

THE GOOD FORTUNE OF BEING AN UPSILONIAN

By Gari Tiongco '62



When I joined Upsilon in 1962, my only wish was to enliven my student life, to enlarge my circle of friends and make the most of my student life. I daresay I got more than I bargained for. Had my life ended right after my student life, I would have already lived a full life.

I thought that after my student life in UP my involvement with the Upsilon would diminish, but I was happily mistaken. I am indeed lucky to belong to batch '62, much to the envy of my buddy, Chitong'61 for there seems to be so much blessings and camaraderie going on around our batch. The following 5 anecdotes (I have more) will illustrate why.

Sincere fellowship of my fraternity brothers...

1. When I started my law career in Davao 30 years ago, Dion de la Serna'57, and Rey Villarica'62 were already in the practice 4 years ahead of me. We knew in our hearts that we had to form one law office, which we eventually did.

Now the three of us were of widely divergent personalities. Our ideas of spending a good time were totally different and we hardly socialized with each other. It did not mean that we disliked each other for we respected each others' differences. *Our Upsilon spirit was the strong tie that bound us and there were no hindrances to our unbelievable team work and cooperation. Working like true brothers, we were an efficient machine*, the envy of our peers, and the toast of the legal circles in Davao. In 10 years time we harvested as our retained clients, about 90% of the banks and big corporations in the city. Dion handily became the Davao IBP president and Gladys, too, soon afterwards.

Since none of us were interested in going into politics, and the local environment had no more challenges to offer us, with heavy hearts we dissolved our law office. Soon afterwards, Dion had the good fortune of being appointed to the Cabinet and Rey chose to continue his law practice in Davao. I decided to move on to the big city.

With our happy experiences behind us, our bond became stronger and to this day, we show genuine concern for each other. Rey passed away a few months ago. Grief stricken, I gave the best eulogy I could muster at the solemn final rites held for him by the Davao Chapter.

Upright Self-respecting Men...

2. A Manila-based bank, a client of mine in Davao, supported my establishment of a new law office in Manila. A huge claim was assigned to me with contingent lawyers

fees. It is known as a “no cure-no pay” case. On that basis, I asked for and was given the maximum fee allowable. This was the opportunity I was looking for, which never came my way in Davao. I knew that success in this case could be life-changing and could be a turning point in my career.

As I filed the case, I could not believe that the President of the respondent firm was my contemporary in college, a promising professional manager, in the person of Mon Abad '66. I immediately sought his audience and explained that here we were- two Upsilonians, two professionals hired to do their respective jobs. I further said, “*Walang personalan, trabaho lamang*”. Mon was dismayed and disillusioned at the turn of events. In disgust he angrily called his lawyer, who as it turned out, was another Upsilonian in the person of Paul Davis, '74, a former IF. Paul was satisfied with my explanation, and promised his boss, Mon that he would do his utmost to defend the firm. However Mon, still not satisfied, reported me to the President of Upsilon Alumni Association, Ed Espiritu '55. Ed told Mon that this was bound to happen in a world full of Upsilonian professionals. He advised Mon to do his best to defend his firm, as I would also do to protect my client. Mon finally relented and both of us shook hands and promised to pursue our own job objectives. After a lengthy litigation, the case was settled in my favor. Indeed, the case was life-changing for me. I got the biggest ever single lawyer's fee in my professional life, which most lawyers in the country cannot even dream of in their lifetime.

I am proud to state the Upsilonians involved that in this legal battle never compromised their professional careers, principles, and integrity. I guess this mandate of the Credo was firmly instilled in our hearts: “*I cherish the sincere fellowship of my fraternity brothers because it considers me an upright self-respecting man capable of growth and service to my fellow men....*”

As the years passed, Mon and I both became Presidents of Upsilon Alumni Association, one after the other. To this day, we maintain very good relations, and the legal case of 20 years ago never became a hindrance to our friendship.

