

CHARITO

She was born in Malolos, Bulacan and christened Rosario, just like our mother. But no one ever called her Rosario, it was always Charito. Her fruitful life of 86 years and 6 months encompassed 10 decades, from the 1930s, to the 2020s. We had the Great Depression during the 1930s, an era of economic devastation. When she was 7 years old our country was invaded and brutally occupied. At 10, living in Manila, our family lived through the Liberation of Manila, a carnage unequalled in our history. Charito had vivid memories. She had already started school at Holy Ghost College during the occupation, the only school she ever attended. The German nuns of the Holy Ghost were her mentors. I went to the nearby San Beda College and we often walked to school together, my Big Sister, 5 years older. She made sure I went straight home; I had a habit of trying to hang out with my friends and cousins. The 1950s were a watershed era, our father was at the peak of his government career and our mother was busy accumulating cheap land around Manila, land for 10 pesos a square meter (50,000 today). Those properties served our family well in later years when the value of land skyrocketed.

Finishing college at Holy Ghost and starting a career as a home economist and nutritionist, Charito blossomed into a beautiful woman. Then along came Jose Acayan Hilario. I'm not sure exactly how they met, but he became a regular feature at our house in Aviles St. He visited often and I didn't like it. They would sit in the living room, at opposite ends of the couch. That was courtship in the 1950s. Our lone black and white 19-inch TV was in there and I wanted to watch the basketball games. So, I sat fuming, when is Pepe going to leave? But they were meant for each other. Pretty soon Pepe's parents came to see my parents to ask for Charito's hand in marriage. They started their life together, getting married at the San Miguel Pro Cathedral church not far from our home. It was in this same church that they renewed their vows 60 years later, in 2018.

At first Charito & Pepe lived with our parents, the first two children were born while they lived in Aviles. There was an incident there that showed Pepe's courage and devotion. My parents were aging, so Pepe was the man of the house. A burglar entered our home. Pepe confronted him and was shot. Thankfully, he survived, as he has survived later challenges like cancer. In the 1960s, after I had gone, they moved to the big house on Horseshoe Dr. In the 1970s, they bought their home in PhilAm. Their four boys were raised there. Charito and Pepe wanted badly to have a girl. Sadly, she gave birth to two girls, Maria Teresita (1963) and Maria Rowena (1966), but they did not survive infancy. Her little angels are buried at the Escobar family plot in Iba.

At this time our parent's health began to decline. Our brother Jing was in Mindanao, Tita was busy with her teaching career plus 6 children, Toto was nearby but pursuing a successful banking career, and I was in Illinois. It was up to Charito to minister to our parents' needs. Their health care, arrangements for caregivers, household help were all organized by Charito. In the ten commandments, we are told, "Honor Thy Father and

CHARITO

Thy Mother.” Charito did that in spades. Speaking of household help, we had one, nicknamed Valing, who served our family for almost half a century. She too, had declining health. Charito took care of Valing. When Valing later became bedridden, Charito arranged for care in a home managed by nuns. Myrna is their current housekeeper, an excellent cook. Several years ago, Myrna had a stroke. Charito & Pepe again shouldered her expenses and care. Myrna has fully recovered. Charito lived the words from Matthew, “as you do to the least of my brethren, you do unto me.”

As the end of the millennia approached, Charito & Pepe’s children grew to maturity, finishing college, getting married. They were blessed with four grandchildren but three of them were abroad. So, Frankie and Cecile’s daughter Bea was doted on, the recipient of all of her lola’s affections. With Pepe’s retirement, they transitioned into another career. They counseled engaged as well as already married couples at Sta. Rita parish. What better mentors than a couple with an ideal marriage. They were pillars of the Christian Family Movement, serving as co-Presidents for a time.

I never heard Charito curse, nor speak ill of anyone. With her living in ten decades, she has many stories to tell. She was a living voice of our family history. In my essay writing involving family history, she was the last stop for fact checking

Since they had lived in the Horseshoe house, Charito “inherited” all the mementos of my parents. Every time I visited; she would bring out some memento. One year, there were postcards my father had received while a student at the University of Illinois from 1907 to 1911. Another time, it was a gold watch from the 1930s given to our father by an American friend. There were accounts of the land our Escobar grandparents had in Iba, parceled out to our mother and her siblings. I once asked, why only one memento at a time, just let me see all of them. Her reply was, “so you’ll keep coming back.” I would have come back anyway, mementos or not.

Charito never learned to drive. But she loved her iPad and her cell phone. Those were the first things she checked every morning. Having a son in Singapore and another in Illinois, with 3 grandchildren between them, FaceTime was indispensable. Charito and Pepe were almost addicted to telenovelas, Korean, Mexican and Filipino.

But every afternoon was Rosary time. Sometimes it was with EWTN, at times without. They went to Mass several times a week, if not Mass, at least to Adoration. Their parish had constructed a small chapel for perpetual adoration.

Someone once described success as leaving the world a little better, anything from flowers to healthy children or ameliorating a social condition. By any definition, Charito was a success. You blessed us with your life. One of the beatitudes aptly describes her: *“Blessed are the clean of heart, for they shall see God.”*

CHARITO

And finally, again from Matthew, *“Well done, thou good and faithful servant: thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord.”*

Deo Gratias.

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May 6, 2021