

The Upsilon in the UP Centennial Celebration

By Gari Tiongco '62



Historically, the UP Alumni Association is an Upsilon-controlled organization for as old as UP itself. Tony Quirino, Pio Pedrosa, Ferdinand Marcos, Gerry Roxas, Nicanor Yniquez, H. R. Reyes, Estelito Mendoza, and Eddie Hernandez, all distinguished Upsilonians, once served as UPAA President. For more than two decades, Upsilon, thru Ed Espiritu and Pons Mathay continued to rein the organization. Concurrent with the office of the UPAA President is a coveted 3-year seat in the UP Board of Regents.

Ed and Pons had passed the torch to us. The responsibility was awesome considering the goodwill they have established. But we were faced with a great challenge posed by rival candidates who were once the allies of Ed and Pons for 20 years. They thought that they, not us, were the heirs apparent. With the retirement of the duo from UPAA, they presumed that Upsilon's days were over.

A formidable team composed of decent, distinguished members of all other fraternities and sororities raised their battle cry to end the Upsilon domination. This sentiment aroused the interest of 25,000 alumni who came out to elect the Board of Directors. This battle royal caught fire in the national media where we were the object of widespread criticism. It was a fierce and ugly battle which did not end with the canvassing of votes, but in the Supreme Court. Of course, pitted against the Upsilon machinery, the conclusion of the election was rather obvious.

The next contest was to elect the Centennial UPAA President. We needed the support, cooperation and most of all the participation of all alumni if we were to successfully lead the organization. We had to use every ounce of the vaunted Upsilon charm, to win our worthy opponents back to the fold. The combined charisma of all Upsilonians in the board, Chitong R '61, Behn C'58, MonMaro '66, Romy G'63, Leon A'59, Gil F '63, Fred P '67, and the late Mari Hidalgo '54 plus one Sigma Deltan, Ligaya Tankeh, was irresistible and worked its magic. Our rivals agreed to join us in a unity ticket which I was privileged to head. We won unopposed. Peace and cooperation reigned in UP and the stage was set for a memorable and successful centennial celebration.

In the hollowed halls of the boardroom of the UP Board of Regents as well as in UPAA, we were never parochial in our undertakings as we had the best interest

of the University foremost in our minds. We humbled ourselves as we actively solicited the involvement of all groups who, after all, shared the same loyalty and allegiance to UP. By giving our utmost to the University, we were giving ourselves to the country as well. We downplayed our being Upsilonians as we simply followed the credo. *"Its abiding faith and loyalty to the ideals of my alma mater and my country suffuse me with courage."* The response of the UP community was unexpectedly overwhelming and gratifying. We not only unified the fractious fraternities but also inspired all to cooperate and contribute to various alumni endeavors. Little did we expect that by being humble, we became prouder; by downplaying the Upsilon, we actually highlighted it as we gained the respect and admiration of all. As a result, we are proud to say that we had **30 successful projects** for the centennial celebration. We need not describe all of them here because they have been described in a book we produced for the centennial celebration.

The centennial year festivities started on January 8, 2008 with a **Torch Relay to the Oblation** in which some 15,000 alumni participated. This was the biggest single gathering of the alumni in UP history. Congratulations go to Chitong Rivera '61 who chaired this event.

Another notable project was an **Art Exhibit** to showcase all recognized visual artists since the founding of UP. It is one profession where the excellence of UP alumni has not been deservedly known. Nonoy Gamboa '62 and Romy Carlos '63, helped conceptualize and implement the project, aptly called **"100 Years 100 Nudes"**. Nene Araneta'53 agreed to hold the show for free at Araneta Center. Our objective was twofold: to feature all UP trained artists, old and new, and to bring their art to the common man. As the project gained momentum, all alumni artists now wanted to participate and so we had to exhibit more than 100 nude paintings. The project was a smashing success. Almost all the artworks were sold out. Thousands of people from all walks of life viewed the exhibit. The UP Artists Group had acquired a life of its own as it became organized and had put up its own exhibits since then. Araneta Center had now been discovered as a new place for art exhibits. For posterity, we recorded the event in a coffee table book.

