



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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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!

LL



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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