

THE ROBREDO SISTERS

A STARSTUDIO EXCLUSIVE THREE'S A CHARM

Fresh from the campaign period, Vice President Leni Robredo's number one cheerleaders—her daughters Aika, Tricia and Jillian—stopped by *StarStudio* to share about their family life and their thoughts about the possible changes they'll face in the next six years

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Around August last year, people from different sectors began calling on Camarines Sur Representative Leni Robredo to gun for the vice-presidency. But inside their home, behind closed doors, Leni's daughters (with the late Department of Interior and Local Government Secretary Jesse Robredo) Aika, Tricia and Jillian were singing to different tune.

Content that their mother was already serving in Congress, they weren't keen on letting her get into what they perceived was a more complicated life that came with assuming the second highest position in the land.

"Yung pagiging Vice-President kasi, ibang usapan na 'yan. Siyempre mas prone siya to criticism," Leni's eldest daughter Aika explains to *StarStudio*. "Tapos nandoon na rin kasi 'yung protective instinct namin sa family. Nu'ng namatay kasi si Papa (Sec. Jesse was killed in a plane crash in 2012), feeling ko, kailangan ko ring mag-step up as a second parent. That's why parang part of my responsibility is to look after them."

But it didn't take long for the sisters to understand the importance of their mother's candidacy and how it could help bring about positive changes in the country should she win.

Eventually, they decided to stand by Leni and give their all to campaign for her.

"Kapag nasa posisyon kang tumulong sa iba, tumulong ka," Aika continues pensively. "Parating sinasabi ni Papa nu'ng buhay pa siya na dapat hindi lang sarili mo 'yung iniisip mo. Kung kaya mong gumawa ng isang bagay na makakabuti para sa mas nakararami, maliit na sacrifice lang 'yun on your part."

Because of their active participation during the election season, the Robredo sisters came to learn so much about politics and more importantly, about the needs of the Filipino people.

On top of that, this remarkable experience also helped shape them into the better version of themselves—stronger and wiser beyond their years.

Growing up in Naga

Aika, Tricia and Jillian, who all trace their roots to Naga City in Camarines Norte, share that they had a normal childhood just like everybody else despite their parents being involved in politics. But having said that, perhaps the quality that made Jesse and Leni distinct is that they were very much driven in everything they do and they always encouraged their daughters to be the same.

"Pati kaming mga anak nila, tine-train nila to be good at what we do," Aika shares with a smile. "Nakatutok

sila. Ini-encourage din nila kami hindi lang sa academics kung 'di pati na rin sa extra-curricular activities."

Between their parents, it is Leni who tends to be strict when it comes to daily reminders for the girls. Jesse, on the other hand, rarely got angry but when he did, he was feared—though he was mostly a kind, calming presence in the family.

"Mas naging close ako sa dad ko kasi parehas kaming middle child," Tricia explains. "So in that sense, may connection kami, pero it doesn't mean na wala kaming connection ng mom ko. Magkaiba naman 'yung relationship namin."

Jillian also claims to be a daddy's girl when she was younger, but shares that when Jesse had to spend more time in Manila following his appointment as Interior and Local Governments Secretary, she became closer to Leni.

As a family, their favorite bonding activities were eating out and watching movies together. Aika recalls that on Sundays, they would visit their paternal grandparents. It was an idyllic existence and they were a very close-knit family until one day, in August 2012, tragedy struck, and the family was shocked to discover that the Robredo figurehead had passed away.

On their own

To say the least, losing a good husband and father was devastating for Leni and their daughters. But they did their best to remain strong and still live their lives to the fullest as they knew Jesse would have wanted. In order to cope, Aika kept in mind what Leni would always say: at the end of the day, the only person you can depend on is yourself.

Aika and her sisters also used this mantra to help their mother recover



Leni Robredo with daughters Tricia, Aika and Jillian during her proclamation as the Vice President of the Philippines last May 30.

from the loss.

"Siguro 'yung pinaka-contribution namin sa nanay namin that time is hindi namin pinabayaan 'yung sarili namin.

Ako, bumalik sa work; sila bumalik sa school. Kumbaga, 'yung struggle na bumalik sa normal na everyday na buhay, hinarap namin, kahit may nawala sa amin," says Aika.

Jesse may have been gone from their lives for four years now but his daughters still miss his presence in their everyday lives.

