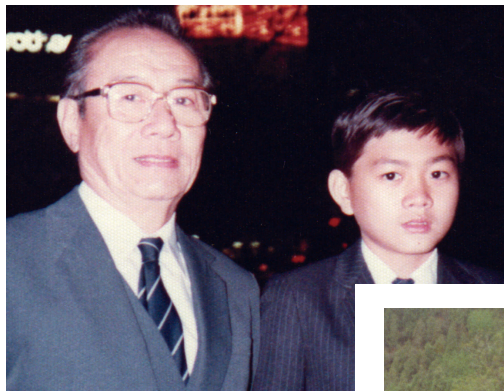
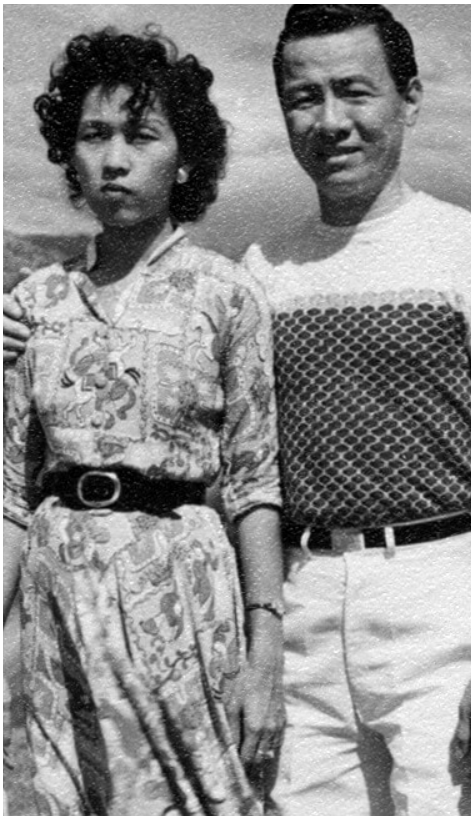


GONZALO CO IT

THE GREEN CROSS SAGA

MY AUTOBIOGRAPHY





**In memory of my beloved wife Katherine,
and for my children, grandchildren
and great grandchildren**

CHAPTER 1

MY LIFE IN CHINA

I WAS BORN

on January 25, 1922 in our ancestral home in Chio Ku Kho Village, Jin Jiang, Fujian Province. It was the year of the dog in the Chinese calendar.

I was the firstborn of my parents and was named Co Su Giap. I don't know if my mother and grandmother held any notion that mine was an auspicious birth, but I can surmise that they greeted my arrival with great warmth and joy because of the way they raised me.

My father, Co Ay Tian, was not there when I was born. He had moved to the Philippines when he was 14 years old after his father's death. In those days, a lot of Chinese were migrating to the Philippines for greener pastures and he traveled with a group of them. When he arrived in the Philippines, his uncle, Vicente Gotamco, gave him a job with his lumberyard company.

After 10 years, my grandmother asked him to return to China and get married to continue the lineage. The marriage was arranged and she had picked a wife for him. Dutifully, he returned to the village of his birth to marry my mother, Lo Siok Kee. He was 24 and she was 17.

My mother left the comfort of her parents' home in Sua Be Tau Village to live in my father's ancestral home. She was from a well-off family and had bound feet. In those days, Fujian women of aristocratic lineage had bound feet. From childhood, they submitted to this painful regimen because small feet were considered beautiful in China.

After my mother got pregnant, my father returned to the Philippines where his livelihood was, and I was born in his absence. For the first 11 years of my life, I did not get to meet my father. I knew him only as a distant figure who sent money to support us, and, because I did not know him, I did not miss him. My world was complete in the presence of my mother and my paternal grandmother, Go O-Tim. They both loved me and took care of me. I lacked for nothing as a child, and I grew up secure in their love and confident about the future.

Idyllic Childhood

My childhood was idyllic and not marred by any extreme hardship. My father, the second child of Go O-Tim, was her only son, and he supported her after his father died. My father had an older sister and a younger sister who had both gotten married and had gone to live with the families of their husbands. They lived a distance from our village but came to visit us often.

I also had a maternal grandmother, Ang Wu, whom we saw frequently. She lived in Sua Be Tau Village, some distance away, but my mother and I went to visit her several times. Today, the journey by car would take a mere 30 minutes. In the 1920s, on foot or by sedan chair, the trip took a couple of hours.

My mom had an elder brother and a younger sister. Her elder brother (my uncle) had gotten married and had several children. Both of her siblings came to the Philippines eventually. My uncle worked in Ilocos and sent money to his family in China. My auntie married and lived in Manila.

In those days, the custom was for grandchildren to live with their grandparents and take care of them until their grandparents died. So it was with our family.

Ancestral Home

My mother and I lived with my paternal grandmother in the ancestral home of the Co family. Ten rooms were built in a square around an inner courtyard where activities like raising chickens, ducks and pigs took place. From the outside, the enclave looked like a small fort with strong walls and small windows. The walls were made of bricks the color of ochre, which is yellowish brown. The enclave was designed for protection against marauding bandits. I recall one incident with robbers but nothing untoward occurred.

We occupied three of the 10 rooms. My grandmother, Ama, had her own room, while my mother, Abu, and I slept in the room where I was born. About three by four meters in size, our room had ample space for a wooden bed with a mosquito net (the mosquitoes were very big) and a cabinet for our belongings. We also had an *orinola* (potty) that was emptied in the morning.

The third room was where we cooked and ate. It was where my grandmother and my mother did their chores and where I studied by the light of a kerosene lamp. The rooms were cold in the winter and hot in the summer. They were also poorly ventilated with small windows high up in the walls. The other rooms in the enclave were occupied by distant relatives. All the rooms had tiled floors, while the rest of the house had stone floors.

Staple Food

Outside our enclave was our vegetable patch. We had people to till the land for us, so my mother and I were spared the rigors of toiling in the field for the vegetables we ate. Our staple was *camote* (a root crop known in the West as sweet potato). My mother made a soup with the *camote*, which we ate with viands, mostly vegetables. Maybe once a week we had a bit of chicken or pork or fish. For breakfast, we had plain *lugaw* (rice congee). During birthdays, we had *misua* (noodles) and boiled eggs in the morning. It was always in the morning at the start of a new day. *Misua* for long life and eggs for new beginnings. Sometimes, we had shredded chicken with the *misua*. Then lunchtime and dinnertime, we were back to *camote* soup. There was not a lot of noodles for food then, but there was never a time when we went hungry, which was a blessing because the land was parched and water was scarce.

My mother had to fill pails of water at the well that was a few meters away from our house. She put it in a big jar from which she drew what was needed for cooking, washing dishes and cleaning up. Bathing consisted mostly of sponge baths and we had a common toilet outside our quarters. My mother washed our clothes near the well because that was more convenient. Our clothes were mostly cotton outfits – light ones for the summer and heavier ones for the winter. For special occasions we had nicer garments made of silk. Our shoes were made of heavy cotton, like the *kung fu* shoes of today.

My Studies

I was not given any chores around the house or the farm as I was occupied with studying. I attended Chin Yaw Elementary School, which was a 10-minute walk from our home. I went with the neighbors who were my age, including my best friend, Kieng Tha, who lived nearby.

The lessons were traditional, consisting of writing Chinese characters and memorizing the Confucian classics. I enjoyed my schooling and many of my professors liked me. I had good relations with them, especially with Professor Sy Piak Chiam. On weekends, the other students and I would go to his farm, where there were many fruit-bearing trees. One of my classmates was Co Giok Tong, who is living in Manila today with her husband, Sy Ying Chiw, a famous Chinese poet and writer.

Now that I think of it, my mother must have had some difficulty doing the housework with her bound feet, but I do not recall her ever complaining. She accepted her destiny with cheerfulness, understanding and tolerance. She had a big heart, as did my grandmother. While we were not poor, we did not have much; but what food we had, Ama and Abu shared with the needy who came to our door. Both of them were Buddhists, devoted to Kwan Yin, the Goddess of Mercy, to whom they offered incense

at the Shiong Te Kong Temple in our village. Like any young kid, I mimicked them, waving incense before the statues without much thought about religion or spirituality. It was just another custom in the life that I was born into.

Ancestral Hometown

Chio Ku Kho Village where we lived had a population of 2,500. Apart from the school and the temple, there was a small market but no restaurants. It was not the practice to eat out because the village was poor. For the most part, we had what we needed in the village. Occasionally, we went to Chio Say or Stone Lion Town, the biggest municipality near us, which had a bigger market and a commercial district with factories, including a brick-making factory. However, we did not go often because it was expensive. The conveyances then were human-powered. We hired either a sedan chair or a rickshaw.

The sedan chair or *minjiao* was basically a wooden box slung on two poles. The box had a seat and curtains to shield the occupant from the sun. My mother and I shared a sedan chair because we were light enough to be carried by two men.

Sometimes, we used rickshaws, which were carts on wheels pulled by men, many of whom were from Jekang Province. (The rickshaw originated in Japan in 1868. China used it to transport people from 1914 to 1949 when it was banned by the Communist government.)

Jekang was a poor province so the peasants went to Fujian to look for work. Pulling a rickshaw was usually the first job that these men could get and it suited them. They were big, muscled men who gripped the ends of the poles in their strong hands and hurried along the path with quick steps. The coolies, as they were later known, grew accustomed to the work and were adroit in their steps. In contrast, the hour-long trek to Chio Say would have been difficult on foot for my mother with her tiny feet.

Other than going to school, the activities I looked forward to were family occasions, which were usually celebrated with banquets. They always served very good food and my favorite was *machang* or glutinous rice. We attended wedding parties and funeral parties. Because the village was small, nearly everyone we knew would go to the wake if someone died.

On feast days, we had activities supervised by the temple. I remember these as very happy occasions. We paid a temple fee but the shows were free. If it was a small occasion, we had a puppet show or a small play with some actors. For these shows, they used hand puppets or puppets on a string handled by puppeteers or puppet masters. Sometimes, we had a *kaw kah*, a bigger play that lasted three to

four hours. Usually, two of these dramas went on simultaneously. They had the same subject and the same scenes, and took place on stages next to each other. When the people watched, they would compare and say, "Ah, this one is much better." That was the biggest entertainment then (there were no movie houses) and the themes were usually about the emperors and the history of China. It was a way to impart history and moral lessons.

Through actors on stage and by example at home, I was taught to respect my elders, love one another and help other people whenever I can. And I saw my grandmother and mother living out those values, which deeply influenced me.

When I was 10 years old, my grandmother died. Then my father asked us to come to the Philippines. It was a year before we were able to leave so I met my father for the first time when I was 11.

JOURNEY TO THE PHILIPPINES

AFTER

AMA

passed away, there was no one to hold us back in China. So, when my father sent for us, we joined him in Manila. We packed our clothing and some personal items that were precious to us. We could bring only what we could easily carry because the trek to Xiamen (formerly Amoy) was a long one. It took almost one night to reach there by sedan chair. We were accompanied on our journey by my adopted cousin, Co Ching Ho, and my maternal grandmother, Ang Wu.

My father was ranked the fourth among four cousins. The second cousin had died without any offspring. So, in keeping with Chinese tradition, my mother adopted a boy to be his heir. Ching Ho was from Un Chew in Jekang Province. We brought him to Manila with us.

We stayed in a small hotel for travelers in Xiamen. There in that seaport, my maternal grandmother, Ang Wu, bade us farewell. We did not know if we would ever see her again, but it was not a tearful goodbye. The Chinese of my time were stoic, even fatalistic, about such things.

After going through a quarantine check imposed by the British who controlled the ports in China, we boarded a British-owned ship, the *Anne King*, which was bound for Manila. There were many passengers on board, most of them Chinese who were fleeing the hard life in China. Fortunately, we had a cabin that had bunk beds for us to sleep in.

I had an inkling that it was a momentous journey for me and that my life would surely change. Like any young boy with a sense of adventure, I was excited by it. I was equally excited to finally meet my father.

First Meeting

When our ship docked at the harbor in Manila, my father was waiting for us at the pier. My mother recognized him. After we disembarked, he came to meet us. Our meeting was very formal. We did not hug each other after my mother presented me.

Perhaps our Chinese upbringing did not permit us to be demonstrative of our feelings.

My father took us to live with him in an apartment on Fortuna Street in Pasay City, near Dapitan Street. At that time, Pasay City was considered a prime district, a commercial area second only to the Quiapo-Divisoria area. Makati was only swampland, which the Ayalas later converted into the country's premier financial district.

The apartment block was owned by my granduncle, Vicente Gotamco. My father worked for him as the manager of Hap Him Lumber Company on Harrison Street. Hap Him was a branch of Vicente Gotamco Hermanos Company, which had its main office on Tanduay Street in Manila. I still remember the address of my first home in the Philippines: No. 11 Fortuna Street, Pasay City.

My first days in the Philippines went by in a blur. Everything was very different – the people I encountered, the language they spoke, the environment – all these were strange to me. Even the Chinese food tasted different, but I was not homesick for China.

Visit to Relatives

After a few days, my father took us to visit our relatives. I remember Dy Kim Po, Sa Kim Po, Sy Kim Po and Go Kim Po – or Second Grand Auntie, Third Grand Auntie, Fourth Grand Auntie and Fifth Grand Auntie. (First Grand Uncle and First Grand Auntie lived in Davao so I never met them.) The four aunties were the in-laws who were living above the store on Tanduay. It was a memorable encounter because they made us feel welcome.

Slowly, I adjusted to my new environment. I learned Tagalog by making notes of the meaning of the words and memorizing them. After a few weeks, I was able to communicate already, but it was years before I could speak Tagalog fluently.

The adjustment was not difficult because, along Fortuna Street, we had Chinese neighbors among our Filipino neighbors, and we circulated in the growing Chinese community. So many of my former compatriots were escaping first the hard life in China and later the communist regime of Mao Tse Tung and starting new lives here in the Philippines. I recall in particular a certain Mr. Lo, a very rich man who had three wives all living in the same house on Fortuna Street, a circumstance that amuses me even today.

How I Got My Name

Sometime after our arrival, my father had to register our presence. In those days, the government granted some people a "quota" that allowed them to bring in a certain number of relatives from China. Chinese families that did not have an allotment

usually bought slots from those who had the “quotas” and used their surname when registering as “family” members.

In our case, we didn’t have to buy our slots. Since my father was working already and had a good position, he was allowed to bring in relatives and we were able to register using his surname Co.

At the immigration office, I was given the name Co It. In Chinese, “It” means No. 1. I was the first of my father’s line. My cousin, Ching Ho, was Co Sam. He was the third Co to register. That’s how, many years later when I was naturalized, Co It became my surname.

