

Treasures of gold we've none

But we're richer than anyone

We had a mother

As grand as Inay.

Inay was our guiding light. She was the moon and the stars of our little universe.

Our mother didn't read to us when we were children for indeed at the time there was no children's literature as it exists today, but she was a great storyteller. Inay would describe events or people in the most colorful of language with unerring accuracy. We loved to hear her stories about Sta. Elena; Inay could describe them in the most humorous way that would leave all of us laughing.

Whenever she was in the hospital, as soon as she felt better and while waiting to be discharged, she would tell me stories about the Japanese occupation, about how she would help our grandparents in their sari-sari store, how she and our grandfather would take the kalesa to sell food, how our grandmother would hide the money around her waist for they were living in dangerous times. Storytelling by Inay is like a work of art, a canvass of many colors.

When Inay came home from the hospital for the last time we were gathered around her. One by one she gave her jewelries to us. Each piece was accompanied with anecdotes or instructions not to lose them or give away to future daughters-in-law. One ring, she said, should be soaked in a solution to bring out the color, another ring should be cleaned, another piece was bought from a cousin, another bought from winning the numbers 1/22. She told us how one of our brothers lost his ring with three diamonds when he got into a fight in a nearby barrio. And once again, for the last time, we were caught under the spell of her storytelling.

Inay never went to a university but she was a great teacher. She taught me and my brothers and sisters how to love one another with a love that was true and a love that was pure. She did not do it with any grand gestures or eloquent speech, she simply showed us how. We learned it not because we were afraid of her but because we were inspired by her.

Our parents created a world where each of us was important, each of us was loved. Through the years we've all experienced joy, pain and now sorrow but we've always emerged stronger. It is the power of this love that drew Inay's grandchildren from New England and the West Coast to New Jersey to comfort and to say goodbye to Inay .

Through her illness our mother never made a solitary journey, not even for an hour. One by one we took on different roles so we could take care of Inay. It was a great privilege to have worked with the most knowledgeable, capable, compassionate and loving group of care givers – the Team Bundalian.

We are forever grateful to our spouses, partner and children for the sacrifices they've made while we took care of Inay. We created different teams: the first responders, the transition team, the day and night shifts and special task force consisting of massagers, runners, drivers to and from hospitals, homes and airports, cook, shoppers, cleaners and washers.

At first, we had one-man teams and later on upgraded them to two-people assists, bilinguals preferred. Every spoon of thickened liquid, every spoon of mashed food and every touch you've given Inay bespoke of your great love for her.

Jesus says that His Apostles will be known by the love they have for one another, and that is true with us as well. At every juncture, in every crucible moment in our life as a family we've always faced it together. This journey that we had gone through was by far the most painful – and I am in awe at the magnitude of the sacrifices you've made for Inay.

Inay was not just a great teacher, she was a wise one. She knew that once we've learned this lesson on love well, everything else would flow there from. Love was what we needed to get through this journey and love was what was given by all of us to all of us. It was the thread that held so true.

As hard as it is for all of us, our mother's passing is harder still on our Dad. In his twilight years, he depended a lot on Inay to help him navigate his ever decreasing world. Our Dad sat in the same chair by the window everyday, slept on the same side of the bed. Our Dad asked Inay for the time and the day; he measured everything by Inay. Inay was our Dad's compass and his point of reference. She was his sunrise and his sunset, his day, his night and his tomorrow.

Long before our little brothers and sisters were born, Inay and I formed our partnership. She gave me the job of being the second mother. That act of trust was the greatest gift our Mother has given me. The work that went with it was inconsequential compared to the joy that I got from it. Inay, I hope that despite my shortcomings I did my job. I am consoled by the fact that I stayed awake with Inay that one last night because first mates don't desert their captains when they're down.

Inay was a great advocate of any one of us in need. The one unforgettable partnership however that she had was with our brother Arnel. The way the two of them did everything was exceptional and sometimes amusing.

Our parent's greatest wish was for our brother Noriel to be able to join us here in America so we all could finally be one whole family. For 20 years we've all nurtured that wish. On April 4th, 2011 our family touched that dream when Noriel and his family stepped on American soil. A week after that Inay was taken to the hospital never to recover. She said her work was done, she was content, she couldn't ask for more. And in a voice that she can no longer speak, as first mate, I hereby declare all men on board; all men accounted for.

For 61 years Inay did her job faithfully and lovingly. She and our Dad raised 10 children with little means to accomplish it but they did it well. Even in the direst of circumstance Inay never lost her quiet dignity, something that I could only aspire to.

Someone wrote that the Eskimos had 10 words for snow and the Egyptians had 20 words for sands. But if someone were to ask me the words that would describe a mother's love, all I could think of was the way our mother would rock my little brothers and sisters to sleep with a song - and there's no word for that.

Inay also took care of her grandchildren, and in the hour of her greatest need they were her companions and her consolation. When Inay came home from the hospital for the last time, she was

ministered to and prayed for by her grandchildren. They would camp in her bedroom, the living room and the dining room of what they would always call Nanay's house. I know that the only epitaph that Inay would appreciate is the one that says her grandchildren truly loved her.

I am certain that when Jesus welcomed Inay at the gate of heaven, if she had asked Him to judge her by how much her grandchildren loved her and how they took care of her when she was ill, Jesus would have told her – well done my faithful servant well done. In the end, our Mother belonged to her grandchildren. That was her legacy. To Jesus, Our Lord, we commend our Mother with love and gratitude.