

Balitaan

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Jenifer's Journey to Success

From an interview with Rick Zemlin



Photo left to right: PCAFPD Vice President Roland de Jesus, Jen, her son Lars and her mother.

Jenifer "Jen" Mercado Halili grew up poor in San Pasqual, Batangas. Her father became ill and unable to work from the time Jen was five years old. She began selling ice candy from door to door in her barangay. By the time she started elementary school, helping to support her family was a way of life. During Jen's elementary school years, her mother earned a meager income by selling homemade snacks in her daughter's school yard. During recess, Jen assisted her mom while the other kids played. After classes, Jen sold the remaining items around the neighborhood. A few years later, Jen switched to

doing piecework sewing at home, as well as baking and selling *pan-de-sal* – leaving little time for homework or play.

Through these experiences, Jen grew more and more determined to study hard so that she could eventually secure a better livelihood and help her family escape from biting poverty.

After graduating from high school with top honors, Jen applied for a PCAFPD college scholarship. Jen was ecstatic when she won, "I was so very happy because my prayers to have a college education were answered. I thanked God for giving me this great opportunity," she recounted.

Jen was drawn to studying Civil Engineering with a focus on environmental issues because she believed that protecting the environment is critical to helping the poor. "We have no money to go to a hospital and see a doctor, and the medicines are too expensive to buy. When we have a clean environment, we will also have good health and a good source of food to eat" she observed.

Civil Engineering also appealed to Jen as a major because it would still allow her to work in support of her family. By now, she had added to her other income generating activities by doing laundry work in the barangay, washing cars and jeeps, cutting hair and doing manicures and pedicures.

Jen graduated from Batangas State University with a BS in Civil Engineering. Roland de Jesus, PCAFPD Vice President for Philippine Operations, helped Jen find her first job working with the Manila-based Philippine Chamber of Mines, an umbrella group for the mining industry.

Jen's job was to advise the mining industry members on minimizing environmental disruption in their operations. However, because Jen had only a bachelor's degree, she was not certified to sign off on the regulatory compliance of companies.

With the backing of PCAFPD, Jen went to graduate school, receiving an MS in Environmental Management from Philippine Women's University in 2011. With the necessary credentials in hand, Jen was able to secure a higher paying job with more responsibility.

Jen is now an environmental manager and a government accredited Pollution Control Officer at an international construction firm. Her efforts benefit the community by helping assure that the company will not cause pollution through its operations, but rather will protect and enhance the environment.

In her scant free time, Jen gives back to her community through her position as Second Vice President on the Board of Trustees of Batangas Coastal Resources Management Foundation, Inc., an NGO that promotes tree planting and coastal cleanup to the benefit of local fishermen and the broader community.

Jen works hard at her job but life is much better now. In a gratifying turn, Jen, who is now married and has one child, can afford to hire others to help her with household chores. She is now able to support continued care for her father, has sponsored two of her siblings in their own college pursuits, and provides care for her third sibling with Down syndrome.

For her own son, Lars, Jen carries a smile of deep satisfaction, and says: "My son will not have a difficult childhood like mine. He does not have to work, and he can go on school field trips because we can afford the required fees for participation."

More than two decades after receiving her first scholarship from PCAFPD, Jen remains immensely grateful to the Foundation. For the interview to help us tell Jen's story, she commuted hours into Manila in her rare free time. In closing, she says, "I would do anything for PCAFPD."■

Editor's Note: Rick Zemlin (Davao del Sur 81-83) returned to the Philippines this past year with hopes of interviewing PCAFPD graduates to provide us and our supporters with information about the impact of the scholarship program. This is the second profile we have published. The first, about Carla de la Cruz, appeared in the September fundraising appeal. A full version of this profile will appear on the website along with other interviews.

His dream of being a CPA is closer now

Anwar Alauya, from Davao del Sur, graduates in November with a degree in Accountancy from the University of Mindanao.

THANK YOU. These are the first two words I say, a very big thank to all the people behind my new achievement in life.

