

A Tale of Two Brothers

I had two older brothers, Augusto (1919 - 2002) and Vicente Jr. (1925 - 1994). Maybe I shouldn't be surprised at their contrasting personalities since being brothers doesn't necessarily mean physically, intellectually or emotionally similarity. But Toto (Augusto's nickname) and Jing (Vicente) couldn't be more different. From their career paths, interests and family, their lives were a study in contrast. Toto was gregarious, a writer & storyteller with a great sense of humor. Toto wrote regularly for his bank's employee publication. Jing was probably the quietest person in the Orosa clan which near the end of their lives numbered close to 200. He never uttered a word unless he was first spoken to. Toto was an avid reader, buying best selling books by the dozen. He had copies of the classics, from Shakespeare to Tolstoy to the Greek philosophers. I don't think Jing ever read a book after finishing college.

They were both already in their 20's and 30's when I was growing up in the late 1940's and early 1950's. It was Toto who had a much greater influence on me. The three of us occupied a large second story "bachelor's quarters" apart from my parent's main house. Underneath was a one car garage and servant's quarters. With a college background in banking and finance, Toto started working for the Philippine National Bank (PNB) just before the outbreak of WWII. Like our dad, he spent more than 40 years working for a single employer. After formally retiring from the bank he was called back by PNB numerous times to manage distressed banks under receivership. If you total it up, he was associated with PNB for half a century.

With war clouds in the horizon in 1941, Toto tried to enlist. He said he wanted to become a pilot. But somehow he was rejected. He was told he had a heart problem. (Since he lived past 83, he probably outlived the recruiter.) He was lucky, the air force consisting of the United States Army Air Corps & the Philippine Army Air Corps was virtually wiped out in the Dec. 8, 1941 Japanese attack. He spent the war years working at the bank. He stayed behind to guard our house whenever our family went to our ancestral hometown in Batangas to escape the fighting. Staying with Toto was a houseboy named Barlito. Looting was common if you left your property unguarded. People did whatever was necessary to survive.

Both Toto and Jing were brilliant academically but it was Jing who was the more stellar student. He went into civil engineering, the same major as my dad's. From the first employers on, his life was a quest for a niche. He didn't like working for anyone, telling my sister Charito that his bosses were often dummies (he used the Spanish word *bobo*) and asking why he should be taking orders from *bobos*. After working for private employers he then went into private ventures with some partners. He tried agriculture, from rice farming to cacao growing. He was involved in the latter business when he died tragically. In between he was into logging concession and mining. There may have been some other ventures that we didn't hear about. He spent more than 3 decades in Mindanao and he seldom shared whatever he was doing.

After I arrived in Pittsburgh in 1962, I kept up a steady correspondence with Toto. We wrote each other regularly. Most of his letters were typed. That was a relief because his penmanship was awful. Later on when I traveled for job assignments or on vacation, I sent him postcards. We played one upmanship on the number of places we had been as attested to by our postcards. I

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consider it a draw, I visited more places physically but he had the better arrangement. As a Senior Vice-President of PNB he went on business trips to New York and London. He toured the main branches around the Philippines. Of course he received VIP treatment. I had to pay my own way almost all the time. My business trips took me to places like Cedar Rapids, IA and Danville, IL. Whenever I returned to Manila to visit he would show me the stack of postcards I had mailed. He had saved every one of them.

I tried to engage Jing in letter writing but he rarely responded. I stopped trying. Jing never traveled outside the Philippines and his vacations consisted of visiting our parents. I had written previously that each of us inherited property from our parents. Jing sold his not long after receiving the title. This became the seed money for his business ventures. But none ever really prospered. Slowly but surely his capital got depleted. His businesses were in the province of Davao in Mindanao, a 2 hour flight from Manila. To visit our parents, Toto sometimes had to buy the ticket for Jing.

Jing never married although at the time of his death he had a common law wife whom we hadn't known about. He died violently, bludgeoned by some burglars or bandits. I say bandits because he lived in an isolated hamlet far from the main city of Davao. Jing had no cash or valuables so the motivation is unclear. We couldn't imagine such a quiet hard working man making enemies. He hacked the cacao farm out of the bush. He lived in a house without indoor plumbing. Toto learned about Jing's murder when he received a phone call from Nestle, the giant Swiss food company. Jing had been selling his cocoa beans to Nestle. Toto and our brother-in-law Pepe Hilario claimed Jing's body from the local police and brought him back to Manila. The murderer or murderers were never brought to justice. No witnesses ever came forward. Jing's common law spouse never volunteered any information, only saying she was not around when it happened. This woman asked Toto to provide additional capital to continue operating the cacao farm. Toto refused and we never heard from her again. Toto brought back the police pictures of Jing's body which I refused to look at. I would rather remember him as the quiet engineer who worked hard to pursue his dreams even when fate was sometimes unkind.

Toto married at age 35. He was on assignment in PNB's New York city office when he met the daughter of a career diplomat. When he returned to Manila after his assignment, he brought along his bride Lourdes. Lou is still with us today, age 81. Whenever I visit, her first question is "where would you like to go shopping?"

Toto's oldest grandson was Marc, who was diagnosed with acute lymphoblastic leukemia (ALL) in his early teen years. He would be treated, go into remission and within a year or two the ALL would return. As a last resort, Marc went to Bethesda, MD for a bone marrow transplant. It was arranged by his Manila oncologist. The donor was his younger brother Martin. But the transplant didn't work. The doctors sent him home but before leaving, Val and I were able to visit him in the spring of 2001. It was a beautiful spring in Washington, DC with the cherry blossoms in full flower. Marc died a few months later, before his 21st birthday. Toto was devastated. I make it a habit to call Toto and my sisters regularly. Whenever I called, Toto would rail about why Marc

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was taken at such a tender age. He even said he had been praying that he be taken instead, saying "I told my guardian angel to leave me and save Marc." He had led a productive and honorable life with no regrets so why Marc and not him? It was my turn to tell my elder brother, twenty years my senior, "you do not bargain with God." A year after Marc's passing, Toto would be gone too.

For years, Toto was active in the Quezon City Sports Club, serving as President. The QCSC is an oasis in the middle of the Quezon city urban sprawl. We spent many hours at the club with Toto, Lou, their boys Mike, Morris and Mel, along with their families. After his passing, the library at the QCSC was aptly named the Augusto Orosa Library.

Mario E. Orosa
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