

## REMINISCENCES I

Growing up in the Philippines

### Growing up on Aviles Street:

#### Surprise?:

I was born to Vicente Ylagan Orosa and Rosario Venzon Escobar on Nov. 21, 1939 in Manila. The reason I wrote surprise is that when I was born my father had already celebrated his 50<sup>th</sup> birthday and my mother her 42<sup>nd</sup> during the previous month. My closest sister (Rosario or “Charito”) was five years old and our eldest brother (Augusto or “Toto”) would be 21 in less than two months. Our other two siblings were eighteen (Angelina or “Tita”) and fifteen (Vicente Jr. or “Jing”.) Mom delivered me in our house on Aviles Street, under the care of Dr. Rosita Rivera. They must’ve made house calls back then.



*That's me with Charito*

It was a happy occasion and there was a huge baptismal party in Aviles. My godparents were Dr. Luis Santos, a surgeon friend of my parents and Mrs. Eulalia de Rustia. It was “peacetime” in the Philippines, the worldwide depression seemingly had no effect and the drumbeats of war in Europe and China were largely ignored even as the bombs were already falling. So for the next two years I was the typical middle class baby, cared for and indulged by a “yaya” or nanny named Gloria. Peacetime was the Philippine equivalent of Camelot but little did anyone know or have



imagined the brutality that was coming. (I did not see Gloria again until a number of years later when I was already a teenager and she asked me to be the baptismal godfather to one of her children.)

#### The War Years:

The western world thinks of America’s entry date into World War II as the day the Japanese Imperial Forces attacked Pearl Harbor. But we can think of this cataclysmic event very differently, much more traumatically since it also meant being brutally occupied for three years. It started the day the Japanese not only bombarded but also invaded our homeland shortly after the attack on Pearl Harbor. America was bombed but never invaded or its borders seriously threatened. The Japanese invasion of the Philippines occurred on several fronts. Clark Air Base in Pampanga was attacked, destroying the fleet of planes that had been parked almost wingtip to wingtip, supposedly to guard against sabotage. Ground troops landed in Lingayen in Pangasinan. My father evacuated the family to Calauag, Quezon, some 250 kilometers southeast of Manila. This was the hometown of Dr. Vicente Ylagan (Tio Inte,) who was married to Vicente’s younger sister Felisa (Tia Feling.) Tio Inte was a physician and Tia Feling a pharmacist. They operated a drug store on the ground floor of their house in Calauag while living upstairs. Tio Inte and Tia Feling also had large landholdings outside of Calauag consisting of coconut groves. (If I am not mistaken the land is still in the hands of their heirs (grandchildren.) My sister Tita just recently told me that to avoid the Japanese, they stayed out in the coconut farm where she recalls that the mosquitoes were the largest she had ever encountered. She even contracted malaria and had to take quinine which fortunately was available with two physicians in the family. But Vicente and family’s stay in Calauag was short lived. The Japanese landed at Atimonan, about 30 kilometers northwest. So Vicente packed his family up and went to Bauan, Batangas. This was where the family of Rafael Y. Orosa (Tio Paito) and our matriarch Juliana Ylagan Orosa (Lola Kanang) lived. All this happened less than a month after I celebrated my second birthday.

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My brother Augusto (Toto,) the eldest of the five of us children, stayed at the house on Aviles in Manila to guard against looters and squatters. He packed a .38 caliber revolver and was accompanied by a houseboy named Berlito. Toto told me he slept with the revolver under his pillow. If the Japanese had found out there was a firearm in the house, it would have been the firing squad or worse, like decapitation. He would instantly be suspected of being a guerilla and be tortured for information. Years later, I remember finding the revolver, showing it to my friends and playing with it. I'm lucky it didn't go off. Yes, we had ammunition.

It wasn't long after the invasion that they returned to Manila and endured three years of occupation. Dad continued to work at the Department of Public Works. He had no choice. He needed to support his family with five children (I was then 2 years old) and if he refused to work, it would've been Fort Santiago. Ft. Santiago was an old Spanish fort and was notorious as the place where the Japanese Kempetai, or secret police, brought in Filipinos for interrogation and to induce "cooperation." They specialized in several forms of torture to make you compliant. One story that has been circulated was about the "water torture." A water hose would be jammed down your throat and turned on full blast. Like everyone else, Vicente was paid in pesos issued by the Japanese occupiers. This money was issued by the Japanese and practically worthless, worth about as much as the paper it was printed on and often referred to as "Mickey Mouse" money. (*In the summer of 2002, Val and I were going through an antique market in Lawrenceburg, Indiana and found a collector who was selling this currency, so I purchased some.*) Filipinos resorted to barter, bypassing the whole currency system. At the end of the war, there were stacks and stacks of Japanese-Philippines currency that had been circulated. But food was scarce, the farmers weren't planting and whatever was grown either went to the black market or confiscated to feed the occupying troops. A garden was started in the back yard of the Aviles house. Camote (sweet potatoes) and talinum (spinach like vegetable) were grown. This was in the city and the back yard wasn't any bigger than most suburban yards you would see in the US. Vicente's younger sister, Maria Y. Orosa, regularly sent canned foods to the house. So during the period when I was two to five years old, our caloric intake was limited. I made up for it later.

All American and European civilians were interned by the Japanese at the University of Santo Tomas in the heart of Manila. Maria sent food to the internees as often as she could. This of course was done surreptitiously, or it would inflame the Japanese. Filipinos caught helping Americans were often dealt with severely. The internees were not prisoners of war. They were American men and women working in the Philippines, with some Europeans. None of them were connected with the armed forces, but that didn't mean anything to the Japanese occupiers. Vicente had another brother who was a physician, Dr. Sixto Y. Orosa. He was allowed to minister to the internees. There would have been an obvious shortage of even the most basic medical supplies. But his mere presence and his regular visit undoubtedly brought comfort to the internees.

After the liberation of Manila in February of 1945 the American Red Cross posthumously gave an award to Maria for her services. The supreme irony is that Maria died when the building she was in was hit by American bomb. Today there is a Maria Y. Orosa street in Manila and another one in Bauan, Batangas. Today, Orosa St. in Manila is an interesting one. It is considered "trendy" and has a lot of restaurants and nightclubs. A couple of them are gay bars. But we're getting ahead.

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During the occupation, there were Japanese sentries on street corners and Filipinos had to bow before them while passing through. Failure to do so or have an inadequate bow would invite a slap. Our houseboy named Berlito was once the victim of this. So Rosario made the children practice bowing on Saturday so they wouldn't have any problems during the walk to either San Miguel Cathedral or San Beda church the next day for Mass. The sentry they had to pass was on the corner of Mendiola and Aguila streets.

Remarkably, our house suffered almost no damage from the war, either from the Japanese invasion or subsequent liberation by the American and Filipino forces. Some stray bullets penetrated the roof, but that was all. One story I heard was that my father liked to watch the "dogfights" during liberation and the American planes, probably P-51 mustangs, coming in to strafe the fleeing Japanese and strike their fleet in Manila harbor. As a kid, I remember the rusted hulks resting along what was then Dewey (now Roxas) Boulevard. It was years before they were removed and sold back to the Japanese for scrap. No entreaties from my mother would make him take shelter, he wanted to watch the Japs get their comeuppance. The two older boys, Vicente and Augusto, also watched the dogfights with our dad. We did have an air raid shelter, a large concrete pipe that we would all crawl into. It was lined with "banig" or Filipino sleeping mats and everyone had a pillow. Of course my mother would never let such an ugly monstrosity sit without beautification. So plants were placed all around and on top of the shelter. Now, these are stories I was told, I don't recall any of them.

The following excerpt describing her own family's war experience comes from the journal of Maria Christina "Diding" Orosa, the daughter of my first cousin Sixto L. Orosa Jr. I wish to express my appreciation to her for allowing me to use it. Diding lives in Edinburgh and London

*"Manila fell to the Japanese on 2 January 1942 and all foreigners were interned. Lolo Sixto was the only non-Japanese allowed to visit the internees regularly, and he took with him concentrated calamansi (Filipino lime) juice rich in vitamin C and darak (rice bran) biscuits rich in vitamin B concocted by his sister Maria. She worked for the Bureau of Plant Industry and was a pioneer in food technology, experimental with all types of native fruits and vegetables. She held the rank of Captain in the underground movement of Marking's guerillas during the war, and died of shrapnel wounds in 1944. There is a street in Manila named after her. Although she was my godmother, I never knew her.*

*Ting, my father, joined the Batangas Unit of the Blue Eagle Guerillas, thereby imperiling the rest of the family, The Japanese regularly checked each neighborhood and did a head count. A family was made to suffer for the unexplained disappearance of any male relative. In 1944, the entire family, including my mother, brothers and me, moved to the ancestral home in Bauan. When they left 1913 Taft Ave., the district was elegant with Spanish style mansions and tree-lined streets. When the war finished two years later, almost everywhere was a wasteland. Manila was second only to Warsaw in devastation –bombed and sacked by the Japanese, bombed by American liberating forces, and burned and looted once more by the Japanese. The Taft Ave. house was reduced to rubble.*

*The Bauan house was crowded with refugees, so a dilapidated nipa (palm) hut was found on the beach on the outskirts of Barrio Aplaya. Later the family was able to move to a slightly better house. Mama remembered that when the air raid siren sounded she had to grab us children and dive under the hut, straight into the pigsty. Nipa huts were built on stilts*

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*and domestic animals were kept underneath.*

*Lolo resumed practice as a barrio (village) doctor, battling dreadful diseases with inadequate facilities. During a house call to a neighboring island, the "house" turned out to be a small boat where a man lay bleeding from stomach ulcers. Lolo was rushing the patient to Bauan when Japanese soldiers stopped and searched the boat and found recent issues of banned American magazines. He was able to convince them that this was an emergency, so he and the patient were allowed to disembark, but the rest of the crew were tortured and the owner-captain executed. At four the next morning, Lolo was taken by the soldiers and made to stand for hours in the middle of the main road. Fortunately a Japanese civilian recognized him and arranged his release.*

*Soon after this, a warning came via a Japanese friend that all the men in Bauan were to be rounded up and killed. The family decided to do a moonlit flight by sea to the neighboring island of Mindoro to the south. My father's guerilla unit, now officially attached to the 11<sup>th</sup> Airborne Division of the US Army, was based in Mindoro. The Americans had taken the town of Calapan, which is where the two batel (very lightly made sailboat) headed for, with grandparents in charge of one each, and passengers including aunts Leonor & Rosalinda, uncle Jose, my mother, my brothers, me and friends that Lolo could not turn away. Aunt Helen was a nurse at the Philippine General Hospital in Manila and felt obliged to stay at her post.*

