

## REMINISCENCE II

### Coming to America

#### The Snowdons of Bethel Park, Pennsylvania:

Coming from Manila to Pittsburgh in August of 1962, I was met at the Pittsburgh International airport by the family of David and Jean Snowdon. Mr. Snowdon was an executive with the Mellon National Bank of Pittsburgh and Mrs. Snowdon was a full time homemaker. They had three children, Charles (Chuck,) Richard (Rich,) and Elizabeth (Liz.) Chuck was about my age and was finishing up at Oberlin College in Ohio. He would later earn a Ph.D. from the University of Pennsylvania. Both Rich and Liz were in high school. They were my "host" family, arranged for by an organization in the greater Pittsburgh area to help overseas students make the adjustment to life in America. This organization had picnics and other socials for the students and their host families. I even remember one party where we were introduced to square dancing. Not only were the Snowdons a host family, they were a surrogate family as well. Over the next four years, I spent a lot of Christmases, Easters and Thanksgivings or just plain weekends at their home in on Casswell Drive. Not having a car, I took a streetcar from the Carnegie Institute of Technology to downtown, changed streetcars and got off at the end of their street. Unfortunately, those streetcars are gone now. The streetcars harkens back to a bygone era. If you meet someone from Pittsburgh and test whether they are old timers or not, mention Carnegie. If they refer to the school simply as Tech, then they are genuine Pittsburgh natives. The school is now known as Carnegie Mellon University. They will also refer to the University of Pittsburgh as Pitt.



*Mom and dad, the Snowdons and me in 1967. The Snowdons came to Painesville, Ohio to meet my parents. Dad was 78 and it was his last trip abroad.*

The Snowdons were devout Presbyterians and if my visit coincided with a Sunday, they would drop me off at a Catholic church. I finally told them I would be very happy to join them at their church and that's what we did. If I arrived on a Friday evening, Mrs. Snowdon would always fix fish for dinner. I asked why and she said it was the Catholic requirement in the United States. Fish or no meat every Friday all year (this has since been changed.) I told her that in the Philippines, it only applied to the Lenten period. I preferred Mrs. Snowdon's roast beef to fish anytime.

Mr. Snowdon passed away two years ago at nearly 90 years of age. Mrs. Snowdon is now 88 and continues to live in Friendship Village, a retirement community not far from their Bethel Park home. After Val and I moved to Cincinnati, we visited the Snowdons annually since they are only a short day's drive away. In the forty years that have passed since I came to the US, there has not been a single Christmas season passed when we didn't exchange season's greetings and family updates with the Snowdons. We were family. My friend Ajit Badami of Mumbai India also has fond memories of his host family, the Hagers of Mt. Lebanon, another Pittsburgh suburb. Ajit is also in touch and visits the Hagers at every opportunity.

Thanks to email, I have reestablished contact with the Snowdon children. Chuck, more formally Dr. Snowdon, is head of a psychology department at the University of Wisconsin in Madison. Rich has been in San Francisco for a long while. Liz recently retired as a librarian near Philadelphia.



*Mrs. Snowdon in 2002. She always treats us to dinner at her beautiful retirement complex.*

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### First Roommate, Weather:

At Carnegie, I was assigned to a room at Forbes Hall. My roommates were Norman Berlat and William Steer (not sure about the latter's surname.) The three of us occupied a large room. When I was first informed that I was going to Forbes Hall, I thought there was a mistake. Forbes had been identified in the prospectus as a women's dormitory. Surely they would not have confused Mario with Maria. That would have been an interesting situation. The world of college campuses was still twenty years away from coed dorms. But it turned out that Forbes had been converted to a graduate dormitory. Too bad, I was looking forward to the confusion.



*My roommate Norm Berlat. We are still in touch after 40 years. He now lives in Houston, TX.*

Norm was Jewish and the first Jewish person I had ever met. Since then I can say that my life has been



*My other friend at Carnegie, Ajit Badami. Originally from Mumbai, India he now lives in Irvine, CA.*

enriched by knowing and associating with a number of Jewish people. That first winter of 1962 was pretty cold. Temperature recorded new lows of minus 13 degrees. Now you are talking about a fellow that never experienced temperatures lower than 65. Sixty-five Fahrenheit is extremely cold for a Filipino, so imagine a temperature colder than your freezer. Norm was kind enough to lend me some of his warm clothes like sweaters, earmuffs and scarves. I liked to walk around even in the cold and Norm warned me about frostbite, which I had never heard of either. He always inspected my ears and extremities whenever I returned from my wandering around in the cold. It seems that whenever I move from one location to another, it happens that the new location always receives record unfavorable weather. Later on, it was record snowfall

in Illinois. Then in Tennessee it was record rain and freezing rain.

### Mrs. Eda Goldstein of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania:

Through another "foreign" student, I was introduced to Mrs. Goldstein shortly after arrival in Pittsburgh. She was a Jewish woman who took kindly to overseas students at either the University of Pittsburgh or Carnegie Institute of Technology where I was studying. She must've known how lonely we could be, especially on weekends and holidays when the other students went home to their families and girl friends. I say girl friends because the graduate engineering classes at Carnegie were all male. Mrs. Goldstein invited a few of us for dinner at her apartment on 5<sup>th</sup> avenue, right across from St. Patrick's church, or took us out to dinner at restaurants which I know we students couldn't have afforded. We couldn't afford to eat out and usually gorged ourselves at the dormitory cafeteria and pocketed cereal boxes prior to the weekends that the cafeteria closed. Mrs. Goldstein was born in 1901 but I don't recall her saying where. She did say however, that she lost a lot of relatives during the Holocaust so she may have been born in Europe. She was a widow, had no children, so this was perhaps her way of having a family. She was Jewish, I am Catholic and the Indian students were Hindu. It was not just foreign students either, sometimes there were Americans, both Jewish and Christian. There was no talk of religion, but we talked a lot about cultures. I shall always remember her kindness. Nowadays you hear about performing random acts of kindness. Well, Mrs. Goldstein was doing that forty years ago.

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I lost contact with Mrs. Goldstein after I moved from Pittsburgh to Painesville, Ohio and found out she passed away in 1987. God bless you, Mrs. Goldstein!

### The Neers of Springfield, Illinois:



*Mary Jane and  
Carl Neer, taken in  
the late 1980's.*

Carl and Mary Jane Neer were alumni of the University of Illinois, both graduating in 1933. There weren't very many women college graduates then. They became friends with my parents since Dad was a U of I graduate also, but dad's degree was from further back, in 1911. They were all active in the alumni association, but on either side of the globe. Carl Neer was a geologist and spent the early days of his career as a nomad, working the oil fields of Texas before settling in Illinois. He made a very handsome living operating "stripper wells" in southern Illinois. I received an education from Mr. Neer about the independent oil business. Oil men such as himself would purchase the leases and drill these wells, which were on private farmland. The output was low by the standards of Exxon, 10 barrels a day perhaps, sometimes more. But Mr. Neer had more than a dozen wells so you do the math. At \$25 a barrel times ten barrels times twelve wells times 365 days a year. That adds up to a cool million. Next time you are driving along the interstate in southern Illinois and see a well pumping in the middle of a cornfield, the well is making someone serious money with very little maintenance. Most of the new oil wells in the continental United States are found by independents, not by the large oil companies. The Neers didn't have any children and spent a lot of time traveling around the world. Mrs. Neer was the photographer and they amassed a huge collection of slides, anywhere from Angkor Vat in Cambodia to the wilds of Kenya to the island of Bali in Indonesia and of course the Philippines. They have seen the Banaue terraces, I haven't. No location was too distant or too exotic for the Neers. I spent many an evening with the Neers looking at the slides and getting a running commentary from Mrs. Neer. I don't know where that slide collection wound up, but I would love to have gotten my hands on it.

They came to visit my parents back in the 1950's when I was a teenager, so we made acquaintance then. After I arrived in the US in 1962, it wasn't long before we were getting together on a regular basis. For my first visit to them, I took a Greyhound bus for the first time, going from Pittsburgh to Chicago where Mr. Neer picked me up. They gave me a royal tour of Chicago, including the tallest building then, the 40 stories Prudential Insurance tower. Today, 40 stories would be like a 5 foot 8 inch player in the NBA. They figured I was hungry for some Filipino food so for dinner one evening they took me to Don the Beachcomber, which served "Polynesian" food, which was actually glorified Chinese. I was also introduced to exotic drinks like Mai Tai and Singapore Sling. But another incentive was the Neers wanted me to meet the staff. They were all Filipinos! Unfortunately, Don the Beachcomber is no longer on the scene. They were a Chicago institution.

