

My Memorable 67th Birthday on October 18, 2013

by Joe Orosa Aliling

It was Friday, October 18, 2013, here in the San Francisco Bay Area, California. It was my 67th birthday. I am documenting my thoughts and feelings on this particular milestone in my life to share to my family, friends, and for posterity.

When I woke up at about five o'clock that morning, I placed an overseas call to the Intensive Care Unit (ICU) of the Medical City Hospital in Metro Manila. It's located about a mile from the Manila Temple of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. I was able to talk to the ICU nurse attending to my mother. 5:00 a.m. (PST) here in San Francisco is 8:00 p.m. in Metro Manila, Philippines.

My mother just had a heart surgery that began at 7:00 a.m. (Manila time) on Friday, which was 4:00 p.m. (PST) on Thursday here in San Francisco. The ICU nurse told me that the surgery had concluded, but my mom was still sedated and her heartbeat was still fluctuating. Based on their past experiences, the ICU staff nurses were confident that her heartbeat would stabilize in due time. (When my dear younger sister, Mimi, came to visit San Francisco on November 3-8, 2013, she confided to me that the heart monitor for a while displayed a horizontal line but my brother, Jing, was quick to withdraw the waiver that he signed before the surgery. Luckily, Jing is a doctor in that hospital and the medical team was able to ask him again if he was really determined to stick with the waiver. Somehow, he changed his mind and the medical team revived my mother.)

I spent the whole Friday morning reminiscing the happy moments, as well as the highlights of some trials and tribulations in our family life. My trip to memory lane began from the time my mother had a mastectomy when I was young. Based on an autopsy done before Christmas, what we thought was a benign tumor in her breast turned out to be malignant. On Dec. 26th, she had her mastectomy. She was admitted into the hospital on Christmas Eve, thus, we spent Christmas in her hospital room.

It was a melancholy Christmas for my family. That made that particular Christmas very memorable to me. It was also the time when the film "All Mine To Give" was showing during that Christmas Season. The story was being narrated by the eldest child, and it sank deep into my heart because I was the eldest child. The film depicted to me a horrifying scenario in our family life, in case we were orphaned early in our childhood.

The flipside of this trial was the blessing of being able to understand the true meaning of the birth of Jesus Christ, his purpose here on Earth, and the significance of his Atonement. Everyone in the family gained an increased knowledge of the gospel, and our individual testimonies of the truthfulness of the gospel fortified our faith in God.

Then, thoughts of amusing and hilarious anecdotes in our family life came to mind. Perhaps, it was a reassuring feeling that my mother has led a wonderful life as a widow, raising her children singlehandedly after my father passed through the portals of death and “through the veil” on October 14, 1973. Being the eldest child, I pinched in for my father and made sure that my brothers and sister received their college diploma from the University of the Philippines, thus, realizing their childhood dreams and that of my father’s. These fond memories were interrupted by my son’s phone call informing me that he was on his way to meet me in Oakland.

At about 12:00 noon, I met my eldest son, Joe Jr., at the Oakland Temple to go through the temple endowment session at 1:00 p.m. In the Temple, which is the House of the Lord, sacred ordinances are performed through the priesthood keys of Elijah the Prophet wherein these ordinances performed here on earth would also be binding in heaven. Through the priesthood keys of Elijah, my children, grand children, and the rest of my posterity, yet unborn, are sealed to me and my wife, Rachel, for time and all eternity. As God has promised, we will be together forever as a family if we remain faithful to our covenants and endure to the end.

By 3:00 p.m., my son and I were on our way to Fremont to rendezvous with his younger brother, Joey, and his spouse, Becky, and their children, Liam, Tate and Naiya, to have dinner together.

At about 6:00 p.m., we were at Tribu (which means “Tribe” in English), a popular Filipino restaurant in Union Landing. Becky ordered her favorite pancit (noodles), a traditional Filipino birthday dish, which is a token for “long life here on earth.” Joey ordered his favorite “inihaw na baboy” (thinly-sliced Filipino pork barbecue), crispy pata (pork knuckles, a poor man’s version of the roasted pig served on special gatherings like a “fiesta”), garlic rice, and plain Jasmine rice. We also ordered “calamansi” juice (which is the Filipino version of lemonade). Everybody, even baby Naiya, had an wonderful time at Tribu.

After dinner, we proceeded to my grandchildren’s home to have dessert, i.e., a 10-inch diabetic “ube” (purple yam) cake baked by our friend, Minia, from Newark. The cake was decorated with toys that the kids really liked. Liam and Tate led us in singing “Happy Birthday,” and then they blew the lighted candles. Naiya was seated comfortably on my lap. Becky cut the cake and gave everybody a slice to eat and savor.

At about 9:00 p.m., I received an overseas call from my dear younger brother, Tito, informing me that he had just visited Mama at the ICU and that she was in good stable condition.

It was a long but delightful evening for me, indeed, to enjoy these eternal treasures on my birthday.

Later that evening, as I lay in bed, my father came to mind. Then, memories of my boyhood paraded in my mind – I was in my bedroom, lying down in bed, staring at a picture frame hanging on the wall. On it was inscribed the poem “A Father’s Prayer” written by General Douglas MacArthur, commanding general of the US Armed Forces in the Far East (USAFFE). I began reciting the poem, silently in my mind, which I knew by heart, to wit:

“Build me a son, O Lord, who will be strong enough to know when he is weak; and brave enough to face himself when he is afraid; one who will be proud and unbending in honest defeat, but humble and gentle in victory.

“Build me a son whose wishbone will not be where his backbone should be; a son who will know Thee, and that to know himself is the foundation stone of knowledge.

“Lead him, I pray, not in the path of ease and comfort, but under the stress and spur of difficulties and challenge. Here let him learn to stand up in the storm; here let him learn compassion for those who fail.

“Build me a son whose heart will be clear, whose goal will be high; a son who will master himself before he seeks to master other men; one who will learn to laugh, yet never forget how to weep; one who will reach into the future, yet never forget the past.

“And after all, these things are his; add, I pray, enough of a sense of humor, so that he may always be serious, yet never take himself too seriously. Give him humility, so that he may always remember the simplicity of true greatness, the open mind of true wisdom, and the meekness of true strength.

“Then I, his father, will dare to whisper: ‘I have not lived in vain!’ Amen.”

After saying my evening prayer but before falling asleep, I asked “Papa, how am I doing?”

As I approach the twilight of my mortal existence in the remaining birthdays to come, I would like to share my personal testimony to all those with whom I am sharing this joyful anecdote on my 67th birthday. I would like to leave you with my personal testimony that the parting words of Moroni prior to his death are true: “Yea, come unto Christ, and be perfected in him, and deny yourselves of all ungodliness; and if ye shall deny yourselves of all ungodliness, and love God with all your might, mind and strength, then is his grace sufficient for you, that by his grace ye may be perfect in Christ; and if by the grace of God ye are perfect in Christ, ye can in nowise deny the power of God...”

“And now I bid unto all, farewell. I soon go to rest in the paradise of God, until my spirit and body shall again reunite, and I am brought forth triumphant through the air, to meet you before the pleasing bar of the great Jehovah, the eternal judge of both the quick and the dead, Amen.”

I leave with you these thoughts and feelings in the name of Jesus Christ, Amen.