*During the journey, they encountered heavy weather, and the batel under Mama Binay's charge lost its sail twice, nearly got shipwrecked, then finally made it to shore not in Calapan, but another town, Naujan. None of the men knew how to handle sails and it was Mama Binay who, having spent many years in a seaside town, told them what to do. Even in war greed can be a frightening thing. Everyone had been told to bring only the barest essentials, but when items had to be thrown overboard during the storm, it was discovered that a man had brought cartons of cigarettes to sell. During the Japanese occupation, cigarettes were rarer than pearls.*

*Eventually the refugees were reunited in Calapan, and again there was no room at relative's houses. They found a deserted farmhouse and used wooden crates for tables, tins for plates, fingers for eating. The family jewelry, title deeds, etc. had been buried in bamboo tubes in the garden in Bauan.*

*The day after the flight, the Bauan men were indeed rounded up and most imprisoned in the church, which was then blown up with dynamite. Most of the town was torched, including the Orosa house. After liberation, Jose was sent back to dig up the bamboo tubes. He found everything intact, including diamond parures and other pieces that were Mama Binay's family heirlooms. Commonwealth peso bills still new and crisp, a big bottle of pearls lovingly collected during their years in Sulu. He chose to return to Manila, entrusting the tubes to a family friend to take back to Mindanao. The friend eventually turned up claiming that his batel had capsized and the tubes swept overboard. Assorted pieces surface later, adorning other women."*

#### Prisoner of War:

Benjamin A. Farin, a second cousin on the Escobar side and pilot in the budding Philippine Air Force, was part of the units that surrendered in Corregidor in May 1942. He was lucky. If he had been among the forces that surrendered in Bataan a month earlier, he would've

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*Ben Farin at 81, yes he colors his hair. Framed picture from his younger days.*

been in the notorious "Death March." Instead, he was moved by ship and rail to Capas in the province of Tarlac, better than walking, but it was no picnic. Ben contracted malaria and dysentery, wasted away to skeletal condition and was given up for dead by the Japanese. So he was released. At least the Japanese released Filipinos who were too sick to do any resisting by joining any of the numerous guerilla groups. He somehow found his way to our house on Aviles. My mother Rosario took him in and Ben was ministered to by Dr. Cesar O. Ilagan, the physician son of Vicente's eldest sister Simplicia. Dr. Cesar himself was a physician officer in the army and was in Bataan but did not join in the surrender. Being Filipino, he was able to blend in with some civilians, obtain a banca and escaped via the bay to Manila. He kept a very low profile the rest of the war. After close calls during the war, both Cesar and Benjamin enjoyed lengthy lives. Ben returned to the Air Force piloting a C-47 but later became an entrepreneur and politician while Cesar continued his medical career. There were a spate of WW II movies produced after the war and one was "An American Guerilla in the Philippines." The male star was Tyrone Power, a big name in the 1950's. Cesar was staff and personal physician to Tyrone and the two became lifelong friends. Cesar passed away in 2000 at 87 while Benjamin, now 81, lives in Iba, Zambales, the ancestral home of the Escobars. Ben owned a resort on the beach at Iba and served as town Mayor for many years.

### Post Liberation:



*One of the American officers that Mom & Dad became friends with after liberation was Angelo Musso of San Francisco. 20 years later Angelo met them in SF.*

Immediately after liberation, Manila was in ruins. Vicente was lucky to have a civil service position, but it wasn't enough. To generate the extra income they sorely needed, Vicente & Rosario had several boarders. There were three bedrooms on the second floor of the Aviles house, with a large open area. One room was rented to a Jewish couple, another room to a American woman officer (WAC) named Betty and the master bedroom to Maj. & Mrs. Hollings. No one recalls the names of the Jewish couple. (If I were to surmise, they probably came from Shanghai in China. When Hitler came into power in Germany and the persecution of the Jewish people started, many left. Unfortunately, most countries, including the United States, spurned them. One exception was Shanghai and about 20,000 found refuge there. The movie "Shanghai Ghetto", released in the summer of 2003, recalls their plight.) The family maintained contact with the Hollings even after their return to the United States. The Hollings son visited Rosario and Vicente at their new home on Horseshoe Drive (Quezon City) in the late 1960's. The family also had frequent American visitors, among them a young American officer named Angelo Musso, from the San Francisco area. Mr. Musso also kept contact with the family for years.

The youngest children, Rosario (Charito) and Mario, slept on "banigs" or straw mats on the wood floor, protected from the ever present mosquitoes by a "kulambo" or mosquito net. Charito has a lot of stories and anecdotes about me during my boyhood days. She seems to have made it a point to remember these stories because I don't. We'll get to them later. Vicente and Rosario had a small bed in a corner. The two boys, Toto and Vicente Jr. (Jing) were shipped off to the detached garage, which had a large room above. Toto was then 22 years old and had tried to volunteer for the Air Force. At his physical Toto was rejected by

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the armed forces doctors for having a heart murmur. If he had been accepted, it is likely he would not have survived the war. His contemporaries that went into the armed forces gave up their lives in the futile attempt to stop the Japanese hordes. Our two cousins Ben Farin and Cesar Ylagan were very lucky. As it is, Toto lived for eight months past his 83<sup>rd</sup> birthday. Our eldest sister Angelina married during the middle of the war and lived apart. Now 82, is retired with her husband Manuel "Manolo" Velez Jr. in the town of Cleveland, Queensland in Australia.

Vicente also moonlighted as a professor at the Mapua Institute of Technology and Far Eastern University (FEU,) teaching in the civil engineering departments. He only gave it up after reaching cabinet level position in the government. The Dean of Engineering at FEU was Mr. Hermenegildo Reyes, a lifelong friend and fellow engineer. Our homes were within shouting distance. Dean Reyes later took control of my alma mater, then known as Polytechnic Colleges of the Philippines, later changed to Central Colleges of the Philippines (CCP.) Dean Reyes asked my dad to become President of the school, even while my dad was already in his 70's. Dad's portrait now hangs in the boardroom of CCP. The President of CCP passed on to Atty. Crispino "Babes" Reyes, Dean Reyes' eldest son, and my contemporary.



One business activity my parents engaged in was operating a "jeepney." After the war, thousands of American Jeeps were left behind. Enterprising Filipinos converted these to passenger vehicles, serving the whole country as a sort of mini-bus. Jeepneys then could hold ten passengers, eight in the back and two in front beside the driver. They were ubiquitous then and still are even today. However, the wheelbase has been stretched and they have doubled the number of passengers in the back. The jeepney was open on all sides and a plastic cover was rolled up around the sides. When the rains inevitably came, you rolled the plastic down. One of my cousins, Nasario Escobar, was the conductor and stayed in the back guarding the opening in the tailgate to make sure everyone paid. Nasario is now 73 and remembers the experience well. The fare was ten centavos or five cents at the prevailing exchange rate of 2 to 1. Nasario was paid two pesos daily. (Nasario and his family eventually immigrated to the United States and lived in St. Paul, Minnesota.)

A story passed on to me by various sources is instructive of my father's integrity and dedication, and why he needed to moonlight instead of just taking advantage of his perks. He and a delegation of officials were sent to Europe and the United States to study the latest trends in highway building, construction and modern materials. As is the custom in almost all governments everywhere, public officials traveling are given a "per diem" or daily allowance. You spend more and it comes out of your pocket. You spend less and you can keep the difference. If it were up to me I would be eating at McDonalds. Well, my dad didn't spend all of his per diem. As a cabinet official, I imagine he had a reasonable per diem that allowed him to dine at better restaurants. So, upon returning, he turned back in thousands of dollars. Everyone was incredulous! Why are you returning it? You are entitled to this. No, I didn't need it so I'm returning it to my government. Do you think this would happen among our public servants today??

A succession of nephews and nieces came to live at 430 Aviles while pursuing their studies in Manila universities. The first was a young lady named Lirio Posadas. She was followed by Teresita L. Escobar, the daughter of Rosario's younger brother Jovito. Very few colleges had American style dormitories for students and besides, Filipinos would only trust their relatives

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or extended families to watch their children, specially the young women. Teresita is now widowed and divides her time between two children in the Chicago area and two children in Toronto, Canada. We see her often.

The last two nieces to stay in Aviles were Alice N. Orosa, the daughter of Vicente's younger brother Rafael (Paito) and Anita E. de Vera, the daughter of mom's eldest sister Julita (Juling.) Anita and her two sisters eventually moved to the United States, later followed by Juling. Tia Juling celebrated her 100<sup>th</sup> birthday in 1995 and passed away in 1996. Alice and her husband live in San Jose, CA while Anita and her children live in Quincy, MA. They are both retired and enjoying their role as grandmothers seven or eight times over.

There were others, all cousins of mine, that stayed with us on Aviles St. Two of them were Apolinario (Naring) Orosa and Cipriano (Pering) de Vera, the latter while going to medical school. Another cousin that stayed briefly was Helen Orosa del Rosario, who is now 80. Except for Alice and Anita, I don't recall any of the others.

Honestly, I don't remember all the comings and goings but our house must've looked like Grand Central Station at times. Boarders, nephews, nieces and visitors!

### Augusto, aka "Toto":



*Toto in the early 50's, at age 31.*

Toto was already 22 years old when the war started but having been rejected for military service due to a heart "condition," he stayed home. He wanted to join the Air Force and the rejection was a lucky break. The others who volunteered at the same time he did and accepted for service all died during the conflict. Whatever this "condition" was, he outlived just about every one of his contemporaries. Since Toto had a phobia of doctors until the day he died, his malady was never really diagnosed. He once told me, I don't want to know. According to Toto, the Japanese required that all radios with short wave frequency be surrendered. So the family's large radio (radios were huge then and this one was the size of a small filing cabinet) in Aviles was turned in. The Japanese disabled the short wave function and returned it to us. We continued to use the radio well into the 1950's. But one of my uncles, Jose or Tio Pepe, was living around the corner on Buencamino St. and he didn't turn his in. So Toto went there regularly where they listened to broadcasts on the state of the war and reported it to the rest of the family. The broadcasts came all the way from Australia. So by the middle of 1942, they knew it was not all hopeless and it was just a question of time before McArthur fulfilled his destiny. Toto knew before the local Japanese (who may not have ever been told) that the American Navy had scored a stunning victory at Midway. But if the Japanese had found out Tio Pepe & Toto were listening to American broadcasts, there would've been no Toto and no Tio Pepe. Keeping a firearm at home, listening to American broadcasts, Toto certainly lived dangerously. He sometimes jokingly referred to himself as an "Amboy," a derisive term shortened from American boy that was used to describe some Filipinos with a seemingly overenthusiastic liking to things American. With McDonald, Coke, Nike, Levi and Star Wars, that would probably describe half the population today

For a short while after liberation, Toto worked for the American government or Army, lasting less than a year. He was "payroll auditor" meaning he disbursed the cash to workers on payday. These workers were construction men on projects financed by the United States government to help rebuild the city. Warsaw, Poland and Manila were the cities that were

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most heavily damaged in WW II. Toto carried thousands of pesos from location to location to hand out the pay. The peso was worth a lot more then, the exchange rate being two pesos to the dollar instead of over 50 today. Toto did have a bodyguard, a burly fellow named Salanova. Neither of them was armed. This payroll system would be unimaginable today. There would be armored cars and shotgun toting guards.

