

Rosario II

Preface: I wrote a biography of my father years ago. Then I wrote a story about the Filipino pensionados which included my father. Numerous essays followed. But until now I've neglected to write anything about my mother. Finally, here's to my mother. This is an updated edition of the original "Rosario" essay issued in January, 2013. The length has more than tripled by the addition of other events from my mother's life. I am indebted to my sister Charito for her insight and recollections, without which a lot of incidents in this essay would be missing. Thank you also to my wife Val for her loving critique.

There is no question that my mother Rosario Escobar y Venzon was the dominant person in our family. No one ever called her Rosario, she was always *Chayong*, a common nickname for Rosario. She was energetic, voluble, generous, a risk taker and visionary. Of course she could also be domineering and didactic. By contrast, my father Vicente Ylagan Orosa was laconic and imperturbable. As a cabinet level government official and a Grand Master of the Philippine Masons, he was used to conducting meetings and speaking in public. But privately, he was subdued and self-effacing. Maybe that is how they managed a strong 60 year marriage. I honestly can say I never heard them argue although my sister Charito said they did have arguments mainly about how generous they needed to be to their five children. My mother could literally fly off the handle, but never at my Dad. She always made sure his needs and his favorite foods were provided, like a fresh Sunkist orange along with a hot bowl of Quaker oatmeal for breakfast. She would also have a frothy hot chocolate made from Batangas cocoa, much richer than the commercial powder since the cocoa butter had not all been extracted. Later in life he called her "*hija*" which is Spanish for daughter. My father never uttered an unkind word about anyone. His only vice was to punctuate some of his sentences with Spanish cuss words. They are mild compared to what you'd hear today. I don't know if my parents would be considered polar opposites, but they certainly complemented one another. They were yin and yang.

My mother was born in Iba, Zambales in 1897. Her birth certificate indicated that her parents Juan Escobar y Gonzales and Teresa Venzon were "*mestizos espanoles*" or mixed Filipino and Spanish heritage. The birth certificates written by Spanish friars always indicated whether the child was *Indio* (native Filipino), *mestizo* (mixed) or *Chino* (Chinese). In case you are doing the math, my mother was 42 when I was born in 1939. My oldest brother Augusto was already 20 and my sister Angelina was 18.

It is probably an understatement when I say my mother was generous. My parents lived in Manila from 1936 to 1965. Most of our relatives, especially on my Mom's side, lived in the provinces. Unlike today, there were no universities or colleges in my mother's province of Zambales or in my Dad's province of Batangas. To get any kind of college education, you had to study in Manila. The choices were limited to one public university - the University of the Philippines - or to any number of Catholic universities, the oldest one dating back to 1611. There were several notable non-sectarian private universities but they were outnumbered by the Catholic schools. Mom opened the doors of the Orosa household to many young relatives. I only specifically remember two first cousins, one from the Orosa side and another from

Rosario II

the Escobar side. My Orosa cousin went to Holy Ghost College (now known as Holy Spirit), a Catholic school for girls founded and run by German nuns. My Escobar cousin went to Centro Escolar University, a privately owned girls school.

There were others who stayed with our family starting immediately after the war but I honestly do not remember them. My sister Charito recalls them all. The following information comes from her. Among those who stayed were a first cousin who became a medical doctor and a second cousin who became Mayor of Iba. Both are now deceased. Later there were three women cousins and three male cousins. Several of these cousins survive. We remain especially close to Teresita, an Escobar first cousin who lives in retirement in a Chicago suburb. Our first cousin Helen L. Orosa stayed briefly during the Japanese occupation while working as a nurse at the Philippine General Hospital. At 93, Helen is the most senior of my generation of Orosa first cousins. Whenever I see her, she always reminds me that she stayed with our family during the occupation. Obviously not all these cousins and other relatives could have stayed simultaneously but for 12 years we had at least one or two cousins staying at any given time.

