

## Memories of Pepe Hilario

My earliest recollection of Pepe was back in the mid 50s when he was courting Charito. The term wasn't in vogue then, but they had to practice "social distancing." Whenever Pepe visited, he would sit at one end of the couch in the living room, while Charito sat at the other end, six feet apart. Every so often, my mother would take a peek to make sure the social distancing rule wasn't violated. I hated it when he visited during weekends. I wasn't allowed to watch TV, to provide them with more "privacy." With that social distancing, what privacy do they need? Television broadcasting was in its infancy in the Philippines. But we could watch the NCAA basketball games on our TV, a 19 inch black & white relic (I think it was a Zenith) which needed a tall antenna on our roof in order to work. Having gone to San Beda, I was always rooting for the collegiate Red Lions or high school Red Cubs. The TV allowed us to watch basketball games live, although reception was fuzzy at best. So, when Pepe was around while San Beda was playing, I was downcast. I kept asking, hasn't he left yet, fourth quarter na! Hindi ko mapapanuod ang katapusan!

Our eldest brother Augusto, aka Toto, teased Pepe mercilessly. Toto was a perpetual teaser, in a humorous way. But Pepe never lost his cool. I think Pepe wore Toto out by not paying him any attention. Pepe was just imperturbable, compared to our more loquacious brother.

Finally, the time came when Pepe and his parents came to Aviles to meet with our parents. Their engagement became official. I think our father was happy to have another engineer in the family. Our mother was happy that Pepe's mother was from Iba. A new chapter was about to begin for Pepe & Charito. As was customary then, weddings were usually in the morning. Reception was a breakfast or brunch. Their wedding at San Miguel Pro-Cathedral was on a Saturday (I Googled it). The reception was at the Selecta on Dewey Blvd. (changed to Roxas in the 1960s). Selecta was a favorite among the Orosas, being a regular venue for our annual reunions. For whatever reason, I wasn't seated with other family members. Being a surly teenager, it was likely no one wanted to sit with me. But I do remember the former General Jesus Vargas was at our table. The general, then Secretary of National Defense, was a contemporary and friend of Pepe's father Hilario Hilario, both having been in the guerilla resistance during WWII. Years later, Pepe told me that some of their relatives were upset at not being invited. The bridegroom's family traditionally paid for the wedding then, and the Hilarios had to limit the attendance as they were paying for another wedding. (Perhaps his brother Manolo got married the same year?) I kidded Pepe that they should have used their credit card and invited all their relatives. Unfortunately, there were no credit cards then.

To start off their married life, Pepe & Charito stayed with us in our Aviles St. house. This was not long after Toto, his wife Lourdes and infant son Michael, having started out in Aviles, departed for the Horseshoe "compound" which already had two houses. Before Toto & Lou, there was my oldest sister Angelina (Tita), Manolo and their first born children in Aviles. I can't recall any time in our family when we didn't have three generations under one roof. This is still true today. When my sister Tita was still alive, they actually had four generations in their compound.

Dondi and Jimmy were born while they were in Aviles. Pepe was doing well at Atlantic Gulf & Pacific Co., where he became the industrial refrigeration expert, specializing in York systems. Pepe had a car that he financed himself, a rarity among young men since cars were and still are very expensive in the Philippines. He made numerous trips, then and later, to York's headquarters in York, PA. I had finished school, working for Procter & Gamble's affiliate Philippine Manufacturing Company. In 1962, I left for Pittsburgh, PA to study at the Carnegie Institute of Technology. A near tragedy struck not long after I left. A burglar entered the house and went upstairs. Pepe woke up, confronting the intruder. Pepe was shot at point blank range,

## Memories of Pepe Hilario

but fortunately, no vital parts were hit. The burglar and his accomplice left and were never apprehended. Pepe, bleeding profusely, got rushed to the hospital and recovered.

The 1960s were pre-email days, that was still a generation away. I kept a steady correspondence with Charito and Toto. There was no Skype, Viber, Messenger, FaceTime, etc. It was all snail mail. (I am leaving Charito's correspondence and cards with Joel. I don't know whether she kept my letters and cards.)