My parents Sawit and Aisa are the persons I am most proud of. I can still recall the time I was chosen to be an exchange student (2008-2009). I was crying and ready to quit and let go of my dreams – to ride an airplane, to experience snow and study in an American school. That year was a test of how strong we were as a family. Three of my grandparents passed away during my screening and my father had a stroke in the middle of the processing for my passport. I could see in my mother's eyes how hard and difficult it was, but she just smiled and continued to help me. Because we didn't have enough money to comply with all of the requirements, I wrote a letter to the Barangay Captain, City Councilors, Vice Mayor and Mayor asking for financial help. My mother supported me in this for my chance to study and live in America. I was really shy, but I



remember how strong my mother was at that time, so I took a step to face them all. Fortunately they heard my dream and we were able to shoulder the cost for vaccinations, a passport and other expenses.

But I knew that to live and study in United States was just one of my dreams. I told myself that my life will not be the same as yesterday; it will be better and great and I will be a successful person. After my exchange year, I became more mature and gained a strong determination that I can be what I want to be in the future. College was not as easy as I thought. At first it was hard but GOD is very kind. HE gives uncounted chances for me to finish college.

One that I thank the most is the Peace Corps Alumni Foundation for Philippine Development. I waited two or three years to win this scholarship and finally, with my prayers, I was one of the blessed persons in the world to have a scholarship like this. Without it, I would not be wearing a black toga this year; I would not be a professional today. One thing that really marks in my heart is the discovery that PCAFPD is a family I can lean on; the staff, and my co-scholars are like family. Sir Roland is a father that always gives advices to me and to other scholars as well. He always makes sure that we make good decisions and he helps me understand my role as a scholar and a citizen of this country. My co-scholars in Davao City are always there to support me. I don't just have a scholarship but I also have a family, a PCAFPD family. Thank you for being the bridge to reaching my dreams.

My plan now is to pursue my Accountancy profession, because my dream to be a CPA is one step closer; and, of course, to find a job to finance my education and help my family. Thank you very much PCAFPD. You're a gift from GOD. Without you, I would not feel this extreme happiness. Thank you! ▪

Editor's note: In 2008-09 Anwar received a Kennedy-Lugar Youth Exchange and Study (YES) scholarship, a merit-based program sponsored by the US Department of State.

On the road to being a teacher

Mellicent Macatangay, from Batangas, is majoring in secondary education at St. Bridget College in Batangas City.



They say that the teacher is the sage on stage. I say, a teacher must be the guide on the side. My teaching experiences serve as evidence of this strong belief. In fact, my teaching experiences have made me even better, not only as a future educator, but also as a daughter, sister, and as a humane person.

This semester we only had one full subject, the Student Teaching Program. The STP aims to help students translate into practice the concepts and principles taught in the classroom. With all the teaching experiences that I have had from our off-campus and in-campus exposure, I am now ready to face the real world of teaching!

Henry Adams once said, "A teacher affects eternity; he can never tell where his influence stops." Having this instilled in my mind, I was able to overcome all the fears and hesitations I felt when I stood in front of my students. There's a lot of pressure for sure knowing that many eyes are on me weaving high expectations. However, the fact that I am going to be a teacher, and a good one, inspires me to do the best that I can in all that I venture.

Practicum: It was so sudden that one day I woke up and found myself teaching in front of students that I barely knew. At first, I was hesitant. I never liked teaching, is what I thought. But when the day came that I had to leave them, tears kept falling from my eyes. I was so attached to my students that I didn't want to leave them. I guess that is when I realized – I like teaching – I love to be the teacher.

In less than a year, this will be my craft. Finally, I learned to embrace the nature of teaching. A good teacher can be a lifetime inspiration for everyone. From teaching springs all the other

professions. With all the rich experiences I had during my practicum and previous practical subjects, I am confident that I am now ready to face the world of teaching. Every day is a happy teaching day! Every day is a day full of learning and good memories. ▪

Contribution honors Filipinos in Central Luzon who saved the life of a Navy pilot in 1945

Richard Foye of New London, Connecticut, made a grant to PCAFPD through the Community Foundation of Eastern Connecticut to honor the brave Filipinos who rescued and saved the life of his father US Navy pilot William Foye, after his plane was shot down in Central Luzon in February 1945.

