

## Orosa Website Rewards

I started working on the [Orosa family website](#) more than 20 years ago. Gee, that was the previous millennium. I was still working for Procter & Gamble at their Winton Hill Technical Center in Cincinnati, which enabled me to take advantage of the “informal” resources that were available. Some of my colleagues, although not computer engineers, were geeks. Most were chemical engineers, like me. But they were a generation younger, familiar with computers, software and its nuances. By contrast, I cut my engineering teeth using a slide rule. I was full of questions, what software is easiest to use, how do I get a domain name, how to maintain the website, etc. Two of the younger engineers were a big resource, telling me about website software, domain name registration, file transfer protocol and web host. I picked the simplest software at the time, Microsoft FrontPage, which allowed me to write in plain English and not have to learn any computer language. Twenty some years later, that would come back to haunt me, but that is another story.

With help from Val, we had already accumulated a ton of information about our genealogy, both my paternal (Orosa) and maternal (Escobar) sides. This research dated back to our stay in Jackson, TN during the early 90s. Within a 5-minute drive of our home was the [Family History Library](#) of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints. You can research genealogy from any part of the world by using this free resource. At that time, the steps were laborious. First check out their microfiche, note what looks relevant, then order the microfilm from the LDS archives in Salt Lake City, UT. The microfilm rolls were huge, sometimes more than a foot in diameter. Then scroll ever so slowly through the microfilm to find the information, stop and print. Val did this patiently day after day, since I was still working and often on the road. The Philippine records from the Spanish colonial era (1565-1898) were written by friars in Spanish using cursive. But Val found the key words, Orosa, Taal, Batangas, Escobar, Iba, Zambales, etc. Today, you can do all this searching from your computer at home. We created our genealogical list, which was among the first items to be uploaded to our website. Slowly but surely, the website grew. Today, according to website tracker URLM, we have 2,655 pages, with 300 visitors a month. Later on we conducted research on Val's paternal (Rzepka) and maternal (Gutowski) ancestors.

Without doubt, the Orosa website has been the greatest source of satisfaction as far as any of my hobbies were concerned. I've done photography (still do), even doing paid photo shoots for weddings and parties while in Illinois (I needed the money), tennis (the extra money paid for an indoor club membership), winemaking and running (did a couple of 20K races in Chicago). All pale in comparison to the website feedback.

Why has the website been so rewarding? I'll mention two names – Vicente Y. Orosa and Maria Y. Orosa. The former is my father, and the latter is his younger (by 4 years) sister. Concurrently while growing the website, I started to write essays, accelerating my writing after retiring in 2001. If you care to look, I have more than [100 essays](#). Most are short, such as this one, about the length of a newspaper syndicated column, or 1,500 words. Some are much longer, as many as 20,000 words. Both my dad and Tia Mary (as she was called) led colorful lives, well documented in certain areas. This is not to detract from their 6 other siblings. They were all overachievers. I wrote about my dad's life and the story of the [Pensionado](#) program, which was a scholarship provided to young Filipinos by the American colonial government. Maria wrote letters home to her widowed mother Juliana, which along with now available material from ancestry.com provided material about [Maria's life in Seattle](#).

These essays attracted a lot of attention from serious researchers and others who were just curious. At one time, if you Googled Orosa, the first item would be orosa.org. We have lost this

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edge, as there are now a bunch of commercial websites incorporating the Orosa name. I won't give them any free publicity by listing them. Googling Orosa gets around 1.5 million hits, and the top trafficked sites today belong to a nail polish company. There is even an Orosa website in the United Arab Emirates. Among other things, Orosa UAE sells handbags for around \$500. Of course, commercial websites probably have algorithms that optimizes search engine results. I get solicitations for search engine optimization regularly. But if you Google Orosa genealogy, our website is still #1!