My Baptism and Education

The year after I arrived, my father enrolled me in a Chinese school, Pasay Chung Hwa, on Harrison Street. It was walking distance from our home. Because of my formal education in China, I was placed in the secondary level and the subjects I took were similar to those of other local high schools during the American regime. That was when I started to learn English, which would provide a very lucrative livelihood opportunity for me later on.

The following year, I was baptized in Sta. Clara de Montefalco Church on Zamora Street in Pasay City. I was 13 years old. Jesus “Paco” Sonora, the father of actress Susan Roces (the wife of the late presidential candidate and actor Fernando Poe, Jr.), stood as my godfather. Paco was a collector for Hap Him Lumber Company, where my father also worked; that’s how they knew each other. Paco gave me my Christian name, Gonzalo. All through my school days, I was known as Gonzalo Co.

At that time, the Church did not require me to take Catechism classes before I could become a Catholic, perhaps because I was still considered a child. So I was baptized and the parish office issued a baptismal certificate.

My father arranged for me to be baptized because he wanted me to study in La Salle College, an exclusive school for boys. La Salle, located on Taft Avenue in the City of Manila, was a Catholic school and required the parents to present the baptismal certificate of the child being enrolled. For me, this was Divine Providence at work because that’s how I got “enrolled” in the faith. Moreover, I learned my Christian values at La Salle.

Father’s Foresight

My father had the gift of drawing buildings with exact measurements, which the engineers subsequently approved for construction. He built houses on Gotamco, Fukien, Sinsego and Harrison streets, many of which still exist today. While my father

was a manager and a contractor making a good living working for our relatives, he probably aspired for something more for me. That's why he sent me to La Salle, which had only a few Chinese students then.

Although he did not explain his choice of school for me, I know now that my father was forward-looking. My father wanted me to learn English, which was the *lingua franca*, the language of commerce in the Philippines. He knew that studying in La Salle would provide me with invaluable contacts in business and help me integrate more easily in this country that had become my home.

My father, who was a very traditional Chinese to whom lineage was important, demonstrated his regard for me as his firstborn son by his actions. Sending me to an exclusive Catholic school was one of them. The tuition at La Salle was P10 a month in grade school and P12 a month in high school, which was considered expensive then because the salary of managers working in Divisoria and Quiapo was only P30 a month. My father earned P120 a month as a manager and a contractor, so he could afford my tuition.

When I enrolled in La Salle, I was put in Grade 3 although I was quite big already. I was 13 years old, at least four years older than most of my classmates. After Grade 3, my teachers determined that I could cope with my subjects so they accelerated me. I advanced directly to the 5th grade, which I completed. Then I was accelerated again, so I skipped Grade 6 and went on to Grade 7. I was still older than my peers, but the age gap had narrowed considerably.

Classmates and Teachers

Many of my contemporaries were very bright. Among them were Lim Chai Kee (Alfonso Lim), who became a big shot in Pasay City, and his brother Lim Chai Hun. They owned big plantations in Mindoro. I remember also William de Lange and his brother, and Roberto Jalandoni and his brothers.

The other classmates I remember were Benigno de Guia, Nicanor Jacinto, Jr., Francisco Sison, Melecio Arranz, Jr., Arturo Sinco, Joaquin Ong, Harry Huang, Manuel Go, Fausto Bayot, Charles Lee, Arturo Monzon, Roberto Macasaet, Manuel Ty, Jr. and Jose Oledan.

Among my teachers were: Bro. Gerfried (head teacher), Bro. Hubert, Bro. Archadius, Bro. William, Bro. Lucian and Mr. Ariston Estrada. The director was Bro. Xavier. They were all Germans and belonged to the St. John the Baptist's de la Salle Order of the Christian Brothers. (Some of the brothers were herded into concentration camps and killed by the Japanese during World War II.)

A Priestly Vocation?

I remember that Bro. Gerfried was very strict, but I learned from him and the other brothers to study hard, work hard and be an upright man. They lived out what they taught and their lives were so inspiring that I wanted to become a priest, but I could not pursue that vocation because of my filial obligations.

All my life, however, the values that I imbibed while at school would govern my actions and would – along with the influence of my mother and grandmother in my early youth – shape my character, as did the books I read.

Japanese Invasion

My first, second and third years of high school were spent in the Taft Avenue campus of La Salle, which was a three-centavo ride by *auto calesa* (a conveyance similar to a jeepney) from our home.

But World War II was upon us and schools had to close temporarily. The Japanese military eventually allowed La Salle to resume classes under the name Christian Brothers Academy, but they needed the buildings of La Salle for the offices of the Japanese Imperial Army. La Salle was transferred temporarily to the nearby campus of St. Scholastica's College on Leon Guinto Street. That's how I was able to graduate in 1944.

The memory makes me smile because of the humor in it. La Salle's all-boys high school Class of 1944 bears the distinction of having completed its senior year in a school exclusively for girls!

WAR AND LIBERATION

DURING THE WAR

years, I did not feel that I was in grave or imminent physical danger, although times were difficult. That was God's hand at work, keeping us safe and providing for us, even when food became scarce.

Somehow we managed to escape the brutality of those Japanese soldiers who committed atrocities during their occupation of the Philippines. We were told that whenever we went to the Japanese headquarters or met them on the street, we had to bow to them and we complied to save our necks from the swish of their swords. Apparently, that act of subservience appeased them and kept us out of trouble.

Manila, an Open City

As the Japanese forces approached Manila in late December 1941, the United States Armed Forces in the Far East (USAFFE) withdrew to Bataan and declared Manila an open city, which probably saved it from being razed to the ground. Thus, life in Manila went on in an almost normal manner in the early part of the Japanese Occupation. Trying to woo the Filipinos, the Japanese set up a government headed by President Jose P. Laurel, who later stood as my godfather when I got married in 1948.

After the war broke out, we moved from Fortuna Street in Pasay to Alonzo Street in Manila. Those were the premises of Hap Ho Lumber Company, another branch of Vicente Gotamco Lumber Company. We lived inside the property, which was safer for the family.

My Siblings

By that time, my parents had their second son, Anthony, who was born in 1940 when I was already 18 years old. Mary came the following year, followed by Joseph in 1944, and Peter after the war in 1949. Because of our age difference, I was more than an elder brother to them; I was sometimes also like a father to them.

My father had two other families. When my mother was still in China, he had a brief relationship with a staff member of Second Grand Auntie, and they had a child, Rebecca, who is still alive and is now 80 years old. Then he had a relationship with a

woman who worked at the Bureau of Customs, with whom he had two children. My mother raised them as her own. My half-brother Edward died at the age of five and my half-sister Loring died in her 60s about 20 years ago.

My Cousin Disappears

The only one our family lost during the war was Co Ching Ho. My adopted cousin had become so patriotic about our new country that he joined the Filipino guerrilla forces that were fighting the Japanese in 1944. He told my mother that he was going with some young men from Tabora Street to buy and sell in Laguna. In reality, this story was just a cover. Ching Ho had joined the Hua Gee Guerrilla Movement, which was a force composed of Chinese youths fighting for the Philippines.

In 1945, five of them were bringing ammunition to Santa Cruz, Laguna, at night. Three of the youths were not afraid, but my cousin and another lad were scared. The two lagged behind and were caught by the Japanese soldiers. The Japanese brought them to Santa Cruz and executed them there. The first three managed to escape unnoticed and one of them told me this story in Tabora. Ching Ho's body was never found. He and the other Chinese guerrillas who died during the war were honored for their contributions to the resistance movement. Now his name and theirs are inscribed on a monument in the Chinese cemetery in Blumentritt.

Working Student

In 1945, I began taking my Bachelor of Science in Commerce at the Far Eastern University, but I would only finish two years of college because of the exigencies of making a living. By day, I was a student; by night, I was a waiter at Gold Star Café on Avenida Rizal and had a monthly salary of P20.

We did not know then that the war was about to end and that the Americans were finally returning to liberate the Philippines from Japanese occupation. When the Americans did return in 1945, what some historians call the "Rape of Manila" ensued as the US forces bombed sections of the city and surrounding municipalities to dislodge the Japanese troops. The Japanese used the Filipino population as a human shield while they retreated.

Looking for a safe place for us, my father moved the family again. This time we lived above Gold Star Café, which was owned by Quieng Sun Hing, the husband of my mother's younger sister, Lo Sun Ti, who had also migrated to the Philippines. We were certain that, at the very least, we would have food there.

The American soldiers who frequented the café liked me and gave me big tips because I could speak English. I remember making coffee in a large container eight

times a day. My father, who also worked in Gold Star then, made a cola that was also popular with the American soldiers.

It was an experience that defied sanity. We could hear the heavy shelling as far as Grace Park during the day. But, after the fighting, the Americans would come in for a meal and a chance to forget the horrors of war. For many of these soldiers, who were fine young men, the nightlife revolved around cafés, not the girlie bars that mushroomed in another part of town.

Serving them at Gold Star Café, my father and I managed to eke out a living that provided for our family to the end of the war and through Liberation time.

Cusinero & Bodegero

We lived there on Avenida Rizal for almost two years. In 1947, we moved to Balmes Street in Quiapo, Manila. We stayed in an apartment owned by Vicente Gotamco and my father worked in the main office of Gotamco's lumber company on Tanduy Street. By that time, I was working at Manila Commercial Company, a trading firm that distributed health care and beauty products like Gray Cross Alcohol and various lotions.

Manila Commercial Company, located on Rosario Street (now Quentin Paredes Street), was owned by five people: Yu Cho Im, the manager, who was a former professor in Chuang Chui School, China; Lao Yee Cho and his brother; their nephew Lao Heng Yim; and my uncle, Quieng Sun Hing. My uncle was the treasurer and assistant manager of the company. My father was just a nominee, a trustee, of Uncle Quieng.

I began working in Manila Commercial as a *cusinero* (cook) for six or seven people. I had learned the techniques of cooking from Sui San, the cook at Gold Star Café, so I could easily whip up dishes for the managers and the secretary. I remember waking up early and walking two or three minutes to the market on Carvajal Street to buy the ingredients for the day – *pancit* (noodles), vegetables and some fish. Then I walked on to Manila Commercial on Rosario Street to cook their meals.

Because I did the marketing daily, my cooking was very fresh. Miss Gapos, the secretary, liked it so much that, even when I was promoted, she would cajole me, "Gonzalo, cook for us. We don't like the cooking of the new cook."

I guess one of the reasons why they liked my cooking was that I didn't stint on the ingredients because I did not pocket the money. When the money allotted for food was not enough, I dug into my own pocket and bought whatever was needed. After a short time, I became the *bodegero* (warehouse man) also. My salary as a cook and a

bodegero was P30 a month.

English Teacher

By day, I was a *cusinero* and *bodegero*. By night, I was a teacher at Sin Hing Night School on Juan Luna Street, in front of Our Lady of the Holy Rosary Church in Binondo, Manila. For two years, from 7 p.m. to 9 p.m. from Monday to Friday, I gave English lessons to people who had just arrived from China. The owner of the night school was Yap Sui Tek, who worked in China Bank and who was also as an associate editor of *Chinese Commercial News*. His child, who was five years old at that time, is now a prominent columnist and media personality, Julie Yap Daza.

At night, going home to Tanduay, I would usually ride a *calesa*, a horse-driven cart. Even if my night job extended the hours of my day, I was amply recompensed for my efforts. Sin Hing paid me P200 a month, an enormous amount of money at that time. I helped my father with expenses and saved the rest for the future. That was the seed money I used to start my own business later on, but for the moment, in 1948, my income allowed me to get married and start a family of my own.

A WEDDING AND 8 BAPTISMS

WE SURVIVED

a war. That experience left within us an inexplicable longing, a deep hankering for life that many of us expressed with the happiest of occasions – weddings, births and baptisms. So it was with me.

On May 23, 1948, I married Katherine Sia Siu Eng. I was 26 years old, she was 21. Like me, Katherine was a Catholic, so we celebrated our union with Catholic marriage rites at the chapel of the University of Sto. Tomas. The priest who officiated at our wedding was an Italian named Fr. Casorari, who was a member of the Society of St. Paul.

Great Matchmaker

Today, I know it was a match made in heaven. Back then, I acknowledged the matchmaker as Sy Kim Po (Fourth Grand Auntie) because she picked Katherine for me from among the lovelies of Chinatown and set the wheels in motion for our first meeting. We had never seen each other before we were introduced to one another.

I remember preparing for our meeting with some trepidation, my heart fluttering and my stomach full of butterflies. What if she doesn't like me? What if she refuses me? What if I don't like her? I hadn't even seen a picture of her! Worst, what if it didn't work? What if it was a mistake?

The Sia family was from Chuang Chiu, my mother-in-law's village in China, and they had migrated to the Philippines. My father-in-law came to the Philippines. They were married here and lived in a big house with many rooms on what is now the site of the President Hotel, on Ongpin Street. The rooms were rented out to different tenants who shared common bathroom facilities.

Fourth Grand Auntie's son, Go Bon Bio, my uncle, accompanied me to their home. All my fears turned out to be groundless.

First I met her parents. Her father was Sia Eng Yin, who took to me immediately

and accepted me in his family. Years later, just a few days before he died at the age of 86, he was baptized and he took Gonzalo as his Christian name.

Katherine's mother was Maria Co Po Hap. She was also a Catholic. Katherine's adopted brother, Sia Ting Kok, who was younger than she, was also there.

They had other relatives there, but I no longer remember who they were. Finally, I was introduced to Katherine. She was beautiful! She was slender and had olive skin and curly dark hair. Her eyes were like big almonds and her lips had a pout until she smiled. And then it seemed as if the sun lit up a new day.

Love at First Sight

From the moment I saw her, I loved her. And she fell in love with me also the moment she saw me. Love at first sight for both of us. What matched-up couple could be so lucky to find love so unexpectedly and have it last their lifetimes? Only by God's grace did that happen.

Perhaps Sia Eng Yin considered me a prime catch for Katherine because I was responsible, hardworking and devoted to my family – I don't know for sure. What I do know is that Sia Eng Yin made it easy for me to woo his daughter. He would drop by my office at Manila Commercial on Rosario Street and invite me to have dinner at their house, saying they had cooked something special for me. Willingly, I went and allowed myself to be charmed by Katherine.

We had a few dates before we got married. I remember taking Katherine to dine at Panciteria Shanghai and Panciteria China and to watch the movies. But don't ask me what the movie titles were – all I can remember is being with her. She was wonderful!