In the mid 60s, our parents undertook their biggest project, the construction of the large house at their 4,000 square meter lot on Horseshoe Dr. in Quezon City. Besides the more expansive yard, the new two-story house was much bigger. Pepe helped in sourcing the materials. His employer also happened to be in the treated lumber business. There was lots of space for their boys, now four with the addition of Frankie and Joel, to run around in.

It wasn't long after that Pepe and Charito bought a house at the [Phil-Am](#) development in Quezon City. They must have decided that 15 years living with the in-laws was enough. Besides raising a family, Charito & Pepe immersed themselves in ministries at their parish of [Sta. Rita de Cascia](#). Their main ministry was the [Christian Family Movement](#), in which they served as co-presidents. They continued to be active with CFM into their 80s.

For a long time, Pepe wrote a weekly column entitled Twelve Pebbles, the title being based on the twelve stones from the Book of Deuteronomy. I still have a collection in my email files. Pepe was passionate about the pro-life movement, joining others in protesting the Reproductive Act. (After many years of debate, the law was finally passed during the administration of President Noynoy Aquino.) This was one of the few times Pepe would be emphatic, saying we do not want a culture of death. He came as close to raising his voice as I could remember. Pepe even went to the legislative hearings and attempted to testify. I do not recall if he actually got to testify.

During my (and Val's) visits after our parents passed away, we usually stayed with Charito & Pepe. A couple of times, we stayed at the big Horseshoe house, then occupied by Frankie, Cecile & Bea, while they were constructing their new house next door. But Pepe was the driver, picking me up at the airport and taking me back for the return trip. I always admired Pepe's ability to know just about every street in Metro Manila. He was literally a walking, talking Google Maps. With Pepe, you didn't need Google, Waze or Mapquest. He even knew which streets were flooded after a rainstorm, which had to be avoided. He was partial to Honda, I don't think he ever owned another brand. He loved to participate in the Honda mileage contest.

Singing was another of Pepe's passions. He sang in the parish choir and with a group of former college mates. Even with years of singing experience, he was still taking lessons, culminating in a recital to showcase his skill. Pepe never passed up karaoke, something that is in the Filipino DNA. His paean to Charito was *Some Enchanted Evening*, from South Pacific. His version of Paul Anka's *My Way* wasn't bad either. Forget that guy named Frank.

After their sons were grown, Pepe was able to take Charito on his overseas trips. They also made vacation trips, visiting us in Crystal Lake, IL, Jackson, TN and Fairfield, OH. His sister Aida and her physician husband Hermes lived in the Milwaukee, WI area, and we were able to see them there also. After Hermes & Aida retired and relocated to the east coast of Florida, Pepe & Charito visited there too. One of their last overseas trips was to Chicago in 2006, after their granddaughter Kiten was born. It was going to be a happy occasion, to attend the christening of their granddaughter (their fourth and last grandchild). But the church in Chicago couldn't or wouldn't conduct the baptism during the time Pepe & Charito were there. I was extremely disappointed

## Memories of Pepe Hilario

that this church couldn't accommodate a devout couple who came 8,000 miles. I'm still disappointed when I think about it. Of course, Pepe was his usual calm and collected self, never criticizing the church's staff.

In Dec. 2018, we returned to San Miguel Pro-Cathedral for Pepe & Charito's 60th. I have been privileged to have been at their wedding, their 40th, 50th and 60th anniversaries.

Pepe was a survivor, having beaten prostate cancer, a heart attack and Covid-19. But his loneliness was palpable when [Charito](#) didn't survive the same Covid. You are together now, that's all that matters. Married for 62 years, the clock resumes. Farewell, Pepe, give Charito a big hug for us.

*And he will raise you up on eagle's wings,  
bear you on the breath of dawn,  
make you to shine like the sun,  
and hold you in the palm of his hand.*

Mario E Orosa  
Fairfield, OH  
August 30, 2022