Aside from the boarders there was an endless stream of people who visited our house on Aviles Street in Manila. (The street has been renamed Jose P. Laurel St.) I remember two seamstress sisters who were from Bulacan, coming to the house to measure and fit dresses for my mother and sisters. They also made all the curtains and drapes. They stayed as long as it took to finish their work which could be several days. Mom had other favorite vendors or suppliers, referred to as "*suki*." Most of her *suki* were Chinese Filipinos. There were also a number of Escobar relatives or in-laws who came to Manila for short visits. These people stayed with us. Mom had a B & B before the concept became popular. As far as my mother was concerned, the door was always open.

Teresita, who turned 84 in January, was my mother's favorite niece. Although born more than three decades apart, the two loved to talk. Augusto told me the story about driving them to Iba. The two women never paused in their conversation. Back and forth they went. Driving to Iba took seven hours or more during those pre-expressway days. Augusto said he finally stopped the car to get relief from the chatter. When I told this to Teresita years later, she said the only reason he stopped was because he wanted to smoke. I think there is some truth in both versions. Even during those pre-Surgeon General cigarette warning days, mom wouldn't allow smoking in the family car.

After reading the earlier version of this essay, Teresita informed me that Mom was her *ninang* or godmother at her christening. Through the years, Mom and Dad were *ninang* and *ninong* (godfather) for a number of people. In earlier days, they were mostly godparents at christenings but in later years, they were popular godparents at weddings. Mom took her *ninang* role seriously. Teresita remembers that Mom never failed to lend a hand when she needed it.

Mom was the Escobar family banker or lender of last resort. Or perhaps she was the first resort. Her parents were landowners of several parcels in their hometown of Iba,

Rosario II

including farmland. It remains a mystery how my Escobar grandparents came into all this property. Teresa and Juan belonged to an era (born in 1868) when few native Filipinos owned land. The Spanish colonizers made sure of that. They had enough that each of the six surviving children was able to inherit some property. A seventh child grew to adulthood but predeceased my grandparents. Her two children inherited what would have been their mother's share. There is nothing more important to a Filipino family than getting their children educated. To finance their children's college education, mom's siblings turned to her for financing. Cash must have been difficult to come by. Salaries were meager and colleges expensive. Doesn't this sound familiar? Even my Dad moonlighted as a civil engineering professor to supplement his government salary. Mom very willingly bought her sibling's Iba properties to provide them with educational funds. She eventually wound up with the largest parcel within Iba and some farmland outside of town. Today, only Mom's and her brother Jovito's heirs still have the properties that were originally my grandparents. Mom willed the Iba properties to my sister Charito. Since none of Charito's four sons are interested having property in Iba, she is looking to sell the property. That would only leave two parcels in the hands of the children of Jovito.

A small plot within Mom's accumulated parcel is occupied by the heirs of one of Mom's younger sisters. This sister's family had no place to stay back in the 1950's, having already sold the inherited property. My generous mother allowed her sister's family to move in and build. Almost 60 years later, they are still there. To obtain a title, the heirs paid Charito a small fraction of the fair market value. Charito must have inherited our mother's generosity.

Mom's Iba property was not allowed to lie idle. Behind the lot was a *nipa* palm lined creek that eventually emptied into the West Philippine Sea. (The beach and sea is probably less than a kilometer away.) On the property was a small pond dating back to my grandparents' days. Mom envisioned a self sustaining fish pond with *bangus* or milkfish, the most popular farmed fish in the Philippines at the time. Bulldozers and backhoes came in to deepen and widen the ponds. The ponds were connected to the creek by a sluice. It was important to refresh the water using the tides since the *bangus* would deplete the oxygen in a confined pond. *Bangus* fingerlings were procured then released into the ponds. A two story house was built closer to the street. There was a covered patio between the house and ponds for alfresco dining. We ate many a meal there. The last time my two sisters and I enjoyed a meal there was in 2006. Within our family and cousins, the property was referred to simply as the fish pond, using the Tagalog word *palaisdaan*. *Isda* is Tagalog for fish. My parents made numerous visits there. Thanks to my Mom, we were the first family among the Escobars and Orosas to have a country home. For years until Mom's health started to deteriorate when she was in her 80's, the fish pond provided a constant supply of *bangus*. She always made sure the pond was maintained and stocked.