When I recall those days, I remember the little details were unimportant after I saw her. But, as we got to know each other better, I learned that she was born here in Manila and graduated from Uno High School in Mayhaligue Street in Sta. Cruz, Manila.

Fortunately, my in-laws to-be liked me and they allowed us to marry after just a few months of courtship. I guess they realized that we were obviously in love. The wedding was a simple affair, with 20 tables of guests at our reception in Panciteria China.

As I mentioned in the previous chapter, former President Jose P. Laurel was our godfather. Among our guests were relatives and friends, including Jackson Horn (Ang Tian Seng) who gifted me with a Sacred Heart and Last Supper statue as a wedding present, which I still keep today. (Jackson married Beta Gotauco, a very jovial person

and they had a happy marriage together.)

Simple Wedding

Our wedding was very simple. Katherine was so beautiful that she didn't need any more adornments. We didn't know back then that we would be so happy and so perfect together. All I can say is we were tremendously blessed and I am grateful for that!

After we got married, we stayed in Balmes Street. My granduncle, Vicente Gotamco, owned several apartments there and my father arranged for us to stay in one of them. As a young couple starting out in life together, we hardly had anything to our name. The son of Third Grand Uncle Golanco, Uncle Amading Golanco, who is still living today in Hong Kong, designed some furniture for us, including cabinets, side tables and our matrimonial bed, which is the same bed that I use to this day, nearly 60 years later.

What we needed at home, we eventually purchased. Back then, we didn't have refrigerators, televisions, washing machines or aircons, so furnishing a home was easier.

Wedded Bliss

Wedded life was wonderful. Katherine, or Eng-nga, as I fondly called her, was perfect for me. She was loving, caring and respectful. She took very good care of me and our children, and we were happy together. I could not have asked for more.

In 1950, our first child, Syril, was born. I was very, very proud. I now had a son to carry the family name. Our second and third children were also boys: Marciano was born in 1951 and Pablo in 1952. Then came three girls – Agnes in 1953, Lucy in 1955 and Cecilia in 1956. They were followed by our youngest boy, Felix, in 1958, and our youngest girl, Anastacia in 1960. In one decade, from 1950 to 1960, we had eight children and each one of them as precious as the other to me and my wife.

Shortly after our children were born, they were baptized. Their baptisms and their confirmations provided other occasions to celebrate God's goodness to us and His many blessings, and to cement our ties with the people we chose to be their godparents.

It was a busy time for us as a family and for me at work.

FOUNDING GREEN CROSS

IN 1949, during my second year as a *bodegero*, Uncle Quieng Sun Hing had a dispute with Manager Yu Cho Im, so he left Manila Commercial Company and returned to Gold Star Café. My uncle appointed me to succeed him as treasurer of Manila Commercial and my salary was increased to P50.

Before he left, Uncle Quieng gave me his keys to the office. It was just a bunch of keys held together by a ring made of thick wire. To this day, I still use the key holder. The keys have long changed, but the ring that holds my keys together is the original one belonging to Uncle Quieng. To others, this loop of wire may appear to be a worthless piece of junk, but I treasure it as a remembrance of my uncle who gave me my first big break.

Treasurer

I ceased to work as a *bodegero* and *cusinero* when I became the treasurer. Establishing a reputation for honesty and integrity, I was given the responsibility for the sales force for the Quiapo and Divisoria areas, where our prime customers were. My appointment to the post happened after the salesman in charge of the districts made a mistake and left Manila Commercial Company. That was when I learned how to sell, a skill that would help me later on when I started my own company.

In those days, selling was quite simple, not the hyped-up activity of retailers today. We had good products, which we offered to retailers and vendors. If the products sold well, they continued to buy from us. We were honest in our dealings and we make a reasonable profit from our trade.

Manila Commercial bought its products from Rabin Company of New York, USA. It was owned by an American Jew, Mr. Rabin, who came here with his wife. We met at the Manila Hotel. Rabin Company supplied Manila Commercial with face powder, skin lotion, face cream, other beauty products and isopropyl alcohol, called Gray Cross Rubbing Alcohol. It was the first time we encountered an alcohol product in the Philippine market.

Alcohol for Common Use

This alcohol product languished in the Jabonero Street *bodega* of Manila Commercial for a long, long time, probably because the salesmen didn't know what to do with it. I had this idea that we could market it for everyday, household use. So, I brought it out of the warehouse and introduced it to the vendors in Quiapo. It sold at P2 per 500 ml bottle. (At that time, it was packaged in a glass bottle because plastic bottles were not yet being used.)

That was the first time rubbing alcohol was introduced for common use in the Philippines and it started selling very well. In fact, it sold so quickly that we ran into problems with the stock.

In 1950, during President Elpidio Quirino's term, the newly established Central Bank imposed import controls. Manila Commercial Company could not import products, so we bought raw products from La Tondeña and made rubbing alcohol in the house of Mr. Yu Cho Im on Benavidez Street. We did this for a while, but we could not turn the tide for the ailing Manila Commercial Company, which continued to do poorly.

In 1952, I decided it was time to move on. I resigned after putting up my own company, Gonzalo Laboratory, on 2500 Taft Avenue, Pasay City. It was a sole proprietorship. I owned 100% of the company.

No Turning Back

There was no turning back. I poured all my savings into my new venture – the princely sum of P3,400. The P400 was a gift that my father had given me several years before. For sentimental reasons, I had never spent it, but kept it as an emergency fund, something I could dip into should the need arise.

Now was the time to use it, so I put it in with the P3,000 that I had saved from my income as an English teacher in Sin Hing Night School. My father never held an interest in my business. In fact, while I established Gonzalo Laboratory, he continued working as a building contractor for his uncle, Vicente Gotamco. It was only in the latter part of 1952 that my father started coming to Gonzalo Laboratory. He would help out, sticking labels on the bottles or washing secondhand bottle caps. He did not infuse any capital into my business, nor did he manage it.

My P3,400 was enough for a humble start. For P90 a month, I leased one of two apartments at 2500 Taft Avenue from the owner, Mr. Ramirez, who later became my *compadre*. (Mr. Ramirez was the father of Donnie Ramirez, a famous lifestyle columnist today.) Then I bought raw materials from La Tondeña and some containers. Gonzalo Laboratory's first and only product then was Green Cross Rubbing Alcohol.

I named the product Green Cross. I wanted to differentiate it from Gray Cross Alcohol, the product that I had successfully introduced in the domestic market during my stint at Manila Commercial Company. So I changed the word gray, a color that seemed so dark and foreboding, to green, which to me signified hope and new life. Besides, I was from La Salle, so I was partial to green.

Trademark Obtained

I went to the Bureau of Patents, where trademarks were also being registered, to register the name Green Cross. However, the officer-in-charge of the registry refused to give me a trademark for Green Cross Rubbing Alcohol. The name was too similar to Red Cross, he reasoned.

Refusing to be stymied, I approached the head of the bureau, Attorney Federico Agrava, who happened to be a member of the Order of the Knights of Columbus. Since I was also a member of the Knights of Columbus, albeit of a different chapter, he approved my trademark without further questions. Later, Mr. Agrava and I became good friends.

First Employee

Gonzalo Laboratory started operations on June 16, 1952. My sole employee then was Raymundo Dig, a former colleague from Manila Commercial Company. Dig, a good worker, confided that he was going to resign from Manila Commercial where he was not earning much. I told him that I was about to start my own company and invited him to work with me. I promised that, after a humble start, things would pick up, and I would be able to pay him good wages. He decided to join me in my new venture.

Early Customers

Dig mixed the alcohol and I peddled it. My first customer was Colossal Drug on R. Hidalgo Street in Quiapo, Manila. The owner was a distant auntie from my village in China. I will never forget her because she brought me good luck. *Buena mano* or a good start is important to any Chinese in business. A good first sale is said to be a portent of strong sales to come. And indeed I was not disappointed.

Gonzalo Laboratory had plenty of customers. Since I had no agent, I got to know the owners of the drugstores personally when I did my rounds. I sold my alcohol to Mercury Drug Store in Bambang. Mercury was owned by Mariano Que, whose right-hand man was Jacinto Concepcion. I also sold to United Drug (the forerunner of pharmaceutical giant United Laboratories or Unilab) in Sto. Cristo and, later on, Commander Drug also bought alcohol from me. SM, owned by Henry Sy, was just a small store on Carriedo. Henry Sy also owned a small drugstore in front of Quiapo

Church and this was managed by one of my friends, Domingo Tan, who also bought alcohol from me.

Some of my other valued customers were Sin Lian Thay, a grocery store on Sto. Cristo, Keng Sen Trading, Bee Lian Trading and several others in Divisoria.

All the drugstores became my customers and Green Cross eventually became the premiere brand among locally produced alcohols.

Expanding Operations

Booming sales prompted me to expand my “factory.” In 1953, I occupied the second unit on 2500 Taft Avenue. I also brought in Raymundo’s brothers, Augusto, Horacio and Arturo, to help bottle the alcohol. Since we were not automated yet, they had to repeat the process over and over again – wash the glass bottles, dilute the 100% alcohol to make it 70% alcohol, filter it, bottle it, label it and then pack it for delivery.

Eventually, we were able to hire a driver named Salustiano Nordan, the brother-in-law of Raymundo. Then I also hired his other brothers-in-law, Jose and Benjamin Anquilo, and his cousins.

The ‘KBL Era’

Back then, employers tended to hire relatives of good employees, providing a source of livelihood for families, sometimes even generations of families. This practice was almost feudal, with the owner of the company viewed as a patron to whom employees brought their concerns. Those times when this practice prevailed were later euphemistically described as the “KBL era.” *Kasal, binyag, libing*. Wedding, baptism and funeral.

Employers felt responsible for employees and their families almost from cradle to grave. In return for demonstrating concern for the workers’ welfare, employers reaped the workers’ loyalty and longevity of service. That was my experience, too.

Employee Relations

I augmented the salaries of the workers by providing free meals at work and giving a sack of rice every month to married employees. Later, I rented an apartment for Raymundo and his relatives. I relied on Raymundo to oversee the workflow at the factory, but the workers were free to approach me with their concerns and I tried to help them in their hour of need.

I was mild with them, even when mistakes were made. It was not a habit of mine to raise my voice to berate anyone because more could be gained by a reasonable discussion than an impassioned tirade. But I could not and did not abide cheating or stealing. The workers must have been happy because so many of them continued working for me for decades.

First Salesman Hired

I did all the sales myself until there were just too many customers for me to service. So I hired a salesman, Ruben Tizon, Jr. He worked with me for more than 20 years. Mr. Escobar was a later addition to my sales force and he also stayed with me a long time. The sales people earned a salary plus commission, so they were amply recompensed. Plus, they knew that if they could approach me in an emergency and I would always help them. Even when the profits were not yet big, I felt I had been blessed with much that there was enough to share.

RAISING A FAMILY

DEEPLY INGRAINED

among traditional Chinese is the custom of honoring one's parents and looking after the

family one is born into. The oldest son, in particular, has the responsibility of caring for his ageing parents and his siblings.

As the firstborn son, I felt that responsibility very keenly and, in honoring my parents, I often gave them priority over my own family. My family life could have been complicated by this custom; instead it was simple because Katherine loved me very much and accepted that this was the way things were. And I loved her more for that.

No Quarrels

My wife and I never quarreled. Even from the start, Katherine demonstrated great maturity and understanding. Our goal was to raise our children to the best of our ability. If we had any disagreement, we talked about it calmly and reasonably. Our relationship was not a contest nor was it a battle of wills. We worked together and it was always for the children.

Loving Touches

I knew Katherine loved me because she took care of me. She was always concerned about what she would feed me and the children, and would even pick little stones and husks from the rice before cooking. It was another of the many loving touches that Katherine did automatically for us. I remember she would wake up very early and prepare my breakfast – fish or oatmeal – before attending to the children.

Breakfast was the one meal that I usually took at home because I was either busy at work or with my parents who lived upstairs on the second floor of the two-story house we shared on Mirasol Street.

According to Chinese custom, filial piety demands that the eldest son attend to his parents' needs. That's why I was always with them when we lived at Mirasol. If I wasn't attending to my parents, I was working on the company's book of accounts or planning my sales trips.

I had a tiny alcove in one of the two bedrooms of our ground-floor home. The alcove was just big enough for a school desk and a chair, and it had a curtain. A drawn curtain meant I was busy working, and the children were not allowed to disturb me. They were not allowed to mess up my papers either, but the girls admitted they used my corner as a hiding place when they played hide-and-seek.

My daughters recall that I would hand out their vitamins after eating. Making sure that the children took their vitamins was my way of safeguarding their health and letting them know I was concerned about their welfare. Pablo recalls that I had helped him with his lessons, particularly English. I can't recall anymore that I did; in fact, I thought I was always working. But I must have done it a few times for him to remember so.

Provincial Trips

When Gonzalo Laboratory was starting out, I was very busy selling our products, first in Manila and its neighboring cities and later in the provinces. My provincial sorties kept me away for several days at a time. While I labored with an unwavering determination to succeed, I did not enjoy those trips. I hated being away from my wife and children and could not wait to get back home.

Whenever I could, I took a member of the family with me for company. Marciano joined me in several of my provincial trips, but, more often than not, it was Pablo whom I awakened at 4 or 5 o'clock in the morning to accompany me. This was usually during the summer when he had no classes. (Eventually, Pablo took charge of provincial sales for the company that my sons established and he reaped the benefits of being recognized as my son by the people we had sold alcohol to.) Whenever I could, I also took Katherine along and some (if not all) of the children.

Good Education

Katherine and I divided the responsibilities of raising our kids. I worked hard for the family and provided for them. I made sure that our children attended good schools because I valued a good education. If I could not give them great wealth, I could at least give them a good education, which was something that no one could steal from them.

Most of our children began their studies at Crusaders Academy, a Spanish owned Catholic school run by the Dominican fathers in Binondo, the heart of "Chinatown" in Manila. While I wanted my kids to learn about our Chinese culture, I also wanted them to grow up in the faith and to have moral values.

Then, in 1960, when I became a naturalized citizen, one of the requirements

was that I put my kids in Filipino schools. That was when I placed all of the children in Filipino-owned Catholic schools. The girls studied at St. Paul's Manila and the boys in Letran, Mapua and La Salle. Katherine made sure that I was present for as many of their graduations as I could attend.

Meanwhile, Katherine cooked for our kids, kept our house in order, made sure they studied their lessons and cared for them when they were sick. All these she did with the assistance of only one housemaid, Linda, who served us for many years. Even when we could already afford it, Katherine didn't hire a cook. She insisted on doing the cooking herself. My wife enjoyed pampering the children with her cooking, even if she served only one viand and rice.