The Neers retired from Springfield and moved to Sarasota, Florida. We had an opportunity to visit them several times, including once with all the six children when we were on our way to Disney World. The Neers took our whole family out, Val, me, six kids, to dinner at their fancy Sarasota Yacht Club. I haven't been to the inside of a yacht club since. Another time to an Amish family restaurant, which was more to the kids liking, the other place was a little too formal.

Their last remaining years weren't pleasant for the Neers. We stopped receiving a Christmas letter from the Neers so I wrote back, several times in fact, with an increasing

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sense of urgency. I finally received a letter from a nephew of Mr. Neer who indicated that Mrs. Neer had passed away and Mr. Neer was in a nursing home with Alzheimers. He passed away in 1994. We were more than a generation apart from the Neers, but you wouldn't know it from our friendship.

#### Crystal Lake, Illinois:

We (Carol, Nadine and Mario Jr.) moved into Crystal Lake, Illinois early in 1971 to start my career with the Quaker Oats Company in Barrington. The house we purchased was in a neighborhood called Orchard Acres. Within days of moving in, someone came to the door. He presented us with a cake and a bottle of champagne, to welcome us to the neighborhood! I think his name was Roback but I'm not so sure, it has been over 30 years. This was the first time such a welcome was given to my family and has not occurred since in any of the places we have moved into. It was an interesting subdivision. The streets were in the shape of an h, with the legs coming off the main highway. I say interesting because Americans of Scandinavian heritage from Chicago established the neighborhood. Crystal Lake itself was about 40 miles from downtown Chicago. My neighbors were surnamed Soderberg, Jacobson, Hansen, Johanson, Carlson, Peterson, Olson, Rasmussen. I'm not sure of the spelling of the surnames, since there are variations, like Olson could be Olsen, or Oleson. It was not 100% Scandinavian, our immediate next-door neighbor were Erika & Nicolas Schilling, born and bred in Germany. But now the neighborhood had a Filipino! Who said the Swedes or their kindred were a cold and formal people?

The Schillings introduced me to a new experience, drinking goldwasser. Never heard of it before, but one evening Erika called me over to have drink. Her husband poured this syrupy white liquid with what looked like very small bright yellow leaves. These were the gold itself! The Germans mix pieces of gold into their schnapps and drink it as an elixir. Erika swore by it, guaranteed to cure your ills. The drink tasted good, typical of a liquer, but it seemed like a waste of gold to me. Nicolas Schilling was a Wehrmacht veteran who decided to migrate to join the very same Americans who were shooting at him and vice versa. He told me some war stories and proudly took out his Iron Cross decoration for bravery. A German WW II veteran showing his medal to his Filipino neighbor in a Chicago suburb. Only in America! By the way, Nick was neither condemning nor justifying the war, he was simply relating his experience. He had served just like millions of others on all sides of the conflict.

Another drinking experience was glug, a Swedish concoction of grain alcohol, sugar, cinnamon sticks and I don't know what else. Some fruit I think. Some of the families make it around Christmastime as a tradition and I was invited to partake, always being served warm. On a cold winter night, it does warm your stomach if nothing else.

The neighborhood had an annual tradition, a pig roast followed by a softball game. Filipinos of course like roast pig, but the de leche or suckling kind, seldom over 15 kilos, with resulting crispy skin. But these were monsters, over 100 kilos. A huge oil drum was stoked with charcoal and the skewered pig turned by a motor. It took all night to cook. A crew stayed up to make sure it was neither burned nor out of charcoal, drinking beer in the meantime. By picnic time, the cooks were in no condition for any festivities. The meat was great, but the skin, which Filipinos savor as a delicacy, was practically inedible, very tough.

After eating, the men were divided into two groups, one side of the street vs. the other, and played "slow pitch" softball. Another sport I was introduced to in the Chicago area. I was familiar with fast pitch softball, where batting averages are low and the thrown ball is as fast

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as a baseball. And also harder to hit since the pitcher is much closer to the batter. With slow pitch, the ball is bigger, sixteen inches circumference, and thrown underhand with hardly any velocity. Fielders wear no gloves. The key was power. Lots of home runs are produced. The losers had to stay and clean up the mess. The hardest job was the umpire's, he/she was derided by both camps. But after all the eating and drinking, the softball game was more Keystone Cops than sport. Good clean fun and nobody had to drive home. We staggered. There were only about thirty families in Orchard Acres, but they were fun, kind and hospitable.

I lived in Orchard Acres four and a half years, a divorced father, all the while going with a Val Wagner (you'll hear more about her.) Val had four children and had her own house in Crystal Lake. After all that dating, the subject of marriage was seriously discussed and Mario said "as soon as my house is sold, we can't have two houses." Val sold the house in record time, all it took was one ad in the Chicago Tribune.

#### Citizenship Cake:

I received my American citizenship in 1971, shortly after starting at Quaker Oats Company. The ceremony was in the morning and I returned to work early that afternoon. Waiting for me was a large cake saying congratulations on becoming an American. I am sorry we never took a picture. The department manager, Oscar Gilbert, and my immediate supervisor Pete Marks had ordered the cake without my knowing. The whole department was there, about 15 engineers in what was then the Process Development Department. First, we received a welcome by the Swedes of Orchard Acres and now this surprise by coworkers at Quaker Oats. What a great state this Illinois is! It was going to be home for almost eighteen years.

New American citizens are sworn-in by a US Federal judge and the judge at my swearing in was no less than the Hon. Julius Hoffman of the Chicago 7 fame. He was the one who conducted the trial of the leaders of the riot that occurred during the Democratic presidential convention in 1968. It was a very famous, or notorious trial depending on your point of view. Mr. Hoffman was not an imposing man, short of stature, slight of build and his speech was barely audible, but I also wish I had a transcript of his speech.

My former manager Oscar Gilbert is now 81 years old and leads an active retirement with wife Ruth from his base in Bowling Green, Kentucky.

#### Bill Hoffman and Chuck Seaman:

William Hoffman and Charles Seaman, both of Painesville, Ohio were the pair that signed my petition for American citizenship. So if you are looking for someone to blame, to answer the question of how was this guy named Mario Escobar Orosa allowed to become an American, blame Bill and Chuck. They had to swear and sign in front of an immigration officer that I was of good moral character and no threat to public safety! Talk about blind trust. My first wife Carol and I belonged to the United Methodist Church of Painesville and Bill and his wife Costi were active there. OK, United Methodist since my first marriage was in a Protestant church and during those times, I was automatically out of the Catholic Church. Carol's maternal grandfather was a United Methodist minister in Akron. They were a terrific couple, Costi was an artisan and their house was full of antiques and knick-knacks. Chuck and I worked at the same company (Lubrizol) and played tennis occasionally. His wife Cindy was a schoolteacher and we (w/ Carol) socialized a lot with them. I don't know what happened to Bill and Costi but they would be in their eighties by now. Chuck and Cindi

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are still in Painesville and we hear from them every Christmas.

Speaking of citizenship, I took my test in Cleveland, Ohio shortly before moving to Illinois. I studied the Constitution and Bill of Rights, and had the Declaration of independence memorized. The Immigration officer asked real questions. I wonder if they do those tests with the same rigor today. I would bet no, or if they do, it would be watered way down. It is politically incorrect to make a real test, plus they would have to be available in other languages. Donde esta Jorge Washington just doesn't cut it. Unfortunately, even a lot of native-born Americans wouldn't do well in that kind of test anymore. OK, name the Bill of Rights. If it were up to me, the test would be rigorous. There would be questions like when and how did the Civil War start, what is the Marshall plan, name the succession (at least two) if the President dies or is incapacitated, name at least two Americans who have been awarded the Nobel Prize for Peace. Of the two Nobel laureates you name, one must be white and the other African American. What effect did the following Supreme Court decisions have on American life – Brown vs. Board of Education, Roe vs. Wade, Miranda? Name three Supreme Court Justices. If they flunk, they have to study and take it again. Three failures and you're out of here. Just like bar exams.

### Jim Leiding:



*That's Jim Leiding with me in front. We must've been working on something or checking the racing forms.*

Jim was Val's and my cupid. Along with Jim, Val and I belonged to PWP or Parents without Partners of Crystal Lake in early 1973. The PWP acronym was corrupted by the men to stand for something else but we'll pass on that. Jim was a salesman, peddling water softeners. He made a good living at it, owned a nice home along the Fox River and drove a white Cadillac Eldorado convertible. He lived the good life, chateaubriand, lobster and champagne were some of his favorites. He is the only man I've known who had a mirror above his gigantic bed, which looked like it was twelve feet long. He was a completely self made man and just divorced from either his third or fourth wife. He had many stories to tell, which I am sure were embellished. One was that during a period of unemployment, he had to catch fish and crabs to feed his family.