In contrast with most of the Orosas, Toto didn't go to any of the so-called elite schools like Ateneo (ugh) or La Salle (more ugh.) He went to a then obscure business school named Jose Rizal College, now University. The only thing I remember about JRC as they were called was their cheerleader's. JRC was in the same athletic league as my alma mater San Beda. They were all guys and during basketball halftime would perform dances like the mambo and cha-cha. I think they did it more to irritate the priest administrators of the Catholic colleges. Toto's mentor was Tio Pepe, the uncle he was closest to. When Tio Pepe passed away prematurely, Toto wrote to me with his own tribute.

Toto went on to a distinguished banking career at the Philippine National Bank, working there for over forty years. Like my dad before him, he had only one employer. He passed away in September 2002 at age 83 and my "paean" to him can be found in our website, [www.rosa.org](http://www.rosa.org)

#### Accused!

My dad was accused in some quarters of "collaborating" with the Japanese occupiers. Vicente provided an affidavit to the contrary and the incidents described in the affidavit provide an insight to life under the boot of a foreign occupier. After proving the charges a lie, Vicente stayed at the Department of Public Works and steadily rose to cabinet level position and served under several presidents. Within a year and a half after the war, he made a quantum leap in his career to Undersecretary position. He was already closing in on forty years of service to the Philippine government.

There was an incident where Japanese soldiers searched the Orosa house in Bauan, finding money and coins belonging to dad, his brothers and their mother. It represented the life savings of several families but it was confiscated. Dad wrote to Japanese authorities regarding the theft of family property by Japanese officers in an effort to reclaim it. Our family's property was never recovered. The affidavit and letter are in the Appendix.

My sister Charito graphically remembers the incident mentioned in #11 of the affidavit, although she was only ten years old at the time. She said our mother went down on her knees to ask the Japanese officer not to shoot our father. It seems that the officer had his revolver cocked and pointed within a few inches of dad's head. Perhaps it was our mother's pleas that made the difference. We'll never know. Regrettably, my father was a somewhat laconic man and never told us stories of his adventures in the United States as a young man or their experience during the war.

#### Postscript to Vicente Y. Orosa's career:

My dad worked faithfully for the Philippine government for something like 45 years and never got as much as a gold watch or luncheon when he "retired." He had been retained by President Ramon Magsaysay as Secretary of Public Works and Communications past the mandatory government retirement age of 65. Magsaysay was probably the most popular Philippine President ever, but he died tragically in a plane crash in 1957. The new president, Carlos Garcia, was surrounded by political hacks. My dad's career was



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characterized by honesty and integrity, a very uncommon trait among Filipino public officials then and now. (A corruption index issued Sept. 2002 places the Philippines as better than places like Pakistan and Nigeria but Taiwan, Hong Kong and Singapore are way less corrupt.) When he wouldn't cotton to pressure from Garcia's lackeys to bypass civil service rules in hiring by patronage, he was unceremoniously removed. But he held his head high and enjoyed the last laugh. His alma mater, the University of Illinois in Champaign-Urbana, awarded him their highest honor, Distinguished Alumnus, in 1959. His portrait hangs in the Union building, the focal point of the university. Among honorees in the past are Nobel Prize winning scientists, the Chairman of the Olympics and several CEO's. Not a bad company to be with, Vicente. I never lose an opportunity to visit the Illini Union and gaze at his portrait. Now if only the fighting Illini football team had an equally impressive showing.

### Education:

I went to San Beda College on Mendiola Street, about a half kilometer from the house on Aviles, preceded by my older brother Vicente Jr. (Jing.) Since Jing was fourteen years older than me, he was already out by the time I started. San Beda is run by the Order of Saint Benedict (OSB) and is named after the Venerable Bede, an English monk. The OSB itself was founded by the Italian monk St. Benedict, and the main monastery is at Monte Cassino in Italy. Monte Cassino was the site of a horrific battle in WW II and almost totally destroyed, but has since been restored to its former glory. Their motto is "Ora et Labora" or work



and pray. For ten years, this was my second home, with graduation from high school in 1955 at the age of 15. Yup, fifteen. At that time the Benedictine monks at San Beda were almost all Spaniards, and discipline was no nonsense. We wore khaki pants and white shirts every day and on the first Friday of every month, went to confession and communion. Once a year there would be a holy retreat. I remember Fathers Rojo, Martinez, Benabarre, Ortega, Lopez, Casares and del Hoyo. There were only a handful of Filipino Benedictine Fathers or Brothers at that time. And looking back, they were terrific educators. The Spanish Benedictines were the administrators and handled an occasional subject like religion but lay teachers handled most courses. They drilled us with unpopular subjects like physics, calculus, geometry & trigonometry, chemistry, world geography, English literature, not neglecting Wikang Pambansa (Filipino language.) English Lit would probably be politically incorrect today. Shakespeare, Chaucer, O'Neill. Who would care about them today? I still remember some verses of Gray's Elegy. How about Mark Anthony's funeral oration, it was my favorite. At no time was there any hint of race superiority or condescension on their part. They wanted us to become good Christian (Catholic of course) Filipinos. Better than the products of the dreaded Ateneo (Jesuits) and La Salle (Christian Brothers.) Every Monday morning there would be a flag raising ceremony, sometimes with outside speakers. Imbuing patriotism was the order of the day. These were the same people that called us Indios 100 years before, but today wanted nothing more than to make us the best. Today, the Benedictines monks and brothers at San Beda are all Filipinos. Thank you Fathers and Brothers.



*This was probably around my First Communion*

It was not all study. Then as today, the Filipinos favorite sport is basketball. (The other is cockfighting if you can call that a sport.) Though our stature handicaps us, our players aver-

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aging almost a foot shorter than the Americans, that didn't matter. We had an "NCAA" league, an imitation of the US collegiate NCAA. We were the Red Lions of Mendiola. We even copied NCAA school's music. Music for Ateneo's theme song was Notre Dame's, La Salle's was the US Navy song if I remember. San Beda's song was the US Marine's, with our own lyrics. Wonder if anyone checked for copyright. The other schools followed the same practice, one of the other school songs was Wisconsin's. I didn't find this all out until I came to the United States and said, hey, that's our music! It was really the other way around. How ignorant can I get? Our NCAA only played ten games vs. 30 for the USA collegiate version but it was life and death for us then. Pep rallies before the game and bonfires afterwards if we won. You think baseball games are noisy? Go to a Philippine collegiate basketball game. Not only did we compete on the court, we also wanted to see who could shout the loudest and longest. Fistfights were not uncommon when boys from one school ran into boys from a rival school.

The Benedictine fathers must've done something right. San Bedistas, as we call ourselves, seek each other out and celebrate their days at Mendiola. There is a second branch in Mandaluyong outside of Manila, which wasn't there during my days. Alumni associations are in practically every region in the United States. If I had sons going to school today, San Beda or other Benedictine institution is where they would matriculate. I would beg, steal or borrow to pay the tuition. Oops, no stealing.

#### Where we lived:

Since my boyhood days, the Philippine population has quadrupled so it should be easy to imagine that it was easy then to get around the city of Manila, which is rather small. Get on a jeepney, pay ten centavos and you'll be there in fifteen minutes. The presidential palace, called Malacanang, was also on Aviles St. *{Aviles St. was changed to Jose P. Laurel St. in the 1960's}* and less than a kilometer from our house. Also nearby were five schools, San Beda College (where I went,) Holy Ghost College (where my sister went,) Centro Escolar University, La Consolacion College and Mapa High. San Beda was boys only, the next three were girls only and Mapa was coed, being a public high school. Four churches were within easy walking distance, San Beda, San Miguel, St. Jude and San Sebastian. It is interesting that next door to Malacanang palace was a San Miguel Brewery bottling plant, followed by the San Miguel pro-Cathedral. To walk to San Miguel pro-Cathedral from our house, you would pass Malacanang Palace and the brewery first before getting to the church. A perfect symbol of Philippine life, play some politics first, then drinking and finally redemption at the House of God. Houses in our neighborhood were large and boxlike but there were still touches of elegance, relics of a bygone era. The older generation fondly referred to the pre WW II era as "peacetime," a sort of Camelot and remembering them as the halcyon days. My parents told me stories about Manuel Quezon, the Commonwealth President, taking a walk along Aviles, alone with no phalanx of bodyguards. Quezon was referred to as the Great Kastila or Spaniard, Kastila being a Tagalog term for Castilian. He would stop and talk to the residents and my parents spoke to him in Spanish. I have a Malacanang group picture from 1937 showing First Lady Mrs. Aurora Quezon and my mom standing just behind her. An American President, Harry Truman, also walked around Washington DC in the 1940's. Wouldn't happen anywhere today, even the Pope has to have bodyguards. The Quezon City and Makati suburbs, with their obscene fortress walls, checkpoints and armed security guards, were still to come.

Hurricanes are to Florida what typhoons are to the Philippines. They are the same meteorological phenomena except in different oceans. In the Indian Ocean they are called

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cyclones. Typhoons were named with masculine gender but it has since been changed, alternating with feminine. Since they are a natural disaster, I would name them all after women. Just kidding to see if you were reading. We would start with **Alberto** then **Bartolome**, **Carlos**, etc. By the end of the season, we would have almost exhausted the alphabet. But flooding was not as prevalent as today. Manila is crisscrossed with “esteros” or estuaries, which served efficiently as storm drains. They were still pretty decent then but starting to deteriorate. Today they are all silt clogged and choked with garbage. Every couple of years or so, with a really bad typhoon, maybe category III, flood water would rise and enter the first floor of our house. Then the smaller furniture and electric appliances were hauled upstairs and the bigger ones raised on blocks. The kids thought it was fun. We walked the streets up to our knees splashing water. Since sewers would back up, the water could be filthy. But I don't remember getting sick. Of course there would be a holiday from school. My children and now grandchildren have snow days in Ohio and Illinois, but we had baha days in Manila.

### Cousins:

Filipino families are large and closely knit. Often our best friends and playmates are our first cousins. This was particular true in the Orosa family. I was particularly close to the children of Tio Aching (nickname of Nicolas and pronounced at-sing) my dad's younger brother and corporate lawyer for the Hong Kong & Shanghai Banking Corp. They lived less than half a kilometer away. There were four brothers that I spent a lot of time with – Conrado or “Nonoy,” Senen, Tito and Cesar. Nonoy died tragically in a bicycle accident when he was 18, getting hit by a jeepney. I was devastated.