Special Dishes

Syril's favorite dish was *chay po ng* (pickled radish omelette). Even when Syril was already a married man with teenaged kids, Katherine would call him up and entice him to come over by saying she had cooked his favorite dish. And he would come and finish one plateful by himself with gusto! Marciano's favorite was her chicken curry, with potatoes and curry rice. For him no one can make it the way she did. Katherine also cooked dishes that were meals in themselves like *kiam pung* – sticky rice with pork, chicken, mushroom, peanuts and a little soy sauce – similar to Valenciana rice. She saved time and money with those all-in one meals.

Katherine was wise about time as she was with money. She would take the kids to Crusaders' Academy in the morning, then go to her parents' house on Ongpin. At noon, she would bring Syril, Marciano, Pablo, Agnes and Lucy their lunch, make sure they ate and then return to her parents' home. At midafternoon, she would pick the kids up from school and they would take the jeepney home to Mirasol.

While the kids did their homework or played, my wife was busy at the kitchen, preparing dinner. When she was done, Katherine would call the kids and they would go in. The evening meal would be ready on the table and they would sit down and eat, often without me because I was traveling a lot.

Homespun Values

Katherine taught them never to leave even a morsel of rice on their plates. One grain of rice, she told them, took two buckets of water to grow, so it was wasteful to leave any on the plate. If there were any leftovers, the four girls would finish them before eating the newly cooked food so that their mother would not have to eat "old food." To this day, our children have kept the habit of leaving clean plates and have even passed it on to our grandchildren.

Even when they were young, I never spanked my children. I believed that if you talked to your kids, they would understand. And usually talking to my kids was enough.

Katherine was the disciplinarian who made sure our children were well behaved, respectful and disciplined. Around 9 p.m. one night, Lucy and Cecile wanted to buy a bottle of grape soft drink from Ching Sari-Sari Store (a sundry goods shop) down the road. They had saved enough money for it and didn't want to wait until the next day. The girls couldn't pass the main door because their mother would see them, so they used the escape door (a trap door for emergencies) to go out. When they got back, my father was standing in the street, waiting for them, a very imposing figure in the culprits' minds. My mother and my wife were right behind him. The two girls got a severe scolding.

Another time, Cecile played a trick on Lucy at dinner. They were having pork chops and Cecile craved more. "Look at the lizard," she told Lucy, pointing to the wall. When Lucy turned to look, Cecile speared her pork chop and gobbled it up. After the kids helped clear the table, Katherine asked Cecile why she had eaten Lucy's pork chop. Cecile said she had finished hers, but wanted to eat more. "Why didn't you ask for more?" Katherine inquired. Cecile replied, "Because I know you cook only one piece for each of us." My wife said what Cecile did was wrong and made her carry a book on each palm with arms outstretched, a punishment that Cecile said deterred her from ever taking someone's portion again.

Our Bulwark

While Katherine was strict, she was also fair. She loved our children and was devoted to them. The kids remember her watching over them when they were sick, feeding them *lugaw* (congee) or *sopas* (chicken soup). In those days, it wasn't the practice to rush children to the hospital whenever they had a fever or felt unwell. Home remedies and Chinese medicines were often applied first. Katherine was by the side of whoever child had a fever or an ailment, and the sleepless nights were often hers, especially since I was away a lot.

Katherine was our bulwark, the post that we leaned on. It was because she was so strong that I could concentrate on my task of building the company and I could leave the children in her capable hands. I have to say that she raised them well.

She was adamant that, among siblings, there should be no rivalry, no cheating and no taking advantage, only unity, assistance and love. They had to be united – like the Musketeers, "All for one and one for all." Later, when the kids were married, she would remind them to be solid for one another in spite of their respective spouses, because if they remained united, the in-laws would follow suit. It was sage advice from

their mother who unselfishly allowed me to assist my younger siblings as they were growing up.

Thanks to my wife, my children grew up well behaved so that it was a joy for me to be with them. I enjoyed the company of our children very much and I tried to be more demonstrative towards them than my own parents had been towards me. I'd put my arms on my sons' shoulders or hug my daughters to shield them from the cold wind (when we were traveling abroad later on) or take one of the younger kids up on the saddle with me when we went horseback riding. My sons don't remember the affection I tried to show them, which was difficult for me also to do because I was brought up to be more reserved. Luckily, we have a few faded photographs to tell the story.

Great Times

In the early days, when we didn't have much money, we still managed to take our children on "family outings." Usually it would be on a Sunday. We'd go to Mass at Our Lady of Sorrows Church on Harrison Street in Manila, where the parish priest was Fr. Casorari, the same priest who officiated at our wedding.

After Mass, we'd have a meal, usually Chinese food, at simple restaurant like Panciteria China on Ongpin in Chinatown. We'd ride the jeepney to get there, all 10 of us. I remember the fare was 15 centavos per person. In those days, there was a smaller jeepney called the AC, which was half the size of today's jeepney. It was just right for us. I'd sit in front with the driver and Katherine would sit behind with the children.

One time, we forgot that it was Lucy's birthday. When Katherine remembered, we had impromptu lunch at a restaurant, followed by a stroll along the boulevard. Manila Bay was unpolluted then and the children frolicked by the waterfront. Lucy recalled that it was one of her best birthdays as a child.

Even as young children, my kids learned to appreciate the simple joys of living and to be grateful for what they had. When we still lived in Mirasol, Katherine would pack a big basket of food that she had cooked and instruct Linda to bring the kids to Roxas Boulevard. On a grassy area, Linda would unfurl a *banig* (woven mat) and set the food on it while the children played by the waterfront, the *bancas* (outrigger boats) bobbing in the sea nearby.

The kids didn't need expensive toys or big vacations to have fun. They were a *barkada* (gang) already because there were eight of them. When they woke up, they were already among their favorite playmates. Plus, we had neighbors who had kids their age also. When their homework was done, the older ones played *patintero* and

hide-and-seek, with the younger ones as *saling pusa* or tag-alongs. The children grew up treasuring their closeness with one another.

Christmas Time

Felix remembers how Katherine and I used to take the children around to see their godparents during the holidays. It was a custom among Filipino Catholics for children to visit their godparents and receive an *aguinaldo* (gift) on Christmas Day. I liked this custom because it also gave the parents and godparents a chance to catch up and renew their ties. I had so much fun going the rounds on Christmas Day because I'm a sociable guy and I enjoy being with friends.

For the children, it was fun too because, at every stop we made, they would be given gifts and the little red packets called *ang pao*. We did this until Felix was already a teenager and started to make excuses so he wouldn't have to go. He explained that he felt embarrassed to be making the rounds and receiving *aguinaldo* because he considered himself too old already.

Out-of-Town Trips

We did have a few out-of-town trips with all the children. Katherine and I took the kids to Tagaytay where for a picnic, horseback riding and sightseeing. Taal Volcano was visible from the lookout point there. Another time, we took them to see Mayon Volcano in Albay Province. The kids also remember our trips to Baguio City (the summer capital), where we enjoyed the rides at Burnham Park and climbed to the grotto of Our Lady of Lourdes.

We rode a bus going to our destinations because I didn't own a car until the early 70s (when Syril was already married). We stayed in small hotels, which was within our means.

In all these, we were just an ordinary family relishing the simple joys of life.

When we went out together, it became apparent that we were a big family – a fact that often surprised people. Agnes recalls how hilarious it was when we all got on a bus and the conductor's head kept flipping back and forth as he counted 10 of us. He asked in amazement, "Are you all together?" "Yes," Agnes chirped. "And we're one family!" We were going to a movie that time and we bought 10 pieces of *siopao* (roast pork in a steamed bun) with 10 drinks and 10 tickets to the show.

Frugal Habit

Katherine and our kids were never big spenders, even later, when we were comfortably off. In truth, my wife was quite frugal. My sons recall that, when they

were young and she would take them along to visit her parents in Ongpin, she insisted on walking from Harrison Street in Pasay City to Vito Cruz on the boundary of Manila before boarding a jeepney. The ride from Harrison to Ongpin cost 15 centavos, but if she boarded the jeepney at Vito Cruz, the ride cost only 10 centavos. By walking half a kilometer, she would save five centavos. On the return journey, she would get off at Vito Cruz and walk all the way back to Harrison just to save another five centavos. Ten centavos each added up when multiplied by three or four people, because she always took some of the kids with her to visit her parents.

One time, our third daughter, Cecile, wanted to eat canned pineapple tidbits. "OK," Katherine said, "we will save for it." And they walked so that she could save the money to buy Cecile what she wanted from the *sari-sari* store.

Deep Impression

Syril shares that Katherine's frugal habit made a deep impression on him. "She saved 10 centavos. You can't have a million unless you save the centavos. If you're 10 centavos short, that's not a million. That's just P999,999.90. The centavos you save add up."

I knew Katherine loved me because she was careful about the money I gave her. She knew I worked hard for our living, so she carefully husbanded our funds. She never asked for anything extravagant (not even a TV when our neighbors already had televisions) and never even reproached me for not being able to give her a house of our own.

In the early years of our marriage, we lived on 36 Mirasol Street, now Buendia Avenue, in Pasay City. It was a rented two-story house. My parents lived upstairs with my three brothers and two sisters, and we lived downstairs. Our place had two bedrooms, which was small for a family of 10, so we added a third bedroom later on.

Our Real Home

When the place became too crowded because the kids were already bigger, we moved to 1783 Dakota Street, which is now Macario Adriatico Street in Malate, Manila. When we moved, I was able to spend more time with my family and have my meals with them. We stayed on Dakota Street in a rented house (near what is today the famous Remedios Circle with quaint cafes and fine restaurants) for a short while before transferring to Sta. Monica, now Buendia Avenue, in Pasay City. Our home on Sta. Monica was just walking distance from Roxas Boulevard. Before all the reclamations took place, the water used to go right up to the seawall running alongside Roxas Boulevard and the children often played along the waterfront.

We lived in a rented house on Sta. Monica until 1984 when we moved to a compound on Zamora Street, Pasay City, that my sons built.

When we were still living in Dakota, I managed to purchase two lots in Sun Valley, Parañaque, with my hard-earned savings. I placed the lots in Katherine's name in the hope that we would some day build our own house there. But we were never able to build on it.

My brother Anthony and his wife were going through a difficult phase in their marriage. Anthony asked if I could let them have one-half of the Sun Valley property so that they could build a house of their own. I thought that might give them some stability in their marriage so I asked Katherine if we could let them use one of our lots. Katherine pointed out, and rightfully so, that we lived in a rented apartment and had no house of our own yet. But I was insistent. Ever the dutiful wife, Katherine agreed and signed the papers so that Anthony could use half the property.

Anthony's marriage was saved, but we lost that lot and the adjoining lot also as they appropriated both lots for their use. Years later, when Anthony was able to build a house in Ayala Alabang, he moved out of Sun Valley, but he never returned the lots to us. Now the relatives of his wife live on that property.

To this day, I have never owned a house. As I consoled Katherine, I console myself that this life is temporary and will pass away. I look instead to the mansion in heaven that Jesus has prepared for us (John 14:2). My children will attest that I have been telling them from way back then that our real home is in Heaven so we should strive to get there.

INSIDE GREEN CROSS

AS MY FAMILY

grew, so did my business. Two years after I established Gonzalo Laboratory, I introduced our second product, which also became a popular household item and eventually outsold Green Cross Alcohol.

Introducing Zonrox

I realized the market could use a bleaching product, and there was none yet produced locally. I did some research at the Philippine Education Company on Echague Street, Manila, on how to handle this bleaching product. Then I bought the raw materials from a company and we made our own bleach. I named the product Gonrox, Gon from Gonzalo, and rox from the imported brand Chlorox.

Some time after I launched Gonrox, a Chinese merchant came to my office and complained that the name Gonrox was too close to his own bleach product, Old Rox. Without making a fuss, I changed the name Gonrox to Zonrox and I was blessed for it. Zonrox, our second product, became even more popular. That was in 1954.

Slim Margins, Plenty Sales

I kept the price of our product reasonable. That meant our margins stayed slim and the only way we could earn more was to increase the volume of sales. *Pera-pera ang kita, pero marami benta*. Few centavos in profit, but plenty sales – this was how many Chinese enterprises of that era grew – and mine was no different from the others. I would tell my grandchildren later on that even a tiny profit was still a profit, and that miniscule profits added up to significant amounts over a period of time.

First Delivery Truck

Meanwhile, I protected our bottom line by keeping the expenses down. Because I was frugal, we made a small profit early on, which enabled me to buy a secondhand “International” truck for carting the supplies around. Even when it ceased to be roadworthy, I kept the truck around for the longest time for sentimental reasons. It was the first vehicle I had ever owned.

The Art of Selling

I worked hard at expanding our sales in new markets because our expenses were also growing. There were more mouths to feed and more kids to send to school. And I had to help my parents also with expenses for my siblings who were growing up.

Manila was not a difficult market for me because I knew my customers. Many times, I walked into their stores with no appointment. I had my Manila folder tucked under my arm (I didn't even own a briefcase yet) and sometimes (especially in the provinces) I picked up some *siopao* or *hopia* to share with them. During my visit, we hardly ever talked about business. We talked about families, schools, ailments, events and even their problems – everything but alcohol.

Sometimes my older sons – Syril, Marciano and Pablo – accompanied me on my sales visits and I would proudly introduce them to the owners or managers of the *boticas* (drugstores). Marciano recounts that I was so close to my customers that, if they were having a meal or a snack, they would ask me to eat with them. And I would partake of their food as a sign of conviviality. Only when we were leaving would they mention their order, almost like an afterthought, "*Sige, padalan mo ko ng isang kahon ng alcohol.* (OK, send me a case of alcohol.)" There was no need for me to solicit sales for Green Cross Alcohol because I was identified with the product. But, more than that, I had established valuable friendships with my customers.

Your Word Is Your Bond

In those days, there was no need for a PO or a placement order. The merchant's word was enough. It was an era when our word was our bond, when a handshake was as good as a signed contract. After my visit, I'd send the delivery van with their order, which they would simply sign for. Thirty days later, I'd send the collector to pick up the payment. I gave my regular customers short-term credit and hardly anyone ever failed to pay.

Providing short-term credit (a practice that merchants insist on even today) put a strain on the company's finances initially because I didn't have a deep pocket. As I expanded sales, I had to seek short-term credit from my suppliers of raw materials, which they readily gave because of my good track record. I always made sure that I paid them back on time. Later, they even extended my credit to 60 or 90 days.