"Nami-miss ko 'yung every day na sabay-sabay kaming nagdi-dinner," Aika shares. *"Tapos 'yung paggising mo nandiyan siya paalis papuntang work. Parati niya akong binibisita noong mag-isa pa lang ako nakatira dito sa Manila tapos parati kaming lumalabas."*

Tricia, meanwhile, reveals that one of the things she loved about her father was how he used to bring her to school during her first days in college, and how he would text her Bible verses.

For her part, Jillian appreciates how their father would help her out with her Math lessons no matter how busy he got. *"Kahit may meeting siya sa Malacañang, sinusulat sa tissue or scratch paper kung paano i-solve 'yung problem tapos kukuhanan niya ng picture and then ise-send niya sa akin,"* Jillian says.

Answering the call

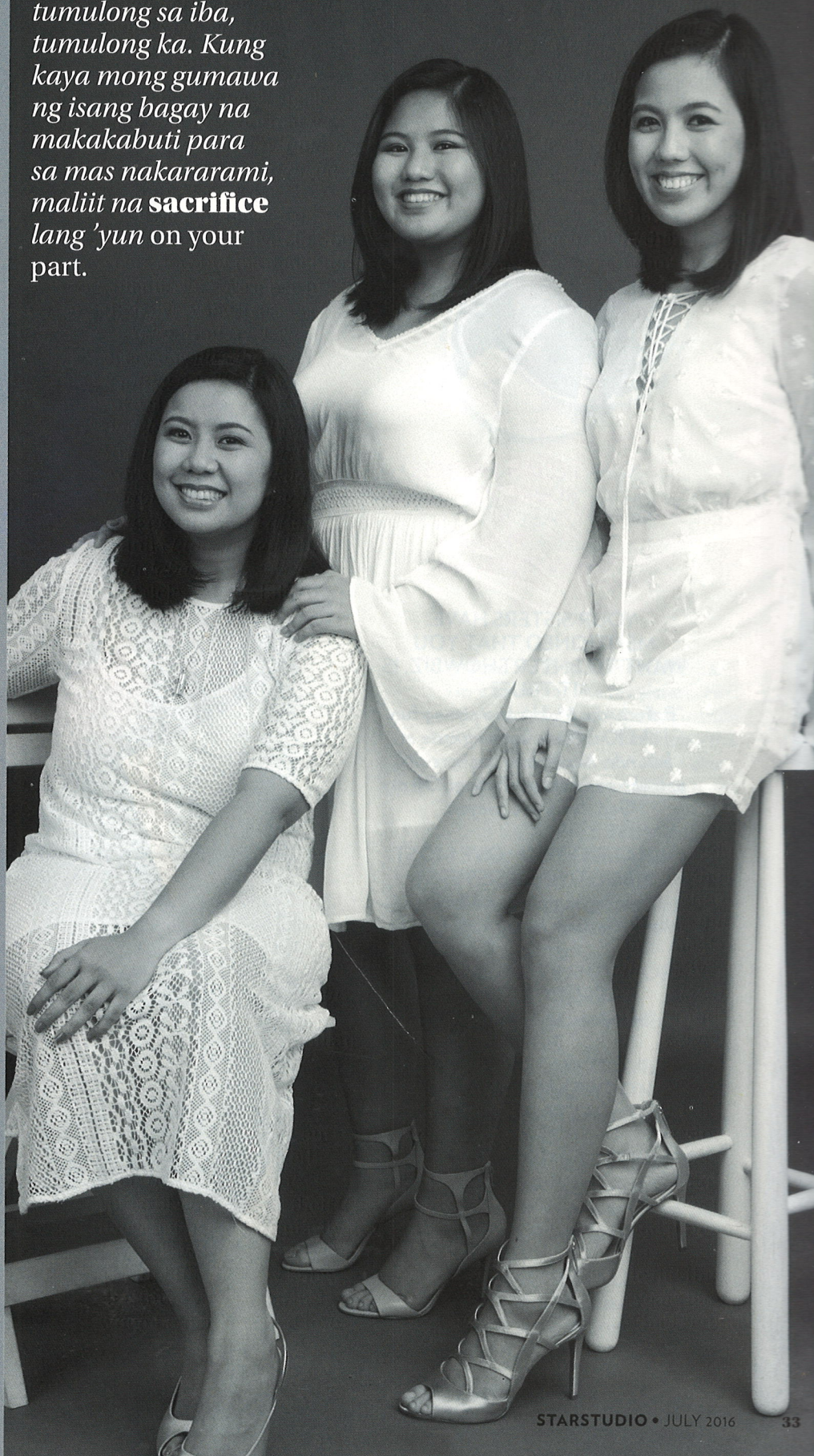
After Jesse's passing, Leni and her daughters tried their best to regain the sense of normalcy in their lives that had momentarily slipped away.