Perhaps the most interesting and somewhat surprising contact was with a historian named Lonon Taylor. Lonon contacted me after reading [my dad's biography](#) on our website. As it turns out, he was an old Orosa family friend. I had written about [Lonon](#) in another essay, but his story bears repeating. His father Alonzo Taylor was a civil engineer working for the U.S. government. He was assigned to the Philippines, living in Manila from 1946 to 1955. Mr. Taylor worked with and became friends with my father, who was then the Undersecretary of Public Works, later becoming Secretary. Mr. Taylor's family, consisting of his wife Virginia, his mother Sue and only child Lonon lived in the American compound called Seafront, on Dewey (now Roxas) Blvd. They made frequent visits to our home on Aviles St., which Lonon remembered fondly. As a parting gift, my mother gave the Taylor ladies a full length *terno* apiece, which Lonon donated to the Smithsonian after his mother died. (As excited as I was to learn of Lonon's donation, the odds of getting displayed at the Smithsonian is practically nil.) Lonon was a historian for the National Museum of American History at the Smithsonian Institute, with his magnum opus being [The Star Spangled Banner: The Making of an American Icon](#). Ours was an epistolary friendship at first but we finally got to visit Lonon and Dedie at their home in Fort Davis, TX in 2014. Lonon passed away in 2019, but before doing so, he completed a book about his time in Manila between the ages of 6 and 15. He remembered the words of the Philippine National Anthem, giving his book the title of "[Child of the Sun](#); Memories of a Philippine Boyhood." I was honored that Lonon asked me to review some of the chapters in the book. Starting with an essay about my father in our website, discovered by a Smithsonian historian, a rekindling of a family friendship, then completing his memories. That's how it went.

Another contact is [Dr. Ian Morley](#), a professor at the Chinese University of Hong Kong. He has taken an interest in Philippine urban history, writing voluminous books on urban planning and development during the American colonial period. He goes beyond the work of Daniel Burnham, following up on the contributions of Filipino urban planners. His latest book is [American Colonisation and the City Beautiful: Filipinos and Planning in the Philippines](#). Going through the Orosa website and my father's biography was part of his in-depth research. Dr. Morley and I even met in Cleveland, OH to continue our discussions.

Several descendants of pensionados have contacted me, asking for more information, to trace their ancestor. Sometimes I am able to provide information or direct them to the proper resources, but sometimes the trail grew cold. With hundreds of pensionados during the life of the program, scattered over the archipelago, it would have been a monumental task to track each one down. There have been a number of graduate students writing their dissertation about the pensionado program. Recently, I received an email from a student at Northwestern University in Evanston, IL. If and when she writes her paper, I'll be sure to share it.

But when it comes to quantity of inquiries and contacts, no one comes close to the subject of Maria Y. Orosa. There has a steady flow of emails over the years. Some of them have led to

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exciting results, such as Maria being discussed at a world symposium, or published articles. At present, I still have about half a dozen active contacts.

One researcher who initially got in touch with us early in the pandemic was a New York based freelance writer named Jessica Gingrich. Ms. Gingrich conducted in depth discussions with Evelyn O. del Rosario Garcia and me. Evelyn is the daughter of the late Helen O. del Rosario, who initially compiled the original 1972 book on Maria's recipes. Ms. Gingrich proceeded to write a [beautiful article about Maria](#) in the online magazine ladyscience.com.

Have you ever heard of Global Grand [Challenges](#)? It is one of the many programs sponsored by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. At its (virtual) annual meeting in October of 2021, in the section devoted to food, a video presentation was made to introduce participants to the work of Maria. The presenter was [Catherine Ceniza Choy](#), a professor at the University of California in Berkeley. Professor Choy, a Filipina American, spoke to both Evelyn Garcia and me for more details about Maria. Later on, Prof. Choy wrote a glowing review about the new book [Maria Y. Orosa, Appetite for Freedom](#).

Here are other researchers who have been in touch regarding Maria's life: an anthropologist and assistant professor at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor; a Filipina Canadian filmmaker in Toronto, Ontario; another Filipina Canadian filmmaker in Vancouver, BC. The online magazine Atlas Obscura expressed an interest. Though nothing has materialized so far, [Atlas Obscura](#) has many articles about the Philippines and is worth a visit.

There are many more instances of inquiries and connections made through our website. Some were highly personal, looking for former partners, or even humorous, as with a case of mistaken identity. But the examples above are enough to illustrate how the website has been a valuable tool to many.

At the beginning of this essay, I wrote the words "*would come back to haunt me*" with regards to the software. Simply stated, the software is obsolete and no longer supported by current Windows operating systems or web host servers. So, our website contents are frozen in time until software is updated, or the contents migrated to another system. Stay tuned. For important family events, we will communicate via Facebook, which has an Orosa Clan page.

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