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An Anihan Alumna's Journey: Grit, Grace and Gratitude

Marisol Manjares shares how faith, family, and determination carried her from humble beginnings to become an executive area chef in one of Metro Manila's top restaurant groups.

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TWELVE YEARS AGO, a young woman from Barangay Punta, Calamba City, stepped into Anihan

Technical School with big dreams and very little else.

Marisol Manjares, one of eight siblings, grew up with parents who had no permanent jobs. There were days without electricity or running water, and meals were often stretched thin. But even then, she believed, “*Panandalian lang ito... makaka-ahon din kami.*” (This is temporary... we will overcome.)

Marisol is now Executive Area Chef at *Wild Flour Hospitality Group*, one of Manila’s most respected restaurant brands. She worked her way up—trainee, line cook, junior sous chef, sous chef, chef de cuisine, and finally area chef. “Nothing came easy,” she admits, “but with faith, hard work, and a grateful heart, everything became possible.”

Celebrating her milestone of 10 years at *Wild Flour*, a decade after her graduation from Anihan in 2015, she

looks back on her journey, and summarizes it in **five lessons** that shaped her life:

1 - Family as inspiration.

“Lahat para sa kanila,” (Everything is for them.) she says. Growing up poor made them closer and more determined. *“Kung hindi namin naranasan ang mga hirap noong nakaraan, hindi kami magsusumikap na magkakapatid.” (If we had not experienced those difficulties in the past, we siblings would not have worked hard.)* Today, they own four small homes, several modest vehicles, and 3 siblings are working abroad. “Success is sweeter when it lifts everyone with you,” Marisol reflects.

2 - Discover your strengths.

Academics were never her best arena, but she found her element in the kitchen. *“Alam kong masipag*

ako,” (I know that I am hard-working) she laughs. At Anihan (2013–2015), she sharpened her culinary skills, earning a National Certificate in Cookery, Bread and Pastry Production, and Food & Beverage Services. “After graduation, pitong araw lang ako nagpahinga at nagumpisa na akong magtrabaho sa Wild Flour Restaurant, sa Bonifacio Global City (BGC).” (I had just seven days of rest, then I started working at Wild Flour Restaurant, in Bonifacio Global City (BGC).”

3 - Convert your work into prayer.

Marisol believes the secret to good food is simple: *lutong may puso* (cooking with heart.) Inspired by St. Josemaría Escrivá and the spirit of Opus Dei, she learned that all work, no matter how ordinary, can be holy when offered to God. She celebrates St. Josemaría’s birthday and feast day each year, finding occasions to share

with her friends and colleagues his message of sanctifying daily work.

4 - Be proud of Anihan.

“Basta Anihan graduate, pasok agad sa trabaho!” (If you are an Anihan graduate, you land a job immediately) she shared in a speech to the 2023 graduating batch in Anihan. During her first job interview at *Wild Flour*, the executive chef asked only one question: *“When can you start?”*

That’s how trusted Anihan graduates are—known for skill, character, and reliability. “Anihan felt like family,” she recalls. *“Naalala ko noong ako’y baguhan pa lamang, ang mga nakasama ko na graduates din ng Anihan ay nagsilbing pamilya ko doon sa restaurant.”* (I remember that when I was still a newbie, my fellow Anihan graduates in the restaurant treated me as family.) Now, she tries to give that same support to the fresh

graduates entering the team in *Wild Flour*.

5 - Put God first.

For Marisol, this is the foundation of everything. “*Gawing sentro ng buhay ang Panginoong Maykapal, at tiyak ang inyong tagumpay.*” (*Make God our Lord the center of your life, and your victory is assured.*) she says.

Marisol is able to enjoy precious time with her parents and looks forward to her next dreams: putting up her own bakeshop or café, getting married, and starting a family.

For her, Anihan will always be where she learned that grit, faith, and gratitude can turn even the humblest beginnings into a life of purpose and success.

Anihan, a technical school established in 1986 by professional women of Opus Dei, continues its mission of

*developing young women from
families of limited resources to
become successful professionals in the
hotel, restaurant and food industry*

Michelle C. Salon

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