



CASA ACACIA

by Marnie Elizaga

I remember Dasma as it was being built. A carpenter named Roger gave us rides in his wheelbarrow as the workers dug out the swimming pool. We played downstairs on fine new wooden bunkbeds. I once spent the night with an accommodating Tita upstairs in the green room. She brought out a nightlight for me, a little statue that glowed. The rehearsals for the Christmas pageant for 1968 were still in C. Ayala, but the party was at Dasma. Cristina played Mary, Arthur was Joseph, Alfie (who was Ponchit in those days) lay on a pillow as Baby Jesus. I wore paper angel wings from my nursery school and also had a birthday cake that day. Shortly afterward, my family left for America.

The next time I saw Dasma was when I was about ten, when Cristina, Peppy and I accompanied our mother on a monthlong trip to the Philippines. We were awed by the scale and luxury of the place, the swimming pool, the pantries full of snacks and Coke, the two kitchens, the household help, and the surrounding mansions and embassies. Not to mention the parade of

enthusiastic Titas that had to be kissed (never had to kiss anyone in the States) and the bright talented bilingual cousins who swam like fish and danced like pop stars. We enjoyed finding little *butiki* (lizards) on the screens—we would send them flying with a quick tap against the mesh. We congregated with other cousins in the ultramodern Music Room to take advantage of the air conditioning. Cristina had a birthday while we were there and Lola threw a spectacular party with an ice cream cart, cotton candy man, and other amusements, and gave her a diamond ring. At the airport I felt I was leaving my homeland and my people and I wept. I spent the next year begging my parents to let me go back to this paradise to see more, learn more, try St. Scholastica's, and spend more time with Tita Malu, whom I adored.

I got my wish and I lived in Dasma for an entire school year when I was twelve. I remember having breakfast in the kitchen and thinking that the pineapple juice sometimes tasted odd. It took a while before I realized that this was because I kissed Lola on the cheek in the mornings and her night cream with its peculiar fragrance was still on my lips.

Lola loved to go to restaurants. In Spanish restaurants one could predict she would order *callos*. I thought she could probably think of something more glamorous to eat in a fancy restaurant than boiled beef stomach in tomato sauce. But since then I have boiled tripe myself several times with the windows open and the kitchen fan blowing during severe *callos*-craving emergencies no doubt inspired by my memories.

Staying in Dasma, it seemed I came upon new rooms and closets every few months. I opened one door, and there was an

(continued on page 4)



Chandelier from Italy not Spain.
Arms are of gold plated brass
unlike the Spanish glass that
easily breaks like our old ones
in C. Ayala.

CASA ACACIA
(continued from page 3)

American-style bathroom with floral wallpaper. It was so disorienting I thought if I closed the door I might be lost. That was the powder room. One day, Lola found me walking upstairs to take a shower after swimming, and suggested I

use the poolhouse shower. She showed me the way to the little outbuilding with two bathrooms, one for men and one for women. Tita Malu showed me Tita Mitos' abandoned darkroom, tucked into a corner of the house. One night a maid was leaving and I went with Lola Luz for my first look at the servants' quarters, and there espied the bunkbeds I had played on so many years earlier. I was quite appalled to see that there were just *banigs* (straw mats) over the wooden platforms, no mattresses. I was told that the maids preferred it that way; they wouldn't want to get used to mattresses and then sleep on a *banig* back home.

The closets and cupboards in Dasma were crammed full of stuff: old photography magazines, *Time*, *LIFE*, Christmas decorations, souvenirs, Lolo Jim's old ivory shark-skin suits. The dresser in the guest room was bursting with old report cards. Of course I read them. They were not all A's let me tell you, never mind what your parents claim. At one point Lola had Tita Malu take an inventory of the household furnishings. Lola remembered the provenance of each piece -- the silver light fixtures on the walls from Italy, the chairs from Spain. Tita Malu once pointed out to me the shop in Mabini where the custom wooden furniture had been ordered. When we took some pictures of Dasma out of the family albums in Morton recently, we found Lola had written on the back of each photo details about the furnishings that were special to her. How precious those comments are now.

Grand as it was, 1253 Acacia Road was only emblematic of Lola's greatest achievement, which was raising eleven children and forming the core of the family ties that continue to sustain us.

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MEMORIES OF DASMA

JOVIM LAICO:

LOLA HAD THE MOST HUGEST OF EVERYTHING IN THAT HOUSE:

- the biggest pantry (best hiding place).
- the biggest pillows in the music room (you could make a mansion out of them).
- the biggest master bathroom (we'd get there with Lola still in her corset getting powdered).
- the biggest playground (the house itself).
- the biggest half bath (the powder room).
- the biggest cars (huge finned *chedeng*).
- the biggest servants' quarters.
- the biggest parties (hey, it's a big house).

- We (the boys) used to race our Matchbox Cars down the sides of the driveway.
- Lia and I would wet and mix different leaves on the rocks and boulders.
- When the pool wasn't taken care of, it was TADPOLE season!!
- Tito Popoy's room invasions (since it was by the pool).
- THE POOL!!!!!!!!!!!!
- Playing with the intercoms.
- There were always a lot of snackies in the huge pantry.
- The Dasma House was where all the cousins ended up when school was cancelled due to a typhoon.
- Swimming naked in the pool (everyone under 5 that is).
- Lolo's personal stash of toothpicks (new and used).
- The library with Lolo's pictures of his patients.
- Playing "hiding in the dark" in the library, etc.

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TERESA (FLORES) DAMOCLES:

Before I sat down to write this article for the annual *Laico Lines* newsletter, I put a lot of thought into my memories of visiting Lola Luz. Since I only returned to the Philippines twice after moving to the USA when I was only a toddler, there are a few occasions I can bring to mind.

Those two visits took place during the Christmas seasons of 1975 and 1983. I still remember how the house in Dasma looked, and how huge the family room was. Of course, I remember the swimming pool and watching the gardener tend to the yard

(continued on page 5)