For whatever reason, Jim and I became good friends, a flashy self made salesman and an admittedly very conservative Filipino engineer. Having been recently divorced myself, I spent a lot of time at his place, the drinks were free and he had a back yard pool and a boat. I was into winemaking at the time and we tested my concoctions liberally. Raisin wine was our favorite but I made wine from pineapple, honey, bananas, oranges and even tried dandelion. From the yellow flowers, smarty, not from the green leaves. The winemaking is another tale.

I had just broken up with some other woman from PWP and Jim suggested calling that skinny blond named Val. So I did and the rest is history. Val and I of course just celebrated our 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary. But story of Jim ended tragically.

Jim was going with a lady named Sherry, brunette and vivacious. We had a double date and had stopped at my house for some drinks. On his way home, he swerved to avoid an incoming car. His Eldorado convertible ran off the road and flipped. Jim's injuries were minor but Sherry was very seriously injured and went into a coma. She died in a few days.

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Later on, Jim moved to Florida and we kept contact for a few years. When we didn't get a Christmas card one year, I sent an urgent letter to his new girl friend. What's going on? Her answer gave me a shock I'll never forget. Jim had committed suicide! But why, why? He was a bon vivant and being a salesman – I would even call him a huckster – an eternal optimist. Instead of just the annual Christmas cards, I should have made phone calls too. I did visit him once in Florida during a business trip in the mid 80's. Would I then be able to discern his state of mind and make a difference? I'll never know. Jim, thank you for your friendship, and for insisting that I call Val. See what you had started? We are still a pair. Twenty five years and counting.

#### The Siewerths of Crystal Lake, Illinois:



Arthur (Art) and Mary Siewerth were both native born and bred Illinoisians. Art was the big city kid from Chicago while Mary grew up on a farm. In Illinois, there isn't too much in between. Chicago and its environs contain three quarters of the state's population. The date of our initial meeting is again hazy, but it was back in the early 70's. Val and I were going together but not yet married.



*Art & Mary visiting us in Jackson, TN. See Cuddles the cat? She went from IL to TN to CA and back to TN.*

My father was a lifelong Mason and became Grandmaster of the Grand Lodge of the Philippines, which I remember well. But he never talked to me about Freemasonry, which was unfortunate. I would have joined the Fraternity much sooner. But I'm getting ahead. It turns out that Masons are not allowed to solicit. A man has to ask to join, and traditionally, not once but three times. Maybe that's one of the reasons our membership is declining. But Art was a Mason so finally I asked and he signed my petition to join the local lodge. That was the beginning of a beautiful friendship between Art & Mary and Val & me. Art and I were both active and became Master of the Lodge at one time or another. We also were in the Order of the Eastern Star, a woman's organization for wives and daughters of Masons and became "Patrons" there too. A little later on Art signed my petition to join the Shriners. That was even more fun. Those are the guys with fezes, not hats, and sometimes wear outrageous costumes.

Art had originally wanted to make a career in the United States Army. But during the Korean War, he was injured in a plane crash and lost his right arm almost to the armpit. That didn't seem to bother him. He played golf regularly, belonging to the Crystal Lake Country Club and some friends didn't want to play him because they would look bad losing to a one armed guy.

After Art passed away a couple of years ago, Mary got in touch with us and told me she wanted me to have Art's Masonic ring. It is a beautiful and quite valuable ring with a large diamond in the middle. I was hesitant since they had three boys, a daughter and a grandson that was already in his late 20's. But none of them were Masons. So I accepted, resized the ring to fit my finger and will always wear it proudly. But if one of their sons or grandsons became Masons, I would part with the ring. It would still be an honor. Mary passed away in October 2002 at age 82. We shall miss her.

#### Bill and Lesley Baran:

Bill, Lesley and I all worked for the Quaker Oats Company in Barrington throughout most of the 70's. Bill had a Ph.D. and worked in Research while I was in process engineering, with a lowly

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*Lesley with Bill in his Shiner Piper uniform. He played the bagpipes for the Atlanta Shriners.*

B.S. (Ask me sometime about what they stand for.) Lesley was an executive secretary to one of the vice-presidents. We had little interaction at the start but coincidentally, I joined the Masons in Crystal Lake while he joined in Cary and we visited each other's lodges. From then on, we got close. Bill and Lesley asked me to be the godfather to their only child Billy in 1978. We also joined the Shriners and rode in a "unit" or parade group. If you haven't seen a full fledged Shriner parade, you haven't lived. Hurry, we are getting older and shrinking in numbers. Our vehicle was a 50 cc. Honda mini-bike, built for kids. Bill is over six foot and so were some of the other riders and we always drew cheers maneuvering those little machines around. Crowds loved our figure eights.

Bill and I decided to leave Quaker Oats for greener pastures and led peripatetic lives over the next two decades. Bill went to Pennsylvania, Maryland, Georgia, Arizona and is still working, in Chattanooga, Tennessee. I went to Tennessee and Cincinnati, Ohio but almost landed in St. Louis, Missouri in the process. But wherever we were, we managed to visit each other on a regular basis. What a fellowship we enjoyed and hope to continue!

A recent story concerning my godson Billy: I received a call from Bill that Billy was in distress. He was driving through Cincinnati on his way to visit Bill in Tennessee when his car broke down just on the other side of the river in Kentucky, barely a half hour's drive from our house in Fairfield. His clunker needed major repair and Billy had no credit card and the shop wouldn't take Bill's. So I proceeded to the shop and arranged to have his car fixed. There were complications but Bill and his girlfriend wound up having to fly down to Chattanooga. On the return flight, I fetched them from the airport and they picked up the car. Here's the clincher. The car broke down again just north of Cincinnati! But Billy is stubborn and graduated from a mechanic's college. He won't get rid of that car so he had it towed 100 plus miles to his apartment. I believe he still has that car and trying to keep it running??



Celebrating Mario's retirement, March 2001.

Appearances: I am sure that sitting down by or standing close to my American friends like Bill, Art and Jim, we would appear to be odd couples. They are all much taller and heftier. The only one I could see eye to eye was Chuck Seaman. But what has size, race or religion got to do with friendship?

#### Mabel Lewis Schermesser Lentz:

Mabel is my former mother-in-law, and I resent any jokes about mother-in-laws. She is one of the sweetest women you will ever meet. Now 83 years old, she is hale and hearty and divides her time between Akron, Ohio and Pompano Beach, Florida. Still drives a big old Cadillac. Every time we meet, she greets me like I were still married to her daughter, with affection. No bitterness, coolness or anything.

Knowing that I was doing genealogy research, Mabel dug up some papers some of her relatives had written. It was a treasure trove of information! It turns out that one of her

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forebears on the Lewis side is Augustine Washington. Who is Augustine? He happens to be the father of George Washington. Mabel, and therefore my children and grandchildren are directly descended from Elizabeth Washington, a full sister of George. Elizabeth was married to Anthony Lewis, who is Mabel's forebear. So, my kids can call George W. great, great, great, great, great, grand uncle. Got it?

#### Fr. Albert Kirk of St. Mary's in Jackson Tennessee:

Some of the stories in this collection are rather light in nature but the following story is probably one of the most important. In August of 1993, Val was taken ill. She had severe chest pains. With her family's history of heart problems, this was no trifling matter. She went to her physician, who sent her to a cardiologist immediately. The cardiologist conducted an angiogram. Without much discussion with Val or me, he had Val scheduled for open-heart surgery the next morning. In addition to her congenital ASD (atrial septal defect,) she had a blockage on one of the major coronary arteries. It was urgent and there was no time to waste.

After the operation, a Fr. Kirk came into Val's room. Fr. Kirk was the pastor of St. Mary's church in Jackson, the only Catholic Church in Madison County. The southern states are overwhelmingly Protestant, Tennessee is heavily Baptist and the Catholic population is probably between 5 and 10% (my guess) vs. more than 25% nationally. We had indicated Roman Catholic on the hospital questionnaire about religion. We explained our situation to him, that both of us had previously been married. I don't think she was given communion but Fr. Kirk led us in prayer. He said to visit him after Val had recuperated.

Some weeks later, we did visit Fr. Kirk. After we all prayed, he said we could ask for an annulment through the Memphis diocese. We received the forms and answered them. The form was quite lengthy but we submitted it as quickly as we could. The investigation process by the diocese took almost two years, but we finally received a letter saying our first marriages had been annulled. There was no cost to us, except for a voluntary contribution. The children were quite concerned as to what this meant, but we assured them that it was a technicality necessary for our marriage to be sanctified in the Catholic Church.

So on Aug. 7, 1995, in the presence of two witnesses, we were formally married in the Roman Catholic Church. Fr. Kirk had been transferred so another priest conducted the brief ceremony. The witnesses were our neighbors, the Luys, a Filipino couple originally from Cebu. We picked Aug. 7 since that was our wedding date in 1977. In 2002 we celebrated our 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary by going to the Marriage Celebration at the Our Lady of Snows Shrine in Belleville, Illinois. With 28 other couples, we renewed our vows. And we have been parishioners at St. John Neumann Church in Cincinnati ever since we moved from Jackson in 1995.

