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Student Profiles: Ning Ocampo, Loyola Marymount University

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Student Profile

Going Bald for Guate

By Carolyn Quinn

During two convocation hours in April 2005, the attention of the passersby on Loyola Marymount University's Alumni Mall focused on a single fundraiser.

"They had crowds of maybe 100 or more people standing in a circle, watching different people get their heads shaved," said Mark Potter, assistant director of the Center for Service and Action.

To raise money for the construction of a women's center in Guatemala, eight students had volunteered to shave their heads—for every \$100 raised, another student went bald. The fundraiser was called "Go Bald for Guate."

The inspiration was Ning Ocampo, bald as a result of alopecia, who decided to stop wearing her wig during the spring break service project in Guatemala.

Luningning A. Ocampo has been involved in a variety of activities at LMU. A biology major, member of the honors program, she also participated in CLC and Sursum Corda, a service organization.

The decision was not made immediately. "On some days she wore a hat or bandanna to keep the wig on," said Pam Rector, director of the Center for Service and Action, staff representative on the trip. However, it became inconvenient for her to continue wearing it, since "the major form of transportation is riding in the back of an open pickup truck, standing up and holding onto support bars," said Rector. "She realized that she couldn't hold onto the frame, take a picture, and hold her hair at the same time," said Katie Mitchell. "She said, 'screw it, I can't



Ning Ocampo

Loyola Marymount University

take it anymore,' and she took it off."

Ning's decision was well received by both the community she was visiting and her fellow students. In San Lucas Tomilán, "A lot of the people who actually stopped to talk to me were saying, 'yeah, you know, we just wanted to make sure you weren't sick, but we think you have a beautiful head,'" said Ning.

Likewise, the other LMU students reacted positively. "Our group was supportive of her being without her hair," said Mitchell. "It was like, 'I'd go bald for you, I'd shave my head for you.'"

"For so long, I was deathly afraid," Ning said. "I wouldn't go to the beach because my hair might fall, I wouldn't go in the water. If it was windy, I hated it. All these things—like roller coasters—I could never enjoy."

"I started thinking, I'm not even sick, I don't even have leukemia. There's so many things I can do with my healthy

body that they can't do, that it's an insult that I'm not letting myself do just because of this wig," she said. "I need to just suck it up and just go out there because I can."

"The 'Go Bald for Guate' campaign came from the group," said Rector. "Ning said she would come back to LMU and not wear her wig, and asked the guys if they would go bald to be in solidarity with her. They said yes. It initially wasn't an idea to raise money; it was an idea to support Ning. Sometime during the trip we thought of the fundraising aspect of it all."

"It works on a couple of levels," said Potter. "At once, it was a gesture to the community in Guatemala, saying, 'we don't mind going through the temporary humility of having

shaved heads or the attention that brings us, because we know that by doing it we can raise money for people who are really in need.'" Two girls and a rugby player whose long hair had earned him the nickname Sampson were among those who shaved their heads for the fundraiser. "Go Bald for Guate" raised \$3,000.

Ning graduated—sans wig—on May 7, 2005. She is considering a few options for her future, including medical school. One thing is certain—the experience Ning had with her group in Guatemala will stay with her. "Every morning when I wake up and I question, 'am I going to wear my hair today?' I just think of them and say, 'no way, I can't do it.'"

Carolyn Quinn is a history major at Loyola Marymount University.