Here's the story in Richard's own words: "My father passed away 20 years ago, and as with most World War II veterans, had said very little about his wartime experience. I always wanted to learn more. In March 2013, my wife and I spent a few days at the National Archives in College Park, Maryland researching potential William Foye information. We were reviewing Navy Records and Philippine Guerrilla Records. As my wife and I began reading the primary source documents, she began to cry. She was reading about the Philippine people that sacrificed their lives to save William Foye, a young USS Enterprise Navy F6F pilot. The doctor that treated him, the families that gave him food and shelter, the Guerrilla fighters of PQOG, some that helped him up the hill in the Putho section of Los Banos to get away from the enemy, and those of the village of San Luis who did not reveal the location of the Americans, are among those that allowed him to be rescued by the PBY pick up and paid the ultimate price. This history changed and deepened my family history project. William Foye lived; and I am alive because of the bravery of these people. William married a Navy nurse and they were blessed with eight children and 19 grandchildren."

After learning his father's remarkable story, Richard wanted to do something to honor those who made his father's survival possible. He

contacted the Philippine Embassy to inquire about the possibility of setting up a scholarship to benefit students in Southern Luzon because his father and a number of his children were educators. The Embassy put Richard in touch with PCAFPD's President Maureen Carroll.

Richard wrote again in May, and told us that following a local newspaper article about his project, he began to receive unsolicited donations to help students in the Philippines. He held those donations in a Bill Foye Philippine Scholarship account while he finalized a Donor Advised Fund.

In October, PCAFPD received a \$500 check from the Community Foundation of Eastern Connecticut to "recognize the sacrifice of the Filipino people in southern Luzon: PQOG guerillas, teenagers, doctors and villagers who rescued US Navy Aviator William Foye during WWII (October 1944-February 1945). Their selfless actions – often at great cost – sometimes loss of life – are remembered by a grateful Foye family." ▪

Editor's Note: *PQOG refers to President Quezon's Own Guerillas, one of the guerilla units in Batangas, Central Laguna and West Central Tayabas.*

We remember Judy Swigost Hill

PCAFPD is saddened to report that long-time supporter Judy Swigost Hill passed away on October 24, 2014. Judy served with Group XII in Iloilo from 1964 to 1966. After her service, she first worked for Peace Corps and as a writer in Chicago and Washington before moving to New York City, where she continued a writing career and became a computer consultant. She was an awesome golfer. In 1982, she married Wally Hill and inherited a family she loved. Judy leaves four step-children, ten grandkids and four great grandkids, as well as many close friends. Judy established the *Rachel Singer Memorial Scholarship*. It is her wish that contributions in her memory be made to PCAFPD as well. As of November 13, \$300 has been given in her memory. The photo of Judy was taken at the Peace Corps 50th anniversary celebration in Washington in 2011. ▪





PSAA Assembly held in May at La Roca Resort

By Carol Radomski (Batanes 1980-83)

The PCAFPD Scholars and Alumni Association (PSAA) held their Annual Assembly in Los Baños in May. PSAA president Aries Astilo and secretary general Genesis Galap organized and facilitated the event, which attracted more than 20 scholars and alumni. The three-day assembly focused on leadership development and setting organizational priorities, but attendees also enjoyed getting to know each other through fun teambuilding activities.

Peace Corps Director Denny Robertson made welcome remarks at the assembly and commended the group on their commitment to “give back” to the Foundation and to their communities. PCAFPD president Carol Radomski and board members Roland de Jesus and Hans Groot were also on hand to congratulate the alumni on their many accomplishments and work with them on future plans. Special thanks to board member Alex Romero and his family for hosting the event free of charge at La Roca Resort.

A high priority for the PSAA in the coming year is helping to locate many of the alumni with whom we have lost touch over the years, so that we can carry out an effective alumni survey in 2015. They will also focus on mentoring current scholars and strengthening the geographic “clusters” of scholars and alumni. Several clusters reported on their recent or planned community services activities (see below) and the Negros cluster offered to host the 2015 PSAA Assembly.



The Davao cluster of the PSAA hosted their first event in Davao on May 10-13. They successfully organized a multi-faceted event including a men’s volleyball tournament, a coastal clean-up effort, and a children’s feeding program.