But little did they know that three years later, just when Leni had settled into

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Kapag nasa posisyon kang tumulong sa iba, tumulong ka. Kung kaya mong gumawa ng isang bagay na makakabuti para sa mas nakararami, maliit na sacrifice lang 'yun on your part.

On Aika: White lace dress by Mango,
heels by Charles &
On Jillian: White bell sleeves chiffon dress
Sfera, nude strappy heels by Charles &
On Tricia: White embroidered rompers
Forever 21, heels by Charles &



Jillian



Name: **JILLIAN THERESE ROBREDO**

Age: **16**

Education: **Philippine Science High School**

YOUR SISTERS HAVE MENTIONED THAT YOU WANT TO ENTER SHOWBIZ. IS IT TRUE?

"Before, oo. Mukha kasi siyang fun. I like KathNiel—sobrang cute at bait nila. Kapag may bashers sila, pati ako nasasaktan. Parang, 'Oh my God, hindi sila ganyan.'"

WHAT DO YOU LOVE MOST ABOUT YOUR SISTERS?

"Sobrang supportive nila. Lagi silang nand'yan kapag kailangan ko ng tulong."

FAVORITE SONG?

"Hands to Myself" by Selena Gomez

DREAM TRAVEL DESTINATION?

Spain



On Jillian: Peach cut-out dress and denim jacket by Forever 21

On Tricia: Lace and chiffon dress
by Sfera, denim varsity jacket by
Forever 21

Tricia



Name: **JANINE PATRICIA
"TRICIA" ROBREDO**

Age: **21**

Education: **Unibersidad
de Sta. Isabel Naga City
(grade school and high
school) and Ateneo de
Manila (college)**

WHAT ARE YOUR HOBBIES?

I'm a swimmer like my sisters. For two years I did basketball courtside reporting for ABS-CBN. I play the piano and a little of violin. I also used to be part of the debate team.

FAVORITE SONG?

"Worth It" by Fifth Harmony
("Power song ko 'yun. 'Yun 'yung
lagi kong pinapakinggan bago mag-
exam")

FAVORITE MOVIE OF ALL TIME?

High School Musical

DREAM TRAVEL DESTINATION?

Istanbul, Turkey and South Africa

FAVORITE CELEBRITY?

Ed Westwick (British actor most famous for his role as Chuck Bass on *Gossip Girl*)

FAVORITE STYLE ICON?

Kristen Stewart

her role as Congresswoman, a different kind of calling would fall on her lap: answering the public's call for her to run for Vice-President.

While Aika and her sisters were against it at first, they eventually came around and offered their utmost support in their own ways.

Aika, who was working for the Office of Civil Defense at the time, resigned from her job to focus on her mother's campaign. "*Tingin ko kasi noon dapat may family member na full-time na nakatutok at madaling i-deploy kung saan kailangan,*" she explains.

Meanwhile, Tricia and Jillian remained in school but on weekends, they also joined the campaign sorties.

"Initially, *gusto kong mag-leave of absence talaga from medical school that time, pero hindi ako pinayagan,*" Tricia reveals. "*Nahirapan akong mag-focus during the campaign in the sense na kunyari, kapag nasa school ako, gusto ko nasa kampanya ako. Pero kapag nasa kampanya ako, at the back of my head, alam ko kailangan ko nang mag-aral for my exam.*"

Indeed, the elections proved to be the most grueling yet, what with all issues and mudslinging further magnified by social media. Leni's daughters, however, have learned to take everything in stride—especially the bashers.

"Yung bashers, I think, over time *masasanay ka na lang din,*" Aika muses. "*Kami naman kasi, na-warn na kami about that nu'ng umpisa pa lang. But while ine-expect na namin 'yun, siyempre, nu'ng una, medyo hassle, medyo nakaka-affect sa amin. Pero over time, matututo kang huwag na silang pansinin. At least 'yung pinanghahawakan naman namin is alam namin kung sino kami, at alam namin kung ano 'yung totoo.*"

Towards the end of the elections, the controversy surrounding Leni's bid for the Vice-President's post became more heated when allegations of cheating started being thrown towards their camp. The situation got so intense that even Senator Bongbong Marcos' son Sandro got into a small Twitter scuffle with Aika after he accused the administration of cheating in the elections, tweeting, "Also the total votes for President are not the same total for the Vice President. What the hell #DayaangMatuwid."