Since Gonzalo Laboratory was a small operation at first, it was easy to keep track of the accounts. I did the books so I knew what payments were due and what collections to make. My sons remember that I used to bring home my work – usually I tallied the book of accounts and planned my sales trips – and I labored until late at night. I preferred to work at home rather than in the factory so that I could be with my

family. At least, even if I was busy, the children saw me at home.

Real Life Business School

I didn't realize it would etch on their impressionable minds that I was working hard all the time, but it did. My older sons took it to heart because, when they were in their early teens, they came to work for me, voluntarily giving up their Saturdays and their holidays to help out in my business.

I paid them nominal wages – not big wages so it would not seem like I was bribing them to work, but not too small either so that they would not feel exploited. I tried to teach them early on the value of hard work and the dignity of labor. Marciano says they worked not for the wages but because I was working hard for them and they wanted to pitch in and do their share. They made me proud of them.

Syril recalls that they went to junk shops to buy secondhand bottles for the alcohol to augment the purchases of new bottles. Today, Syril still remembers the smell of the odorous junk shops and dirty glass bottles that they had to wash. Marciano recalls diluting the 99% alcohol with water in a drum to make it into 70% rubbing alcohol, filtering it and then filling the clean bottles. After putting caps and labels on the bottles, they packed them 24 to a box, and stacked the cases six high, ready for delivery. My sons sometimes even accompanied the delivery man (they were too young to drive) and the credit collector.

By helping me out, my sons learned various aspects of doing the business while they were still young. In this, I was no different from other Chinese parents who taught their kids the business while they were still young. It was business school in real life and my sons didn't have to pay tuition for it.

Like my sons, my younger brothers also helped out at Gonzalo Laboratory, as did my father when he retired. They would wash caps and bottles and stick on labels. Over the years, my younger siblings learned the business from me as they grew up.

Expanding the Workforce

As Gonzalo Laboratory flourished, I brought in more salesmen and office staff, including a bookkeeper/accountant. While the salesmen serviced my regular clients in Greater Manila, I took charge of the provinces.

Among the cities I frequented were Angeles in Pampanga, Tarlac in Tarlac, Dagupan City in Pangasinan, Laoag in Ilocos Norte, Baguio in the Mt. Province, Legaspi City in Albay, Naga City in Bicol, Lipa City in Batangas, and the province of Laguna all

the way up to the province of Quezon. I covered almost all of Luzon. Eventually, our sales in the provinces equaled our sales in Greater Manila.

My younger children remember that I wasn't home a lot of the time and that was true because I had to venture to the provinces in Luzon to sell alcohol. As I mentioned in the previous chapter, I brought family members with me whenever I could. Sometimes, I was accompanied by just Marciano or Pablo. I didn't have a car so we had to go by bus or by train, and I had to bring cases of alcohol along. At first I didn't have bodegas (warehouses) in the provinces. However, when the sales picked up, I set up my first provincial bodega in Dagupan so my agents in the north could draw stocks of alcohol from them.

Typhoon in Bicol

On the road, I faced the usual hazards — bad weather, dirty food and water, accidents and the loneliness of a journeyman. I made it through all of them safely by the grace of God.

My older sons usually made an effort to see me off when I went on my provincial trips. On one particular trip to Bicol, Marciano dropped me off at the Pasay train station. While I was away, a typhoon sliced through the Philippines and hit Bicol directly. Katherine was worried about my safety because I was overdue. Strong winds, heavy rains and rising waters made it impossible to travel. I weathered the storm in a cheap "med rep" type of hotel that I usually stayed in, and went home after it blew over.

Typhoid Fever

Once, I got sick from the food I ate or the water I drank in Dagupan City. Somehow I managed to return to Manila but I had to be brought to San Juan de Dios Hospital because I had a high fever. My fever kept recurring for a week, causing grave concern for the family. Katherine, who watched over me, and the children, who visited me, feared they were going to lose me. Luckily, Dr. Buenaventura Angtuaco, my *compadre*, diagnosed my ailment as typhoid fever and prescribed the right medicine. He told me to take the medicine and eat. I did. The next day, my fever dropped and I eventually recovered.

A Rabbit and a Carabao

The worst thing that happened to me was an accident on my way home. I took a Philippine Rabbit bus from Baguio. We reached the tollgate in Balintawak after 6 p.m. and it was dark already. A farmer was leading his carabao across the road. The bus driver tried to avoid them, but it was too late. The bus hit the carabao and flipped on its side and skidded a distance along the road.

The carabao was killed but the farmer was not injured. However, many of the bus passengers got hurt. My back was injured. The pain was so intense that I decided to go straight to De Los Santos Clinic on España, where the doctors said I had a slip disc. I wore a brace for six months.

Despite my back injury, I continued working. At that time, staying at home as an invalid or as a recuperating patient was not an option. If I didn't work, who would run the company and feed our families? The company was then not yet strong enough to survive on its own.

Loneliness of a Journeyman

The other travail of a traveling salesman that I experienced was the loneliness of being away from spouse and family. Communication was not as convenient as it is today with cell phones, direct dial, text, fax and email. Back then, some provinces were not connected yet on the phone grid, and long distance calls to those areas that were connected were expensive. Fax machines had not yet been invented and email was just a glimmer in some geniuses' minds. Even television (which gives you a sense of closeness because you're all watching the same programs) was not yet a fixture of many homes.

Sometimes, I longed for home so much that I felt like climbing on the next bus and heading back to Manila. Of course, I didn't do that. I didn't succumb to the loneliness either by having a girl at every stop. I had made a promise before God to be faithful to my wife and I honored that because I loved her. What I did, when I could already afford it, was to bring my family members along with me on my provincial trips, as I mentioned in the previous chapter.

Our Own Building

In the early 1960s, Gonzalo Laboratory began to provide sufficient income for our needs. In 1965, Gonzalo Laboratory transferred from Taft Avenue to our own building on Iba Street in Parañaque. It was the site of our new alcohol-making plant. This was a significant development because the company was no longer a tenant but the owner of its premises. It indicated that Gonzalo Laboratory had achieved a measure of stability.

One by one, as they graduated from college, I invited my siblings to join my company as employees. When Anthony wanted to start his own garments business, I gave him capital for it. But his business failed, so I took him into Gonzalo Laboratory and paid him a salary. That was in 1966.

Next, I helped Joseph set up his design center for furniture, but that business

also failed. So I took him into my company. Then I invited Mary, an employee in an accounting firm in Binondo, to join me also. Peter, the youngest, was still in school at that time, but eventually, he came into my company as well. I paid them all salaries because they were employees of the company.

By inviting them to join me, I was fulfilling – according to Chinese custom – my obligation as the eldest brother to take care of my younger siblings. Because I loved them, I trusted them and let them have the run of the office, while I concentrated on marketing and sales, which I was good at. This meant that I was out a lot, opening new markets for our products, particularly our best sellers, Green Cross Alcohol and Zonrox.

First Move to Takeover

In 1971, my brother Joseph persuaded me to convert my single proprietorship into a corporation. I did not care about the structures of companies and was quite happy with my company's set-up, but I did not want to slight him, so I agreed.

I did not realize then that, by agreeing to convert my single proprietorship into a corporation, I was opening the door for my brothers and sister to take over my business. It was a devious plan that took three decades to unfold and, all that time, I had no inkling whatsoever of their maneuverings. If you ask me how it was possible that I did not even suspect what they were doing, I will tell you that I loved them and I trusted them completely. Never once did I think they would betray me. But they did.

On August 11 that year, Gonzalo Laboratories, Inc. was registered with the Securities and Exchange Commission as a corporation. In reality, it was 100% my single proprietorship business, but clothed to look like a corporation. I assigned to it all the business and assets of my single proprietorship and these became the start-up business and assets of the corporation. Gonzalo Laboratories, Inc. merely continued the business of my single proprietorship.

The new corporation had an authorized capital of P500,000, divided into 5,000 shares valued at P100 per share at par value. The subscribed capital was P200,000, divided into 2,000 shares. The paid-up capital was P70,000. I put up the entire P70,000 because no one else had the money to do so.

Implied Trust

I owned the corporation 100% then and now. However, the law required five incorporators, so I brought in my brothers Anthony and Joseph, my sister Mary, and my mother Ang Si. I placed 50% of the shares by implied trust in the names of Anthony, Joseph, Mary and my mother. (Peter was still in school at that time.) I kept the other

50% in my name.

Later, however, half the shares in my name (25% of the company) were transferred to my father Co Ay Tian and Peter who joined us from a vetsin company.

That left 25% in my name. After another rearrangement, only 17.5% of the shares were left in my name. All the rest were placed by implied trust in the names of other members of my family. Total assignment to both my parents now amounted to 33.4%.

By the 1980s, Joseph, a brilliant manager, ran the company with absolute and unquestioned powers. There was no audit and there was no accounting among the board members. Everybody trusted him until he fed his vices and his pride. Joseph went as far as buying several racehorses using company funds, raising the ire of Anthony and Peter, which resulted in heated arguments among them that I became the arbiter of.

In 1986, my brother Joseph had an argument with my son Cyril about an inconsequential thing: cotton buds. Cyril was already in the market and Joseph wanted to enter the market, too. When I tried to speak to Joseph the following day, he blew up and laid down the gauntlet: Who would leave the company, me or him?

He coerced me to go. He made me sign some papers that were, in hindsight, surprisingly ready at hand! I did not read the papers because I trusted him and I did not want to insult him by reading them. I went home and my youngest son Felix was witness to my tears.

Joseph and my siblings purportedly paid me P9 million for the 17.5% of shares in my name, but the money came out of the coffers of my own company. It was me paying myself, so how could that be a sale? And it was an insignificant sum, compared to all that I had put into my own company! There was no payment whatsoever for 82.5% of the company, which I still owned.

My brother Joseph, however, realized that Green Cross was so identified with me that they couldn't complete my ouster then and there. They made me the chairman and gave me a salary equal to that of Anthony who was the president of the company. I was not involved anymore in day-to-day operations, but I still signed the checks and attended the board meetings. It was a titular position at best, but to keep peace within the family, I did not speak out or fight them for control. After all, I owned the company and never relinquished it to them.

Yes, they gave me P9 million in 1986. But, in 1989, my four siblings withdrew

huge amounts of money (more than what they gave me) from company coffers to build four mansions in Ayala Alabang Village. I continued to stay in my simple bungalow in Pasay, which my children owned. My siblings never even considered building me a house.

Over the next two decades, my siblings maneuvered to wrest total control of the company from me. First, they appropriated the shares that I had entrusted to them. And when our parents died, they also misappropriated the 33.4% shares that I had placed by implied trust in our parents' names. They claimed it was their inheritance. If so, I too was entitled to a one-fifth share, a compulsory inheritance. Even that, they did not concede to me.

All their dark maneuverings went on without my full knowledge. Neither I nor my parents during their lifetime knew what perfidy my siblings were up to. If my parents had known, I doubt that they would have let it happen. My father was an honorable man and he had served as a worthy trustee of the shares of Uncle Quieng in Manila Commercial Company. He knew that the Manila Commercial Company shares were not his own and never tried to appropriate them. As for my mother, she loved me. It was unthinkable that they would have been a party to my betrayal.

The Ultimate Betrayal

Subsequently, my siblings tried to expunge all records of my having been the founder of the corporation. First, my siblings voted for a change of name. Gonzalo Laboratories, Inc. was renamed Green Cross, Inc., after our flagship product. Then, in 2002, during the 50th anniversary of the company, they put out an audio visual presentation which said that our father, Co Ay Tian, was the founder of Green Cross. That, of course, was a blatant lie by which they hoped to wipe out my life because that was what Green Cross was to me – my life's work.

My involvement in company day-to-day affairs had ceased in 2001. My siblings set up a trust fund in my name, funded again from my company's coffers. Altogether, they allotted P80 million, a miniscule amount compared to what Green Cross is worth today. The company, with all its assets, properties and trademarks, is estimated to be worth P24 **billion** as of this writing.

Of the pittance that I was given, I was allowed to distribute P40 million to my children, but the remaining P40 million was held in a trust fund. I could spend the interest of that money, but not the principal. That money is supposed to go to my children upon my death.

When they set up the trust fund, I realized that they were speeding me on to

retirement, as they had summarily retired my original employees at the age of 65 back in the 1990s. Taking the hint, I no longer went to work. I was 79 years old then.

Then, in July 2006, I had a dream just before I woke up. In that dream, my late wife Katherine told me to get what was mine for the sake of the children, grandchildren and great grandchildren. I wondered what she meant and shared what she said in the dream with my children. The only thing that belonged to me was the company. I had no other asset to speak of.

A visit to the Securities and Exchange Commission revealed what my siblings had carefully hidden from me all these years – how massively they had betrayed me! At one point, Anthony, Joseph and Peter each held 29.1% of the company's shares, and Mary held the remaining 12.7%.

Joseph had passed away in 1992 from a massive coronary during a trip to Hong Kong. Absolute power had corrupted him. Now that power went to Anthony, the second in line in the company, and it corrupted him, too.

In 2001, I approached Anthony, asking him to correct the wrong done by Joseph to me, but he refused. The P80 million that they had given was enough, Peter yelled, hurling those words at me. To hear that from one whom I had picked up and nurtured pained me immeasurably.

Joseph's alleged shares were distributed to his heirs. My other siblings had parceled also out some of their alleged shares to their heirs.

No deed of absolute sale for the 82.5% shares that I had placed by implied trust in their names or my parents' names has ever been executed. I have never relinquished ownership of those shares and I have never been paid for those shares.

Moreover, they took Green Cross Alcohol and Zonrox, our prime products, without compensating me for the trademarks, which I continue to own. The trademarks are registered in my name at the Bureau of Patents.

There was nothing for me or my children for all the sweat, hardship and sacrifices that I put into my own company!

It was incomprehensible at first to me that my siblings – whom I have loved dearly and cared for, and even put ahead of my own children – could do this to me. It was the ultimate betrayal.

And their betrayal was not a momentary weakness because it involved longrange planning. They were looking to the future. They knew that my children were my true heirs and, if my siblings did not stage their coup d'etat, my children would inherit the company. So my siblings wiped me out, and in so doing, blotted out my children, too.

When I finally contested my siblings' claims to my company, they terminated the trust fund in my name. Their letter to the bank said that I had violated a provision of the trust agreement by my action, which voided the agreement.

With one stroke, my siblings and their heirs impoverished me and took away the little that my children might have inherited from the trust. Their cunning knew no bounds.

In spite of all of these, it remains my fervent prayer that my siblings and I will be reconciled and I trust that God will do it in my lifetime.

SERVICE TO GOD AND MAN

THE YEAR

was 1950. I had a lovely wife and a newborn baby, and I was gainfully employed. The future looked bright, but I felt something was still missing in my life.