In celebration of World Ocean Day 2014 in June, the Negros PSAA cluster participated in the U.S. Embassy-sponsored coastal clean-up day in Dumaguete City. ■



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Switch in major and *Business Idea Competition* leads to success

Mary Jane D. Amarille from Negros Oriental is studying Management Accounting at Foundation University in Dumaguete City



Failure is a negative thing. Oftentimes it brings to our life frustrations and discouragements. But the real challenge is how to make our failure the start of something new and better.

My second semester was full of challenges and

lessons. It served as a turning point of my life. I had to decide something crucial, something that had a bearing on my future. Let me share with you the experience that led to this story...

My grade in Financial Accounting II did not reach the cut off. I needed to have a 2.0 (87-89) grade in every accounting subject that I took but, sad to say, I was not able to make it. I got a 2.25(86) grade for the first time in my major subject. I was devastated. I knew that I had tried to do my best, but maybe my best at that time wasn't enough.

At that moment my dreams began to fall. I began to evaluate myself. Acceptance is the first step to a new start. So, I started to identify the cause and do something to change it. The main reason that I was not able to focus on my final exam was because our teacher gave us a project one week before the examination date to divert our attention. Another factor was lack of sleep. As an accountancy student, I slept a maximum of 4 hours a day just to make sure that I passed the daily exams. As a consequence I suffered from stress and an *urom* or what we call *bangungo* or nightmare. But mine was different. I never dreamed of something bad; it's just that when I lay down to sleep, I began losing my breath so intensely that I thought I would never awaken. And I observed that it occurred more frequently when I was suffering from lack of sleep. I made a decision to quit accounting, but never my dreams in life. I just had to change my route to reach success. So, I shifted to management accounting.

Because the pressure was not as great as when I was an accountancy student, I had an opportunity to pursue extra-curricular activities. I was chosen to participate in the *Business Idea Competition* representing the Junior Institute of Management Accountants (JIMA). I never expected this to happen because, even though it was not an inter-university event, the ones chosen were among the best in their organizations.

The competition was not easy. We had to introduce a product which had never existed or been introduced in the market; then make a business plan and present it to a board of judges. At first I was really in doubt that we could do it. I was used to making a report in front of the class, but this was different because I was representing our organization. Together with my partner, we prepared for the competition. He was the one who designed, made and packaged the product, while I was assigned to prepare the business plan and the final presentation. We worked hand in hand, and with the encouragement and support of our co-majors, we started gaining confidence.

The day of the competition finally arrived. I really felt nervous but also tried to convince myself that we were better than some, if not the best. I promised myself to do my best but was also willing to accept failure. What mattered most to me were the exposure, knowledge, confidence and, above all, the experience that I would gain from the competition. The moment came when I would present the product; we prayed silently and believed that we had done our best. At the moment that I started our visual presentation, the power point application failed. It did not work. I had no other choice but to present everything orally. I presented the product and said with all honesty and confidence that it could gain a gargantuan target market.

I never expected any cheering from the crowd. But the moment I finished, a loud round of applause occupied the whole venue. The product was a flower vase made of recycled paper, engineered in a double helix structure like that of DNA. That's why it is called a "DNA Vase." It has a bottle inside that primarily supports the paper-based outside structure, thus making it very durable compared to

other paper products. I will never forget the comment of one of the judges, Sir Bulfa (Dean of the College of Agriculture), said, "I am speechless, it was well presented". I smiled, and laughed silently, because I never expected such a comment, knowing that our planned visual presentation was a failure. The cross examination followed. We had to defend our product; and again my partner and I were able to do it. Finally the competition was over and my partner and I were proclaimed the winners. What a success! At last our labor was rewarded.

Life is a really a journey. While navigating in a vast ocean of life, sometimes we encounter challenges like storms that seem to hinder us in continuing the journey, but we should remember that after every storm there can be a rainbow that symbolizes hope, another way and another route for us to navigate to reach our destination in life. ▪

Teaching at an Island School in Zamboanga City

*This essay is by PCAFPD scholar **Ignacio (Jun) Señara, Jr.**, from Zamboanga, who graduated in 2007 from Western Mindanao State University with a degree in Secondary Education. PCAFPD is now supporting his Master's Degree studies at Ateñeo de Zamboanga.*



Being a teacher is not a job but a vocation. It is self-sacrifice armored with understanding, patience, skills, talent, commitment and wisdom. This was true for me when I had a chance to be a substitute teacher in an

island school. Although it was only for the month of November 2013, I learned a lot from the local people and it was fulfilling to share and to listen to parents regarding their way of living and outlook on life.