Thank you, Father Kirk, wherever you are!!

#### My Americans:

There you have it, the Snowdons, Mrs. Goldstein, the farm family, the Neers, the Swedes of Orchard Acres, Jim Leiding, the Siewerths, Oscar Gilbert, Barans, Seamans, Hoffmans, Mabel, Fr. Kirk. I have been shown nothing but kindness. How can I not love this great country? Who said the twain shall never meet? Whoever said that is dead wrong.

#### Where were you on Nov. 22, 1963?

There are some dates, hours or moments that become indelibly etched in our minds. To a lot of people, 11/22/63 qualifies. I had transferred from a Carnegie Tech dormitory to an

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apartment in the “Shadyside” district of Pittsburgh, within walking distance of the school. Shadyside was “trendy” and one of its streets had several nightclubs. The neighborhood was popular with artists. My roommate was Alberto Sandoval, another Filipino at Carnegie and also a chemical engineer. Our landlord was an elderly gentleman named McMahon, with full snow-white hair and an accent. I found out later that he was born in Ireland. Alberto wasn’t home that afternoon but I was. There was a knock on the door and it was Mr. McMahon. He was very sad looking but not in tears, at least not yet. He said President Kennedy had been shot in Dallas. He invited me to join him in their apartment on the second floor (we were on the third floor) and watch the news. So for the rest of the afternoon and early evening, we sat and watched a black and white TV set relating the news from Dallas. Finally it was confirmed that Mr. Kennedy had died. Mr. McMahon was now in tears. I don’t remember how long I stayed with Mr. McMahon and his wife but there wasn’t much we could do or say to one another. Mr. McMahon was born in Ireland and still had that distinctive accent. He looked very sad, and being Irish born, the tragedy must’ve affected him more than I could imagine. A few months later Mr. McMahon sold the building and I moved to another apartment.

Speaking of my roommate Alberto Sandoval, he got engaged in 1963. (No name of the fiancée here – you’ll find out why shortly.) He asked me to be the best man. But before the wedding could occur, after everything was all set, Alberto was mysteriously called to the Philippines by his family. He never returned to Pittsburgh and he never contacted me. No reason, nothing. All the plans had to be undone. Even his employer was looking for him. He never returned to that job either. He may have returned to the US and lived in another state or maybe just stayed in the Philippines. I would still like to know the reason he disappeared.

## OTHER STORIES

### The Draft:

One of the most contentious issues in the United States during the sixties was the military draft. The Vietnam war was raging and the self-indulgent generation didn’t feel like it was their war. But everyone was required to register for the draft, even the foreign born. So like a good citizen to be, I did register. There wasn’t any issue and I don’t remember the exact classification but since I was a student, the student deferment applied. A little later on, I even had a rudimentary physical at the draft office in downtown Pittsburgh. But wasn’t long after that I got married and the classification changed once more. Then the chances of my actually getting drafted became slim to none unless the Vietnamese invaded the United States. So goes my draft experience. I should have saved my draft card to show the kids.



*Brothers Bill Baran, Dale Pitts and me, June 2001.*

### World War II Veterans:

Working during the 1960’s and 70’s I still met a lot of former soldiers and sailors who had served in the Philippines. These are the few Americans who could tell my nationality without asking. They would seek me out and tell me stories about the war in the Philippines or the liberation. A colleague at Lubrizol in Ohio was a paratrooper who “jumped” on Corregidor with McArthur’s forces in 1945. Another Lubrizol employee was a career soldier captured by the Japanese at the start of the war and almost three years in internment camps. He had nothing good to say about the Japanese. He was in his late teens when captured and grew up in

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a hurry. My former boss Oscar Gilbert was in the Navy he told me he served as an MP in Manila trying to keep the drunks in check and staying out of the off limits bars. For whatever reason, certain establishments were identified as not suitable for the soldiers and sailors. Signs saying "Off Limits" were posted. I remember seeing these signs around Manila. No, I was not cruising in the bar sections of town. Without exception these men spoke wistfully of their time in the Philippines, even in the midst of combat. The friendliness and hospitality of the Filipino people was not forgotten. "They were our friends, our allies," they said to a man. And the subject of women was never far behind. Many had memorized and still remembered Tagalog words and phrases of endearment.

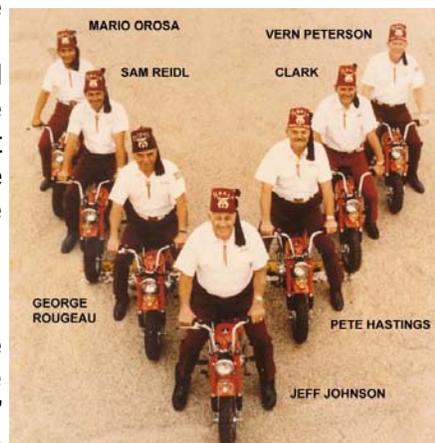
And speaking of women, there was another group of Americans who brought home with them their Filipina war brides. There were quite a few in Pittsburgh and they had the prettiest/handsomest children. One Filipino-American offspring stands out in my memory. His father was African-American and his mother brought him to one of the Filipino gatherings in Pittsburgh. He was of college age, tall and very studious. Instead of mingling with others, he read his college books. He later went on to Harvard and became a Congressman from Massachusetts. I'm not quite sure but I think his name was Joseph Rhodes.

Today these WW II veterans are almost all gone, literally dying at the rate of almost one thousand daily. Oscar himself is 82. Take a moment and pay tribute to these men and women. NBC Evening New anchor Tom Brokaw called them the "Greatest Generation" in his book. Without them we would be speaking Japanese or German instead of the other way around.

There is a brother Mason and fellow Shriner in Illinois whose story I'd like to tell. His name is Dale Pitts of McHenry, a town fifty miles northwest of Chicago. Dale served in the Army Air Corps (precursor to the modern Air Force) in Burma and participated in the "over the hump" operation where the Allies re-supplied the Nationalist Chinese forces by airlifting supplies over the Himalayas. Dale likes to imbibe certain distilled "spirits" and is sometimes subjected to ribbing by friend and foe alike. Like almost all of these veterans, Dale never dwelled much on his war experience. They just did their duty and returned home to raise families. During one conversation, it slipped out that he had a son in Vietnam. It turned out that the son, named Dana, was in the Marine Corps and died in combat. During a trip to Washington DC I made it a point to visit the Vietnam Memorial. You have to search the name in a list, which tells you where the name of the veteran is chiseled out from the black shiny marble. I found Dana Pitts' name and took pictures of the memorial and his name. Dana was only twenty years old when he died in action. Dale never complained or dwelled on about the unfairness of it all. No wonder Brokaw called them the Greatest Generation. I gave the pictures to Dale and hope he still has it.

### Masons and Shriners:

Some of the most enjoyable times I have ever spent were with my brother Masons and Shriners. I joined not only the Masonic Lodge in Crystal Lake but also "appendant" bodies like the Scottish Rite and the Shriners. They are called appendant because being a Mason is a prerequisite to joining. Art became Master of the Lodge and I followed



*The Tebala Mini-Bikes. We had about a dozen parades every summer.*

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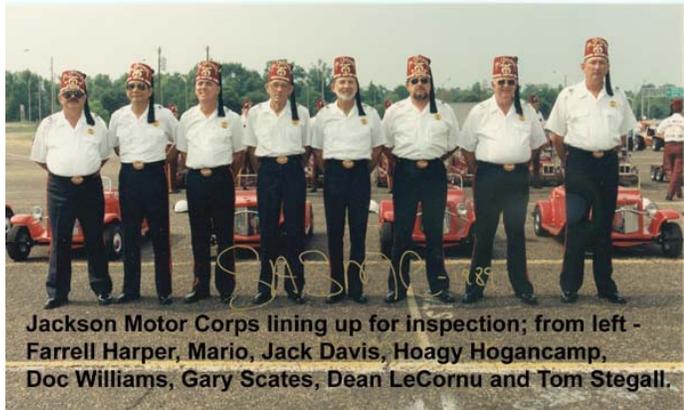
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shortly thereafter. For the uninitiated, the Masons of today date back to 1717 in London England when the Grand Lodge of England was formed. All Masonic bodies in the world trace back to this Grand Lodge. But Masonic roots go further back, to the guilds of stone masons who built the great cathedrals and castles of the middle ages.

