

ESCOBAR ANCESTRAL LAND, A SHORT HISTORY

Our grandparents, Juan Escobar y Gonzales and Teresa Venzon y Garcia, owned a lot of properties in and around Iba. They ranged in size from 4 or more hectares outside Iba, to less than 100 square meters in Iba itself. To put that in perspective, that's 1,000 square feet, or the size of a one bedroom apartment. The larger properties were rice and sugar farms. One was even described as bamboo land. Teresa died in 1938, Juan in 1942, both without a will. Years later, in April of 1951, distribution of the various parcels was adjudicated. Fortunately, the six siblings (Julita, Rosario, Jovito, Tomas, Soledad, Cristeta) and the survivors of Alejandra (Lutgarda & Ricardo), the late seventh sibling, amicably agreed to the distribution. Alejandra's husband Porfirio Sotomil waived his rights in favor of the children. The lawyer in charge, preparing all the legal documents, was Crisostomo Nano of Iba, a relative on the Venzon side. Their notary was Atty. Nicolas Y. Orosa, the younger brother of Vicente Y. Orosa, husband of Rosario.

The largest parcels of land were 4 hectares in Sto. Rosario and Sta. Barbara. The rest were in Sagapan, Iba. For whatever reason, the Sagapan parcels consisted of various sized plots instead of being listed as one contiguous area. We don't know how this came about. Here is the full list, from the court documents:

- A - 3.9736 hectares in Balinbuta, Dirita
- B - 4.1345 hectares riceland in Sto. Rosario, Dirita plus 0.7134 hectares "bamboo land"
- C - 0.8204 hectares in Caongan, Sta. Barbara
- D - 2.5 hectares sugar land in Caongan, Sta. Barbara
- E - 0.8205 hectares riceland in Taguilitil, Sta. Barbara
- F - 1.6 hectares sugar land in Taguilitil, Sta. Barbara
- G - 1.325 hectares riceland in Sagapan, Pulion
- H - 0.1 hectare residential in Sagapan, Pulion
- I - 0.0702 hectare residential in Sagapan
- J - 63.865 square meters residential in Sagapan
- K - 0.9926 hectare horticultural, fish pond and nipa in Sagapan
- L - 0.625 hectare residential plus 0.0375 hectare horticultural in Sagapan

If you total up the plots, they are about 17 hectares or less than 40 acres.

The Escobar ancestral lands look modest by today's standards, but in those days, dating back to the late 19th century, they were pretty significant. Most farmers were landless tenants, which land reform was enacted to correct. More on that later. There were enough properties to go around among the seven Escobar children, ranging in age from mid thirties to early fifties at the time of the adjudication.

We don't know who arbitrated the distribution, perhaps it was based on assessed value, which was listed in the deeds. To their credit there seems to have been no disagreement. I would have

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heard stories from my older cousins, or my mother, if there had been any dispute. The estate was divided as follows:

Plot A was equally divided between Tomas, Cristeta and Alejandra's survivors.

Plots B, C, D, E & F were equally divided between Julita, Rosario and Soledad.

Plots G and H went to Jovito.

Plot I went to Julita

Plot J went to Cristeta

Plot K was equally divided between Rosario, Tomas and Soledad

Plot L was divided between Jovito and Alejandra's survivors.

At this point the story gets interesting. Except for Jovito, the other siblings started disposing of their shares. Part of the reason may have been that a few had already moved away after marrying. There were also college expenses for a future doctor, lawyer, pharmacist, nurses, etc.

- Julita, married to Julian de Vera, was in Mandaluyong, outside Manila, where they both worked at the National Mental Hospital.
- Soledad, married to Benjamin Tumangan, lived in Cabanatuan, Nueva Ecija. Benjamin later became mayor.
- Cristeta, married to Alfonso Balingit, lived in Macabebe, Pampanga.
- Lutgarda, married to Lope Leabres, lived in Quezon City.
- Ricardo lived in Pampanga.

In order to keep the properties intact under Escobar ownership, my mother Rosario bought out her sibling's shares. We lived in Manila, but by this time, a house was constructed on her plot, beside that of Jovito. He even supervised the construction. The transactions were all conducted through Deed of Sale, court filing, etc. mostly notarized by Atty. Orosa.

On May 15, 1951, Tomas obtained a mortgage of 500 pesos on his share of the property held jointly with Cristeta, Lutgarda and Ricardo. Interestingly, the mortgage was issued not by a bank, but a private individual named Calimlim. The following year, on March 11, 1952, Tomas sold all his shares. There were two deeds of sales totaling 2,300 pesos. He subsequently paid off his mortgage and debts to Calimlim.