Tigtabon is one of the islands in Zamboanga City that are known as the hiding place of bandits like the Abu-Sayyaf, MNLF and the like. People in Tigtabon come mostly from the Samal and Tausug tribes with

no Zamboangueños or Chavacano speakers living there. The occupants are fishermen and seaweed farmers. The houses are mostly made of *sawali* and *nipa*. There is no electricity; and fresh water is scarce. Tigtabon Elementary School is the only school on the island. Students have to travel to the mainland for a high school education. All of the teachers assigned to this island school reside on the mainland and they have to travel every day about 30 minutes by boat to reach the island. The island has beautiful white sand beaches but garbage is everywhere. When it is low tide teachers need to step into the water to reach the shore and when you do not mind where you step you might be pricked by sea urchins that are roaming in the shallow water.

Although I am from Zamboanga City, I had not heard about this barangay until my wife Archielyn was assigned as a teacher there in June 2013. I had no knowledge of the people and the culture there. My experience teaching on this island made me realize that being a teacher is not everybody's dream job.

The first time I stepped on this island, I was culture-shocked. It was my first time to see pupils, instead of going to their classrooms to wait for the teachers, coming directly to the port and waiting for their teachers to arrive. The port is full of pupils and you can see joy in their eyes when they see their teacher in the *banca*. You can see their excitement and longing for knowledge. They will then meet their teacher and they will offer their assistance to carry whatever the teacher is carrying, as if he or she were a VIP. When their teacher is not there, you can see in their eyes the disappointment and sadness. Every weekday morning the scenario is the same, it is like a fiesta with so many pupils at the port and some parents who, even though they do not utter a word, also provide a heartwarming welcome.

It is a privilege to get to know the pupils from the island. They are far different from pupils on the mainland for several reasons. First, they do not have books. Due to the scarcity of books, they rely mostly on information from the teachers. Because of this, many of the pupils are non-readers. In my first week, I gave an assignment but noticed the next day that no one in my class did their assignment. I was so disappointed; but later I learned that they did not have reference books and there is no way for them

to complete their assignment since there is no library or anywhere to do research. So, the teachers are obligated to give all the necessary information. Otherwise there is no way for them to learn the material. Second, there is no electricity. Third, pupils have limited school supplies. I noticed that most of the students have only one notebook for all the subject areas. Fourth, the pupils are still practicing the Filipino trait which is doing the "manopo" as a sign of respect when they leave at the end of the day. They will fall in line and grab your hand and put it on their forehead, which I had not experienced doing to my teachers during my elementary days or ever seen done on the mainland. They are far too respectful. They look up to teachers more than to their parents. It is normal for pupils to be hard-headed and sometimes beyond control, but these pupils are very respectful. They greet a teacher whenever they meet him or her, and are afraid of loitering and talking whenever a teacher is around. These are just some of the traits that you seldom see in mainland schools. As a teacher, I really appreciate the Filipino habit of respect that they are still practicing, and at the same time, I felt the need to educate the pupils beyond textbooks.

There are pupils who excel academically despite the challenges they are facing. As a matter of fact, there are pupils coming from the island who are at the top of their class in high school. I saw children who could someday be leaders and could help their community, but due to poverty and lack of resources, their potential will not be realized and they will instead work after elementary school rather than going to high school. Recently, Katrina Punso, a grade V pupil from this school, competed for the first time in the Science Investigatory Project and won Second Place in her division. My wife Archielyn was her coach. A teacher has the power to transform a child for better or for worse, hence, it is the main duty of a teacher to remove ignorance and instill knowledge, values, patriotism and love of God.