The Shriners are the fun or showcase of Masons. They're the ones who run around on parades as clowns, riding small motorcycles (like Bill Baran and I did in Illinois) and big motorcycles like Harley Davidsons, horses, antique car models (like I did in Jackson TN,) and others that are too numerous to mention. Some are dressed up as hillbillies, some as Arabs, although the latter would not go over today. Later on Bill rode a Buick Regal convertible then became a piper, playing bagpipes and wearing a kilt. What is the point of all this? Well, to have fun of course. But also to support the 22 hospitals for crippled and burned children located in North America. Long before the politicians started talking about volunteerism, the Shriners opened the first Hospital for Crippled Children in 1922. Today the budget of the Shriners Hospitals is approaching \$600 million, spending one and a half million dollars daily on patient care and research.

In Illinois, the Mini-Bikes rode at least a dozen parades during the summer, starting from Memorial Day to Labor Day and sometimes an occasional October parade. Our parade season stretched from late spring to early fall. We were in Wisconsin towns like Wilmot, Kenosha, Twin Lakes, and Silver Lake. In Illinois, we paraded in McHenry, Rockford, Zion, Rosemont, De Kalb, Harvard, Woodstock, Cary and Marengo.

I joined the Jackson Tennessee group that had a 1/8 model of a 1932 Ford roadster, powered by a lawnmower engine, painted fire engine red. It makes more noise than a full size car but can't go much faster than 30 mph. The towns we paraded in were Brownsville, Henderson, Lexington, Selmer, Saltillo. We even got as far as Fulton, Kentucky although Fulton was really not that far. The Fulton parade was called the banana parade because Fulton at one time was the



Jackson Motor Corps lining up for inspection; from left - Farrell Harper, Mario, Jack Davis, Hoagy Hogancamp, Doc Williams, Gary Scates, Dean LeCornu and Tom Stegall.

transshipment point for bananas in the United States. From Honduras to Fulton to your neighborhood grocery store, but they don't anymore. Now, aren't you really happy to know that? If you will notice none of the towns, whether in the Midwest or the south, are well known. But small town America loves parades and they have more fun. There is more camaraderie and fellowship.

The interesting part about the parades in Tennessee was the dates they were held – in December. They were called Christmas parades to celebrate the season and the weather is generally mild enough. We would never do this kind of parade in Illinois or Wisconsin, it would be too cold and no spectators would show up. But sometimes the weather plays tricks and on more than one occasion we had to dress in snowmobile suits. No, you can't snowmobile in Tennessee. We have been subjected to the Tennessee equivalent of a white Christmas – freezing rain.

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The southern Shriners were a great bunch of guys with colorful nicknames. No, I never knew any Bubbas. But there were Hoagy, Windy, Crash, Buddy, Who (those were his initials,) Hot, JC, Deano, Doc, Humko, and Dusty. I could go on but you get the message. In Illinois, we pretty much stuck to Bill, Bob and Jim. The northern Shriners were just as colorful individually but names were bland.

#### Hal Todd:

Harold "Hal" Todd was a Shriner and when we met, I had just become a Shriner at Tebala Temple in Rockford, IL. He was soon to be Potentate, the title of the local temple's leader who is elected for a term of one year. As one of those who recognized my nationality immediately, he started to tell me of his experience in the Philippines. He was a 20-year old soldier and he met a local family who took him in as an "adopted" son. This happened fairly frequently, local families treating a young American soldier as one of their family. Hal would tell me on several occasions that after the United States, the Philippines was his favorite country.

Hal and I became friends and with his wife Jean, Val and I socialized with them on many occasions. Since I was a regular at Shrine affairs and he attended just about every function, we saw each other frequently for a number of years. During one of my trips back to the Philippines – I believe it was 1986 – I looked for his "family" and was able to visit. The family was well off and I was invited to their home overlooking the Marikina Valley. I know it was 1986 because my host talked about the recent "people power" revolution that brought down the dictator Marcos.

After many, many years of regular contact with his "family", Hal and Jean finally made a sentimental trip back to the Philippines. Knowing that it might have been the last time they were to see each other, Hal said it was a very emotional reunion. This uncommon and deep bond between Americans who had served in the Philippines and the Filipinos who endured years of occupation while waiting for deliverance by America was a relationship not found among subjects and colonial masters.

In the late 80's, Hal and Jean retired to Florida, I moved to Tennessee and unfortunately we lost touch. Hal would now be close to 80. Hal, I pray you and Jean and still around and enjoying your well deserved golden years. Thank you for the memories.

#### Charlotte Wagner:



*Charlotte during Val's and my 25th anniversary in Sept. 2002.*

This will require some explaining but here is a short version. The paternal grandfather of Val's children was Ed Wagner and Charlotte was Ed's second wife. Ed became estranged from his son after separating from Val and maintained close ties with the children, Val and later with me. That's the background. Charlotte was an active member of the Order of the Eastern Star, which I had been active in at one time. Charlotte belonged to a family of Masons. Her father and her brother Milton (Milt) belonged to the fraternity. Charlotte just turned 80 and after first giving me her father's Bible, she has now given me her father's Masonic ring with a large diamond. So I am now in possession of two Masonic diamond rings. I felt honored that she would do this, the second time I have been so honored in a short period of time. Charlotte could easily have given this ring to someone else. She has a nephew and niece and of

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course there are her grandchildren from Val.

Charlotte's brother Milt was a talented man who did paintings, drawings and sculpture. He relied on God-given talent, never having had formal training or art school. In fact he served in the Army first. He utilized his talent well and created advertising for companies. He had a brain tumor, which caused paralysis of his right side. As a right-handed painter, he could no longer paint. But he taught himself to paint with his left hand. I gave him a picture of Nadine. He painted Nadine's picture on canvas for me, I paid only for the cost. (Frames for paintings can be expensive!)

#### Filipino Immigrants:

It didn't take me long to determine that there were several classes of Filipino immigrants. There never was a monolithic Filipino-American community everyone seemed to gravitate toward their own little class or group. First were the "old-timers" sometimes derisively called "OT's" by more recent arrivals. They arrived in the US before World War II to work menial jobs, from farm hands to dishwashers and rarely had an education beyond high school and sometimes not even then. Very few married since there was a dearth of potential partners. Unlike the Japanese farm laborers who organized recruitment of mail ordered brides, the Filipinos never had that custom. As for marrying the locals (Caucasians), it was mostly out of the question. These oldtimers faced the kind of social discrimination we present day immigrants could not even imagine. There were anti-miscegenation laws in many states and although they were intended for blacks, the laws could apply equally to Asians. (On a more personal level, when I first married in 1965 we could technically be arrested in some Southern states since my wife was Caucasian. These laws were subsequently ruled unconstitutional not long after.) The OT's became useful citizens and many served in the US armed forces during WW II. There is a Filipino-American Congressional Medal of Honor recipient named Rudolf Davila. A fellow named Ramon Subejano won the Silver Star (second only to the Congressional Medal of Honor), one of more than a dozen medals he accumulated. He was referred to as a German-killing machine. I knew several of the oldtimers, including "Uncle Ben" Quinio, a brother of the wife of my uncle Nicolas. Coming to the US during the great depression, Ben's lifetime job was operating an elevator in Chicago skyscrapers. Another one in Pittsburgh was in charge of the kitchen staff at the old Webster Hotel. Today these early Filipino immigrants are referred to endearingly as "manongs", a term of respect.

Then there were the war brides, Filipinas that married Americans who had served in the US armed forces in the Philippines. Almost universally, the Americans were enlisted men and not commissioned officers and the Filipinas they met were of more humble origins. Coming from a poor country, Filipinos are quite class conscious.

The next were the students like myself. There weren't many to start with but during the presidency of Lyndon Johnson, the floodgates opened for new immigrants as well as students. At Carnegie Tech (now Carnegie Mellon University), there were only three other Filipinos that I knew of among nearly 5,000 students. Today just about all the state universities have a Filipino student organization. But they are probably American born.

And finally there were the professionals, mostly doctors and other medical practitioners. The doctors were the haughtiest and snootiest since they benefited from the high income and status accorded medical doctors. I suppose they equated this with social superiority although one lady had the best comeback. "I always tell them not to give me airs, they ate tuyo back home just like I did." Tuyo is salted and dried mackerel, the mainstay of working

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class diet. When fried, you could smell it two blocks away.

There was another group, not really immigrants but servicemen. These were Filipinos that had joined the US Navy. Most were trained at the Great Lake Naval Base outside of Chicago. While living in Crystal Lake, Illinois I met quite a few of them and several joined our Masonic Lodge. There is a story into themselves. The US Navy recruited Filipinos when their Philippine bases at Subic Bay and Sangley Point were still operational. They served as cooks and stewards and have become somewhat of a tradition in the Navy and I am told the White House kitchen staff is mostly Filipino.