As a Catholic, I had learned in Catechism class that the purpose of our existence is to “know, love and serve God in this world and be with Him in the next.” So far, I had no opportunity to serve God, except in my capacity as a son to my parents, brother to my siblings, husband to my wife and father to my child. I had done little in terms of service to my community.

The Legion of Mary

I accepted the invitation of my friend, Dr. Alfonso Cuyegkeng, to join the Legion of Mary, which is the largest apostolic organization of lay people in the Catholic Church worldwide. It gives glory to God through the sanctification of its members. The members become instruments of the Holy Spirit through a program of prayer and service. Its works include evangelization, religious education and visiting parishioners, prisoners, the aged, the sick or the newly baptized, as well as Pilgrim Virgin Statue rotations and meeting the other spiritual needs of the parish community.

Ostensibly, my reason for joining was to get to know many people and make more friends, which is always good for business. In reality, I was grateful for the opportunity and privilege to serve God. I once explained my reason for serving in the following words: “When we serve God, we cannot be proud. We grow in simplicity and we learn to be faithful in our duties. But, most importantly, we grow in humility.”

Praying the Rosary

For 56 years, up to the time of this writing, I have been a member of the Legion of Mary and I have found not only fulfillment (in service) but also comfort during times of great personal difficulties. Our meetings on Tuesdays to pray the Holy Rosary before the statue of the Blessed Mother and our missions on Saturdays have become very much a part of my routine that I cannot imagine life without either the prayers or the service. (I have always loved praying the Rosary, even as a youth in La Salle and, to this day, I still carry a Rosary in my pocket. I have also taught my children to pray the

Rosary daily and they do this with their respective families.)

Our members at the Legion of Mary have dwindled because some of the original members of our chapter have already gone to heaven. But the rest of us continue meeting every Tuesday at 4 p.m. to pray the Rosary before the statue of the Blessed Mother and to visit the sick on Saturdays. Prior to the imposition of martial law in the Philippines in 1972, our chapter worked in four parishes, as directed by Bishop Juan Velasco. From January to March, we worked in St. Jude, April to June in St. Peter the Apostle, July to September in Mary the Queen Parish (which was started in Zamora Street, but which has since moved to Greenhills) and from October to December in Queen of the Most Holy Rosary Parish. When Martial Law was imposed in the Philippines in 1972, we could no longer go to St. Jude, which was the parish of Malacañang Palace, because of the barricades on Mendiola. Bishop Velasco ordered us to be stationed permanently in Binondo Church, where we still serve today.

Visiting the Sick

Our Saturday mission now is mainly hospital visitation. With Bro. James Wong and Bro. David Tiu, I go to Metropolitan Hospital on Magdalena Street in Manila and visit five to six patients on the sixth floor ward. When we visit the sick, we ask if the patient is a Roman Catholic. If the patient is a Catholic, we give him or her a Holy Rosary and a stampita, a little picture of a saint with some prayers. Then we inquire about the nature of the illness and pray with him or her one *Our Father, Hail Mary and Glory Be*. If the patient is a Protestant, we say one Our Father with him or her. And if the patient is a Buddhist or of another faith, we tell them we will pray for them.

Visiting Their Homes

We also visit families and homes where there are sick people. These visits are important because the sick, especially the aged sick, know God has not abandoned them.

Visiting the sick is one of the corporal works of mercy that we Catholics are encouraged to perform to express our Christian love for our fellow humans. In praying, we intercede for God's will to transpire. Sometimes, God's will is that the person be healed. Sometimes, our mere presence reminds the patient of God's love.

My service includes teaching Catechism to old people who want to be baptized. Recently, I went to Binondo Church to teach Catechism to a 75-year-old man. After baptism, he received the sacraments of Confirmation and the Holy Eucharist. Then he got married in the same church to a 45-year-old woman. I was their godfather.

I taught him the Sign of the Cross, what the Holy Trinity is, the Ten Commandments, the Seven Precepts of the Catholic Church, the Seven Sacraments, what are mortal and venial sins, and what are actual grace and sanctifying grace. "After Baptism," I told the old man, "all the sins of your past life will be washed away. You don't need to confess them." Imagine that – having your slate wiped clean after 75 years! What grace that fellow received!

Knights of Columbus

I liked my church work so much that I also joined the Knights of Columbus on May 1, 1958 and became known to its members as SK Along Co.

The Order of the Knights of Columbus is the world's largest Catholic fraternal service organization. Its members are dedicated to the principles of charity, unity, fraternity and patriotism. Several popes have referred to the Knights of Columbus as "the strong right arm of the Church." Council 4267, to which I belong, was chartered on October 28, 1956.

I was elected Grand Knight, the highest position on the council, in 1992, and served for two terms until 1994. My first term was during the council's 36th year, which had the theme "Spirituality and Dynamic Community Services through Columbianism."

Before I became Grand Knight, I initiated a fund-raising campaign for the construction of the monument of Captain Manuel Colayco, a bona fide hero of Pasay City. Even after my term, I continued to assist every major project of the council, notably the acquisition of a clubhouse known as KC 4267 Center for Charity and Spirituality. I also contributed to the council's scholarship program and served as the chairman of the board of Trustees of the 4267 Pasay Knights Foundation, Inc.

In 1995, the council gave me a plaque of appreciation for "continued dedication and unselfish service for supporting and contributing in all council-sponsored projects." Then, in 1996, during the council's 30th anniversary celebration, the council selected me as the "Knight of the Decade" for my services to the council and my contributions to the "growth, development and enhancement of the image of the Order." The following year, 1997, I also received another plaque of appreciation for "continued and unqualified support and dedication to the scholarship program of the council." In 2005, I received a certificate of appreciation for "steadfast support and significant contribution to the foundation's total scholarship program."

Recently, I was given the Quintessential Knight Award in recognition of my contribution to the growth, development and enhancement of the image of the Order and for my continuing vigorous support of the Council's Scholarship Program. The

award was given on October 21, 2006 during the Council's 50th anniversary celebration at the ballroom of the Century Park Hotel in Malate, Manila.

Today, I remain active with the Knights of Columbus. I join them for prayers, Mass and meetings, and continue to support worthy projects.

Manila Chinese

Catholic Association

Among my involvements in church groups, I served on the board of the Manila Chinese Catholic Association in 1953 and participated in the first conference of the Chinese Catholic Associations in the Philippines on October 17- 18, 1953.

Over the years, I met a lot of people in the church communities as I served in the organizations I belonged to.

Rotary Club of Downtown Manila

I joined the Rotary Club of Downtown Manila (RCDM) in 1988 and served as its president in 1991-1992. The theme of my term was "Look Beyond Yourself" and one of my programs was to initiate scholarships for indigent students of Greater Manila.

My induction as its president was attended by my children, who wholeheartedly supported my involvement in civic activities because these kept me busy and active.

On June 26, 1992, I received the Governor's Citation for Rotarian leadership for giving time, effort, resources, support and cooperation to the governor's programs and activities. The district governor then was Johnny C. Aruego and the occasion was the Rotary's 75th anniversary.

I was so involved in the organization that I attended the functions as diligently as I went to the meetings of my church-related organizations. In fact, in Rotary Year (RY) 1992-1993, I received the 100% Attendance Award.

On October 10, 1993, I was also given an award for exemplary leadership, dedication to philanthropic work and contributions to the RCDM's Charitable Foundation Inc. and the RCDM Scholarship Fund throughout the years.

Hall of Fame

On March 10, 1995, I was inducted into the Hall of Fame and given a plaque for being chairman of the RCDM Charitable Foundation, Inc. The plaque cited meritorious services and exemplary contribution to the club for eight years. I was also named a benefactor of the Rotary Foundation of Rotary International Endowment for World

Understanding and Peace. I received the Four Avenues of Service Citation for Individual Rotarians from Rotary International. (The four avenues for service are: international, community, vocational and club.)

On May 27, 1995, I also received a leadership award as past president and a plaque of recognition as most outstanding Rotarian for the year 1994-1995, on the 16th charter anniversary of our club. The awards ceremony took place at Century Park Sheraton Hotel in Manila and the president then was Johnny TK Cheng, Jr.

After my service as chairman of the RCDM's Charitable Foundation from 1995 to 1998, the board gave me a plaque of appreciation for valuable services as chairman and for wise counsel and active and productive involvement during my term.

On May 22, 1998, I was conferred another RCDM Hall of Fame Award for leadership, dedication, Rotary knowledge and active participation in all club projects and activities even after serving my term as president. This was given during the 19th charter anniversary celebration held at Century Seafood Restaurant at Century Park Hotel in Manila.

More recently, on June 20, 2003, I was recognized as a Major Gift Donor for RY 2002-2003 by District Governor Rosie Dy Go. That was a rare award.

Scholarships

On my own, I have been granting scholarships to high school valedictorians since the 1980s. I used to give a total of P120,000 to five valedictorians each year, but now that amount is divided among four scholars.

Each year, four deserving students are chosen and they each get a check for P30,000, which they can use to help defray their expenses in their first year of college.

Filipino-Chinese Charitable Organization

I served as the treasurer of Filipino-Chinese Charitable Organization for 10 years and a director in 1992. The last two years, I was in charge of the home for the aged.

Chambers of Commerce

I was also a director of the Philippine Chinese General Chamber of Commerce in 1993 and was the president of the Pasay City Chinese Chamber of Commerce for two terms: 2004-2005 and 2006-2007.

CHINESE ASSOCIATIONS

LITTLE DID I KNOW

that in coming to the Philippines I became part of the great Chinese diaspora.

Chinese had been migrating to Southeast Asia, Australia, Africa and the Americas to escape famine, wars and even political corruption on the mainland since the 1800s. This great migration continued until the year 1949, when China closed its borders at the start of Mao Tse Tung's Cultural Revolution.

In their new lands, the Chinese banded together in associations. Those who had the same surname or a similar one, assumed they must have had a common ancestor (albeit a remote one) and were therefore clansmen. They formed clan associations based on family names. Those who were from the same town or district also formed geographic associations.

Many of the Chinese who went in search of better opportunities were men who left families behind in China, or young men starting out in life (like my father). Others were young couples hoping for a brighter future in a new land. Some, like my mother and I, were sent for by family members who had gone ahead and carved a life for themselves in their new lands.

Since the migrants were facing many uncertainties and sometimes even hostility in their new homes, the associations became important to them because these provided protection against discrimination and physical harm. More often than not, however, the protection was for the enterprises that the migrants started. Clansmen supported their businesses, patronized their products and, whenever they could, shut out the competition from outsiders.

The associations also opened doors to livelihood for the unemployed, gave succor to needy brethren, and took care of the orphans, the widows and the aged. Apart from these social services, the associations gave them a venue to express cultural traditions, including speaking their native dialects which helped keep the Chinese culture alive.

Apart from clan associations, there were also geographic associations for the hometown, the home district or the home province. Chinese who were born or who lived on the mainland expressed their affinity for China by joining these geographic associations, which made an effort to give assistance to their hometowns.

The Chinese who were born in China or who had studied there tended to treasure their membership in these associations, while many of their younger kinsmen who were born in their new homelands and had been assimilated there no longer joined these organizations.

New Friends

In my case, I did not join the clan associations for protection or succor. I had grown up here and was hopeful about the future because, after the war, we had entered an era of great opportunities. In fact, I had already started my business and my children were growing up already when I became a member of my first association.

I joined the association because I'm a sociable person. I enjoy meeting people and making new friends. I also knew that by meeting more people, I was expanding my contacts, which was always good for business. I am sure that, as clansmen got to know me, they patronized my products. It was simply the Chinese way – they did business with those they had an affinity with.

The Associations I Joined

The first one I joined was the Chio Ku Kho Family Association and that was in 1967. I served as its president for two terms, from 1985 to 1988.

In 1976, I became a member of the Philippine Kho Association and was its president for a single term from 1994-1995.

Then, in 1981, I joined the Liatsan Family Association which comprises five clans – Lu, Lo, Koh, Co and Chi. I was the president from 1997 to 1999.

I was also a member of the Jin Jiang Association and became its director in 1993. My ancestral village, Chio Ku Kho, is located in Jin Jiang, a district of Fukien province in China.

Recently, I was asked if it was indeed true that only the Chinese who were born or educated in China and who had more than average means could be presidents of these associations. I was never aware that these were leading criteria for selecting presidents. To my mind, the willingness to serve and to initiate projects that would benefit our clans or hometowns were the considerations, and I was happy to do both.

Donations to My Hometown

The clan associations organized trips to our ancestral homes in China and contributed to development there. My brother Anthony and I donated a building for the Chin Yaw Grade School in Chio Ku Kho Village. I also donated another building that serves as a teachers' dormitory for the same school in our village. Another time, I donated funds so that the road in our village could be paved. I also built a pagoda in honor of our parents and a stage where plays could be performed.

Once, my son Syril asked me why I gave such donations to Chio Ku Kho Village. Knowing the extent of poverty there, I wanted – even in some small way – to push back the frontiers of ignorance and illuminate the minds of my former compatriots through education and the arts. And, by building a road, I wished for others to come to the village and for the villagers to have access to the world. Perhaps if thoughts could contend, then flowers would indeed bloom.

THE LINEAGE CONTINUES

BY THE TIME

the 70s rolled in, my business was doing well and providing enough for my family and my father's family. There was time now to enjoy the fruits of my labors.

Like my father before me, I wanted my lineage secured, so I encouraged my oldest son, Syril, to get married. Syril recalls that I told him that I didn't care whom he chose for his wife – he could marry anyone from any race just as long as she was a Catholic. I figured that they would have a better chance of surviving as a couple if they were of the same faith.

Syril Gets Married

Syril obliged. He was 21 and picked Gliceria "Vicky" Geronimo Ang to be his wife. It was not an arranged marriage; not even a matchmaker was involved. They were colleagues from work.

They got married on February 14, 1971 in Our Lady of Sorrows Church on Harrison Street, Pasay City. The reception was held at Golden Peacock Restaurant on Roxas Boulevard. It was a significant event among our relatives and our clan because Syril was the firstborn son.

After he got married, I gave Syril P7,500 and a handwritten list of chemicals to order. I wanted him to start his own galenicals business. Working together, Syril and Marciano established Cirimar Laboratories, which came from the shortened combination of their names, Cirilo and Marciano.

To their credit, Syril and Marciano did very well and, despite a tough beginning, were able to expand the company. Pablo and Felix joined them and they moved into the importation of medical supplies and baby products, and started new businesses as well. Today, those businesses sustain them and their families.