On occasion, Mom enjoined my Dad to provide even temporary employment to some Escobar cousins. Lest anyone think nepotism in government service, the positions were low level, menial and most often temporary. During my trip to Manila last

Rosario II

January, an Escobar cousin related the story of his first job. It was the first time I heard it. He became a very successful attorney but during his college days, he needed employment to help pay his expenses. Assigned to a road construction gang, at the end of the day he was so sore he couldn't move. He went to my Dad to express his appreciation but said he had to quit. The job was physically demanding and it made law school study impossible. He said my Dad cussed him out in Spanish and told him to return to work. When he did, a sympathetic supervisor assigned him to a less demanding job. Sixty years later, we had a good laugh.

It might appear that my parents had unlimited resources to take care of less fortunate kinfolk, not to mention funding the property purchases they made. Nothing could be further from the truth. They were a frugal couple and took all kinds of opportunities to supplement their income. Every centavo was hard earned. Unlike some of our Orosa relatives, they never went on vacations outside the Philippines. They were content to spend weekends in Iba or visit my Orosa grandmother in Batangas. I mentioned that Dad moonlighted as a college professor. The schools where he taught were the Mapua Institute of Technology and Far Eastern University.

Because of their early peripatetic lifestyle, my parents didn't own a house until they moved to Manila in 1936. Mom met my Dad when he was assigned as District Engineer of Zambales. After they married in 1918, they moved every few years. The next assignment was in the province of Cavite where their eldest child Augusto was born. Then they moved to Cabanatuan, Nueva Ecija. My sister Angelina, brother Vicente Jr. and sister Alicia were all born in Cabanatuan. My parents began to accumulate property while in Cabanatuan. During the 1920's, they bought farmland which was leased to tenant farmers. Nueva Ecija has been called the rice granary of the Philippines, having the most fertile rice farms. I remember the tenant whose name was *Aling* Asuncion coming to our house to pay rent. (*Aling* is not really her name, it is an honorific Tagalog word used to address a usually older woman.) I have no doubt that the motivation to purchase the 80 acres or so of rice farmland came from my mother. After Cabanatuan, the next move was to the historic town of Malolos in Bulacan. Malolos is historic because the Philippine Republic was proclaimed in Malolos on June 12, 1898. Tragedy struck shortly after they moved to Malolos. Alicia was then only three months old but she became ill and died. My parents took Alicia's body back to Cabanatuan for internment. (Alicia was re-interred in Iba sometime later.) My sister Charito was born in Malolos. My parents' next move would be to Manila, where I was born. Manila was the capital and largest city in the Philippines. It was called the Pearl of the Orient. All the premier educational institutions of the country were located in and around Manila. Mom expressed an interest in returning to school. She had once dreamt of becoming a lawyer. But my Dad was adamant that she remain a full time homemaker. Mom was just a little bit ahead of her time.

In the late 1960's, some attempt at land reform was undertaken by the government. My parents were handed a bunch of paper or government bonds in return for their Nueva Ecija farmland, which had become very valuable. My brother Augusto joked that we could use the bonds as wallpaper. We did receive sporadic interest payments. It must have broken my parents' hearts to have this land taken away in

Rosario II

their old age; they had owned the property for over 40 years. Years after our parents passed away, we five siblings received a payout for the mature bonds. The total was the equivalent of a few hundred dollars. But land reform wasn't uniformly carried out. Large *haciendas* or estates were left alone, the owners tying up the government in court. For example the 15,000 acre Hacienda Luisita plantation of the Cojuangcos (family of the current president Benigno Aquino III) is still in the process of being redistributed.