Aside from the immigrant "classes" mentioned above, the fractious nature of Filipinos was aptly demonstrated as the number of immigrants grew exponentially. Every province had to have its own organization, sometimes down to the town level. Then there were school alumni organizations as well. The only time I became active in any organization was in Pittsburgh. A lot of Filipinos I know, including relatives, were turned off by this clannishness and stuck to ever-larger extended families while forsaking the Filipino organizations.

Living in the Cincinnati area for the last seven years, there is FASO or Filipino American Association of Southern Ohio. Our advantage is that there is only one organization.

#### The Pittsburgh Folk Festival:

Back in the early 60's, the city of Pittsburgh had a three day cultural event called Pittsburgh Folk Festival. This was to celebrate the diversity of cultures that make up America. Pittsburgh was somewhat of a pioneer in this, it was the only one I was aware of. Today, all kinds of ethnic festivals abound. Groups like the Serbo-Croatians, Carpatho-Russians participated plus groups representing countries like China, Greece, etc. There were three phases to the festival, a food booth, a cultural booth with exhibits and a dance program. The Filipino community was invited to participate and at that time there was an organization formed called "Samahang Filipino ng Pittsburgh" or Filipino Organization of Pittsburgh. The official organization decided we weren't ready to participate. However a few of us somewhat rebellious graduate students decided to go ahead, infuriating the larger group. We had very little help. But guess what we pulled it off. The "camaron rebusado" or fried shrimp in the food booth was a hit. Our dance of the "Tinikling" and "Fandango sa Ilaw" brought the house down. I was told by the organizers of the event that we were the surprise hit. Yours truly danced the tinikling. I don't know if Pittsburgh still has the Folk Festival but this is how the Filipinos first participated. Don't let anyone tell you otherwise.

#### The Greeks:

I really didn't know very many but they certainly were a very unique group of people. Bill Talidis, Uncle Louie, the brothers Archos, Gus Zaharias, Tom Topalis and a few others. Uncle Louie's surname was Kalinikos, born and raised in Greece, coming to America to sew furs for the furrier Talidis. He was already approaching 80 by the time I met him around 1980 but he still loved his wine and storytelling. Most of the Greeks I knew were via the Masonic fraternity and the Shriners, which meant we all called each other Brother or Noble. The Archos brothers owned John Evans Inn in Crystal Lake for nearly thirty years and it was the best restaurant in Crystal Lake if not McHenry County. They had the best roast Long Island duck, steak and seafood. I spent many evenings there with friends like the Siewerths and other Shriners. I learned to love Roditis, a Greek blush wine. There I discovered saganaki, the flaming cheese appetizer. For after dinner I preferred the brandy

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Metaxa, never developing a taste for ouzo. Notice that they all had Anglicized nick names, their actual baptismal names were more like Vasilios and Stylianos and Demetrios.

Most of the Greeks were successful entrepreneurs. They are legendary in northern Illinois for owning restaurants that were clean, serve wholesome, reasonably priced food and generous portions. The service is always fast and polite. The only town we lived in that didn't have Greek owned restaurants in the area was Jackson, Tennessee. Bill Talidis owned a fur salon that included a mink farm where he raised the vicious little animals. Minks have razor sharp teeth, are nasty and have to be kept in individual cages. That's where I bought my first extravagant gift for Val, first a mink stole then a full length coat. Wearing a real mink coat is politically incorrect today but the height of fashion twenty-five years ago. They certainly keep you warm. Bill told me his hometown was devoted to the fur trade.

Maybe the Greeks are the greatest contributors to Western democratic thought starting with Socrates but I define them in more personal terms. The Greeks were generous to our Masonic and Shrine causes. They were fun loving, hospitable, closely knit but not clannish. We regularly roasted whole lamb and goat at Talidis' farm. I seldom see the fellows now but whenever I visit Illinois and attend a Shrine function, the first guy that will insist on buying me a drink is one of the Greeks. Opa!

Remember Uncle Louie? When he passed away, he insisted on having his Shriner fez adorning his body. Opa to you too Uncle Louie.

No, this piece was not inspired by the fat wedding movie.

#### Human Guinea Pig:

I have participated in three clinical studies, with the third one ongoing. Don't ask me why I like to volunteer for these things. I was only paid once and that was a very pleasant surprise. First was with a cholesterol study conducted by Quaker Oats back in the 1970's. Oatmeal is known to be beneficial, it might even be argued that it is the best grain, better than wheat or corn. Quaker wanted to quantify how much oatmeal would reduce cholesterol. For several months, we consumed three ounces of oatmeal daily. Yes, it did reduce the bad stuff but believe me eating three ounces of oatmeal every day forever is not very appealing. Today, advertising claims are made about oatmeal being good for the heart but of course there are a lot of disclaimers, using "it may" instead of "it will." But it won't hurt to eat it regularly. My dad did have it for breakfast and we bought the oatmeal in big cans.

The second clinical test in the 1990's also involved cholesterol reduction. This is more interesting and gives an insight on how drugs are approved and the risks involved no matter how thorough the work. There are a lot of clinical tests conducted in Cincinnati and ads appear all the time asking for volunteers. Certain qualifications are needed relating to age, physical condition and afflictions, with "compensation" mentioned but not quantified. So I answer this one ad and because I now had high cholesterol and taking medication, I qualified.

The medication was called cerivastatin, belonging to a family of statin drugs routinely used to treat hyper-cholesterolemia. So I take this for two months and periodically I would stay in the clinic to monitor the level in my blood. It wasn't pleasant, you try to sleep and they come in to draw blood every hour. Another time I had to collect my urine over a 24-hour period. I was given a container. Now I tried to hold off going during the time I was at the office. I'm

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walking down the hallway to the men's room and bump into my boss. Mario, what is that gallon jug you are carrying and what's in it? The test was very successful the drug was approved by the FDA and called Baycol. I was proud, not only that, they handed me a check for \$1,500. Hmm, maybe I can be a professional guinea pig.

What happened next demonstrated that there are always risks. A few people died while taking the medication and the drug was withdrawn from the market. Now, I could've been one of those that develop a reaction but during the first time we took it, the two doctors, Drs. Stein & Isaacson, watched us like hawks.

The last test I'm on now is a little different. The test is a very large prostate study test involving selenium and vitamin E. It is thought that these two vitamins could reduce prostate cancer. My dad had prostate cancer and was operated on while in his 60's but he lived to a ripe old age. My brother-in-law just recently had an operation for prostate cancer. This test is double blind, meaning I could be taking placebos and the people administering the test don't know either. No, I'm not getting paid but am given the vitamins (placebos) and a special multi-vitamin that doesn't contain these two. I get free "checkups." The old guys know what I mean.

The test has now been combined with another test and I am also being evaluated for Alzheimer's disease. The two vitamins are thought to help with Alzheimer's too. We are given a "memory" test to evaluate the onset or retardation of the disease. Since I am about to turn 63 and expect my genes to carry me through several more decades, this could be a very long test.

#### Overnight millionaire:

It was one of those events that I sometimes fantasize about. Like a princely sum falling into my lap. Winning a lottery without buying tickets. Yes, I buy lottery tickets but usually wait until the jackpot hits \$30 million or more, which amuses some of our children. They ask "isn't \$5 million enough?" Part of our IRA and 401k is with Fidelity Investments and we receive regular statements. One statement showed a balance of over \$13,000,000! I mentioned it to my "friends" at work and they unanimously said take it out. Maybe have it wire transferred. Fidelity to my local checking account then to some hastily opened account overseas. That's how they "launder" money, right? It would literally only take minutes. Yeah, but I would have to leave the country, to a place with no extradition treaty. Like Brazil maybe. Don't know if the Philippines had a treaty with the US since I don't ever recall any Filipino being sent to the US for trial. So what, they said, my family can fly first class and visit. But the euphoria of being a millionaire was short-lived. A few days later the corrected statement came back stating the real balance. Their computer had added two zeroes. No statement about sorry for your inconvenience. But it was fun while it lasted.

#### Farms, Chickens & Others:

During my first year in Pittsburgh, I was asked by the organization that arranged for "host" families what I would like to see. I didn't hesitate; I wanted to see an American farm. Farms that were models of efficiency and food production, something that never ceases to amaze me. America can literally feed the world. Well, the best they could do was a chicken farm, which suited me fine. I can't recall the farm family's name, but the farm was in a county north of Pittsburgh. I stayed the weekend and was shown how they worked the farm. The

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family kept thousands of chickens in coops for egg production. The coops were totally enclosed, like a Quonset hut. The chickens walked around on top of a closely knit wire mesh, close enough so their feet wouldn't go through but large enough for chicken "you know what" to fall. The "you know what" accumulated under the wire and on a periodic basis they would rake it out for dumping in the fields. Great fertilizer. Believe me, the odor is strong. Two feet of piled up chicken shit is not a trifling matter. That's how long they waited for it to accumulate before removing. The eggs rolled down and were collected in buckets. I imagine today's chicken farms are larger and even more automated today.

