zepeda. Having Tuberculosis that made me blind at the age of 24, was a nonstop nightmare. Every morning when I wake up, I would still get surprised that I am in this situation. If only I can rip off what is keeping me to see what is in front. It was a struggle for me not to see my face in the mirror. All of my clothes, make-up, jewelry felt worthless.

I even had difficulties if I am still wearing the proper clothing when I just wait for the day to end at home, attend the church ceremonies, or just spend the afternoon crying at the near park. I got my hair super short because I didn't see the need to comb it anymore. I started to not talk to my boyfriend because I was so ashamed of my looks and disability. my mother also told me that I will just have to accept that all blind women will just be left by the men. I will just have to always stay inside the house until I grow old. My parents also didn't put me to disability schools and rehabilitation, after they heard stories of blind women being sexually harassed by other students. I learned all the blind ways, started to take care of myself, and remember my needs as a woman.



I still had the opportunity to get a scholarship after losing my chance to be an Architect. This made me show my parents that I can still live a normal life. I took off and rented an apartment near a government office, where I got a job as a Consultant. I learned how to feed myself, cooked with the use of an electric cooking pot, washed my clothes, pay the bills online, walk to the office with the help of officemates who are also neighbors and do my scholarship at the same time all by myself. I started doing check-ups and learned that my ability to conceive is difficult because of my PCOS Poly Cystic Ovarian Syndrome condition. This became severe because of the effects of my TB Meningitis. Not having my cycle for a year during treatment, made my ovaries have the worst case of PCOS. I did what the doctors advised and just crossed my fingers that ill is normal once the time comes. It's better to have kids than to live alone blind for the rest of my life.

I am fortunate to still be with my boyfriend and now husband. But when I was pregnant with our daughter, there were a lot of humps along the way. The doctor who was checking me during pregnancy told me that I shouldn't have tried to be a mom because I have a history of TB. A lot of the neighbors told me that it's dangerous to take a responsibility of being a mom now that I'm blind. The Filipinos have a culture that totally relies on the mother, and my situation looks very impossible.

Now, I have a four-year-old daughter, who is said to be very pretty. I still do hope that one day I will get to see her, and just be amazed how she enjoys her life as much as possible every single day.