Filipinos like to explode firecrackers to celebrate the coming of the new year. New year's eve in Manila sounds like Beirut must've sounded during its worst days. Police and hospitals show gory pictures of men and boys with blown off fingers and hands but that doesn't deter anyone. The firecrackers get bigger and louder. On one trip that Val and I took, I timed it so we would spend New Year's Eve in Manila. I wanted her to have the experience. She said I was like a kid with the firecrackers. Which was true and leads to the next story. Senen and I must've been 13 or so and we were firing away. Too close to some neighbors I imagine so they complained. Before we knew it, some cops came and hauled us away. Senen and I spent the evening at the jail basically sitting around. No, we weren't placed in a cell. Our mothers were furious. You will have a criminal record, they said. You won't be able to run for office, Senator, even President.

### Free Movies:

Up to my teenage years, I saw a lot of movies for free. I think, but am not positive, that Toto had a banking client who gave him free tickets to Tagalog movies. Toto, a reader of John dos Passos and George Orwell among other authors, didn't particularly like Tagalog movies. Most of the movies shown in Manila then were Hollywood imports but there were a couple of movie houses that showed nothing but Filipino made movies. Today, home grown movies are more prevalent. I inherited the tickets and went with our household help Valing. Valeriana Taas could cook, clean house and climb fruit trees. When the caimito or “star apple” in the back yard needed harvesting, up she went. She served the family for forty years and still lives in the family compound at Horseshoe, in declining health. I could mention the names of the heartthrobs and beauties of the day but to my prospective readers I might as well be naming the Kabuki stars of Tokyo theatres. Filipino movies of those days were tearjerkers. There is one name I'd like to mention, that of child actress Tessie Agana. She was the champion when it came to inducing tears. .A poor boy meets an

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aristocratic woman, her family objects but love wins in the end. Today I would've rated the old movies as one hanky, two hanky or three hanky types. Future President Joseph Estrada was yet to appear on the scene with so-called action pictures and their make-believe fights.

I went to Hollywood movies more often than the local variety, but this time with my dad. Mother wouldn't think of going to those kinds of movies that had kissing on the mouth, passionate embraces and such. Remember that beach scene in the movie "From Here to Eternity?" That was a scandal! There was no kissing in Filipino movies then, maybe a slight peck on the cheek. Dad got free tickets, I think from one of his employees whose name was Hugodino Lim. Dad was then General Manager of the People's Homesite and Building Corp. (PHHC,) or the HUD (US Housing and Urban Development) equivalent of the Philippines. Hugodino was a Chinese-Filipino who I remember because he was always carrying a pistol in his waistband and was rather loquacious. Of course most everybody carried firearms. Signs on doors of bars and nightclubs read "check your firearms." Hugodino got into an argument with a fellow employee, a lawyer, one time and the two guys shot it out high noon style in front of the office building. Hugodino got two bullets in the chest but survived. The lawyer didn't get a scratch. Dad suspended the other guy but I never knew what the argument was about or what happened later. The lawyer came to our house to plead his case with dad, but he should've gone to the cops or the fiscal. Our driver told us that everyone was diving under the desks when it happened. Wouldn't you if you heard shots nearby and 0.38 caliber bullets ricocheting off the walls? At least the two guys decided to conduct their argument outside the lobby instead of inside, thus saving a messy cleanup. Anyway, dad got the best seats at loge, not just orchestra or balcony. Maybe I never played Little League or soccer with dad coaching or watching, but we spent a lot of time together going to the movies. That was my late nights with dad. After dinner, our driver Pilo (Pampilo de Mesa) would take us to downtown Manila where the movie houses were and wait for the next two hours to bring us home. There would sometimes be a discussion on the relative merits of the picture. What a life! No, we didn't eat popcorn at the movies.

My fantasy job is being a censor for movies in the Philippines. Yes, the movies were censored then and there is still an official censorship board. A Board of Censors watches the movie and passes judgment on whether they are acceptable for release or not. And they get paid doing it. Supply your own popcorn. Standards have relaxed, but we still don't permit movies that 17 year olds can go see in the US. There was even a question about Schindler's List because there was a sex scene. Imagine, censoring a Steven Spielberg movie. With censorship, that is how ridiculous it can get sometimes. The Catholic Church hierarchy during my time also rated movies, even after they had already passed through the censors. Certain movies were judged as not suitable for good Catholics. Of course we looked through the list and immediately made a beeline for the unsuitable movies.

#### Life of the bourgeoisie:

Life for the professional or propertied Filipinos wasn't bad during the 40's and 50's. If one didn't care to do any housework or maintenance, there was cheap help. (This is still true but the help isn't as cheap.) On Aviles St., we had a cook, a laundry woman, a chauffeur and a houseboy. The cook went to the palengke (market) daily and our food was always fresh. Chickens were brought home alive, then their throats slit, dunked in boiling water and feathers removed. Seafood was still jumping when purchased, having been just brought in from the bay or rivers, before the gross pollution of today. Vegetables came straight from the gardens. The lavandera or laundry woman washed all clothes by hand, then spread on

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tin sheets under the sun (I guess to bleach) and finally rinsed. Everything was ironed and starched, including underwear. I can even remember the irons of our lavandera used charcoal before we got electric irons. My mother was a stickler for cleanliness, which I think all of us children inherited. Thank you, Rosario. You could eat off her floors. The wood floors on the second floor were regularly waxed and polished with coconut husk. That was the specialty of Daniel the houseboy. The floors glistened like glass. Our house had a bidet. I've never had one since and someday I'll get one. I better hurry.

The help, except for the driver, was provided with room and board but the pay was around \$10 monthly. The driver made more, about \$30, which was the minimum wage then. (Today the minimum wage is \$5 per day.) Freshly graduated with a degree chemical engineering, my first job with Procter & Gamble in 1960 paid \$90 a month, a handsome wage for a 20 year old living at home. That was an above average salary at the time. P & G still pays a premium in hiring the ones they recruit.

Children stayed home even after marriage. My two sisters, Charito & Tita, initially lived with our parents after getting married and having children before getting their own places. My eldest brother Toto did the same thing. Our other brother Jing never married. Children had "yayas" or nannies from the time they were born. I had one myself, a lady named Gloria. Many years later, having married and starting a family of her own, Gloria asked me to be godfather of her youngest baby. I was very happy to accept.

We didn't get our first TV until the late fifties, a 13 inch black and white version with poor reception. Later on the reception was improved after the installation of a roof antennae. There were a lot of reruns. We listened to the radio a lot, following some Tagalog soap operas. I don't remember if those soaps were sponsored by Procter & Gamble, but it is likely some of them were. Kuwentong Kutsero (horse card driver tales) was a family favorite. Overall, life in the fifties was very comfortable for the middle class. The Philippines was still economically ahead of the countries that now make us look like paupers – Taiwan, Hong Kong, South Korean and Singapore. Even our athletes dominated the Asian Games, but not anymore either. No one could touch the Philippines at basketball.

As a cabinet official, one of the perks my dad received was a low license plate numbered automobile. Traditionally, the limousine of the President is #1, the Vice-President #2, Senate President #3, etc. As an Undersecretary, our car had the number 12 and when he became Secretary, we made the leap to number 6. Since there are a number of cabinet members, I recall that he had the number E, so our plate was 6E. That meant the traffic cops would be deferential and parking was never a problem. We were used to getting saluted. I imagine with the world situation today, we would want to be more inconspicuous.

No matter where you live, status symbols are de rigueur. A BMW, more popularly referred to with the ridiculous nickname of beamer, seems to be the rage here today. But among my generation in the Philippines in 1960, it was the Kharman Ghia. It was a two-seater and if you owned one, that meant you were a success, or had parents that were willing to buy you one.

#### A word about the help:

It would appear that the middle class exploited the help, which may be partly accurate. But without exception those that come to the large cities like Manila looking for work as domestics come from poor rural families and have little formal training. They also spoke

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*Agapita Reoperez or Aling Pita, now 84 years old. She served three genera-*

their own dialects and had to learn Tagalog. I remember our lavandera, a tall, skinny woman named Denciang (Prudencia) from the island of Cebu. She was barely literate and she asked me to read the letters she received, which was in Cebuano. At times, she dictated and I wrote some letters, spelling the Cebuano phonetically. Want to see an example of Tagalog vs. Cebuano? In Tagalog, good morning is “magandang umaga” but it is “maayong buntag” in Cebuano. And we have 80 dialects in the Philippines!!

But there is another side, at least for families like the Orosas. The help oftentimes grew to be considered members of the family. We would never, never abandon them. Valing, whom I mentioned in the movie paragraph, is provided with living quarters, years after her service. When she is ill, we all chip in to cover her hospitalization and medication. (In 2005, Valing was moved to a home for the aged by Charito.) Another lady that served both my sisters, Aling Pita is now eighty-seven and continues to receive help from them. Valing and Aling Pita were followed in service by another lady named Vicenta, who is now working for one of my nephews. She started with my parents thirty years ago. She has blossomed into a terrific cook, and during my visits serves my favorite breakfast of rice and “daing” (sun dried fish) or “dilis” (tiny dried anchovies.) This is followed by slices of fresh mango. Yum!



Valeriana Taas or Valing, in her youth and in her late 70's.

We called our help “katulong” which is a literal translation. We never used the word “alila” or servant. They demonstrate remarkable loyalty. During my brother Toto’s last days at home, before being hospitalized for the final time, Vicenta brought food to him daily since Toto & Lourdes didn’t have a cook. And now she is helping Lourdes sort through his piles of accumulated papers. From my visits to Toto, it seemed he didn’t even get rid of old magazines and newspapers.

### Vicente Jr., aka Jing:



*Jing’s graduation picture; he received a B.S. in civil engineering.*

Among my siblings, Jing lived the most unconventional life compared to what was typical among the Orosa clan men at the time. He worked all over the Philippine archipelago for other companies before going into business for himself. Some of the places he lived in I haven’t been to nor have any desire to visit. Like Davao for example. He tried one venture after another. He worked for a couple of mining companies and a construction company. He finally seemed to settle down in the province of Davao in Mindanao. There, he tried rice farming, raising pigs, logging and lastly growing cacao. None of them were particularly successful.

I do have one fond vivid recollection of him during the early 50’s or maybe it was the late 40’s. Jing was an avid bowler and excelled, playing in competitions. Now, bowling in the Philippines then used the smaller ball, referred to in the US as duckpin. Nevertheless, he had few challengers and remember going with him a few times to the bowling alley near the campus of Mapua, the engineering school he graduated from.