In fact, one of their companies, Comark International Corporation, was the Parangal ng Bayan and National Consumers Excellence Awardee in 2003 for "most outstanding feeding bottle for babies" under the Farlin brand, and "outstanding

household product” under the Zim brand.

Separately, Felix set up Maximedia International, while Cecile and Ana formed Star Media Entertainment. Agnes went into manufacturing corrugated boxes, while Lucy established a garments factory.

My First Grandchild

To return to the story, in due time, Vicky got pregnant and bore Syril a child on November 23, 1972. Their firstborn was a boy whom they named Dennis.

My father and I were happy because he had seen his great grandchild and I had seen my grandchild. But it was Katherine who was ecstatic. We “borrowed” Dennis from his parents and soon he was living with us. It must have been difficult for Vicky and Syril, considering that he was their firstborn. But, to their credit, they generously shared Dennis with us, and I am grateful for that.

There is something about having a young child in the house that adds vigor to old bones and zest to life. Dennis quickly became the apple of Katherine’s eye and she took care of him the way she did our children, albeit less strictly. We always took Dennis with us whenever we traveled abroad.

18 Grandchildren

Syril and Vicky had two more children, Vinson and Sheelah, who was my first granddaughter.

One by one, our other children got married and we had more grandchildren. In 1975, Agnes married John Tan from Roxas City. They now have four children: Allan Jason, Andy Joseph, Joy Angeline and Jade Abigail.

Marciano was next to tie the knot. On September 5, 1976, he married Remedios Tan from Manila. They have three children: Ryan Madison, Rex Marcus and Ronson Miles.

Then Pablo and Gaudencia Zamora from Dipolog took the plunge on February 15, 1977. Now they have four kids: Patrick, Kerwin, Karina and Kristine.

On May 18, 1980, Lucy got married to Danilo Ong, her sweetheart from their college days in Adamson. They have two children, Liam Derek and Lance Darryl.

Then on January 3, 1993, Cecile married Antonio Yu, who worked at the United Nations headquarters in New York.

My youngest daughter Ana and Felipe Puno tied the knot in 1989. They have two children: Janine Alexi and Adrian Justin.

Now, I have 18 grandchildren and the continuance of our line is assured. In the Chinese culture, this is indeed a reason for celebration.

Katherine's Illness

Bereavement, however, would also visit our family. In the early 1980s, Katherine began to experience soreness in her left arm. To relieve the soreness, the helper would massage her arm with warmed-up ginger oil or Katherine would apply other home remedies or Chinese medicine. When the soreness persisted, however, we went to the best doctors.

Six or seven doctors said the soreness was part of the ageing process. It was Dr. Eduardo Jamora (the doctor of the late President Ferdinand Marcos) who discovered that Katherine had cancer of the nasal pharynx, which spread to the bone. He said it might have been caused by inhaling the oil-laden smoke from all the cooking that she did. The cancer had also affected her lungs and her left arm.

It was a debilitating illness that gnawed at her from within. Katherine became frail and fragile. Cecile watched over her in the hospital and I hovered around, helpless to do anything to ease her pain.

Katherine's only concerns were all for the living – for the family that she would leave behind. She told Cecile to take care of me, Dennis, Felix, Ana and my mother-in-law, who was living with us. Katherine also made our sons promise that they would build houses on a property where the family could live together.

While Katherine bore her sufferings with grace, seeing her go through that was difficult for me. I had built a strong enterprise on two good ideas that took off like rockets. The company had gone from strength to strength and I had achieved so much. But, for my wife who was in agony, I could do nothing but entrust her to God.

Katherine's Death

Katherine passed away on March 31, 1983. It was the birthday of our daughter Lucy, who was pregnant with her first child. I don't think anybody remembered to greet her a happy birthday.

It was a sad day for all of us. My spouse, my mate for 35 years, was gone. Even though I had known that the cancer would take Katherine someday, I was not prepared for the sense of loss that engulfed me when she died. There are times today, more

than 20 years later, when I still miss her and long to be with her. You never really get over the death of a loved one. You just soldier on because you must.

I didn't leave my room for more than a month after her death. In my seclusion, I mourned for her, but I also spent that time praying. I was sad that she was gone, but I was also glad that she was not suffering anymore and that she had gone to a better place. I look forward to seeing her in heaven when it's my turn to go.

Caring for Dennis

Before she left, Katherine told me to take care of Dennis. My wife was very wise. She knew that caring for Dennis, who was 10 years old then, would give me a sense of purpose and would help assuage the loneliness that Dennis and I would feel after she was gone.

Dennis had difficulty adjusting to life without her because she had been such a big figure in his life. I myself was mournful. The best solution was to have Dennis share my room, so he moved in. That was a good thing for me because I suffered from *bangungot*, a mysterious disorder that claims the life of men as they sleep. (Apparently, only Filipino males are afflicted by *bangungot*. They get dreams and, in their death throes, they try to speak. No words emerge, only gurgling sounds. If no one wakes them up, they die.) Who knows? Dennis may have saved my life because, several times, he woke me up when he heard me gurgling in my sleep.

Being my roommate for 11 years, Dennis acquired some of my habits. At the start, I picked up after him because, like most children, he was untidy and rambunctious. From my example, he learned how to be neat in appearance and organized with his belongings. And he grew up to be mild mannered and gentle in speech. Dennis will tell you that he has never heard me curse or say a bad word. It was not because I tried to be a good example but because I knew cursing was offensive to God.

Deathbed Promise

In 1984, the year after Katherine died, we moved from a rented house on Sta. Monica Street where we had been living since the early 70s to a compound on Zamora Street. To honor their deathbed promise to their mother, my sons built four apartments and a bungalow in the Zamora compound so that the family could be together.

I lived in the bungalow with my third daughter Cecile and my grandson Dennis. Ana was living in the US at that time, and Agnes and Lucy had gone to live with their husbands when they got married. Cyril, Marciano, Pablo and Felix had one apartment each. Then, when the families grew, Cyril transferred to a house in Magallanes, and Marciano and Pablo occupied two apartments each, while Felix and I shared the

bungalow.

Cecile's Role

After my wife Katherine passed away, my third daughter Cecile took over the running of my household and devoted herself to caring for Dennis and me. Cecile felt her responsibility so keenly that she didn't get married until she was 36. I'm grateful for her sacrifices because she did us a world of good at home. I cannot describe the comfort that her presence gave me during our time of grief and in the years that followed. Even today, Cecile continues to take care of us, making time in her busy schedule to attend to our domestic concerns.

Dennis also acknowledges his Auntie Cecile's role in bringing him up. He says he is fortunate not only to have his parents, but also to have known and been cared for by his grandparents and his Auntie Cecile.

To hear him say that warms my heart because other kids have grown bitter about growing up apart from their parents and siblings. (Until his brother Vinson was three or four years old, he didn't know that Dennis and he were brothers. Vinson thought that Dennis was just a friend visiting them.) Dennis has chosen to take the high road and be grateful that he has been lovingly raised by so many of us. I think that is another thing that Dennis has learned from me — seeing the good rather than the bad in any situation.

More Demonstrative

The loss of their mother made my girls, particularly Lucy and Agnes, more demonstrative of their affection toward me. Lucy says it was wasted time that they didn't have the boldness to tell their mother that she was loved and very much appreciated.

I am reaping the joys of being loved by my children. They have left me in no doubt of their affection and respect for me and have rallied around me whenever I've needed them. What more can a man ask for in his old age than to find strong pillars in his children? God has blessed me indeed!

No, Thank You

When I was a new widower (I was just 61 when Katherine died), a relative tried to set up a match for me, but I declined, saying, "No, thank you. I have eight children and many grandchildren." Apart from knowing that no one could replace Katherine in my affection, I preferred not to bring in a new wife whom my children might not like. I had spent so much of my life creating harmonious relationships within the family that I did not want to bring in someone who might disrupt the tenor of our lives.

Good Works and Singing Lessons

Instead, I devoted myself to charitable and civic works. I also started taking singing lessons in the latter part of the 1980s.

My first voice teacher was a fellow named Velasco. His wife was the pianist. I used to go to their studio in Sampaloc, Manila. It was Velasco who taught me the Spanish and Italian songs that I love singing to this day.

Later on, I took more voice lessons at Ryan Cayabyab's Music Studio at Robinson's Galleria in Ortigas Center. I still take weekly lessons not only because singing is entertaining (and fun during gatherings like my 80th birthday), but also because of the beneficial effects of the breathing exercises. The breathing exercises help the process of oxidation, which helps the organs to remain healthy.

Health Conscious

I've always been a health buff. Even in my salad days, I was conscious about the need to remain fit and healthy.

In 1990, when I was already 68 years old, I joined the Gua Tan Kung Health Club of Manila. The members gather in Luneta at 6:30 a.m. to perform physical exercises until about 7:30 a.m. Majority of the members of the club are now 80 years old or more.

Prostate Cancer

A bout with prostate cancer and a mild stroke in my later years have amplified my belief that we need to sleep well, eat right and exercise enough to maintain our health.

In 1992, when I was 70 years old, I was diagnosed as having prostate cancer. My children, Syril and Cecile, took me to the renowned Stanford Medical Center in Palo Alto, California, for radiation treatment.

Syril remembers driving around Palo Alto to get his bearings so that he could take me to my appointment the following day. The next day, however, the traffic was rerouted. He pulled over to the roadside and we both searched the map to find an alternate route. Two traffic cops waved us on emphatically but they did not give us a ticket because we were obviously lost. Fortunately, my son found another way to the hospital and I was on time for my appointment. Subsequently, Syril hired a Filipino driver to take us around.

We were there for two months, living in a rented apartment in Palo Alto, the town

that derives much of its character from the esteemed Stanford University. Cecile kept house for us. During the week, I went for my treatments at Stanford Medical Center.

On weekends, we went out of town to see other places like the churches in the area and the vineyards of Napa Valley. I remember going to Las Vegas where I shook hands with the one-armed bandit. It was a brief acquaintance and strictly for amusement. At the very least, it took our minds away from my treatment.

St. Padre Pio and Venerable Edel Quinn

After two months of being treated at Stanford, I returned to Manila. Several months later, I was declared cancer free. I was convinced that, apart from the treatment, the love that all my children showed me as they rallied around me and the intercession of St. Fr. Pio and the Venerable Edel Quinn (a legionnaire working in Africa), contributed to my healing.

At that time, I promised St. Pio that I would make a pilgrimage to his shrine in Italy if I got better and I fulfilled that promise in November 2006.

Mild Stroke

The other significant illness that I suffered was a mild stroke on November 15, 1995. My lips became numb, I couldn't pronounce words very well and my toes were also stiff.

When I was allowed to leave the hospital, I spent a lot of time in my bedroom praying. I called on Mama Mary and a lot of saints and I was healed. The stroke did not do any permanent damage and, today, after some therapy, there is no trace of it.

However, I am careful now. I think I suffered my stroke then because I was always on the go. I had too many engagements and would eat out for lunch and dinner. That made me careless about my food intake. Also, all the socials meant that I would be drinking alcohol. Because I was having such a good time, before I knew it, I had put away half a bottle of whisky. That was also injurious to my health.

I had to "slow down" after that. I cut down on the number of engagements that I attended and I drank only half a glass of wine. Today, I think I'm healthier than I have ever been in the latter stage of my life!

Death of My Parents

In 1991, my father died. My mother preceded him by two years, having departed in 1989. They had lived to a ripe old age (my father was wheelchair bound in the latter years of his life) and their passing from this earth was expected.

I was saddened at their demise because they had been such central figures in my life, but I was joyful also because, prior to their death, they accepted Jesus and were baptized as Catholics. My father took the Christian name Jesus and my mother the name Maria. Thus they were enrolled in the book of life as Jesus Co Ay Tian and Maria Lo Siok Kee.

They are with Katherine now in the next life and I will join them someday. But not immediately. I still have much to do in this life.

Dennis Gets Married

As the new millennium approached, my thoughts turned once again to my progeny. This time, like my father before me, I wanted to see my great grandchildren. So my first grandchild Dennis Ko and his girlfriend Annabel Lee got some gentle nudging from me to get married.

I went as far as booking at San Agustin Church in Manila and reserving the ballroom at Century Park Sheraton Hotel for one Sunday in February 2000. Annabel recalls that I even asked them if they needed furniture and a place to stay.

My plans for them were premature. While marriage was in the air, they had not actually discussed it in detail. The date I chose came and went with no wedding, so I forfeited the money I had put down for the occasion. Dennis, however, made me a solemn promise that he would get married that year.

The couple decided to get married in December, the last month possible for Dennis to carry out his promise (because there is no 13th month and therefore no more extension, Dennis jokes). The church, Santuario de San Antonio in Forbes Park, was available on December 10, so they got married on that day. Their reception for 800 guests was held at the Shangri-La Hotel in Makati.

First Great Grandchild

Like Syril and Vicky, I was proud and happy that Dennis had come to this milestone in his life and eagerly I awaited the offspring of their union. In August 27, 2001, they had a baby girl whom they named Ashley, and I doted on her as she was my first great grandchild.

Now, every Saturday, I call her and invite her to go out with me on Sunday. Dennis and Annabel understand that my invitation to Ashley means they can come, too. So we all get together at Rockwell to have a meal and watch a movie (usually cartoons or something that a five-year-old child can watch).

Gonzalo Denzel Born

On March 17, 2006, Dennis and Annabel had another child, a boy, whom they named Gonzalo Denzel Ashton Lee Ko IV. According to Chinese custom, the lineage is passed on from the oldest son to his oldest son. Now we have four generations living – me, Syril, Dennis and Gonzalo Denzel.

My joy overflows when I contemplate how richly I am blessed by God to have a long life and to see my progeny. I see Gonzalo Denzel a lot too, because, when Ashley and I go malling on Sundays, Dennis and Annabel also bring him along.

Five Great Grandchildren

Before long, my other grandchildren got married and started their own families. At the time of this writing, I already have five great grandchildren. Ashley and Gonzalo Denzel from Dennis and Annabel; Rissa Mikaela from Ryan and Marvy Mariz; Andre Joaquin from Andy Joseph and Rosalyn; and Sierra Bianca from Patrick and Erica. One more is on the way as Kerwin's wife Girlie is pregnant.

I have greeted each arrival with gladness for they are God's blessings to me in my old age. It is for them that I am writing this book – that they may have something to remember me by.

TRAVELING WITH THE FAMILY

OF ALL THE PLACES

that I've been to in this world, I loved visiting China. The ancient land was my birthplace and the cradle of the Chinese culture which influences me even to this day. I've been to China numerous times, with clan associations, with the Rotary and with members of my family. But I enjoyed it most when I was tour guide to my wife, my children and, more recently, my grandchildren.