The years from 1946 to late 1959 were busy, productive and happy times for my parents. The prewar years, shortly after they moved to Manila, were tranquil, almost languid. Their generation of Filipinos referred to that period as "peacetime." Except for the ultra nationalists, Filipinos hardly minded having American oversight, with a High Commissioner during the Commonwealth era. Mom recalled that Commonwealth President Manuel Quezon got his exercise walking unaccompanied through our neighborhood (we were on the same street as the presidential palace). Greetings would be exchanged in Spanish. "*Buenos días, Señor Presidente.*" "*Buenos días, señora.*"

But the years of the Japanese occupation between December 1941 and the liberation of Manila in March 1945 were an unsettling time for every Filipino. Manila suffered horrific damage during liberation but our immediate family and home escaped relatively unscathed. One of my father's younger sisters was killed during liberation but no other deaths occurred. There were several keys to survival, among them food and humoring the Japanese sentries. My Mom had a backyard garden. The garden mainstays were a green leafy plant called *talinum* and *camote* or sweet potatoes. There was an *estero* or estuary nearby and the Pasig River was only a short walk away. They yielded fresh fish. (You wouldn't even want to touch anything coming out of those places today.) There were Japanese sentries on almost every corner and woe to anyone who aroused their anger. Being the lowest on the Imperial Army totem pole, the sentries liked to lord it over the hapless civilians. My mother coached my siblings on how to bow correctly and force a smile. To protect against errant shells during the Battle of Manila, we had an air raid shelter in the back yard. The shelter was a large concrete culvert which I'm sure my father procured from the city (he was the Chief Engineer.) My Mom equipped the culvert with a *banig* and pillows. Made from palm, *banig* is an intricately woven mat which Filipinos use as a mattress or bed cover. I never knew anything other than a *banig* to sleep on until I came to America.

The most difficult time was after American forces landed (from both north and south) in October of 1944, starting a pincer movement to advance toward Manila. Our family left for the Orosa ancestral home in Bauan where our grandmother lived with her youngest son Rafael (Tio Paito) and his family. The main house was packed with relatives from Manila. Four Orosa families lived in the compound. We lived in the back of the property, in a small house made of *nipa* palm. From our house in Manila, Mom had taken two *bauls* or wooden chests filled with her finest embroideries. With battles raging near Batangas, our family returned to Manila. The bauls and Orosa clan valuables were to be taken across Batangas Bay to the island of Mindoro where there were other relatives. But the wooden boat or *bate!* taking the cargo was

Rosario II

reported “sunk.” A cousin described this episode in her memoirs. Her grandmother, a sister-in-law of my father, had also entrusted her jewelry for safekeeping in Mindoro. Packed in bamboo tubes, the jewels went the way of the *bauls*. According to this cousin, most of the jewelry resurfaced, worn by various matrons of Bauan. The captain of the batel that “sank” must have made a tidy profit.

Jewelry and embroidery can be replaced, but not life. Mom had another traumatic experience during the last days of the war. A Japanese officer came to commandeer the family car. My father refused to give it up. The officer drew his revolver and pointed it at Dad. Near hysterical, my Mom pleaded with him to take the car and spare her husband. The officer took the car and left. Another casualty was our family's savings. My Dad and brother Augusto had withdrawn their savings at the outbreak of the war. The Japanese had searched the Bauan house, finding the money belonging to our family as well as our grandmother's savings. All the money was taken. It was real money, currency printed under the American backed Commonwealth. The Japanese printed their own Philippine currency which everyone considered worthless, calling it Mickey Mouse money. People avoided using this money, relying instead on barter. Finally, Manila was liberated in March of 1945. Philippine independence was recognized by the United States on July 4, 1946 and the task of rebuilding began. My Dad and my Mom were going to be very busy.

