

# A Christmas Blessing

## The Christmas Factory

*Hypertension ended a wife's daily routine along Manila's horrendous vehicular traffic and gave her time to appreciate her own talents in handicraft, which has rewarded her with a totally new but fulfilling business.*



### COMMITMENT TO THE CUSTOMERS

"Now, we're the only store that fixes your previously bought items free of labor charge. You'll only pay for the materials needed," Jo Santos explains on how she values their customers' trust.

Sometimes, one has to empty her cup to get it filled up, or put an end to a long journey to find her true path.

This is the wonderful story of Jo Santos and her husband Tonyboy, who run The Christmas Factory in Sampaloc, Manila. This Santa wonderland makes one rush across the street to see what's in store during, well, the Yuletide season.

The three-story establishment is a showroom, not for elves packing Santa Claus' gifts for kids, but for various versions of St. Nick—from bite-size to life-size. There's Santa on a rope, on a rocking chair, and even on a parachute. There's also a Santa reading a book while sitting on a moon. His clones just come in numerous colorful outfits, including purple, blue, and yellow.

Selling Christmas décor was not Jo's first foray into business. She used to brave Manila's daunting vehicular traffic to drive her children and other kids to San Beda and La Consolacion schools as part of her family's shuttle bus service business.



### BRIGHTENING UP THE HOLIDAYS

The wide range of Christmas decors, each with its own story to tell, makes Jo realize that leaving the shuttle bus service business was not a bad idea after all.

*"You just have to love what you're doing... The number one secret is being sincere in what you're telling your customers. Be honest."*

She still did driving duties even after having increased her fleet to five, always waking up early to get the kids to school on time. And to unwind from such a stressful routine, she dabbled in making decors, which she initially did for her children.

### TRANSITION TO HANDICRAFTS

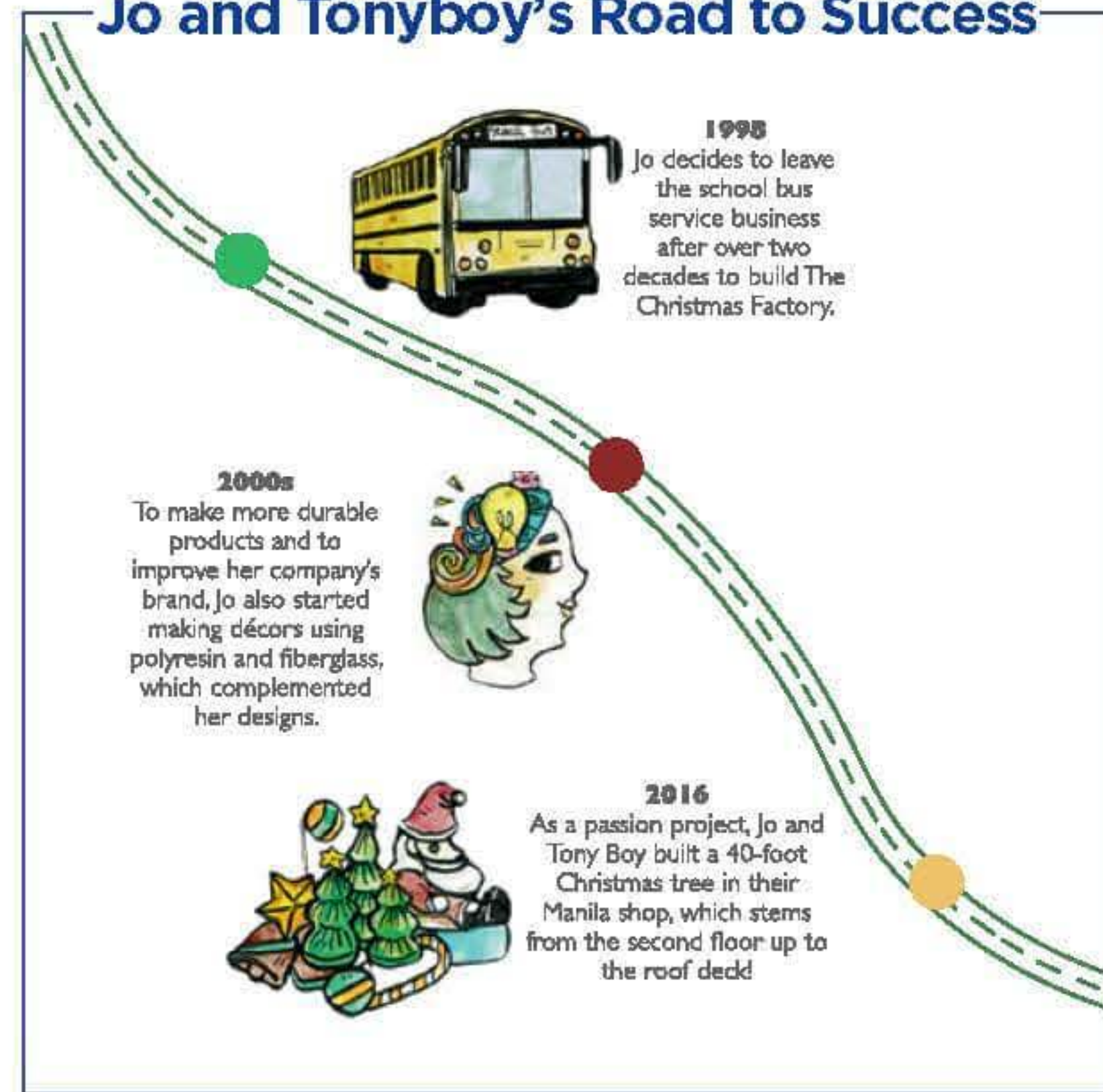
Jo's 23 years of squirming in and out of Manila's traffic jams gave her hypertension. She had to stop doing the bus service, and she was left with only the handicrafts to keep her busy. Her works drew praises from friends and neighbors, prompting her to hold a garage sale.