Among the three of us brothers, I would guess he’d score the highest on an IQ test. I would

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probably score the lowest. He had followed my father into civil engineering. A very quiet man, he never liked being in Manila and preferred the barrios in the provinces. Then in 1994, he was brutally murdered, bludgeoned to death for what reason we never knew. He was growing cacao, selling the beans to Nestle. His killers couldn't have had robbery in mind since Jing virtually had no assets. No automobile, no appliances, no modern conveniences, no bank account of any consequence. His house had no running water or electricity. But he chose this life. The local Nestle manager called my brother Toto, and he and brother-in-law Joe Hilario (Charito's husband) brought Jing home. He was only 69 years old, a premature age among Orosa men. The murderers were never brought to justice. There were only suspects who were questioned but didn't go to trial. It turned out that Jing had a common law wife, but there was no issue and she was no help whatsoever with the investigation. Please God, let Jing rest in peace.

### Angelina, aka "Tita":



Tita is the eldest of my two sisters. She is 82 and living with her husband Manuel "Manolo" Velez Jr. near Brisbane in Queensland, Australia. Born in 1921, she married during the middle of the war so I don't recall any of her life until she had already started a family. What is interesting is the family of my brother-in-law Manolo. His father was Manuel Velez Sr., the Cebuano composer who wrote "Sa Kabukiran" which is the most enduring classic Filipino song. Of course the Cebuanos might

*Tita at age 20 in 1941.*

sisters was Lilian Velez, a beautiful movie actress who was the star of her generation in the late 1940's. She was married but was brutally murdered by another actor. I remember the sensation at the time and the details escape me but I have no desire to recall any of the allegations. The murderer was tried and sentenced, eventually dying in prison. Several years ago, a movie was made of her life, appropriately entitled "The Lilian Velez Story."



*Lilian Velez,  
sister of Manolo*

Tita and Manolo had six children and at least one inherited the musical genes. Their son Enrico or "Rico" went on to become a musician but sadly his career was cut short by a stroke at age 50. Tita had a long, faithful career in the public school system rising steadily through the ranks. She and Manolo retired to Australia to join their youngest son Edwin in Sydney, Australia. She was busy with her career and family when I left for the United States in 1962 but as we both age, we are closer than ever.



*Tita with Manolo.  
He worked as a radio operator on a ship for many years.*

### Rosario, aka "Charito" stories:

Charito is five years older than me and every time we get together, especially when Val or other relatives are around, she loves to bring out these stories about me as a boy. She seems to have a stronger recollection about them than I do and delights in recounting them. Like she is afraid of dogs because I was bitten by one, when I threw a bucket of water at an American Army officer, the dirty tricks I played on our houseboy Daniel, the time a playmate threw a rock at me which caused a head wound and a lot of bleeding



*"Big sister" Charito and husband Jose Hilario. We call him Pepe, others call him Joe.*

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that she had to minister to, that I liked to suck on a can of condensed milk, etc. etc. etc. I couldn't figure out why she would be afraid of dogs when I was the bitten one. Charito explained that I screamed bloody murder during the two weeks of anti rabies shots I had to take. There are quite a few stories and we'll have to have another separate section just devoted to it.

### Tikoy and Chinese:

Chinese-Filipinos or "Tsinoy" are undoubtedly the most successful of any group of Filipinos if we classify ourselves by either ethnicity or regional origins. Our family dealt almost exclusively with Chinese merchants when it came to buy anything ranging from groceries to hardware. They were my mother's "suki" or preferred merchants. It was impossible to spend money without dealing with a Tsinoy business. Chinese concessionaires operated the canteen at our Benedictine school. Today, the Shoe Mart and Robinson mega malls are controlled by Tsinoy families Siy and Gokongwei. During the 1940's and 50's, the Chinese were not as integrated into the mainstream Filipino life as they are today. Besides our features, Tsinoy were easily distinguishable by their poor command of Tagalog. This is no longer true today. I would even bet that the younger Tsinoy have lost their ability to speak Cantonese or Fukien. (Most Tsinoy originated from south China and Mandarin was not their native tongue.) I can remember seeing Chinese women walking very awkwardly on very tiny feet. It wasn't later that I was told of the custom of binding the feet of women from affluent families. It was a cruel irony where the rich suffered and the poor didn't since the poor didn't practice it.

During the Lunar New Year that the Chinese celebrate, it was customary for the Tsinoy merchants to give their customers and friends tikoy a rubbery and gelatinous rice cake that when raw has the consistency of tire rubber. They would be sliced thin and fried. It tastes good but is not recommended for denture wearers.

I am happy to note that we are following the old adage of "if you can't lick 'em, join 'em." Inter-marriage between of Malayan descended and Chinese descended Filipinos are all over the landscape, including my family.

### The Opera Singer:



*Mrs. Lopez*

Would you believe it if I told you I sang in the Bizet opera Carmen? Would you also believe we sung our part in French, not in Tagalog or English? Well, we sure did. One of our neighbors on Aviles Street was Mrs. Asuncion Lopez, of Spanish heritage. They spoke Espanol at home. She had two boys my age who were my playmates. The older brother was named Joelito. The younger one, my age, was Paquito (usual nickname for someone named Francisco) and his mother coached him to sing. You see, Senora Lopez was a Professor of Voice Culture at a woman's university in Manila and her husband Pantaleon Lopez sung baritone. Paquito had a beautiful voice and I'd bet he could have qualified for the Vienna Boys Choir. Senora Lopez was involved in opera and needed some boys to play the street urchins. In one of the scenes from Carmen, some boys were marching and singing, imitating the soldiers from the garrison, which was across the cigarette factory where Carmen worked. You knew that scene, didn't you? Paquito was of course a natural and I got recruited, along with some other



*The Carmen street urchins, I'm second from the left in front. Hey I'm already bigger than average.*



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neighborhood boys. I must've passed the audition or they were really desperate. We practiced and practiced until Senora Lopez declared us ready. We had a dress rehearsal and finally performed the opera on February 27, 1949. It really happened. I was nine years old. And we didn't disgrace ourselves. Here are a couple of lines from our part – "nous marchons, latête haute comme de petits soldats." The Lopezes moved several years later and we lost contact. But muchas gracias, Senora Lopez. No wonder Carmen is one of my favorite operas. The other is Aida. And I can't understand either language.

### Religious practices:

Corrupt or not, Filipinos take their Catholic traditions seriously. But some of our practices are found nowhere else or have long since been abandoned by other Catholics. Viernes Santo or Good Friday meant going to the provinces. Friday afternoon meant looking for the penitencias or flagellants. Once found, us kids would be following them around, getting perverse entertainment from grown men bloodying themselves with barbed whips. What started out as devout men inflicting pain on themselves to purge their souls became entertainment for the kids and nowadays is even touted as a tourist attraction? Check it out on the Internet. Maundy Thursday and Good Friday were national holidays. Even the big suburban malls of today would close. Only religious movies would be shown in downtown theatres. Streets were empty and churches packed, listening to the "Siete Palabras" or seven last words of Christ.

### Skeeter O'Hare:



*Diane O'Hare*

I am not sure of the exact year, perhaps 1960 or even 61 but an American high school senior named Diane O'Hare stayed with us for a few weeks. She was with the American Field Service, which has an exchange program with other countries, sending Americans high school seniors and juniors abroad to spend the year with local families and vice versa. Diane told us her nickname was "Skeeter" and to call her that. I later learned that the name is sometimes used to indicate mosquitoes. She had spent the school year in one of the Visayan provinces and was spending some time in Manila before heading back to the US. There wasn't anyone in our household her age I was the closest but a few years older. With teenagers a few years might as well be 25. She was a pretty sturdy and self-reliant girl and we tried our best to occupy her time. It was a nice experience for all. She returned to her home in southern California. She and I kept correspondence for a while. She married to a fellow named Morton and they moved to Oregon to live an outdoorsy life. She said they were going to construct a log cabin. I told you she was self-reliant didn't I. Unfortunately we lost contact after a while.

### Rosario Escobar Orosa, aka "Chayong":

My mother was called either Ate Chayong or Tia Chayong, very rarely Rosario. My sister and her share the same name but my sister's nickname is Charito and mom's is Chayong. Go figure. Now, Filipino families are matriarchal and my mother fit this category in spades. She was the dominant figure of our family. Risk taker and visionary. For example if it were up to my dad, they never would have bought those properties back in the forties and fifties. I think they even bought some before WW II. But mom wanted to leave a legacy, that each of the children would get something. Each of us five were to be bequeathed a piece of land with a house on it. Filipinos call it "pamana" or literally inheritance. House and lot was a term popularly used, a term I never heard in the US. You bought a house and of course the lot came with it. The piece of property on Horseshoe that is now my sister Charito's was bought for five pesos a square meter but is now worth approximately 10,000 pesos per

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*This was probably Mom's first visit to Malacanang. The date is Jan. 1937, shortly after the family moved to Manila. The First Lady Mrs. Aurora Quezon is seated in the center. Mom is standing behind the woman on Mrs. Quezon's left.*

square meter perhaps more. Of course that covers a period of fifty years and mom couldn't have predicted it was going to appreciate that much, but it was important to her and therefore to my father that the children were taken care of. Everyone dreams of a "house and lot" and my parents were going to make sure it became reality. This would even extend to life beyond. They bought a large enough cemetery plot to accommodate all of us children, in-laws and grandchildren. Our very own compound for the departed. My parents and brother Jing are buried there.

She seemed to be the polar opposite of my father. Dad was quite imperturbable and laconic; she was kinetic, high strung and loved to talk. (I take more after her.) He was an indifferent Catholic but very



*Mama handing out Christmas presents to the poor of Iba*

active Freemason. He also belonged to all kinds of clubs like Lions International, Scottish Rite (a Masonic body) and Knights of Rizal. She was religious and never missed Mass, very rarely joining him in those civic and social excursions. Even when he became Grand Master of the Grand Lodge of the Philippines, she seldom was inclined to join him in the numerous functions held by the Masons. But that her social agenda soon changed with the new President in 1953.

The most popular Philippine President ever was Ramon Magsaysay, who came from the province of Zambales, also my mother's home. They knew each other before his political rise and mom intimately knew his parents and family who came from the nearby town of Castilejos. We may even have a common ancestor, the fabled Fernando del Fierro of Galicia Spain. He was "Monching" to her and not Presidente. So when my dad became a member of Ramon's cabinet, mom suddenly was interested in all the social happenings. They were frequent attendees at Malacanang functions like dinners, balls and charity affairs. Charito and I even got into the act. Milagros, one of the President's daughters was having her debutante ball and we were invited. The bourgeoisie make sure their daughters have this "coming out" or "introduced to society" ball at age eighteen. I was about fourteen and didn't want to go but mom wasn't going to have Charito attend without a "chaperone" – her little brother. Charito had her own modest debut at home.