In the aftermath of WWII, the transportation infrastructure of Manila was in ruins. The streetcar system was destroyed and unfortunately never rebuilt. This brought about the rise of the ubiquitous jeepney. It evolved from an American army jeep, opening the back and placing benches for half a dozen passengers. Today's “modern” jeepney can now accommodate as many as 20. My parents bought a jeepney and operated it in the late 1940's. They even had a “conductor” which in this case was Nasario, another one of my Escobar cousins. The conductor collected the fare and made change. (Today, an honor system has replaced the conductor.) Nasario is now 82, living in Minneapolis, but he remembers the experience well.

Immediately after Manila's liberation in 1945, there was a need for housing for American officers and expatriates. My parents rented out the three bedrooms on the second floor. The first couple was Major Robert Hollings and his wife Mary. They occupied the master bedroom. Another renter was a WAC named Betty. Charito couldn't recall her surname but remembers that she was a vivacious young woman. The last renters were a Jewish couple who kept pretty much to themselves. I wonder if they were among the European Jews whose lives were saved when Commonwealth President Manuel Quezon opened the Philippines to refugees from Germany and Austria. My parents kept in touch with the Hollings after they returned to the U.S. Their son Peter Hollings visited Manila nearly 30 years later and sought out my parents. Peter's parents must have related pleasant stories from amidst the ruins of Manila for him to get in touch with my parents. The Hollings were from South Carolina. I wonder if they were related to the U.S. Senator Ernest Hollings. After the above renters left, the last to rent was Guillermo Pablo. Attorney Pablo was a district judge in Zambales who was reassigned to Manila. A little while later he was appointed a Justice of the Philippine Supreme Court by President S. Osmeña. He then left our house after moving his family to Manila. Judge Pablo's wife was from

Rosario II

Zambales and made the connection to our family via my mother. He became my godfather at Confirmation.

He wasn't a renter but my parents became friends with a California GI named Angelo Musso. He regularly came to the house to visit one of my Escobar cousins. Maybe there was a romantic interest. An accomplished pianist, my cousin Conching was studying pharmacy. Angelo loved to sing along while she played the piano. When my parents visited California years later, Angelo welcomed them to San Francisco, taking them around the Bay area. We'll have to construct a timeline one of these days to track all the people who stayed with us in the 40s and 50s!

My Dad's government career was at its peak between 1953 and 1957 during the presidency of Ramon Magsaysay. Dad was appointed Secretary of Public Works and Communications, one of the largest government departments. Prior to 1953 he was the Undersecretary. At that time the department encompassed the nation's network of highways, bridges, hydroelectric dams, irrigation systems, the Post Office and a government telephone system. Mom was probably happiest during this period. Magsaysay came from Zambales and his mother was a del Fierro, a distant relative of the Venzons. (My Mom's mother was a Venzon.) The common ancestor of the Venzons and del Fierros was the governor of Zambales in the late 18th century, a Spaniard from Galicia by the name of Fernando del Fierro. Magsaysay was an informal man and everyone called him by his nickname of *Monching*. So you could say President Monching and my Mom were on a nickname basis. During the times Monching was passing through Iba, he stopped at the fish pond for R & R.

Dad's position came with invitations to a lot of social and official occasions, many of them at the Presidential Palace called Malacañang. The Palace was only a 10 minute walk from our house and I passed it every day while walking to school. Some events were formal, so Mom had to wear her *ternos* or formal dresses. She had a beautiful collection accumulated over the years. Mom also volunteered for the projects of First Lady Luz Magsaysay. Because of their blue uniforms, they were referred to as the "Blue Ladies," a term that was still in use during the days of Imelda Marcos. There is a picture of the ladies with Luz Magsaysay and everyone appeared to be jockeying for position to be closest to Luz. Someone was trying to elbow my Mom out of the picture. I hope she elbowed back.

