



When I was 4 or 5 years old I used to love to hang out in the piano room at C. Ayala. The identity of who was practicing escapes my mind, but every once in a while when I hear certain piano pieces, I am back in that sunlit room, polishing the curve of the baby-grand back and forth with the back of my dress, or sitting underneath the piano, feeling the vibrations. Later, Tita Peewee attempted very patiently to teach me piano lessons. (My opinion now is that it's better to wait until the student's feet can reach the floor

earliest memories of c. ayala

BY CRISTINA FORD

My family moved to the U.S. in February of 1968, when I was 6 years old. I didn't think I remembered much about our life in the Philippines before that, until I sat down to write this article. My son Eamon, 8 years old, and daughter Isabel, 5 years old, still talk about memories of our life in New Jersey, which we left 3 years ago, and that made me think I should be able to jog my earliest memories as well.

For some time our family rented a house down the street from Lola Luz and Lolo Jim, so we must have spent a lot of time at C. Ayala, the house where Nini grew up.

The clearest picture in my mind at C. Ayala is of trying discreetly to avoid the floor-polishing machine while it was being used in the dining room. One had to pass through the dining room to get to the kitchen. I remember keeping my eyes warily on the very loud, two high-speed rotating disks. Of course, when you're 4, you try not to be noticed, especially if you're the first grandchild, but it seems the operator behind the floor-polisher always seemed to fein losing control of it whenever I tried to get by.

while sitting on the bench.)

I thought I had a Barbie doll once at C. Ayala, the only one I ever, ever had. One of the titas "borrowed" it, and I never saw it again. I mourned the loss of that Barbie for years. So whoever has it, just bring it to the reunion and there'll be no questions asked. Of course, maybe it never really was mine...

There was a fantastic shoe closet at C. Ayala. I must have played for hours in that paradise. Imagine, nine daughters inheriting Lola Luz's passion for shoes, not to mention her hand-me-downs. The white spike-heeled pumps with pointed toes was my all-time favorite pair.

Pepi, Marnie and I used to love playing *labandera* in the driveway. We have all these old photographs of us squatting at metal tubs, stripped down to our underpants (Marnie, in saggy cloth diapers), with our arms covered in suds. I can just hear them saying, "How cutenaman!" We were always posing for cute pictures at C. Ayala.

Knowing our family would be moving to the U.S., our titas and titos were all taking part in preparing four of us little Elizagas by urging us to speak English at all times. No wonder Filipinos assimilate so well in other countries--no other culture does this that I can think of. The results were good and bad. Good because all of us made friends easily and did well in US schools, and bad because when we go to the Philippines, we'll be mistaken for Japanese since we can't speak Tagalog.

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