It is traditional for First Ladies to have some kind of charity or cause (remember Nancy Reagan's just say no?) Luz Magsaysay enlisted the cabinet wives who collected and prepared clothing for the city poor. So mom went to the palace on a regular basis (weekly I think) to hobnob with the other cabinet wives. She was even able to recruit one of my aunts, Tia Luring (married to Nicolas.) They had a nice tailored uniform and posed for photo opportunities. My mother's world was never the same after her beloved Monching died in a plane crash in 1957. And my dad's 46 year career with the government would end soon after.

Here's an indication of mom's love for conversation as related by my brother Toto. Her favorite niece was probably Teresita, eldest daughter of her younger brother Jovito. Teresita

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is now 75, widowed and divides her time between her children in the Chicago and Toronto areas. Toto was driving them to Zambales one time and the two started an animated conversation in the back seat from the time they left Manila. The words never stopped flowing. Toto stopped the car later on to get out and when the women asked, he answered that he was resting his ears from the constant battering. He was smoking at that time so that was probably the real excuse.

She was a philanthropist; first adhering to the concept of charity begins at home then to the lesser fortunate. My parents took various relatives in and I am sure they didn't pay rent. There was an annual Christmas giveaway at her hometown of Iba Zambales to distribute toys and goodies to the children. And she never advertised any of this. Whether she had first read the beginning of Chapter 6 of Matthew, I don't know, but it seemed she was following the principle.

Mom had a lot less education than my dad but she was no slouch. If you consider the dialects, she spoke more languages. Besides Tagalog, English and Spanish, she knew Zambal and Ilocano, the former the language in her home province of Zambales and the latter the nearby province of Ilocos Sur, where her Escobar grandfather came from. On a middle class salary, they were able to accumulate property. The five pretty good-sized properties passed on to the children, a vacation home in Iba Zambales, rice fields in Nueva Ecija and inherited farmland also in Iba. Of course property was extremely cheap when they were first acquired. There were a lot of separate properties in and around Iba and apparently my grandfather Juan Escobar was a landed man. I am trying to research how the Escobars acquired all this property.

She "supervised" the building of all the houses, working with Lope Leabres, married to one of our first cousins. Neither one was formally trained but they could design and build houses that withstood typhoons. They won't win any architectural awards but are all still standing in great shape. They didn't use formal drawings either, mostly sketches. She juggled numerous projects, some of which were referred to by Toto as white elephants. I don't think Toto said that to her face. Lope has passed away too but his children carry on his tradition of being skilled craftsmen. Lope had thirteen children and he trained them all, carpenters, electricians, masons. He was a one-man construction company and vocational school who didn't smoke or drink, although he did like to bet on the cockfights on occasion. Lope's wife Lutgarda or "Lut" is my first cousin, still around and you wouldn't know from her appearance that she had fourteen children, only one of whom did not survive. At 76, she is graceful and slim. The Escobars genes at work.

Mom's biggest construction project occurred after I had already left – the building of the house on Horseshoe where they moved into in 1965. It has now passed on to Charito. I stay there during my visits. A sprawling two-story house made of the best Philippine hardwoods and at one time three generations lived under one roof. Mom & dad, my sister Charito, husband Pepe and their children lived there while next door my sister Tita lived with her children. At that time Tita was already a grandmother, so you can say there were four generations. My brother Toto lived a few houses away. Talk about close. But this is not uncommon among Filipinos.

Mom used the construction of the Horseshoe home as an opportunity to honor her beloved husband. There is a special room or "library" where all of my dad's career mementos were

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stored. His pictures with dignitaries – I have pictures of him with at least six Philippine Presidents – newspaper and magazine articles and tons of photographs. As a cabinet official, my dad had an official photographer and the pictures are all neatly catalogued. They are all in black and white and sharp. I do remember one of the photographers carrying around a very large format camera, a 4 x 5? She hung his large portraits along the wall. My dad used the library as an office to the end of his days.

The Horseshoe property had a lot more land so mom was able to indulge in her other pursuit – gardening and flowers. The family had a full time gardener, a short skinny guy named Kiko (that is the Tagalog nickname for Francisco, the Spanish nickname being Paco.) The grounds had flowers blooming all the time and mom's collection of orchids would rival any arboretums. There were bougainvillea, hibiscus and frangipani. There were coconut trees, mangoes and tamarind. She loved showing the grounds to visitors, especially Europeans and Americans. I have pictures of just about every blooming plant. Something would always be blooming or bearing fruit.

Mom also had a practice that she didn't give up until the early 1970's when she was already 75. She liked to keep animals in Horseshoe, specifically pigs. There was usually only one although before the construction of the big house, she kept several. Almost on a daily basis, the leftovers from the days meals would be taken to Horseshoe and fed to the pigs. Even Nadine and Mario remember them. Once a year, it would be time to slaughter the pig. Sometimes it would be for a special occasion such as a birthday and the pig would be made into "lechon." Lope (Leabres) who was married to my first cousin, did the honors.

The Horseshoe house may have been mom's biggest project but no doubt the most sentimental one is the vacation house and "palaisdaan" or fishpond in Iba, which are now Charito's. The way the story is told to me, her father Juan Escobar had a lot of property in and around Iba and each of the six surviving children were allotted their share. A seventh child, Alejandra passed away prematurely at around age 30. But slowly but surely, most of the children sold their properties, mostly to finance their children's education. My mother bought some of the properties and wound up with a large tract, I would guess over an acre. A two-story house was built and the back excavated to turn into fishponds for "bangus" or milkfish. Bangus is a favorite of Filipinos and is interesting to cultivate. The fingerlings, barely an inch long, are caught near the shore using a net that is the consistency of nylons. Then they are released in the fishponds, fed and matured. I say interesting because obviously they hatch in salt water but the fishponds are either freshwater or brackish. The place was and is beautiful, palm ringing the ponds and a gentle breeze always coming in the South China Sea barely a kilometer away. Charito, Pepe and their family use the place, along with other friends and relatives. During my visit in March '02, a group of secretaries from the Quezon City Sports Club spent a weekend there. A bed and breakfast for free.

Mom and dad were married 60 years and was only a couple of months shy of completing 61 when he died. Like most long married Filipino couples, in their later life they didn't just call each other Juan or Maria, or in their case "Inte" and "Chayong." He called her hija, Spanish for daughter and she called him daddy in return. Listen to older Filipino couples sometime, catch what they call each other. Terms of endearment to awaken their erotic past perhaps? I'm starting to call Val mom. Wonder if she'll call me son? (There is a beautiful article by an Englishman about the Filipino propensity for catchy and colorful nicknames.)

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### Lope:

Lope Leabres was my mother's general contractor and jack-of-all trades. I haven't met any Filipino before or since that possessed his protean skills. He was primarily a carpenter but did masonry work, electrical, design, upholstering, plumbing and landscaping. He re-caned and refinished all our furniture. He could butcher a pig and roast the lechon. I even remember him butchering deer. He fathered fourteen children, thirteen of whom lived to maturity, living productive lives. He trained his boys to be the type of honest skilled person he was and they are carrying on his tradition, building houses in the Manila area and in Iba, Zambales. All this with little formal education.

Born on Sept. 25, 1920 in Penaranda, Nueva Ecija, Lope was related to the Escobars in more ways than one. His sister Guadalupe (Tia Uping), was married to my mother's younger brother Jovito (Tio Vito). Lope married my first cousin Lutgarda (Lut), the daughter of my mother's sister Alejandra (Tia Anday). I don't know much about Lope's early life but ever since the late 1940's until the early 1980's, my mother and Lope formed a two-person design and construction gang. Between the major construction work came the repair, maintenance, odds and ends.

Lope and Mama could sit down with a pencil and paper and sketch out the kind of houses they were going to build. Several houses were built in this manner, including the two on the Blue Ridge lot that I inherited (and subsequently sold to my brother Toto). Consider that neither Lope nor Mama had any architectural training, much less going to college. It was mother's vision to leave something to her five children and she made it materialize. She and Lope also built a vacation "cottage" in Iba. But this cottage is studier than most Iba houses. (It has passed on to my sister Charito.) Whenever they built, Philippine hardwoods were used liberally, with names like yakal and ipil. You won't see much of that today since hardwoods are getting rare and expensive.

Other family members took advantage of Lope's skills. He was highly valued and in a land famous for indolence he had the quintessential work ethic. No one told him to work hard he just enjoyed it. Sunup to sundown was his schedule. He was neither a smoker nor a drinker he did have one little vice. On Sundays he would visit the local cockpit to place small bets on the roosters. Knowing how hard he had to work for his money, his bets were penny ante.

How Lope could work with my mother for the better part of four decades I'll never know. My mother could sometimes be a nonstop talker and be difficult. But Lope soldiered on. His monuments are those houses they built together and his thirteen children. Lope passed away Oct. 25, 1999 at the age of 79. His widow Lut lives in Quezon City, and from her slim and flat tummy shape, you wouldn't know she delivered 14 babies. I haven't counted her and Lope's grandchildren but they must number several dozen.

### Julita Escobar de Vera, aka "Tia Juling":

Tia Juling was my mom's eldest sister, being born in June 1895 while my mom's birthday was in October 1897. Tia Juling lived to the ripe old age of 100 and was just two months shy of her 101<sup>st</sup> when she passed away. The two sisters were almost as different as night and day. Tia Juling is among the least excitable human beings I have ever known while my mom was almost always excited. Tia Juling's circle outside of her family was very small. Her three daughters all immigrated to the US so in the late 1970's (I have to verify the year) she went to Quincy, Massachusetts to live with her daughter Gilda and her family. By the early

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90's, it was obvious that she had the stamina and the personality to have a great life expectancy. I made it a habit to send her a birthday greeting consisting of a computer-generated banner. I tried to generate catching phrases like "its mighty fine to be ninety-nine" or something to that effect. And I also flew to Boston, staying with Gilda and her physician husband Cesar. Val came the last couple of birthdays, partially motivated by the lobster. Gilda would have a "clambake" with all the Boston seafood steamed together. Tia Juling's only son was a physician and all her three daughters married physicians as well.

Tia Juling mentioned that she had not been in contact with some of her siblings in many years. So during our trip to the Philippines in March of 1996, we (Charito, Pepe, Val and I) got together with Soledad or "Tia Edad." Tia Edad is now 94 years old, so there are special genes in the Escobar bloodline. We took pictures of Tia Edad and talked about her eldest sister, now approaching 101. Upon returning to the US, I immediately sent the pictures and greetings to Tia Juling. She wrote back, thanking me profusely and commented that her sister looked "older." She was regular in her correspondence, even though her eyesight was failing. A few weeks later, Tia Juling passed away quietly. Her letter to me was the last she ever wrote. I treasure that small piece of paper.