Speaking of ternos, there are a couple of them somewhere in the recesses of the Smithsonian in Washington, DC. Here is how that came about. Immediately after WWII, the U.S. government assisted the Philippines in rebuilding its infrastructure. A Texas native named Alonzo Taylor was tasked with assisting my Dad's department in rebuilding the country's roads and bridges. Mr. Taylor brought along his wife, mother and son, spending almost nine years in the Philippines. The Taylor family became friends with my parents. Mom gave both Taylor ladies a terno each, which they wore. There are numerous pictures of my parents and the Taylors together, all dressed up, either at our house or at some other location. The Taylors' son Lonon became a historian of the National Museum of American History at the Smithsonian Institution. After his mother passed away, he donated both ternos to the Smithsonian.

Rosario II

I said that Mom was probably happiest during the Magsaysay administration. Prior to Magsaysay's term, Mom had no interest in the social comings and goings of government officials. Dad was active in the Masons and was Grand Master of the Grand Lodge of the Philippines in 1957. Mom didn't have much interest in that either. But Monching was the pride of Zambales and Mom knew his family. Her husband occupied a lofty position in Magsaysay's cabinet, capping a government career that lasted 45 years. To say she was all excited during these years would be an understatement. It is tragic that Magsaysay died in a plane crash early in 1957. He would have undoubtedly been re-elected later that year. Then Mom and Dad would have had another four happy years with an administration that is considered the least corrupt in Philippine history.

There was another happy event for my parents in 1959. My Dad was among the three awarded the Alumni Achievement Award by the University of Illinois in Urbana for his government service. He was in exalted company. The other two recipients that year were a Nobel Prize winner in chemistry and the president of Delta Airlines. Mom and Dad made the journey to the university campus for the award. Mom remarked with some irony that it took an American university to recognize my father's achievement of more than four decades of incorruptible government service. He never received recognition from any Philippine public or private institution. Nevertheless, the decade of the 50's was Mom's and Dad's halcyon days.

Traveling to Illinois also gave my parents the opportunity to reconnect with their friends Mary Jane and Carl Neer who were then in Springfield, IL. The Neers were both graduates of the University of Illinois, which is how they met my parents. The Neers were world travelers and visited my parents in Manila several times. During my parents' last trip to the U.S. in 1967 they stayed with the Neers, the last time they would all be together. My first Thanksgiving in the United States was spent with the Neers. Mary Jane and my Mom kept up a steady correspondence. When my mother was no longer able to write, Val and I kept the Neers updated.

Mom's property purchases began in earnest during the early 1950's. The crown jewel was the one acre property on Horseshoe Drive in Quezon City. It was bought for seven pesos a square meter or about \$14,000 at the prevailing exchange rate. Today, the land in the neighborhood is conservatively valued at 25,000 pesos a square meter for residential and much more for commercial use. There are condos and a new shopping mall half a kilometer away. I would like to say that Mom foresaw all this but she probably didn't. At the time of purchase, Quezon City was considered the boonies. The area was covered with wild *cogon* grass. Her plan was to provide each of her five children a property of their own. More land purchases and house construction followed. No wonder my Dad had to moonlight! But their legacy was assured.

My parents' enduring legacy was leaving each of us five children property consisting of a good-sized lot with a completed house ready for occupancy. The titles were free and clear. Sometimes furniture was thrown in. My Mom was the main driver in accomplishing this legacy. If I am not mistaken my Mom supervised the construction

Rosario II

of no fewer than nine houses. Her partner was Lope Leabres. Lope was the brother-in-law of Mom's brother Jovito. He was married to one of my Escobar first cousins. (Figure that out.) Neither Mom nor Lope had any formal training in architecture or construction. Their education did not go beyond finishing high school. Lope was a carpenter by trade. He was one of the most skillful people I have ever known. Besides carpentry, he did roofing, plumbing, painting, masonry and glazing. He built furniture from scratch. After I finished college, he built an *aparador* or armoire for my room. Lope never used any power assisted tools. He could work magic with a hand plane and chisel. He was even skilled in butchering and roasting a pig on occasion. Lope would merit a separate essay on his exploits which included 13 children. My mother kept Lope employed continuously for years.