With the precision that I planned my sales trips in Luzon during my younger days, I planned our "expeditions" into China. From the flight schedule to hotel accommodations and transportation, no detail escaped me. I wanted the logistics to be perfect so that nothing could detract from our enjoyment of the places we visited and the time we had together.

First Visit

The first time I returned to China was with my wife Katherine and my parents in the late 1950s. Our first stop was Sim Sung. From there, we went to Chio Ku Kho Village in Fujian Province in the southern part of China.

It was a long journey by car. I noticed immediately that the roads had improved from the days of my youth and that motor vehicles were the predominant mode of transportation compared to the rickshaws and sedan chairs of my youth there.

But closer to our village, the changes were less dramatic, even after 17 years. The narrow road in our village was still a dirt path and I would eventually donate funds so that it could be paved and made weather-proof. (Photographs of the paved road can be found in the previous chapter.) Many of the houses looked the same, perhaps because the style of architecture did not vary much. However, I noticed there were more houses and the population was not as sparse as in my youth. China's closing of its doors during the Cultural Revolution had effectively halted the great Chinese migration.

Another change was that electricity had come to our village. There is a photograph of my mother at the ribbon cutting ceremony for the connection of electrical power to

our village for the first time.

Historic Shanghai

Our second destination was Shanghai, a city full of history and the most cosmopolitan of the cities of Mainland China. I remember taking Katherine there back in the 1970s and staying at the Shanghai Hotel.

One of my favorite stops in Shanghai is the memorial of Su Kuang Chi, who was prime minister during the Ming Dynasty. He was converted to Christianity and was instrumental in the conversions to the Catholic faith of many politicians of his time. His hometown was Shanghai, where a memorial was built in his honor. In Manila, the Chinese name of Xavier College is Kuang Chi College.

Political Beijing

Our third destination was, of course, the capital of China, Beijing, the site of the Forbidden City and our gateway to the Great Wall of China – the only manmade structure on earth that can be seen from the moon! It was built during the Ching Dynasty to keep out the invaders. To me, it is a symbol of what man can accomplish when political will is melded with the indomitable human spirit.

These are my usual stops in China but once Katherine, my daughter Ana and my son Felix went for a month-long trip to 12 cities. I was busy at work in the Philippines so I could not travel with them. I did manage, however, to catch up with them in Hong Kong, their final stop, where we spent a few days together.

Appreciating Our Heritage

I can no longer remember the number of times I've been to China, but I have tried to bring as many of my children there as I can. Anna, the most avant garde of my children, says I dragged her there against her will, but in the end, she was glad that she went to discover her "roots." Seeing our humble origin from a village in the "middle of nowhere" made her appreciate where she is today.

Apart from going back to our roots, I want my children, grandchildren and great grandchildren to appreciate the Chinese culture. The richness, depth and intricacies of our Chinese heritage become most apparent in the cauldron of our culture. There one gets steeped in it, even only momentarily.

I am not "traditional" in the same way that many of my peers who were also born in China are. Education, opportunity, travel and faith have broadened my horizon. However, these have not stopped me from appreciating my heritage. You could say that I savor those times that I am in China, like a person eating his or her favorite dish.

I like bringing my family to China because it's also "bonding time" – especially for me and my grandchildren who become my roommates during the trip. It's my chance to inculcate in them values that I uphold through our conversations and stories I tell. That way I don't sound preachy, "old school" or irrelevant to them.

With Lucy's Family

Lucy remembers a trip we took to Beijing, Shanghai and Hong Kong. I had been asking Lucy, her husband Danilo and their children Liam and Lance to go with me to China for a long time, but with their work and the kids' schooling, we were only able to go in 2005. The trip we made was rigorous, but I am happy to report that I was able to keep up with my younger companions, thanks to the exercises that I do regularly and the cuisine that I eat.

Whenever we stopped to eat and it was time to pay the bill, Lucy would try and grab the tab from me and we would argue quite vociferously for the privilege of paying for the meal. I think we did it so loudly that my grandchildren were somewhat embarrassed. Lucy admonished me that I was spending so much already, particularly when I purchased special gifts for her children, Liam and Lance. I told her, "What good is money if I can't spend it to buy gifts for my grandchildren?" That's one of God's blessings to me – to be a grandfather with sufficient means to be generous to my children and their children and their children's children.

Riches in Heaven

Don't get me wrong. I'm not wasteful about money, not especially since I spent a lifetime saving and being thrifty. Habits like those die hard. In fact, during a tour to Bangkok, when a fellow tourist, overladen with shopping bags, clambered on to the bus, I told Dennis, "Look at him. He's spending a lot for last minute shopping, buying all that he can get his hands on, but where will all those things be a hundred years from now? Those things don't last." Another time, in Hong Kong, I told him and his brother Vinson, "You don't have to buy the branded items always. It's better to be simple, to live a simple life."

I was trying to tell them that to be excessively attached to material objects or branded goods is to lose sight of the fact that the things of this world are fleeting and are there only for our convenience. I know this view clashes with the ostentatious display of wealth and the materialism of some Chinese. I do not mean to criticize them. I just want to let my grandchildren know that there are other ways to spend their wealth and that it's better to store up riches in heaven where rust, decay or moths can't destroy them.

Whenever I can, I take the opportunity to impart those little pearls to my

grandchildren. Fortunately, they don't think that I am such an old stuffed shirt. On the contrary, they like being my roommates. It is a chance for them to get to know me as Dennis has and we talk about a lot of things. Because of these conversations, they realize that education, travel and new experiences all broaden the mind.

Vinson's Joke

These trips also bring us closer. They know they can come to me with any of their concerns and that they can kid around with me. Vinson is the boldest of them. He likes to joke because he knows I enjoy a good laugh, even if the joke is on me. One time, when we were in Singapore, Dennis went for an after-dinner stroll and I asked where he was because it was 11 p.m. already. Vinson replied, "Don't worry, Grandpa. Dennis will come back." Vinson thinks that when he goes on his own late night strolls, I don't worry about him, like I do about Dennis. He doesn't know that I ask where he is and that I sleep fitfully until I know he's back in the room. When you're a grandparent, you can't help being concerned about your grandchildren, no matter how old they are!

Fulfilling a Promise

More recently, in November 2006, I went on a pilgrimage tour to Rome and Italy. I was fulfilling my promise to St. Padre Pio that I would visit his shrine if I got well from prostate cancer back in 1992. On this trip, I took along Agnes and her husband John, Cecilia and her husband Antonio, as well as my grandchildren Joy Angeline, Jade Abigail and Vinson.

Everywhere we went, there were pieces of art to ogle, great architecture to admire or lovely scenery to enjoy. Everything was spick-and-span and geared for maximum tourist satisfaction. At the shrines of the saints, we always found something to ponder. For instance, we wondered why the churches were empty. In a lot of the churches, many devotees are Filipinos, some of them migrants or workers in Europe.

My grandchildren know this to be a trait of mine. Whenever we arrive in a city where we will be for the weekend, I always look for a Catholic church where we can hear Mass on Sunday. I have never missed a Mass on Sunday even in a foreign land. I know I cannot be faithful to God in behalf of my grandchildren, but perhaps my faith-filled convictions will make an impression on them.

During a recent trip to Italy, my daughters and grandchildren were worried that I might not be able to keep up with the tour guide, so they brought along a wheelchair for me. I refused to use it until we got to Florence. One of the jewels of Italy, Florence is a walking city. A favorite destination is the *piazza* where the statues of Michelangelo and Medusa can be found. There I relented and allowed them to take me around in the wheelchair. Several days of touring and only fitful sleep at night had finally taken their

toll on me. Irrepressible Vinson, Cyril's second son, decided to run while pushing my wheelchair down a cobblestone path. It was a teeth-clattering experience, almost like a rickshaw ride down an unpaved road in the China of my youth.

I've been to many places like Singapore, Malaysia, Thailand, Europe, North and South America, but I have never been to Australia. Perhaps this year (2007), I'll visit Australia.

CHAPTER 12

MY LEGACY

WHEN MY CHILDREN

asked me to leave a legacy to future generations by writing this book, I was overwhelmed by the task because I have lived only a simple life. Then it occurred to me that therein lay my legacy to them – the simplicity of my life and the quiet joy that I have felt living this existence.

Body

The first part has to do with prolonging life by physical action. We must eat right, exercise enough and sleep well.

After my experience with prostate cancer and a mild stroke, I have become convinced that we must watch our food intake. Prevention is better than cure.

It is better to start preventive care this early on in life, instead of waiting until we have all sorts of ailments before dieting desperately in the hope that we can still fix what is wrong with our bodies. Some things, like clogged arteries, cannot be undone without drastic intervention. So eat the right food!

I eat a lot of vegetables and fruits. I have oatmeal in the morning because it's good for absorbing bad cholesterol. I eat a lot of *camote*. I hardly eat meat – no pork, no beef, only native chicken and fish. Nothing fried, just steamed or boiled. It's good to eat fibrous foods. Aside from providing roughage to help eliminate toxins from the body, basic fibrous foods are also not costly. For the budget conscious dieter, you'll find that vegetables are generally cheaper than meat.

Exercise at least half an hour each day. At 85, I still go to the gym at the Westin Philippine Plaza Hotel. For my cardiovascular routine, I use the treadmill for 20 minutes and the stationary bicycle for another 20 minutes. Then I lift some weights to keep my muscles from becoming weak. Exercise is good for the heart and for blood circulation. When your blood is circulating well, your organs are receiving enough oxygen and nutrients and expelling toxins properly, thereby increasing your general health. Exercise also releases endorphins, the chemicals that occur naturally in your brain to keep you

happy. However, here's a word of caution: If you haven't been exercising regularly, check with your doctor before you begin an exercise regimen.

The third element is good sleep. Most people take sleep for granted. At the end of the day, however late at night or close to dawn it is, you're tired and so you tumble into bed and hopefully sleep until it's time to get up again. Well, here's something you need to know. Between 10 p.m. and 2 a.m., the body recharges the immune system. Those four hours of sleep are crucial if you want to prolong your lifespan. Over an extended period of time, if you miss those crucial sleeping hours, you are doing your body incalculable harm. Additionally, you need to sleep at least seven hours a night. You need to give yourself ample time to go through the cycles of sleep so you can reach that level of deep, regenerative and healing sleep. My busy schedule sometimes keeps me up late, but no later than 11 p.m. And I do get seven hours of sleep each night.

Mind and Emotions

Part two has to do with the mind and the emotions — or the soul of a person. Think happy. Be positive. Laugh at least three times a day. And keep on smiling. I cannot stress enough the importance of all these. Thinking happy thoughts, being positive, laughing and smiling transform your countenance, make you look younger and help reduce stress. Stress causes acidity in the body, which is the environment that cancer and other disease-causing cells (free radicals) thrive in.

When you are sick, laughter lightens your sickness. If a person who is sick of cancer has a normal, happy existence, his or her life will be prolonged. If the sick person is moody, worried, sad or bitter everyday, he or she will not live as long. These observations are valid. I have been visiting five or six sick people every Saturday for 50 years and have met tens of thousands of ailing people and prayed with them or for them. The happy ones live longer.

Thinking happy thoughts and being positive are not attitudes that are achieved overnight. These are built over a period of time. You pick happiness instead of sadness, peace instead of strife, mildness instead of anger, forgiveness instead of resentment or revenge. Each time you encounter one of these choices, you make a decision. Every time you choose the better alternative, you are fortifying a good habit and affirming the best in you. Over a lifetime, you can become one of the greatest positive forces in the lives of people around you. So decide today! The choice is yours.

By the way, you make that decision to pick good instead of bad with your brain, regardless of how you feel about something. Even in the midst of trouble, you can decide to be happy.

You can also decide to let things pass, particularly when somebody offends you. You have a choice – to get angry or to be forgiving. Being forgiving is not the easier option, but (in my view) it's the better one. If you take the longer perspective, if you look beyond this life, the offense committed against you becomes insignificant, especially if you want to go to heaven.

God is there to watch. When other people take advantage of you, when they take something from you, God knows. And He will deal with them in His own time and in His own way.

Spirit

The third part has to do with the spirit. After all, we are tripartite beings: body, soul and spirit. The spirit is the great, unseen part of us, the one made in the image and likeness of God. God is Spirit. We approach God through prayer and meditation. We cannot “reach” God if we are earth-bound, if we persist with worldly desires, if we cling to material things, if we see only as far as this life, and if our values are of the flesh and not of the spirit.

I tell my children and grandchildren, “When something negative happens, pray. Prayer is the most important action that you can take. It brings you right into the throne room of God, the Almighty, who can move heaven and earth for you. Prayer to our Blessed Mother and the Saints can make them whisper in God’s ear on your behalf.”

Our integrity and the values that we espouse are also very important. Material things are passing and we should not be too attached to them. I recall a film titled *Good Earth*. The protagonist, a woman, went through her lifetime holding on to a pearl that was very dear to her. Often she held that pearl in her clenched fist. However, when she died, the pearl slid from her lifeless hand and rolled away.

The lesson of *Good Earth* is that we cannot hold forever on to anything earthly that is dear to us. Certainly, we cannot take our money, our jewelry and our property with us to the afterlife. The world today is becoming too materialistic and too attached to creature comforts. If we have enough to eat, enough to spend, enough to give to the people, we’re OK already. It is important to keep on sharing, giving to the people in need.

In my lifetime, I have experienced both lack and hardship. For about 20 years, I sacrificed so that I could build a business to support my siblings and my family. My wife and children had to sacrifice with me because I ploughed whatever earnings I could save back into the business to fund its expansion. God blessed my efforts

with success. Eventually, the business was earning enough so that I could share the blessings with others.

Look Beyond

My children say it's *All Mine to Give*, after the title of a movie. The reason why I can share generously is because I maintain this frame of mind: What God has given me remains His to dispose. Having been blessed by God, I am, consequently, a channel or a conduit of His blessings. (When I was president of the Rotary Club of Downtown Manila, the theme of my term was "Look Beyond Yourself.")

To be avaricious, to be attached to wealth and to think that I have achieved all these by my own effort alone would be terrible mistakes that would put my soul in jeopardy. For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world but to lose his soul?

At the grand old age of 85, I think that I can say: Don't be attached to material things because these are passing. What is important is beyond this world, beyond this life. I practice a very powerful and deep meditation during which I contemplate my last end. (When you come to understand the magnitude of God's love, contemplation on death is not a fearful experience.)

When meditating on death, everything is suspended, floating. I have no desire, no more ambition, no more worldly things to cling to. I can begin to look beyond myself, beyond this life. Nothing should remain that stands between me and God.