

Going Home



Visiting Tita Ching (from left to right): Tito Vic, Paul, Rey, Arthur, Sarah, Michael, and Gina.

a september to remember

BY ARTHUR L. DAVID

Greetings from the House of David, Fremont, CA! Hard to believe that here we are again called to fulfill our duty in what has become a nice Laico tradition -- The *Laico Lines* newsletter.

This year was especially memorable for Grace, the David family, and myself. It's the year the House of David reunited after 10 years. It's been 8 years since I left the Philippines. Not long after I left, I had always desired to one day go visit my family, especially our mom, who has been afflicted with her debilitating ailment which has worsened in the last 2 years. Finally, the opportunity arrived in April when I got my green card approval.

Initially, it didn't seem like the US-based Davids could manage their vacation schedules to be in the PI at the same time for a one-day reunion. There was always a glitch somewhere from someone. Then after months of pestering and bandying e-mails, a breakthrough. All of us in the US, namely, Grace, Rey, Jovits, Gina and I, were in agreement: Sept. 11 was the chosen date for a catered party in honor of Mom with relatives and friends as guests. Perfect, we thought. However, Mother Nature had plans for that day which we would know about. More on that later.

Grace and I decided on Sept. 5-18 as the time of our stay in the PI. It was a blast. We had a great time with family, friends, and relatives. Naturally, where there are gatherings, food's not far behind. Needless

to say, Grace and I gained a few, although we lost it in no time once we got back to our grind here.

How's Manila? The new shopping centers were impressive. We got to know Glorietta quite well. The traffic was another matter, though. To think it's supposedly better than it used to be. Anyway, years of living in the U.S. has apparently turned my driving prowess to mush. Somehow, it was a huge effort to summon the mental fortitude to "hit the road". I did it once when I had no choice but to drive from my in-laws in Makati to our house in Sun Valley. That was plenty for me. Many thanks especially to Mike and Sarah who kindly lent their driving

skills to take us around.

It was great to play tennis with Mike, with whom I hadn't played in 2 years. Thanks a bunch to Tita Peewee and Tito Edwin and to their Ayala Alabang Country club membership. Some of us went to an out-of-town "hot springs resort" for an overnighter. We roughed it up in an authentic nipa hut, replete with mosquito netting of course. We went swimming there, and Rey, Mike and I played billiards and table tennis for the prized title of "Champion of the House of David".

It was fun to see relatives who also feted us to sumptuous restaurants. Tita Bingbing, Tita Bibot and Bambi took us to Kabalen. Great native buffet. We hung out with Tita Peewee at "Villa Villanueva" in posh Ayala Alabang. Isn't that what it's called? It was nice to see Paul and Sarah who I haven't seen since I left home, and who haven't aged in appearance much either (just like their oldest brother), their respective spouses, and our cute *pamankins*. Also spent time bonding with my great in-laws. Got to put in a round of golf with Dad too. Incidentally, he beat me soundly in that round and even matched my solitary par on the 18th hole via a long downhill putt. Some guts. But most of all, it was nice to spend time with mom. She's a real trooper and a survivor. It didn't matter that she couldn't talk or move much. Her eyes would follow you across the room. It was nice just to be physically close to her. As the famous line in that credit card TV advertisement goes, "priceless".

The party that Saturday was indeed special. A smashing, or more appropriately, a "thundering" success. With all the rain and thunder that day, it's quite literal. That morning was entirely overcast and then I heard the radio announcer say the "T" word -- typhoon. Around lunchtime the rain started coming down in buckets without letup. The power went out
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at one point, but came back on before the party started. Paul, who took charge of supervising the caterers, told them to set up the tables inside the house. I started following up the guests on the phone to assure them the party was still on. The first guests started arriving around 2 hours late. They were our neighbors. We had heard that the city had many spots of flash flooding. Then the guests started to trickle in. They all eventually showed up for Mom. We invited a priest to celebrate mass, Fr. Bernard,

who Mom first met when he was new to the parish years ago. A nice Canadian priest. At one point when people were starting to wonder if there was still going to be a mass, Fr. Bernard suddenly whispered that he had changed his mind, but once our neighbors left, he announced that he would celebrate mass. Apparently, he didn't want the neighborhood thinking he'd do this for just anyone. Towards the end of the mass, he asked for all of Mom's immediate family to join him in the bedroom to lay our hands on Mom to pray, while the guests quietly prayed for her at the same time. It was a beautiful ending to the party.



third time around

**Rey and Jovits make their
annual pilgrimage to the
Philippines and end their trip
on a prayerful note.**

BY REY DAVID

The year began on a tragic note. Jose "Peping" Pastores, Jovits's father, suffered a heart stroke and was hospitalized for a week. On February 3rd, he passed away. Jovits and her family visit his grave in San Jose religiously. Normal life appears to have resumed in the family, but the passing of Daddy Peping has cast a heavy pall of loss over the entire household.

JOVITS AND I HAVE BEEN TO THE PHILIPPINES twice in the past two years. We've already gone to its exclusive resorts, the first time to Boracay, the second to Cebu. We don't care for the oppressive summer humidity. We care less for the infamous Manila traffic and the outrageous pinoy driving. We don't look forward to the dearth of bath water, and the absence of hot running water. The malls, though huge, had little to offer that we couldn't get here. And there were many other countries we would have wanted to visit for the same cost. Of course, the only reason compelling enough to have us return this year was to see dear Mother, who was still bedridden. And that reason more than sufficed.