In response, Aika posted a photo

quote on Facebook, saying, "*Walang #DayaangMatuwid. Ang mayroon lang ay #ProgresiBongMandaramBong.*" Then she captioned the post with, "Never again!! *Laban Leni!! Ang laban ni Leni ay laban nating lahat. Papasok palang ang mga boto sa baluarte natin!! Sabay-sabay tayong magdasal at lumaban #LabanLeni.*"

A new beginning

Finally, the elections are over. May 27 marked the conclusion of the election period as the official canvassing drew to a close, with Rodrigo Duterte and Leni emerging as winners for President and Vice President, respectively.

It had been a tough journey. But for Aika, her biggest takeaway from the experience is reminiscent of what her father always used to say about how things will make sense in the end, if you just learn to connect the dots.

"Parang sinasabi niya noon na kapag bata ka pa, marami kang mga ginagawa na tingin mo won't make sense," Aika explains. "Pero eventually, mare-realize mo na stepping-stone mo pala 'yun sa challenges na haharapin mo in the future. Tulad na lang ng kuwento ng mama namin, before kasi dapat magd doktor siya, kasi pumasa siya sa UST. Kaya lang dumating 'yung results ng UP, eh dream school niya talaga 'yun. Doon siya nag-enroll instead. Doon nagbago 'yung path niya—from medicine, nag-Economics siya and eventually, nag-Law siya. And then pumasok siya sa NGO (non-government organization) at sa Public Attorney's Office. Dahil doon, nagkaroon siya ng understanding sa mga issues ng mga kababayan natin. At tingin ko, 'yun 'yung malaking asset na niya."

Now that Leni has assumed the second highest position in the government, Tricia acknowledges that their lives are about to change in ways they have never imagined before.

"I think that the more obvious glaring change is security," she states. "*Hindi na puwede 'yung basta-bastang lumabas na lang lalo na kapag walang kasama. Alam ko rin na magiging mas busy na si mama. Hindi na puwede 'yung dati na lagi kaming magkakasama sa lunch at dinner kunyari.* But then again, we're all old enough to deal with that, and *naiintindihan namin na it's part of the job.*"

But at the end of the day, while the Robredo sisters are bracing for these big changes, they are still hopeful that they can slowly fade back into the simple, normal kind of life that they have always known all their lives.

"Kami, as much as possible, *gusto namin walang magbabago,*" Aika expresses. "*Talagang tina-try namin na wala masyadong magbago. Siguro, parang work and school pa rin. Ngayon lang siguro mas may attention sa amin, kasi minsan nadadamay kami sa attention na binibigay kay Mama. Pero hopefully kapag nag-die down na ang lahat, babalik na kami sa kung ano man 'yung nakasanayan namin dati.*"

But then again, it is easier said than done. After all, not only did their father leave a remarkable legacy. Now, their mother—a simple bus-riding widow, and the vice president of the Philippine Republic—is also set to do great things for the country. Their being part of this family leaves no room for the ordinary. ☆

The Robredo sisters with their mom, Vice president-elect Leni Robredo, show off their marked fingers on election day. Jillian, who is not yet a voter (she's only 16), displayed her aptly colored fingernail instead. The sisters were constant figures during the campaign sorties of their mom.



Aika



Name: **JESSICA MARIE**
"AIKA" ROBREDO

Age: 28

Education: **Unibersidad**
de Sta. Isabel Naga City
(grade school and high
school) and **Ateneo de**
Manila (college)

WHAT ARE YOU LIKE AS AN ATE?

"Mas strict ako sa nanay ko, lalo na kapag wala siya. Siguro 'andu'n din 'yung pressure to look after my sisters kapag nasa business trip 'yung mama ko, pero parang binabalanse ko rin na hindi purely parent ang tingin nila sa akin. Dapat sister pa rin."

FAVORITE SONG?

"Jealous", by Nick Jonas

FAVORITE MOVIE OF ALL TIME?

While You Were Sleeping (a 1995 rom-com starring Sandra Bullock and Peter Gallagher)

DREAM TRAVEL DESTINATION?

Cappadocia, Turkey or South Africa

FAVORITE CELEBRITIES?

Taylor Swift and Angelina Jolie

On Aika: Nude silk satin
jumpsuit by Sfera, gray long
vest by Forever 21