



Ford family at Salish Lodge, Snoqualmie Falls.

ARE WE A CLOSE-KNIT FAMILY?

by Cristina Ford

Of course, everything is relative, heh-heh. But seriously, in the wake of Sept. 11, we would do well to shake off the shock and start appreciating each other as a family.

That fated morning, our phone rang at 7:30 am. I was up, but only because Sue, my running partner, would be knocking on the door soon. Mike, who is known to keep very late working hours, was enjoying the whole bed to himself, after I got up. Simultaneously checking his caller-ID and the clock, he said, Don't answer it, it's only Dad! But not comprehending his slur-

ry bed-voice, I picked up the phone and could not believe what my father-in-law was telling me. Most of our close family knows we've chosen not to connect our TV so as not to be bombarded with brain-numbing shows. So Mike's dad knows to call us whenever there's earth-shattering news



Isa's room.

like the Mariners winning a ballgame. However, Mike's foothold in the free-lancing world has imparted a hostile attitude toward answering the phone before morning coffee, which could be as late as 10am. The news squelched my energy for running that morning—my father-in-law made it sound like the world, or at least the country, was coming to an end. Of course, most of us did wonder about that at the time. I spent the morning watching the news at Sue's house next door. Ironically, the last time I sat in her living room, it was to watch the implosion of the Seattle Kingdome, which looked uncannily similar. Sue, having moved here from New Jersey, has no family close by, but luckily, running has brought us together as a common interest.

When my family settled in Morton, we had no relatives nearby either, though with my father being the young new doctor in town, making friends was not too big of a problem. My parents would tell us about having to make close friends to stand in for relatives, as a "support system". I was to keep this in mind whenever I complained about some quirks evident in Mom's friends.

When our family was finally able to visit the Philippines again, which, curiously, Nini still called "Home", I was fifteen. It was then I realized, mere friends could never substitute for family.

Lola Luz was still the reigning matriarch, and she welcomed us ceremoniously, to Dasmarinas. Back then, the whole family would show up at the airport to welcome *balikbayans*, and I clearly remember them doing that for us. The whole trip was so full of visiting, special meals, "going out", night-clubbing, "hotel-hopping", shopping for souvenirs, etc. Tita Malu, with her very sharp driving skills and *savoir faire*, did much running around for us, seemingly nonstop. Then when it was suddenly time to go home, I was truly depressed. I thought this was how everyone lived there every day. How could I go back to a culturally impoverished life in Morton? I vowed I would be back in the P.I. as soon as I could, even if I had to come alone. So, five years later, as a confident, proud, vain, sun-seeking college student, I returned. It was just as I remembered, all the aunts graciously inviting me to outings and into their homes. Energetic Tita Ching was the most enthusiastic hostess, revealing to me something I had not realized—how intimately close she and Mom must have been as almost-twin sisters. I was treated like a princess and made to feel very important, without having done anything to deserve it, and in spite of my rude shyness.

Now, with so many of the titas permanently settled in the States, we have, from coast to coast, Laico Centers, which I especially encourage all you single Laicos to visit occasionally. Having lived on the East Coast for 13 years, my nearest Laico Center there was Tita Mitos' house. I am eternally grateful for her warmth and generosity in hosting every Christmas, Easter, and Thanksgiving while Mike and I lived nearby. It was a veritable feast each time, and always something to look forward to. The Villasenor house was the headquarters for my graduation from college, and our wedding, which we couldn't have had there otherwise. Her family also provided a convenient source

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