Between my Mom and Lope, they figured out how to construct a house. Sometimes there was an architectural plan, sometimes there wasn't. To comply with building codes, a civil engineer first cousin from the Orosa side reviewed the plans for permit approval. The somewhat boxy houses are a marvel of sturdy construction finished with a lot of Philippine wood. They ranged in size from a little over 1,000 sq. ft. to four times that size. Mom and Lope's masterpiece was the two-story house on Horseshoe Drive in Quezon City. Most of the walls were paneled with fine Philippine wood like lauan. This was a type of wood popularly used for paneling in the U.S. You can find this wood listed in old Sears catalogs, sometimes referred to as Philippine mahogany. I have never been to a house with more gorgeous wood paneling. The wood was supplied by my brother Vicente Jr., who operated a logging concession in Mindanao at the time. Sadly, you can't obtain this type of wood anymore. The trees have been cut down, along with all the finest hardwood. Both my Mom and Dad spent their last days in this house.

My two sisters still have their properties. My two brothers sold theirs. The Horseshoe property was divided between Augusto and Charito but Augusto sold his half of the Horseshoe property (half an acre) after building a bigger house down the street. The new owner constructed a three-story apartment building with six units in the back and a pair of townhouses in front. That goes to show how valuable the land is. I sold my property to Augusto. Two of his sons live there now (there are two houses on the property). Augusto's widow lives there also.

There was one wish my mother had which wasn't fulfilled. As a devout Roman Catholic, she wanted someone in her family to follow a religious vocation. Every Filipina mother probably wishes the same. She focused on my sister Angelina's two older boys. They were both sent to Christ the King Seminary in Quezon City. They weren't formally enrolled in the vocation program but went as regular high school students. The older son Noel finished high school at Christ the King but the younger Rico did not. Neither expressed any interest in further studies at the seminary. So it was not to be. But Mom always had a lot of other irons in the fire.

My mother's vision even extended to the end of everyone's life. Decades ago, she purchased a large plot at the new Loyola cemetery outside Manila. This was a cemetery where the choice was being interred underground or in stacked vaults. By contrast the traditional Philippine cemeteries consisted of above-ground individual

Rosario II

crypts like the type found in New Orleans. My brother Augusto also purchased a separate plot. The plots were large enough to accommodate our immediate family consisting of my parents, their children and grandchildren. In other words there was enough room for four generations of my parents' clan. Today, my Mom and Dad are interred there, along with my other brother Vicente Jr., my sister Angelina's husband Manuel and nephew Noel (Angelina's eldest son). To purchase such a plot today would cost a small fortune.

There was an old chapel in the Iba cemetery that was in a state of disrepair. Mom asked permission from Henry Byrne, the Bishop of Iba, to repair and use the chapel for her family. Mom being a generous patron of the Iba parish, the Bishop agreed. (Ireland born Bishop Byrne later presided over the funeral Mass of my father.) She gathered the remains of her parents, her paternal grandparents, maternal grandfather, a child who did not survive infancy, my sister Charito's two baby girls, then had them re-interred in graves in the rebuilt chapel. This was before the Loyola plot was developed and would have been in keeping up with the more traditional Filipino custom. People who could afford it built mausoleums with as much square footage as a small house. Mom stayed with an open chapel and not a mausoleum. Thank goodness. The chapel is easy to locate since it is one of the few structures in the Iba cemetery.

The last few years of Mom's life weren't very pleasant. Stricken with Alzheimer's, she was a shell of her former self. There were moments of gaiety. She would sing Spanish songs or recite poetry she learned almost three quarters of a century before. Mom passed away in 1993 at the age of 95. (Two of her sisters lived to 100 and 103 respectively.) Rosario Escobar has left a positive indelible imprint on the lives of many people and we won't forget her generosity.

Mario E. Orosa

April 7, 2013