We now come to the highlights of the Centennial Celebration which was the **Grand Reunion and a Cultural Extravaganza**. We wanted this to be the best and biggest ever in the history of UP for, after all, a centennial comes along only once in a lifetime. Our formula for success was simple: gather the musical greats of UP; select the best director (Behn), put in the producer who solves all problems (Chitong) and of course, we had the support of the Board, half of whom were Upsilonians. By then, everyone had accepted the fact that this was right down the alley of the Upsilon.

The **Reunion** took almost the entire day, from 10am to 4.30pm. It went on smoothly, in spite of the fact that it was the biggest reunion ever with the

most number of participants. Everyone went home happy and satisfied with how the event was celebrated. Clearly, it was an Upsilon event but nobody complained because each and every one, no matter where their group loyalties lie, had their share of fun and enjoyment.

Before the year ended, we wanted to stage a **Cultural Show** to honor not only the musical talents of the UP for the last one hundred years, but also to honor UP with her top artists' *tour de force* performances. It was to be the cutting edge of all cultural shows, the best way to end the centennial celebration. We gathered multi-awarded, world-renowned UP alumni artists from around the world, among them Evelyn Mandac and Noel Velasco, together with the world class Madrigal Singers, the internationally awarded Mabuhay Singers, globally acclaimed UP concert chorus, and nationally recognized UP Administration Choir.

The celebration was held at the Araneta Coliseum, again compliments of George Araneta '53. There were about 300 participants in the show attended by about 4,000 alumni in spite of the raging signal No. 3 storm outside. It was a spectacular extravaganza. When I looked at the audience, they seemed mesmerized as if they were carried away immersed in a happy recollection of the good old UP days.

In a moment of mischief, I whispered to my seatmate at my left, the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court who belongs to another fraternity, "Chief, this is an Upsilon show." He thought for a while and shyly admitted, "Yeah, we could not do this, Upsilon lang ang makakagawa nito". I threw the same mischievous comment, expecting the same answer, to a Senator at my right, also belonging to a different fraternity. At that particular moment, there were three tenors singing: Dondi Ong, '88, and Joseph Ofindo, '75 both macho-looking men, and the third in the middle was the dean of college of music, a good tenor and showman, but who obviously had gay mannerisms. Wanting to hit back at my mischief, the senator retorted: "Ah 'yan, Upsilon ba 'yan?", (referring to the gay one.) I shot back, "Sigma Deltan yan". He gave a roar of laughter in envious approval.

The UP alumni tenors and the sopranos overflowed with artistic genius and all gave lush, lavish and dazzling performances much to the delight of the crowd, even the uninitiated. The four choral groups were positioned on each four walls of the auditorium. With the different maestros simultaneously conducting their respective choirs, all of about 200 voices singing in unison with different voices but in perfect harmony and coming from all four directions, the audience was beautifully seduced into participation. Suddenly, every one stood up and joined the chorus, their passion rising as the song rose to a crescendo. After the song, they gave vent to their bursting emotions by clapping and cheering lustily in appreciation of something never done and

unheard of in the last one hundred years. It was phenomenal. It was magic. It was the genius of Behn Cervantes.

I received so many requests for repeat performances, but alas, these be-medaled artists could only be gathered for a day. So, I arranged a matinee show for students to appreciate this once-in-a-lifetime performance. We gave free admissions to public schools not only for them to learn and enjoy the finer things in life but also like the painting exhibits, to bring arts to the common people. I was not disappointed. The theatre was full of public school students. They clapped and cheered lustily and gave standing ovations to each and every sterling performance of the artists. There was a tumultuous celebration by the students after the show. My spirit was uplifted. I felt like I had never done anything as good as producing this show.

The Presidential Committee on the Centennial Celebrations commended UPAA for its indispensable and valuable contributions to the celebration, soon followed by another from the UP President and the Board of Regents. As an added bonus, the Aliw Awards gave UPAA recognition for the exemplary cultural presentation during the centennial celebration.

On hindsight, all we did was what our Credo called for: *'helping create a climate conducive to learning and progress in the University of the Philippines.'* Between my soul and my shadow, I was silently proud of myself, of all the brods involved, and of the Upsilon fraternity⁰ that molded and welded us together. Like Ed Espiritu and Pons Mathay before us, Chitong and I passed the torch to the good and capable hands of Fred Pascual'67.