In December of 1952, the eldest, Julita, sold her share for 1,500 pesos. (For perspective, that's \$750 at the then prevailing exchange rate. (2 pesos per US \$, vs. 52 today.) She got less because she sold another plot to a first cousin on Teresa's side, Susana Venzon Mendoza aka Tia Sanang.

On April 1, 1954, Cristeta sold her shares for 2,600 pesos. There were two deeds of sale, one for 2,000 and the other for 600.

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Between January 1956 and 1959, Soledad sold her shares through three deeds of sales, totaling 1,800 pesos.

On July 6, 1956, Lutgarda and Ricardo sold their shares for 2,000 pesos.

To reiterate, Rosario was the buyer of all the properties. You may have noticed the discrepancy on the price paid for the shares of property. (2,600 pesos for Cristeta; 2,300 for Tomas; 2,000 for Lutgarda & Ricardo; 1,800 for Soledad.) I don't have an explanation for this. Obviously, the residential plots would be worth a lot more than sugar or rice land.

Thus, by 1959, Rosario had bought out her siblings' shares of the ancestral lands. Only Jovito held on to his original shares. My mother made frequent trips to Sagapan, improving the property. In addition to the two story house, she had enlarged the fish pond, stocked with bangus. A gazebo was constructed near the house. It was the site of social events, including a visit by then President Ramon Magsaysay (1954-1957). Some of the U.S. based Escobars returned in February of 2006, having a reunion under the gazebo. We had all returned for the wedding of Juancho N. Escobar.

A couple of side events occurred after the settlement of the estate. Cristeta, Alfonso and family moved to Mindanao then decided to return to Iba. She had already sold her shares but Rosario allowed her to portion off a corner of the property, where they settled. Years later, Cristeta's descendants paid Charito a nominal amount to transfer the title.

On April 27, 1969, Jovito sold a piece of his Sagapan plot to Charito's husband Jose A. Hilario. The area involved was just 75 square meters, the size of my recreation room or perhaps a vegetable garden. The price was 1,000 pesos. Apparently Jovito was trying to raise some cash. Of course, with his larger property he could have kept selling tiny parcels, shrinking his back yard.

Let's step back in time to the period when Teresa and Juan lived in Sagapan. There was a small fish pond, a large garden, coconut and fruit trees. Thus the descriptive "horticultural land." My late brother Augusto, born in 1919, recalled going to Iba in the 1930s, having fun picking fruit and vegetables. Cousin Nasario Escobar (1930-2018) had vivid descriptions of lolo Juan's animals, which included carabaos and a horse.

My mother Rosario passed away in 1993, at the age of 95. All her Iba properties were passed on to my elder sister Rosario, aka Charito Orosa Hilario. So by this time, all the properties originally owned by Juan and Teresa were owned by the descendant(s) of Jovito (passed away in 1976) and Charito.

The land reform movement was in full swing in the 1990s and Charito's property at Dirita was turned over to no less than six families. Land reform required compensating the owners, which

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is typically slow and below assessed value. In 1997, a private agreement was generated between Charito and the six families, Charito being compensated at a fraction of the market value. My brother Augusto, a Philippine National Bank executive, frequently joked that the bonds issued by the government for land reform would make good wallpaper.

After our mother's death, there was little interest in the house and fish pond. Only Toto and his sons were frequent visitors. He had even constructed a modest cottage at the end of the property, furthest from the road, close to the river. He liked getting away from his high pressure job at PNB.

Charito rented out the property, at one time to a Korean businessman. Another Korean, married to a Filipina, was interested in the property, but no deal materialized. The property went into a slow decline. Charito offered it, at a substantial discount, to our Escobar cousins, but there was only lukewarm interest.

Jovito's Sagapan property passed on to his son Cipriano, aka Amang. He constructed a large, sturdy, two story house. Except for Amang's daughter Lilibeth, his entire family had migrated to southern California. Lilibeth is married to Noli "Bebot" Arcala, a successful restaurateur. After Amang passed away in 2017, Bebot offered to buy Charito's Sagapan properties. The transaction went quickly and was completed by November of 2017.

So in the end, Jovito's descendants own almost all of Teresa and Juan's original properties. I should think lola Teresa and lolo Juan would be pleased.

Mario Escobar Orosa
Dec. 3, 2018
Quezon City, Philippines

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Part of the fish pond, looking towards the river.



House constructed by Rosario (seated) on her Sagapan lot. My father Vicente is standing.