

ARE WE A CLOSE-KNIT FAMILY?
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of *ninangs* and *ninongs* for Eamon and Isa. After each of our children's births, Tita Mitos, Tito Randy, Paolo, and Jeff were there to welcome the new arrival, with a delicious Chinese banquet! Having lived in New Jersey for a lengthy time, we also welcomed other relatives passing through during certain stages in their careers: Marnie Elizaga, Andrew Elizaga, Gina David, Jondi and Mayleen Laico, Mike David, Rey David, Gina Villanueva. They all took refuge at Tita Mitos and Tito Randy's comfortable Laico Center. Since we moved to the West Coast, we've sadly missed out on the sumptuous Thanksgiving dinners there, complete with *kare-kare* and *pansit luglug*. But not to worry, because we now have an executive membership to a Laico Center here in the Northwest--Nini's House!

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GROUND ZERO

by Pee wee Laico-Villanueva

Joedie, my eldest son, was going to celebrate his 24th birthday on Oct. 3. And Walter Hautzig, my former piano professor at Peabody Conservatory, had invited me to a concert he was giving to celebrate his 80th birthday. Since everybody in the States was on alert due to the Sept. 11 disaster, I figured that it was one of the safest times to travel. Plane fares too were at bargain prices. Because of these two factors, I decided to travel to celebrate those two occasions mentioned.

After a direct flight via PAL from Manila to Los Angeles, I spent a few days with Joedie whom I felt like I hadn't seen in ages, even though I had just visited him a year ago. It also gave me a chance to get over my jet lag. Then I proceeded across the country to the East Coast via the now-notorious American Airlines. The LA airport was very strict about passengers carrying metal objects. They even confiscated my tweezers. Cars were not allowed by the terminal so we had to take a shuttle bus from the parking lot to the terminal. Surprisingly, Newark airport was more lenient than LAX because Mitos drove right by the curb to pick me up. On Oct. 29, the day of Walter Hautzig's concert, Randy, Mitos, and I went on a smooth drive in their new Jaguar from New Jersey to Manhattan. It was the first time I had seen Manhattan without traffic. I expected Manhattan to have some smoke from the smoldering disaster site but instead; it was clear skies and a smog-free atmosphere that greeted us. That rains that had fallen a few days after the disaster had cleaned out the smoldering ashes and smoky atmosphere. The efficiency of the New Yorkers was evident from the speedy clearing out of all signs of the disaster except for the cordoned-off area.

We parked the car and walked towards the Ground Zero site, which had been cordoned off. However, one could get a glimpse of the red steel girders, which used to be the core of the World Trade Towers, and the gaping vacant space where the buildings used to be. Assigned New York cops made sure a reverent attitude was maintained by the numerous passers-by. No one could linger around and chat or even take snapshots. You could just pause for a while, long enough to say a prayer, then move on. One of the remaining buildings was all black from the flames and it looked as though its insides had been yanked out because of all the damaged and bent steel bars jutting out from it. All the portalets being used by the debris workers were lined up by the entire frontage of one of the structures, which happened to be an Episcopalian church. (Talk about reverence!) The Merrill Lynch building on Wall Street was still covered with ashes, which remained untouched due to reverence for the cremated remains. Seeing the



Eamon in his astronaut suit.

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