3. On the business side, I attended a real estate seminar in Davao City and one of the participants was Dens Castillo'62, my co-batch. We had lost contact for about 30 years. Of course, we immediately picked up from where we left off and renewed our friendship over several bottles of wine.

Dens was the last Upsilonian UP ROTC Corps Commander. He had enviable qualities: tall, handsome with a commanding presence, and concert-quality baritone voice which handily earned him the lead male role in the 1964 Sigma Delta hit show, “Pajama Game”. He was simply the “heart throb” of the Sigma Deltans and other girls in the campus. Nevertheless, he was shy and appeared to be slippery, making him more attractive and challenging to the girls. Poor me, I only had a minor role in the play. However, for the 3 weeks of rehearsals preceding opening night, Dens squatted in my dorm room where we shared a single bed for the duration.

Dens was now the Senior Vice President of Robinsons Land and was on the look out for properties to develop as a joint venture partner. I happened to have a 37 hectare property which I offered to him. The next day Dens inspected the property and he liked it. He was an extremely fast worker because a week later, he and his boss, the chairman of all Gokongwei companies, came and inspected the property. The chairman, too, liked what he saw and instructed Dens to negotiate immediately to acquire the property. Dens protested that he was not the right fellow to negotiate with me as I was his brod and our friendship dated back for 30 years. The chairman, however, reassured Dens of the company's full trust in him.

Before our negotiations, Dens advised me to get a consultant who is well versed in joint ventures. He said that I am only a lawyer and that pitted against him, I might not know what would hit me. He did not want to eat me alive, so to speak. I was stunned by his bravado but I told him firmly and confidently that I could very well take care of myself.

One would think that we were negotiating for world peace for it lasted 3 hours without any drinks but only water as previously agreed upon. He wrote a preliminary agreement and we both initialed each item. Immediately afterwards, he kidded me, "brod, mahina ka pang talaga": 1) you did not ask for this which we usually give, 2) had you been firm on this demand, you would have gotten it, 3) you immediately gave in to this demand; I could have given that up easily. Well, I was not floored by that revelation because 1) I got an advance upon signing, which amount was higher than my purchase price of the property, 2) my share in the JV was 45%, 5% higher than the usual JV, 3) I got the option to construct the development of the property. I thought to myself, you got the crumbs and I got the meat. To my pleasant surprise, the contract was promptly signed, sealed and delivered less than one week later.

That part of the credo which says: "*upright, self-respecting man, capable of growth,...*", reverberated again in our hearts. We were proud of ourselves for protecting competing interests, without compromising our principles.

Chitong, Dens and I had a 2-week whirlwind trip to 5 key cities in North America. The three of us sneaked out of our hectic schedules to relive the fun and fellowship we had in our college days and we got more than we bargained for. We had the time of our lives in New York, Chicago, Las Vegas, Toronto and Vancouver seeing the sights, shows and visiting high end restaurants as guests of some wealthy clients. Several months after our vacation, Dens met his untimely death in Davao while visiting our project. I gave an impromptu eulogy and said the same things that I write here with a difference: I almost choked in the middle of my speech.

Capable of Growth and Greater Service to My Fellowmen...

4. It is profoundly difficult to describe Lito Pedrosa '62. Though he is not known for his good looks he seems to magnetize women. He has a rough and tough physique, a top athlete, but graceful on the dance floor. He has a volcanic temper but also

prayerful with a soft heart. and an endearing smile. He is an impeccable dresser owing to the fact that he belongs to a 'buena familia'.

Lito is a second generation Upsilonian, with three other distinguished Upsilonian brothers: Ramon'49, a lawyer, accomplished businessman and very active civic leader; Bert'50, a very respected top-notch diplomat, whose wife Carmen, a fearless writer, wrote the Untold Story of Imelda Marcos, and with an equally famous daughter, TV anchor Veronica Pedrosa; and Nanding'52, a former Illustrious Fellow, and like his brother, a successful businessman and known civic leader. The sisters are as talented and as brilliant. His Upsilonian dad, Pio'22, was the former secretary of finance. Pio had a very impressive career in public service and when he retired, he became president of a large bank. Pio's name was spoken with awe and reverence in the business circle.