These are the things that I observed and at the same time I learned. Indeed, it was a great experience being with our Samal and Tausug brothers. Although varied in culture, I observed them living harmoniously. This is also what I like about being a teacher, you have the opportunity to immerse



yourself in the community and be an inspiration, at the same time sharing knowledge, experience and values. You have the power to hypnotize your pupils to be responsible citizens and you are the key to a better community and a better Philippines.▪

Editor's Note: This essay was a purely volunteer effort on Jun Senara's part. He and his wife gave up their jobs in a Manila firm 2 or 3 years back so they could both teach in Zamboanga.

News from a supporter: Keith Hooper's H.E.L.P. Foundation is still striving to help the poor in the Philippines. On its website, www.thehelpfoundation.com, you can read its newsletter and learn about all that it is doing, including typhoon relief efforts. Keith was in Group 21 and served in Bukidnon from 1966-68.

Program Note: We're pleased to share this recent message to PCAFPD's Vice President for Philippine Operations Roland de Jesus:

"Good evening sir. I'm so happy to be one of your scholars. It's really heart-warming that you all support us not only financially but emotionally. You (my PCAFPD family) are one of the reasons why I am inspired to study hard. Thank you so much for being a nice person and such a great second father to us, sir. I'm blessed that I've met a good person like you sir. God bless us all." Maria Mikio Ozawa from Leyte

Contributions from our generous supporters. . . We thank those listed below whose gifts to PCAFPD were received between April 23 and October 19, 2014. The plus (+) identifies those who have made more than one contribution, including NPCA membership renewals, since our report in the Spring 2014 issue of *Balitaan*. In addition to the individual contributions listed below, PCAFPD received a contribution from the Community Foundation of Eastern Connecticut to honor the Filipinos in Central Luzon who saved the life of Navy pilot William Foye in 1945 (see story in this issue). Notes on numbered contributions are at the end of the list.

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Jason Solle	NY	Mary Vanderford	MN	Ray Woods	KS
Jane Sommer	MA	Jay Warren (28)	WA	Evelyn Mittman Wrin	DC
Julie Stahl +	CO	David C. Walter +	VA	Deane Wylie + (33)	CA
Karen Steele +	NY	Larrie Warren	MD		

Notes on numbered contributions: (1) Paul Aleckson's gift is matched 3:1 by his employer Ford Foundation; (2) in memory of Dr. Nans & Chol Bautista; (3) in memory of Patty Wernert and Derek Hulse; (4) part of Judy Kealey Diaz's gift was for typhoon relief; (5) In memory of Ted Grossman and Lone Castillo; (6) for Rachel Singer Memorial Scholarship; (7) in honor of her sister Sarah McMeans; (8) donations made at Group XV Reunion for greeting cards made by Joyce Johnston; (9) Mary Kilgour made one gift in memory of Bill Warren and the other in memory of victims of terrorism; (9) in memory of John and Agnes Kramer; (10) in loving memory of her husband Paul Lampert (Tacloban City 80-83); (11) in memory of her sister Pamela Johnstone Moguet; (12) in memory of Joann Jorz and Lourdes Morales; (13) in honor of Group XIII-B Reunion 8/2014 in Larkspur, CA; (14) in memory of Derek Hulse and Rachel Singer; (15) in memory of Paul Lampert; (16) the McClusky's gift in May was in honor of Carol Ann and Dennis Detlef 's 50th wedding anniversary (Leyte Group 13-A); (17) in memory of Regina Bernard Siojo; (18) in memory of Seymour Greben, a celestial dancer; (19) in memory of Rachel Singer and Group X; (20) monthly gifts are designated for the Ron & Lilia Peters Scholarship; (21) in memory of Stan Suyat; (22) in memory of Laurence Foley; (23) in memory of Salvador B. Junio of Matina, Davao City; (24) in memory of R. Sargent Shriver; (25) in memory of Sandra Jean Stone: (26) in memory of Judith Granada, Cadiz City Science Coordinator; (27) in memory of Bill Warren, a role model for life: (28) in memory of her husband Bill Warren; (29) in memory of his beloved daughter Angela Wetmore: (30) in memory of Wally Allen and Bill Warren; (31) Linda Wicks' gift in May was in honor of Seidel's Checkbook; (32) in memory of his wife Carolyn E. Wylie, Group 1.