#### Juliana Ylagan vda. de Orosa, aka "Lola Kanang":



*Lola as a young woman and in her later years. She passed away in 1958 at age 95.*

Now, any reminiscence of mine would not be complete without memories of "Lola" (grandmother) Kanang. She was called "Inang" by her children and Lola by the grandchildren. To others she was simply Lola Kanang. She was the indomitable, driving force of the Orosa clan. She raised eight children after being widowed in 1910, before she was fifty. The children all became college educated with three of them going to US universities – University of Washington at Seattle (Maria,) University of Illinois at Champaign-Urbana (Vicente,) and Jose going to two, UW at Seattle and graduate school at Columbia University. One son became a physician and author (Sixto,) another a corporate lawyer (Nicolas.) She was not particularly well educated herself and she spoke with the heavy Batangas province accent. (People from Batangas speak Tagalog with a singsong accent analogous to the way Southerners in America speak their English. Other Tagalog speaking provinces have their own accents as well.) I never heard her speak English. But whatever she passed on to her children, whether it was in the form of genes, example, exhortation, or discipline and of course her love, it worked. Speaking of languages, her children spoke Tagalog, English and Spanish fluently. My dad could switch from one to the other without breaking a stride.

There is an umbrella organization that all women's clubs in the Philippines belong to, the National Federation of Women's Clubs, and in 1949, they named Lola Kanang "Mother of the Year," their highest honor. I wasn't there but was told later on that Lola bawled upon being given the award. She was then already eighty six years old.

The Orosa clan had annual family reunions, usually in early January, first held at the homes of one of the children then later on moving to a restaurant or banquet hall as the family grew bigger. During Lola's days, no year was ever missed. As each family entered, we would all make "mano" first to Lola and then to the aunts and uncles. Mano literally means hand in Spanish and Filipinos have the custom of touching a respected older person's right hand to

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their forehead. You would do it for grandparents, uncles, aunts, godparents and close family friends. We were demonstrating our respect and affection. Lola's answer to the grandchildren was usually "kaawaan ka ng Diyos." Literally "may God have mercy on you" but "may God bless you" would be a better meaning. Unfortunately the custom of *mano* seems to have faded and I seldom see it today.

There was a certain script to the reunions. Young men, like my brothers and similarly aged cousins, married or single, would congregate around a makeshift bar and drink Scotch. Filipinos like to drink imported stuff and the favorite of the day was Dewar's White Label. Locally brewed rum was considered only for the *hoi polloi*. A few drank beer and that's where I acquired that very nasty habit of putting ice cubes in beer. How else are you going to keep it cold in that hot weather? When my American friends first saw me do that, they were horrified. I haven't done it since (1962.) My dad and his siblings would sit and discuss what middle-aged men and women discussed back in the 1950's. I don't know, I was never invited to participate. The wives & husbands would have their own little corner. The younger children ran around, the babies and toddlers were tended to by their *yayas* and the teenagers sulked, usually looking bored. I usually sat with my favorite cousins, the children of Tio Atsing (Nicolas.) When my parents, aunts and uncles addressed each other, they preceded the names with either "ate" – ah teh - (for an older sister or sister-in-law) or "kuya" for an older brother or brother-in-law. Thus everyone addressed my eldest aunt Simplicia always as "Ate Piciang." It was another sign of respect. If you haven't caught on by now, everyone has a nickname.

The food was always great, with *lechon* of course. All the help shared in the bounty. They ate just as well as their employers. After the feast, the highlight would be Lola Kanang handing out silver peso coins to the children. That was her 'aguinaldo' or Christmas present. There was a certain age cutoff, dad or one of the uncles would shoo you away from the line if you were too old, and make sure no one went through twice. I suppose Filipino kids can be sneaky. The age of puberty seemed to be demarcation line. Then the children, again up to a certain age, would stand in front of the crowd and perform. It could be a song, a dance, reciting a poem, or making up your own speech, playing the piano, anything. I liked to deliver stuff from Shakespeare, show them one of the results of my Benedictine education. I wish I had sung that song from Carmen. Our uncle Tio Aching was the permanent Master of Ceremonies. But it was not just the children who performed. Our Tio Sixto and his wife Tia Binay would demonstrate their ballroom skills with the tango. I can still hum "La Cumparsita." Before breaking up there would be a family picture taken by a professional photographer. I have pictures of most but not all the reunions. I would pay good money to assemble them all for our web site.

Lola Kakang was strong willed and the lofty positions and titles of her then very successful children didn't slow her down when she needed to go one on one with them. If she wanted to talk to my father for instance, or one of my uncles, she would have someone take her to their respective offices, barge in and say – "Vicente or Pepe or Atsing, mag-usap tayo, or we need to talk." (This story comes from my brother Toto.) If they had another appointment or meeting, it would just have to wait until Lola was done with her business. My father's secretary would just stand there with her mouth open. No one, but no one, talked back to her, no exceptions. Behind her back she was sometimes called General McArthur, but I think it was grudging respect more than criticism. But she never smoked a corn cob pipe. I do remember her smoking cigarettes. She preferred American cigarettes of course, maybe Camels? Bad? Hah, she lived to be 95, with a mind as sharp as ever till the day she passed

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away.

One story related to me by Toto was that whenever one of the children got into financial difficulties, Lola would call all the children and say – you each contribute so many pesos to help out you brother or sister, whatever the case may be. Whether she required repayment I don't know.

Lola spent most of her time with the family of Tio Paito (Rafael) in Bauan but went back and forth to Manila to visit her other children. Bauan was less than 100 kilometers away but Lola had no car so she took the bus. She carried no purse but carried her valuables in a pouch under her "saya." She never dressed in anything other than a saya, which consisted of a full skirt, down to the ankles, which was worn over a slip. Come to think of it, I don't think I ever even saw her calves or knees. The dress was somewhat formal and hardly anyone wears them today. This practice among the older generation led to the term "under the saya." If I were "under the saya," that meant my wife dominated, the boss, and kept me under her skirt. I guess the modern equivalent is "she wears the pants in the family."

A few words about Tio Paito: to me he was the jolly brother. He had a baritone voice and was always ready with anecdotes. Whenever he visited Manila, he would come to Aviles and give us cooked "tulingan" which is a kind of tuna, and Batangas chocolate. This chocolate comes in the form of hard balls, and is used to make a hot cocoa drink. It is rich since the cocoa butter has not been removed. My father loved both tulingan and this Batangas chocolate

One story just recently related by my sister Tita was that during the thirties Lola went from Bauan to Divisoria (one of the old market sections of Manila) regularly to buy dry goods wholesale for reselling in their store. Tita and other girl cousins often accompanied Lola, who stayed at the house of my uncle Tio Pepe during these trips. Lola and the girls took a calesa, a horse driven carriage, to Divisoria. Lola then returned to Bauan via the old Batangas Tayabas bus. Tayabas is another province and the name was later changed to Quezon. They ate from the sidewalk vendors and I imagine Lola haggled with the Chinese wholesale distributors. Then as now, Philippine trade is dominated by Chinese Filipinos. Lola followed a custom that I remember from my mother's shopping. Heads of households always had a "suki" or a preferred vendor. These vendors would give them the best price, easy credit if needed and save any new merchandise for them. Lola and my mother would never buy from anyone other than their "suki."

My cousin Naring Orosa wrote me in Nov. of 2002 describing memories of his growing up and he recalls that Lola was quite a businesswoman. Lola had embroideries made to order in Batangas and took them to Divisoria for sale. Batangas is noted for the fine embroidered textiles. Val and I have napkins and table covers bought in Taal.

I have some old letters from my aunt Maria to Lola, written (in very formal Tagalog) while Maria was studying in Seattle during the period around 1918-1921. The two had an enterprise going. Lola would send all kinds of merchandise and Maria would sell them. In one instance she remitted \$850 back to Bauan! That is a lot of money for that period. I will transcribe Maria's letters and include them in these reminiscences.



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Tita remembers that the family reunions that I was familiar with started sometime in the early thirties. The family numbered no more than 35 or so, a lot of my generation was still to be born. Family members trekked to Bauan and stayed at the house on Aplaya. My first question was “how did Lola and Tio Paito accommodate all these relatives.” No problem. Banigs or straw mats were laid out on the “sala” or living room and whatever space was available and that is where they sacked out. Lola even had a huge mosquito net for the girls. A sleep in, Philippine style! To this day, Tita and some girl cousins are still close, dating back to their reunions in Bauan 70 years ago! Of course these “girls” are all around 80.

Lola was a religious woman and wouldn't tolerate any improprieties. Half the time she had a rosary in her hand and she recited all the prayers in Tagalog. Don't ever say a dirty word in her presence. I am proud that the Orosa family, especially the elders, has as a trademark, their honesty and integrity. It was no accident. They made that choice. But come to think of it, Lola would not have tolerated anything else. It was not because of convenience, Filipinos are nonchalant about dishonesty and corruption. No one is ever shunned because of impropriety. Erap Estrada was elected President in 1998 with the electorate knowing that he had a wife, at least three mistresses and six or more children out of wedlock, all of whom he paraded around.

Toward her later years, in her 90's, Lola's mind was as sharp as ever but her walking was slow and she needed an “akay” or someone to lean on. The young grandchildren such as myself would take her to walk wherever she wanted. She would wrap one hand on your wrist and the other on your elbow and we probably walked two kilometers an hour.

Lola, kung kailangan mo ng mag-akay sa inyo, ako ay nandito. Hindi lang magagalak, isang karangalan sa akin na mag-akay sa inyo.

In 1958, when I was eighteen, Lola passed away quietly at the age of ninety-five. To the world, she bequeathed seven distinguished surviving children, thirty-one grandchildren and at least an equal number of great grandchildren. Today there are now 300 living Orosas directly descended from her. Mano po, Lola.

P.S. After Lola passed away, the reunions continued. From her various business ventures, Lola was able to purchase an accesoria or three story walkup apartment in Manila. The rental from the apartments financed the reunions.

#### Vicente Ylagan Orosa:

My dad's life and career are going to be covered in a separate biography. He worked from his graduation in 1911 until a few months before his passing in 1979. That is more than most Filipinos have lived, equivalent to the Filipino life expectancy. He had a very rich, rewarding life and career but he left the documentation to others. He hardly ever wrote letters or essays. As a cabinet official and a Grandmaster of the Masons, he traversed the country giving numerous talks. There are dozens of pictures of my dad behind a microphone in front of audiences, both government and civic. Unfortunately, there is no record of his speeches. Perhaps they were extemporaneous. I've only found one speech, a very short and flowery ode to Masonry. This can be found in the appendix. At the University of Illinois, among his subjects was 19<sup>th</sup> century prose and he received a grade of 92, so he was proficient with words. But unfortunately very few were committed to writing over his

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long and glorious career.

I have written a separate biography and tribute to my dad entitled “Alaala sa Aking Ama” meaning “To My Father’s Memory.”