Following in his father's footsteps, Lito likewise became president of a commercial bank. He ran the bank the only way he knew how: professionally. *He would not let personal relationship or any other personal interest get in the way of his business decisions, in spite of the fact that this was a family-owned bank.* I was the bank's lawyer and both of us worked efficiently as a team. Being a brod, I was not only his lawyer but also his confidant.

One time he asked for my help with a floundering client who owed the bank a huge amount of money. He asked if I could take over the loan and the collateral; to erase the account from past due and transfer it as an item in litigation. After some serious thought, I negotiated and came into terms with the client and the take-over was approved by the bank's board. The bank, Lito and I were happy. This was simply how I became a considerable landowner outside Davao.

Some years later, predictably, Lito's temper erupted. He gave a merciless tongue-lashing to a senior vice-president of the bank, who was the heir-apparent of the owners, for unprofessional conduct. It was just a matter of time before Lito severed his relationship with this bank. As you cannot keep a good man down, Lito soon became the new president of another bank - the same bank which gave me a life changing lawyer's fee. Thus, serendipitously, we found ourselves resuming our client - lawyer relationship.

5.. I had the good fortune of knowing, at very close range Buddy Maronilla '50. When I met him, he was semi-retired and was already a successful lawyer and wealthy businessman. I worked with him on some projects and cases, and somehow, we seemed to have the right chemistry. We became instant buddies and partners. Being frat brods gave much more meaning and substance to our relationship.

I learned that his job was giving legal advise and direction to a very large, probably the biggest foreign investor in the country. He was not a frontline attorney but his advice was sought after not only because of his legal expertise but also because he has gained their trust and confidence. He was entrusted with very delicate and

sensitive jobs, but not the back breaking or nerve wracking ones. For these, he got very incredible and fabulous fees. I told him that when my turn to retire comes, I, too, would dream of having a patron, like him. *He advised me to keep my hands clean and it will come.* He treated me like a younger brother, and he to me, my older one.

After more than five years of working with Buddy, Behn Cervantes'58 told me that my friend Buddy was THE Buddy Maronilla, the original hero of the famed Upsilon classic musical "Aloyan". I could not immediately adjust my original impression of the man as I never thought of him as an actor. We met almost every week for breakfast, lunch or dinner and during these times he simply refused that I pay for any of the meals. He would go to my office and laze around there talking to my secretary or any of my lawyer-partners. The next time I saw him, I took a closer look at him and tried to fit in the talented actor that he once was. Indeed, he had the physical attributes of a matinee idol - the height, the physique, and the looks. Despite my prodding, he refused to talk about his past laurels. I was amused, amazed, even in awe, at his humility, considering that this is not our common virtue. Paraphrasing a Chilean poet, Buddy was "like a plant that had already blossomed, but still carried the light of the hidden flowers."

Four years ago, Buddy died in a New York Manhattan Hotel that I frequented. Since Buddy was buried in the US, we held our rites at the UP chapel, which "Aloyan" helped build. Not surprisingly, a lot of senior broods lined up to pay tribute to Buddy and their very emotional speeches encroached so much time on the scheduled Holy Mass. Luckily for me, I got this opportunity to pay tribute to the man.

After the Mass, three foreigners approached me and introduced themselves as Buddy's clients. They asked for a dinner appointment. I heard my heart pounding strong and fast, I felt a shiver in my spine and had goose pimples, for I knew then that Buddy must have bequeathed his clients to me. I did not know that Upsilon brotherhood extends beyond life. Buddy was a true brother in life as well as in death. Thank you Buddy boy.