American farms have always fascinated me. Less than a year ago, we visited a dairy farm in Wisconsin operated by a relative of one of Val's cousins. One hundred milking cows, and it "only" took two families to run it. Father and son and their wives and children ran the farm without outside help. No wonder food is so plentiful and cheap, with farmers being so efficient. The world ought to take a cue from the American farmer.

You think that is efficient? Fast forward to 2002. We drive on Interstate 65 often since this is the main artery between Cincinnati and the Chicago area. From the highway, you could see long buildings in the middle of the farmland. I knew they were for livestock but didn't know what kind – pigs, chickens, etc.? I always like to take "scenic" routes so off the highway we went. Finally we saw a gravel road leading to the direction of the buildings. There were no signs. That is on purpose I think, to keep away snoops like me. Then finally, the buildings were close but big signs said NO trespassing, we will take your vehicle, etc. But they were dairy farms. There must be thousands of dairy cattle, a heck of a lot of milk.

#### Barber of Painesville:

This story may seem very minor but it is indicative of the luck or blessings I've received from the most unlikely places. I had just lost my job at Lubrizol but wasn't really worried because the job with Quaker Oats was quite promising and would in fact materialize in days. In effect I went from Lubrizol to Quaker without missing a beat. I got my haircut from a fellow named Ronnie Dooms, a very pleasant, moon faced, balding short guy. After he had cut my hair, he wouldn't take the money. I told him about the job loss and he said that was his way of helping. He was a white guy, I didn't ask, but he wanted to help in his own way. I remember these "little" things.

#### The more we give:

So we try to do our part. I've donated enough blood to fill up your Toyota Corolla's gas tank. Val and I have helped build a house for Habitat for Humanity. I've helped Val (she is a Master Gardener) plant flowers in the median strip of the town next to Fairfield. She has given countless hours to the Master Gardeners to help beautify our city and county and volunteers weekly at the Mercy Hospital Healthplex in Fairfield. We have sponsored a Filipino child through the Pearl Buck Foundation for almost thirty years. It seems that the more we give, the more we receive in return.

#### Door to Door Encyclopedia Salesman:

Low in fund towards the end of my first year at Carnegie Tech, I answered an ad in the paper promising big money. So I went for an "interview." I think they would have been willing to take anyone since it was strictly commission. They would have taken a chimpanzee. The job was selling Collier encyclopedias door to door. Like the Britannica, the Collier consisted of many volumes, twenty if I recall, with each volume the size of a medium dictionary. At one time Collier published a magazine that rivaled Life and Look, all

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of whom became defunct. Of course today a single CD would contain more information. Or if you didn't want to bother with a CD, you could subscribe through the Internet, but we're getting ahead. We were given training on the sales spiel and practiced on each other for a couple of evenings. We would be doing work evenings since that's when people would be home. So off we went.

This was strictly cold call, no prior appointments. The sales manager would drive us to a neighborhood, point at a block where the lights were on and said move it. I should have known that the evening wasn't going to be favorable when we were caught in a sudden rainstorm. We had to run back to the car, taking off our shoes to navigate deep puddles. But the sales manager wouldn't give up. I guess that's why he was the manager. I made a spiel at several houses without success. It was getting late so we all made one more call. That was a huge mistake.

The house I picked was that of a police officer. He let me in, allowed me to conduct the spiel and after I had delivered the punch line of when do you want the books delivered please don't forget to sign the contract, he asked, do you guys have a permit? Huh? A permit? Please ask our manager. Of course we didn't. A permit would cost and besides they almost never grant one. So the officer said you guys either pay a fine for soliciting without a license, then get out of town or your asses are in jail. You will occasionally see signs indicating "no solicitation." I guess this is what they refer to. Fortunately, the sales manager had that covered with some kind of sales insurance. Otherwise I would have been calling my parents in Manila from a jail somewhere around Pittsburgh for bail money. Compared to dozens of Orosas in the US and Canada today, there were none then. Rosario Escobar Orosa would have been hysterical, and not in a funny way either. And I didn't sell a single volume. We were supposed to sell every evening but I never returned for a second round.

#### Cheap Entertainment:

During my days at Carnegie Tech and before moving to Painesville, OH I didn't have much disposable income for such frivolities as dining out, going to the symphony or the theater. I had always liked baseball and the Pittsburgh Pirates had their Forbes Field stadium, since torn down, near Carnegie. It was only a short walk to the park. The left field bleacher tickets sold for exactly \$1.00. That much I could afford. So I went to a lot of games. The Pirates were always contenders for the National League pennant and at that time they had players like Roberto Clemente and Willie Stargell, now both Hall of Famers. Clemente was the right fielder with a rocket for an arm. He could throw from his position in deep right field to the catcher in one bounce. Before his career ended tragically in a plane crash while on a humanitarian mission he had 3,000 hits. Stargell was the gentleman player, unassuming but the team leader and home run hitter. I won't bore you with their lineup but later on Pittsburgh had a first in fielding a starting nine of all African-Americans. Of course that is not a novelty anymore but today I bet someone could start a game with all Latinos, or all foreign born which now includes a record number of Asians. Hurray for baseball!

#### The Wedding Photographer:

Like any other guy, I developed hobbies over the years. But my attention span is limited, especially when I run out of challenges. Somewhere between my tennis and winemaking days, I became a serious amateur photographer, which sounds like an oxymoron. Bought the entire gamut of equipment, a Minolta body, regular lens, wide angle lens and zoom telephoto lens plus a powerful flash. Took thousands of slides, now stored in metal boxes in our

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Fairfield home.

Since photography can be quite expensive and I was in the process of getting married to Val, I looked into the possibility of making extra money. Through word of mouth and contacts at work, I managed quite a few weddings every summer. I didn't want to fuss with developing, cataloging and taking orders, I just charged a flat rate depending on the number of rolls of film. I cleared between \$100-150 for a Saturday afternoon and evening work plus food and drinks at the reception. That money helped, Val and I were supporting our combined six children.

Of course wedding photography is much more complex today, with the advent of video and digital cameras. I would have to considerably upgrade both my skills and equipment to continue doing it.

As for the equipment, which is now at least thirty years old, I passed it on to our son Alan and he still uses it with good quality results.

#### Putative Translator:

Hank Nulle was the Sheriff of McHenry County, of which Crystal Lake was a part. Hank was a friend from the Shriners. I got a call one time and the county court needed a translator for Tagalog to English in a divorce case. No problem. The dispute involved child custody between a now divorced couple, wherein the man was American and the wife was Filipino. Among the people asked to testify was the wife's mother, obviously Filipino and from all appearances was lacking in English language skills. But it later turned out that she could speak halting English and the judge allowed her testimony without translators. It looked like she didn't want me translating either. I would've wanted to stay as a translator since the case seemed to have some salacious parts. The Filipina was petite and attractive and had met her ex-serviceman husband in the Philippines. There was some questions about shall we say marital fidelity and resulting "issue." I should've stayed around to hear the rest of the story. But I had to return to work.

#### Marriage of Convenience:

While belonging to Parents Without Partners, I met a lot of divorced, widowed and separated people, each of whom had sad stories to tell. One was a Filipina who had come to the United States to marry a fiancée she had met while he was in the service. I think it was in Olongapo, where there was a very large naval base. She had a child by a Filipino partner, then had a child with the American partner. The American wanted to marry her and was able to obtain visas for her and the boys. This was conditional on them getting married in the US. Well, to make the long story short, he changed his mind. The Filipina was staying with her mother-in-law to be who wanted her to stay. She had grown fond of the two boys. She went to the Congressman from her Illinois district, pleaded with the Immigration Service but to no avail. Her son was totally out of the picture.

So a plot was concocted. This apparently happens more often than known by the population and was once featured in CBS' 60 minutes. There would be a "marriage of convenience" where the Filipina would marry a citizen and apply for her "green card." The card allows her to stay, then afterwards there would be a quiet divorce. Supposedly, American citizens even lend themselves out for this operation for small fees. Now guess

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whom the mother-in-law thought of to ask to have this scam into action. Mario Orosa of course! It was implicit that there would be no marital “privileges” and there would be no “consummation.” At that time I was already going with Val and she put the kibosh on it immediately. Hey, I could have made extra money getting hired out. But it might not take long for the Immigration Service to catch up and holler fraud. I never did find out what happened to the woman and her two children.

