



## FOLLOWING THE SWEET ROAD TO SUCCESS

***Bagoong* (fish paste) may evoke a strong smell for some. But for Nanay Teresita Valdez, the National Winner in the 12<sup>th</sup> Citi Microentrepreneurship Awards, it is the most fragrant scent in the world.**

"*Bagoong* has been my life," said the 55-year-old entrepreneur.

Indeed, it had been an arduous four-decade journey for her and her husband Tatay Manny.

At 13, Nanay Teresita dropped out of school due to poverty, and worked at a Navotas factory, removing fish heads for the company's *bagoong* product line.

Despite not having taken any food technology course in her life, she figured out a recipe that would prolong the shelf life of the *bagoong*. Her supervisor demanded for the recipe, but she refused and made her quit her factory job. The next couple of years proved to be the most difficult.

"We had nothing," she said. "I would go to the pier and buy 15 kilos of powdered milk, put it in separate containers, then sell it to friends at a profit. I would cook and sell rice cakes.

I did everything to survive."

In San Jose Del Monte, Bulacan, where they set up a backyard *bagoong* business in 2005, their neighbors filed a petition with the barangay to stop their operations. "They said, 'Maybe you're just a front for making shabu,'" she narrated. She and Tatay Manny chose not to give up their business despite the many obstacles.

They were already making *bagoong* for export in 2007 when they faced their most daunting challenge.

"Our biggest client couldn't pay for their order, which amounted to around P2 million," Nanay Teresita recalled. "Filing a court case was an option, but we knew even then we couldn't recover our investment."

With no capital to move around, Nanay Teresita and Tatay Manny had no choice but to return to being employees for a company in Taguig.

She found out about TSPI after a commotion in front of her house, where many other *Nanays* would regularly meet, piqued her curiosity. Along with a group, she secured an initial P10,000 loan from TSPI, which she put into her *bagoong* business.

With fresh capital and her intimate knowledge of the business, coupled with various trainings and character building sessions that she got from TSPI, Nanay Teresita's *Viaña Food Condiments* started to flourish in 2013.

Today, her company makes up to 48,000 *bagoong* bottles a month, and has 22 employees. Her products find their way to Alaska and New Zealand, and will soon be in the United States, after securing the Bureau of Food and Drugs accreditation. This incredible story of perseverance earned for Nanay Teresita the top prize in the 12<sup>th</sup> Citi Microentrepreneurship Awards.