"My husband just put a table with all my items and a sign that said 'Christmas Décor for Sale', and by the end of the day it was a wipeout," Jo exclaims.

Jo used only papier-mâché and plaster at the start, but she knew she needed the best material for her products to stand out.

"With plaster, if it breaks, it shatters into pieces so it's not repairable...so we included polyresin and fiberglass. Now, we're the only store that fixes your previously bought items free of labor charge. You'll pay for only the materials needed," Jo says.

## Jo and Tonyboy's Road to Success



With quality products and good customer response, all she needed to do was to widen her market. "We went to Intramuros to present our products for a Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) exhibit. They agreed to test out our décors and include them in the show. Since then, DTI has been inviting us whenever they have a trade show."

In her factory in Binangonan resides most of her workers, whose wives and children sometimes even help in sanding the products. "Everything is handcrafted," Jo says.

Every first quarter of the year, Jo experiments with new designs. Production goes full blast after Holy Week, and Tonyboy does the quality check.

### MORE THAN JUST A SHOP

The mom-and-pop business now includes a complete service package. Just recently, they decorated a whole town in Batangas, and The Venice in McKinley Hill, Taguig. They also sourced Yuletide decoration materials last year from The Christmas Factory.

"I have lots of inquiries right now. Even gasoline stations want me to do their next year's holiday decorations," says Jo. "You just have to love what you're doing... The number one secret is being sincere in what you're telling your customers. Be honest."

It must have been the couple's sincerity and honesty that have earned them the respect and support of DTI, to which they attribute much of their success and gratefully regard it as a Christmas blessing.



### THE CHRISTMAS FACTORY

**Clockwise from left:** Spot the tip of Jo's 40-foot Christmas tree. Santa Claus comes in all sizes at The Christmas Factory. Jo takes care of conceptualizing the designs, while her husband, Tonyboy personally checks every product coming out of the assembly line.

## HOW DTI HELPED

With the help of DTI's **Negosyo Center**, Jo was able to increase her entrepreneurial knowledge, especially since she moved from the services industry to the manufacturing business. She also developed her handicraft-making skills in the process. Exposure from DTI-sponsored trade fairs such as **Sikat Pinoy** boosted their client base, making The Christmas Factory a go-to supplier of Christmas decorations.