#### Remembrance:

The passing of a loved one today is commemorated differently than it was a couple of generations ago. Rules or customs then were strict. The women wore “luksa” or black dresses for a whole year. So when you see someone in black, the remark would be “nagluluksa” or in mourning. The men wore a little black ribbon on the left side of their shirts, over the heart. The wake would last several days and would be open all night instead of just restricted to visiting hours. A bunch of the young men would usually sit around, as if guarding the loved one. Of course there would be plenty of food for everyone. I haven’t found the source of a couple of Filipino practices. The first one is the nine-day daily prayer, usually held at the home of the family of the deceased. Then exactly forty days later there would be another Mass and get together. I’ve never seen Catholics in America, such as the Italians and the Poles, practice these traditions. I think the luksa portion is gone from tradition, but the nine-day prayers and forty day commemoration continues. If we are to judge by the volume of prayers, heaven should be full of Filipinos.

An ad would be placed in the newspapers announcing the passing of the individual. Of course the more affluent would place bigger ads in more papers. The only practice I’ve seen closely resembling this is in Italy where pictures of the deceased would be posted all around town. I saw this in several small towns but I’m not sure if the custom is followed in large cities.

Cremation was unheard of back in the 1950’s but is getting more common. The way of life sure has changed and the way of death also.

#### Sounds:

Growing up on Aviles St. in Manila during the 1940’s and ‘50’s meant living with sounds. Daily life in Manila then, and now to a certain extent, isn’t complete without being assaulted by sounds. Sometimes they are melodious but oftentimes irritating and intrusive. First were the roving vendor or vendors and the recycle men. There is one vendor we Filipinos can claim as unique and found nowhere else on earth, the balut vendor. He carried a small wicker basket under one arm and constantly bellowed “balut.” Their voices carried, it was almost as if a baritone voice was a requirement to be a successful balut vendor. The eggs were heavily covered in some clothing that kept them warm. Then there was the sorbetero or ice cream vendor. He pushed a gaily-colored two-wheeled cart and his clarion call was a bell he was always ringing in one hand. Even San Miguel Corporation, the country’s largest Filipino owned company, had its own veritable army of ice cream vendors with the bright yellow Magnolia carts. (Control of Magnolia has been passed on to the Swiss conglomerate Nestle.) You still see them today. The tajo vendor carried two containers slung under a bamboo pole. One contained the tajo or soybean curd and the other some small bowls, utensils and water for cleaning. He had a special trowel that he used to slice off the curd, which he then topped off with some sugar syrup. After eating, you would return the bowl and spoon, which he would rinse in the same water he carried all day. No, we never got sick eating from utensils that had undoubtedly been used by a small army of customers. These

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were the main players but there were others. There were vendors for chicharon (pork rinds), siopao (meat filled dumplings) and suman (rice cake wrapped in banana leaves). All had a different way of singing their products' names.

If anything, the choices today are greater with regards to buying your snacks and assorted items off roaming street vendors. This is my unscientific survey but it seems that there are more vendors out in the street today, at least on the crowded streets and highways. Hey, those vendors are smart. Where else can you get maximum exposure than going from car to jeepney to bus when they are stuck in traffic? So those traffic jams do have one advantage. While waiting for the light to change, expect to be approached by as many as half a dozen vendors. But these vendors don't sing like the days of old.

There was one sound that beat all others, the movie float, something not seen anymore. Movie float is my term I don't know what they were officially called. To advertise a new movie, a truck would be decked in billboards on both sides and back and driven all across town with the loudspeakers blaring. (This would only be done for Filipino movies, not Hollywood ones.) Ever pay attention to the posters shown at a theatre lobby? Well, the movie float had larger posters all around and the volume turned to at least 120 decibels. As a kid, I thought that was cool.

Then there were the recyclers. A couple of guys would be pushing an open four-wheeled cart, shouting "bote" or bottle. These were the glass recyclers. When it comes to recycling, Filipinos are ahead of the universe. If you had old jars, bottles, tin cans and newspapers, you sold them to these guys. There would be some bargaining involved but typically, the prices paid were a pittance. At least the guys made a living.

Finally there were the musicians. Two, three or sometimes four guys would have some brass instruments and a drum, go from house to house and start playing. They would not leave until they received a gratuity. It was a good idea during those days to always have some change left with the help even when the house owners were gone. The amount given was important, too little and they would stay around asking for more, too much and they were sure to return the next day.

Since houses then weren't closed up with air conditioning, we kept the windows open and there was seldom a quiet moment.

### Boxing fan:

Even in my college years at Polytechnic College (now Central Colleges of the Philippines) during the late 1950's, I liked to watch the boxing matches. Went to the amateur matches at the Rizal Memorial Coliseum regularly. Far Eastern University usually had the best amateur boxers.

After I started working at Procter & Gamble in the middle of 1960, I could afford the professional fights. By now the professional fights were held at the newly built Araneta Coliseum in Quezon City. I saw all the best Filipino fighters of the era, most of whom were Orient Boxing Champions. With a little luck and a more fair judging system, many of them would have been World Champion. One Filipino who made it as World Junior Lightweight Champion was Gabriel "Flash" Elorde and I saw him fight several times. The other prominent fighters were Tanny Campo, Dommy Ursua, the brothers Espinosa, Leo and Bonnie, Leo

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Alonso, Roberto Cruz, Al Asuncion, Little Cesar and Bert Somodio. They were mostly flyweight (112 lbs.) to lightweight (136 lbs.). The only one heavier was Roberto Cruz who fought as a welterweight.

They fought ten to twelve rounds of fast furious action. At that time the stadiums were not air-conditioned and it was sweltering inside. Betting was heavy (I never bet, just liked to watch) and the crowd usually bloodthirsty.

Foreign fighters came regularly and I even saw an exhibition match featuring the light heavyweight boxing champion Archie Moore. Archie had fought two epic battles but lost to heavyweight champion Rocky Marciano. An African-American lightweight fighter named Arthur Persley, came to the Philippines for several bouts. He liked it so much he stayed and married a Filipina. Saw him fight World Lightweight Champion Carlos Ortiz, narrowly losing.

I seldom missed a Friday or Saturday night fight at Araneta. I would've loved to see that "Thrilla in Manila" between Joe Frazier and Muhammad Ali in 1975, one of the best heavyweight championship fights ever.

#### Nicknames:

Let's end on a light note. It is well known that we Filipinos love nicknames. An Englishman named Sutherland wrote an article for the London Observer entitled "A Rhose by Any Other Name" regarding this practice of ours. It is funny and poignant. Let's recap my immediate family – "Inte" for my dad Vicente, but Vicente Jr. is called "Jing," "Chayong" for my mother Rosario, but "Charito" for my sister Rosario, my brother Augusto is "Toto," my other sister Angelina is "Tita." I'm the only odd one, without a nickname. My late first cousin Sixto Jr. takes the prize. He is "Ting" his wife is "Eding" and his children are "Coy," "Kine," "Monet," "Titoy," "Diding," and "Yoying." Yoying has carried this on and calls a granddaughter "Tutti" although she is English. Other cousins are "Dado," "Miling," "Saro," "Cilding," "Naring," "Nene," "Nonoy," "Carding," "Viring," "Menchu," "Mishi," "Emong" and "Tito." My uncles were "Pepe," "Paito," and "Aching." The last is pronounced at-sing not like a tooth aching. We are skipping a lot of obvious ones, which are simply a shortening or derivative of the name. Not in our family but elsewhere you will hear names like "Ting-Ting," "Jim-Jim," and "Jun-Jun." On my mother's side, we have "Bebot," "Amang," (his name is actually Cipriano,) "Pering," (he is another Cipriano so go figure,) "Pinky," "Binky," "JJ," "Jojo." I have a couple of friends who are called "Saro," and "Ding." As kids, we would use physical descriptions as nicknames for each other, although they would be politically incorrect and considered cruel today. Someone with a limp is called "pilay," literally cripple, "kulot" meaning curly hair, "payat" for skinny, "taba" for fat, "bulutong" for someone with pockmarks, "pandak" for short, "itim" or black for someone with dark complexion or "tiso" for someone fair skinned. Tiso is actually a corruption of mestizo or Spanish for mixed blood. Our family never did this we stuck to regular nicknames. We like to reverse the letters in a name. The nickname of Pres. Estrada, "Erap" is an example. It comes from "pare," which itself is a corruption of compadre. And last but not least, we sometimes like to call our babies and toddlers "Boy," "Baby" or "Girl." These labels stick for life. You could be sixty years old and still be called these nicknames, which is exactly what happened with a cousin on my mother's side and a boyhood friend. The cousin is still Boy in his mid-50's and the friend, who is a lawyer my age, is still Baby but he changed it to Babes. I suppose he did that to make it less funny to his American and European friends at the Rotary. Oh, you want to know what we call Americans? They are "kano," from Amerikano.

## REMINISCENCES I

Growing up in the Philippines

### The New Symbols:

Every country, every people have some kind of caricature representing them. The Americans have Uncle Sam. With George W. Bush of Texas as President, it is back to the cowboy and John Wayne. Never mind that the cowboy was more myth than reality and his days were short-lived. The legendary cattle drive lasted only a couple of decades before being replaced by the railroad. But after having made regular return trips to Manila in the last few years I think I have the perfect symbols for the modern Filipino and a new motto that should be stitched as part of the flag.

The symbol is of some man or woman holding a cell phone, furiously “texting” away. Everyone uses text instead of talking on the cell phone. It is much cheaper and quieter. And here is the part that is just as important – he or she is riding a tricycle. Yup, those home made contraptions where a 350 cc. or so Honda/Yamaha/Suzuki is attached to a cab that can hold two people comfortably although I’ve seen half a dozen people sitting and clinging to the cab. They are not as numerous in Quezon City and Manila but go to the smaller cities like Angeles, Olongapo, Iba, Taal and even Cebu and there are tricycles galore. It is a common sight to observe three or four hundred kilos of humanity clinging to the frame while the little engine struggles heroically. The tricycles represent his resourcefulness and practicality. The text phone is the modern addition.

Now for the motto, which as I said should be stitched to the flag. Are you ready for this? “Kumain ka na ba?” This seems to be the first question any visitor is asked. Not how are you, not where are you going, not where have you been, not simply hello. These questions come later. The first question has to be “have you eaten yet?” The time on the clock is irrelevant. It is a 24/7 type of question. You will be asked “kumain ka na ba” and offered food. You said you’ve already eaten? You must’ve gotten hungry walking through the door. It is time for merienda. “Kumain ka na ba?” I love it. Give me some fried bananas. The same Sutherland that wrote about nicknames also wrote about our dietary habits. Mr. Sutherland does the Filipinos justice.

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**When I started writing a few of these stories, I didn't realize it would trigger a lot of memories. Names, places and events that I haven't given any thought to in decades. Val said it is a sure sign of impending dotage. Maybe it is already here.**

**Growing up as an Orosa is a legacy that I have learned to value as the seasons pass. I WOULD GLADLY DO IT AGAIN.**