This year, Jovits's brother Bernard joined our little party. We took our Asiana flight from San Francisco Airport on Saturday, August 28, and arrived in Manila 17 hours later.

I was anxious to see Mother. Two years ago, she could only walk at a stagger, tiptoeing with someone's support. She could barely speak, and then only to repeat phrases.

Last year, the doctor's inept procedure sentenced her to bed. Without exercise, her joints began to stiffen. Speech came rarely to her. I did not know what to expect this year. When I came into her room, her condition gave me a feeling of sinking helplessness that made me groan. Open wounds on her feet, her stomach, and the backs of her hands exposed abscesses under her skin. Stressed by tendons whose nerves were weak, leaving muscles increasingly taut, constantly clenched against each other, the bones of her hands and feet began to gnarl, to freeze at crooked angles. But this woman whom I love like I love no other was still very much alive, and I was happy to be

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with her again. When I spoke to her, she shed tears – rare tears, the others told me later.

Of course, I love Dad as much as I love Mother, though we as men are not as expressive with one another about our mutual sentiments. Mike does not have a job to keep him back from enjoying the single life, but except for his water store, he has no source of income. And while two-week visits to the Philippines every year may be enjoyable, a two-year imposed stay has a way of inducing despair. Paul and Joy seem to be doing well for themselves. Paul sometime ago managed to be associated with an influential ally of the present administration, and has a promising job. Joy is a marketing manager of the Max's chain of restaurants. Ed has been busy with various business ventures. Sarah, aside from raising darling Nicole, has been pursuing sideline endeavors to keep busy at home.

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THIRD TIME AROUND

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And then there were the little ones. Lizzie, who was my favorite playmate last year, was much bigger now than you would expect in one year, and a bit less spirited, a tad less frisky. She was sweet and would gamely kiss me on the mouth, but she would sometimes be capricious, as if her personality were already developed. Nicole, who just last year was tiny enough to hold in the palm of my hand, was now dervish-wild, running around all over the house, climbing the stairs and sofas and people, and tinkering with everything within reach. She was a joy to play with. Baby Joshua, who wasn't even born yet last year, showed me a glimpse of the future, the first male David who will carry the proud surname beyond this new generation. He was just like Nicole was at his age -- quiet, for the most part, and content just to be fed and carried around the house in someone's arms.

JOVITS AND I, BERNARD, TOTO (JOVITS'S BROTHER), Luz (Toto's wife), and Nikki (their son) took a flight to Cebu, and stayed for 3 days at the Shangri-La Resort and Hotel in Mactan. Naturally it had all the amenities you might expect: a posh lobby, top-grade rooms with an ocean view, a number of heated pools, several first-class restaurants, a salon, a health and fitness center, a day-care, a business center, a medical and dental office. It also had a white sand beach, a golf course, tennis courts, a night-club, a chapel, an aviary, a game room, water rides, and hundreds of helpful staff members. On our second day, Jovits and I joined Jondie and Mayleen at the Café Laguna restaurant in the Ayala Center Mall, and had a marvelous dinner of native Filipino specialties.

EVERYDAY I WOULD VISIT MOTHER. THE AIR conditioner was always on. Either the TV would be tuned in to a religious program, or the cassette player would be playing Frank Sinatra. When Mother was awake, sometimes her eyes would be keen beneath the clench of her brows, and her jaws would labor mightily as if to speak. She would look like a woman who was determined to surmount her infirmity at any cost, but did not know how. Her courage inspires me. At other times, a dispassionate ease would glaze her eyes, looking through you as if she were still caught up in her own visions. I would speak happily to Mother, would let her see my joy in being with her. But at the same time I would be careful not to show the nameless pain gnawing at my heart.

ON SEPTEMBER 5, SUNDAY, WE WENT ON OUR annual excursion to the Canyon Woods resort in Tagaytay. Because our party was so large, we took two cars and two vans. Later that evening, Ed and Sarah took Jovits and me to Dampa in Sucat. They bought the seafood at the wet market, and had the adjoining open-air eatery cook and serve them. It was an unconventional yet satisfying feast.

On Monday morning after Mike and I played tennis at the Alabang public park, we went to meet Art and Grace at the Airport.

On Wednesday morning, after Mike and I played tennis again at the Alabang Country Club, we picked Gina up at the Airport.

On Saturday morning, September 11, the House of David was bustling with preparations for the big Pray-over and Reunion Party but things took a turn for the worse. The rain came pouring down like the wrath of heaven. The caterers had to work within the shelter of the roof. The electric power went out. The flash flood caused a traffic backup of several hours. But despite all these obstacles, everyone we invited over the last two weeks, and others that we invited extemporaneously, came. Some made their way despite being stuck in traffic for 8 hours. This demonstrated how much Mother was loved, that people would endure any hardship to gather for her sake. Totalling more than 50, these included Tita Peewee, Tito Edwin, Tita Bibot, Tito Rene, Tita Bingbing, Tito Eddie, Carlo, Mariel, Jimboy, Mary Ann, Tita Wanda, Tito Jaime, Jovits and her nieces and nephews, neighbors, and others.

I still have my job as a Software Engineer with ProBusiness. Jovits works down the hall from my new office. We're still not done furnishing our home in Livermore. Life in the US is flush and easy. But in some ways we don't feel nearly as alive as when we are back in the Philippines.