#### Mistaken Identity:

During the time I was working for Quaker Oats, I went out of town on a business trip. Coincidentally, a body was found floating in the Fox River, in the vicinity of Fox River Grove. There was no identification, but the appearance of the man was Hispanic and he had “Mario” tattooed on his arm. How the police made the association with me I’ll never know but they must have conducted some clever sleuthing. They surmised that there was a Mario living in Crystal Lake who may be Hispanic. They visited my house on Strong Road and of course I wasn’t there. No one else was home since I was divorced and living alone at the time. They checked with my next-door neighbor the Schillings. Erika must’ve screeched that she hasn’t seen me for days. Then the police went to Quaker Oats and showed photographs of the corpus delicti to my boss Oscar Gilbert. He confirmed that I was out of town, alive and well and the photograph wasn’t of my features. Thank goodness. Whether the Fox River Grove police ever identified the poor guy I don’t know. But at least we know they always try.

#### Prejudice?

I have been asked several times whether during all these years I’ve lived in the United States, if I’ve experienced any prejudice or discrimination. Truthfully the answer is no. If there was, I was too preoccupied with more important undertakings or just too dumb to notice it. During one Sunday Mass, our celebrant was a Franciscan named Fr. Jim Bock. Fr. Jim is memorable because he loves to tell jokes at the end of the Mass. He started off one homily by asking who in the congregation had a primary language other than English. I raised my hand. Although there were Vietnamese and other Filipinos in the church, no one else raised their hand. Fr. Jim asked me if I was fluent in English when I arrived which of course I answered yes. Then he asked whether I felt having been discriminated against. I answered no and that ruined his homily because he was looking for someone to say yes. Sorry, Fr. Jim. Another time I volunteered to speak on the Philippines before an audience of high school girls in a Cincinnati Catholic school. At the end of my presentation, the teacher asked me the question about discrimination. Maybe I am just lucky, or maybe naïve, but I can’t think of a single incident that I have been subjected to. A group of Southern white males, whom some may refer to as rednecks, elected me their president as a Shriner in Tennessee. We still have a long way to go before achieving a color-blind society but in modern life the positives far, far outweigh the negatives.

#### Getting old:

There was an email that went around the Internet about how old we must feel because the generation entering college has no clue about life before 1980. They don’t know the cold war, there has been only one Pope, going down a very long list, etc. That’s just too bad. I think our lives have been richer. We had cars like Rambler, Studebaker, Corvair and Thunderbird. Have you ever heard of Datsun? They decided to change the name to something else. Without the Corvair there would be no Ralph Nader and you figure that out. My friend Ajit’s first car was a 1963 Corvair. I once drove a car, owned by a friend,

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nostalgia.

Singers like Elvis Presley, Little Richard and Jerry Lee Lewis broke the barriers with their animated delivery. Our parents were shocked. But these artists are a lot better than the expletive spewing and misogynistic lyrics you'll hear today. They have the nerve to call it music. The only time I would utter words even remotely resembling what you would hear from these "artists" today is when I am extremely angry. And I would never refer to women the way these jerks do. But what are they angry about? Maybe life is just too easy. We shopped from Sears Roebuck, Montgomery Ward and Spiegel catalogs. They were the size of Manhattan phone books. Gone. But I would say modern life is much better in this one respect, you can now order off the Internet. This has saved a lot of trees.

#### My favorite Holiday:

As I write this section, we have just celebrated Thanksgiving 2002. This is undoubtedly, hands down, no competition, my favorite American Holiday. Of course there is July 4<sup>th</sup> with picnics & fireworks, Labor Day to commemorate the working people who built this country, Memorial Day to honor the fallen and of course Christmas. But Thanksgiving is uniquely American, with a background that no other nation shares, a coming together of family regardless of race, color, creed, or any other descriptor you can imagine. There is no hype, no secularization like we have done to Christmas. Some people seem to think you have to light up your house like Times Square to celebrate Christmas. Excuse me. For Thanksgiving, you don't have to send a card or present a gift. Family reigns supreme. Americans travel more in the days before and after Thanksgiving than any comparable period. The only purpose of this travel is to be with their families. Everything about Thanksgiving is quintessentially American. Of course there are myths and legends associated with Thanksgiving, perhaps a sanitizing of the original events. Still, I'd like to give thanks for Thanksgiving.

#### How we met:

You really want to know how Val and I came to join the same organization and eventually meet? It was early 1973 and we had both gone through a separation and divorce. Carol had taken Nadine and Mario back to Akron and I visited them every month. It was a 400-mile drive each way. The trick to cutting down the driving time is to get behind a semi-trailer and follow them. They usually travel much higher than the speed limit and communicate with other truckers via CB. When they slow down, you slow down, that means Smokey is down the road somewhere. Now you buy a radar detector. There is a national organization called Parents Without Partners, open to anyone who is widowed, separated or divorced. There was a chapter in Crystal Lake but I didn't pay attention to it. But going through the Crystal Lake Herald one evening I saw a notice about a PWP meeting and their guest speaker was Alice Farr, a former Peace Corps Volunteer to the Philippines. As I was to find out later, she was a very young widow with two boys under ten and living in the area. I have to listen to this speaker! I should qualify as somewhat of an expert on the Philippines so I wanted to hear if she was accurate in her portrayal of the country and maybe even learn something. Alice's presentation was full of affection for Filipinos. She had dozens of great pictures of Bukidnon, the province where she was assigned. She served in a very small town and she didn't speak the local dialect. Can't recall the town but it was in the same area as the Del Monte pineapple plantation. The Tagalog she managed to learn during training wasn't of much help but she was able to communicate.

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Alice spent two years teaching English at a local school. I came away with a greater respect for Peace Corps Volunteers. Later on, I had many conversations with Alice about her experience. I joined PWP. The rest is history (see my narrative on Jim Leiding.)

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Sept. 11, 2001:

Like November 22, 1963 September 11, 2001 is another date that will be indelible in our minds. Following is an email I sent to the children a few days after that horrible event.

----- Original Message -----

*From: Mario Orosa*

*To: Alan Work ; Linda Work ; Micheal McCabe ; Todd & Anita DeLaney ; Mario V. Orosa ; Nadine Orosa*

*Sent: Friday, September 14, 2001 8:35 AM*

*Subject: Tuesday's events*

*Hi Alan, Amy, Ann, Anita, Deidra, Linda, Linda, Mario, Micheal, Nadine, Tony, Todd,*

*First of all, thanks Alan for your note. It was moving that everyone communicated and asked about Nadine. Family is still #1. You are right about this being big stuff and life has changed. I won't go into the nostalgia crap but when I came to the USA in 1962, there was no need for security at airports. A group of us foreign students hung around together, mostly Pakistani and Indian. We didn't have any spare money of course so one of our favorite pastimes was going to the Pittsburgh airport terminal roof to watch the planes since it was free. You walked right in. The jet age was coming into being and being engineers we marveled at the B-707, B-727 and DC-8's landing and taking off. No jumbo jets yet. Can you imagine a group of dark guys on the roof of an airport today? They would call the SWAT team!*

*There were no lock boxes on the newspapers at street corners in Pittsburgh. Papers were piled on a table, along with the money. You made your own change. The seminal event was Fidel Castro coming into power. It wasn't long after that airplane hijackings started. Can't even remember if they were pro or anti Fidel. Bay of Pigs and missiles of October all revolved around Fidel. It has never been the same since.*

*I agree this crisis is another one of those turning points. But having been born somewhere else and traveled extensively, this is still the greatest country history has ever seen. Not because of power or wealth or culture but because it has held itself accountable, accepted and given opportunity to a diversity of peoples and always magnanimous in its victories. To paraphrase a remark, I would rather be a lamppost in New York or Chicago than Emperor of Afghanistan.*

*I love each and every one of you. I highly resolve to articulate that more often. Tony & Ann will get a copy via snail mail. For a history lesson, see postscript.*

*Dad*

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*P.S.*

- *A bunch of farmers fought the disciplined and well-organized British Regular Army and won.*
- *In the War Between the States, men stood shoulder to shoulder facing each other with .50 caliber muskets, sometimes only dozens of yards apart. They didn't flinch, knowing full well the first line would die or be maimed.*
- *They were late entering WW I but showed their mettle in Belleau Woods. A Tennessee hillbilly named Alvin York took out German machine gun nests single handedly.*
- *This type of heroic act was repeated during WW II by a little guy named Audie Murphy. He killed a lot of Germans. He must've been smaller than I; he was rejected by the Marines as too small!*
- *The 442nd Regimental Combat Team has the most decorations for bravery. This unit is comprised entirely of Nisei, second generation Japanese-Americans whose parents had been interned.*
- *In Korea, one of the most highly decorated units was the 2nd Rangers, all African Americans.*
- *The men and women of Desert Storm inflicted the most lopsided victory in modern warfare.*
- *And in peace, thousands serve in the Peace Corps, or as medical or as religious missionaries. Val's sister Tracey is presently in Uganda on AIDS education.*

*Yes we have gotten soft, but that veneer is shredded very quickly when our fundamental institutions are challenged.*