

- Christmas was also memorable because we always had to perform a program complete with costumes so we could earn money from Lola. One time I remember my mom forced me to dance "*Magtanim ay di biro*" (Planting Rice is Never Fun) and if I look back my prize was to receive 20 pesos from Lola. So today that's equivalent to 40 cents! Wow, talk about child exploitation!

I have a multitude of memories to share that really shaped a special bond between all of the cousins of my generation. Lola's vision for that house, to make it a family gathering place, was a tradition I cherish and try to practice even here in the US so my kids can create their own "happy thoughts."

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## DASMARINAS DAYS

by Sarah David Fortez

My childhood was made up of memories of the Dasma house. I can still remember occasionally being dropped off by my mom at Dasma on the weekends. Lia, Jovim, Bambi, Bubbles, Aisa, Carlo, Paul, and Gina were great playmates. It was Lia and Jovim who would sleep over with me at Lola's house. They were really fun to be with.

Lolo would go around in his white boxer shorts and white T-shirt. We would ask him, Lolo, *pahinge ng pera* (Could you give us money)? And he would take out his purse and bring out some coins. He made it a habit to count the grandchildren surrounding him "One, two, three. . ." as he pointed at us. We nicknamed him Mr. Count (as on Sesame Street). He seemed pleased with so many kids running around.

I also remember the house gardener. He was an old man, who would always chew a type of tobacco and spit it out. I am not sure if his name was Mang Juan. He would fondly call me "*Kulot*" (curly) since my hair at that young age was curly. He stayed in his room which was below the library near the garage.

When we would sleep over, we would stay in the green guest room upstairs. It had a view overlooking the pool and the neighbor's pool beside it. Each of us had a bed with matching green comforters. We would pretend we were in a hotel room as guests and use the intercom phone occasionally for some room service. I recall one time when I saw some *camote cue* (fried sweet potato w/ sugar) in that guest room growing mold a week after I had eaten some of it. I suppose it was ignored since the house was too big for the staff to handle.

There was a time when we eagerly discovered a whole closet full of costumes. They were these balloon-type dresses with fancy trimmings. We would twirl around in these costumes and pretend we were Cinderella, transformed into a princess. We would take turns being Cinderella's mother and pretend to kick Cinderella as she bowed down before us.

But of course, who could forget the pool? I had the impression that the swimming pool was almost as big as an ocean. Of course, I was pretty small back then. That was where I learned how to swim. I stood close to the deepest part of the pool and asked Arthur how to swim and he immediately shoved me in



the pool. But after gulping in some water and flailing my arms violently, I eventually got the hang of it.

We would always bring toys to the house. The Barbie dolls would always have a new house depending on which closet in the bedrooms we would use. We learned to use our creativity to make their furniture. Sometimes the bed was made out of a shoebox, or sometimes we would use a regular pillow for their mattress.

The Barbie dolls would also have their leisure time at the beach. Of course, the beach would have to be Lola's swimming pool. The dolls would stay on the top step of the pool and enjoy themselves. I can't forget Bambi's beautiful Barbie doll which was called the Ballerina. She had a white ballerina outfit with a floating short tutu and a tiny gold crown on top of her head. She was beautiful.

If we got hungry, we would head for the kitchen and eat hot-cakes, spaghetti, banana fritters, etc. and drink the ever present Dole or Del Monte juice. I can still remember the taste of frozen sliced bread stocked in the freezer.

The library was also a favorite hangout. We would scan the photos of Lolo's patients with the cleft chins and deformities in their before and after pictures. There was a time when we scared each other and the door suddenly closed which left us children petrified. There were also giant pillows and we would pillow-fight one another.

Christmas was also a day of fun and fear. I really enjoyed the reunions with all the food and *lechon* spread on the table, and especially the opening of gifts. However, I would dread the time after lunch when the program would begin. All the kids were required to dance and sing. I would pray that I wouldn't get called to do a number. Luckily, George, Aisa, Lia and the others were always confident and ready to do their thing. No wonder, up to this day, going onstage is not something I look forward to.

We would also visit Lola's room. It had a king sized bed and a huge bathroom with numerous mirrors. Lola would always go to church. We were all required to go to Mass with her and with some luck, eat in a restaurant after.

Right now, I am busy making sure that my baby will have a happy childhood. I just hope her childhood will be as good as mine!

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