



THE LAICO CLAN AT THE BICOL REUNION 1977

FRONT ROW: Jovim, Rey, Jondie, Carlo, Aisa, Lia, Bambi, Gina, Paul, Jorge, Rick, Sara

SECOND ROW (boys kneeling): Jimboy, Arthur, Gumby, Michael

THRID ROW: Bingbing with Bubbles, Bibot, Tonnette, Chicho, Lola Luz, Popoy, Ching, Nini, Malu

BACK ROW: Rene, Cris, Mammie, Eddie, Dan, Pepi, Vic

*MEMORIES OF LEGAZPI*

by Marnie Elizaqa

C. Ayala, Dasma, and BF homes have special memories for most of us, but if you really want to explore Lola's roots, they are in Legazpi and Daraga. When I was twelve, (don't ask when; it was a long time ago) spending the school year at Lola's, I traveled the long road to Legazpi with Tita Malu and Tita Chin-chin (Los Banos) in a jeep. The road cuts through hills of red earth and through a rainforest. It is a long, long journey. After a stop in Naga (Naga-po, Lola used to say), we were back on the highway passing dark mountains enveloped in mist. We passed whitewashed cemeteries busy with people putting oranges and other food on the tombs. It was the first of November, and Chinese Filipinos were making offerings to their ancestors.

In Daraga we stayed at Lolo Coeng's house (Lola's brother, a former mayor of Legaspi). Father Tito Bolinas had died the night before, and we went to Lola Irene's (not "I-reen" but Ee-re-ne, Lola's sister) house for the wake. Lola Ne had a beautiful home with lots of fine wood, a blue tile roof and elegant iron chains instead of downspouts. That day, a

glass-topped casket held the priest's body in the front room. Relatives peered at him and clucked that he had gotten so thin. The men sat on the back patio looking inebriated. I joined my classmate-cousin, Cecile (Cookie Bolinas) on the front porch with other young cousins, Tita Myrna and Tita Coty. Cecile led me around, told me who all the relatives were, informed me of their family reputations ("That's Tito So-and-so. He still runs around with a *barkada* (clique) ") and translated all the jokes. The raucous laughter was occasionally shushed by someone who realized this was supposed to be a serious occasion. But in Bicol, no one is ever serious for long. Later in the week we attended the funeral mass at the cathedral, in which the altar is a huge piece of lava rock from the volcano.

The next morning, we found Meg Los Banos and Ponti sticking flowers with toothpicks into a small palm log. This was to take to the cemetery that evening for All Soul's Day. Meg was about five years older than I, very friendly, articulate in English, and she also spoke Bicol very clearly so I could eventually understand some of the words. I thought, why

didn't anyone ever tell me this really nice person existed? I was overwhelmed with all the fun relatives I was discovering. That night we walked to the family gathering at the cemetery, nearly tripping over small mounds of earth along the path, marked by stick crosses, where I surmised poor babies were buried. The cemetery was crowded with families spending time with their departed ones. We found Lolo Coeng and his family in front of Lola Piang's tomb, which was elegant gray granite, and very pretty with Meg's floral arrangements and candles. As I had never visited a cemetery before, nor had any experiences with death in the family, this trip was quite a fascinating and profound experience. The rituals expressed the culture in a way that I had never seen. In front of the cemetery there was a brightly lit carnival and a night market which reinforced the oddly festive nature of the evening.

We migrated to the Hotel Rex, which is owned by the family. Some rooms had walls with vivid oil murals by Tita Liddy and Tita Fran. There was a little restaurant where Tito Adit hung out a lot and you could order a hamburger or a chicken sandwich (although you might want a

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