

SALAMAT, CORY



Sing the praises: At the Dulce Nombre de Maria Cathedral-Basilica in October 2004, former Philippine President Corazon Aquino joins the choir for a mid-morning Mass.

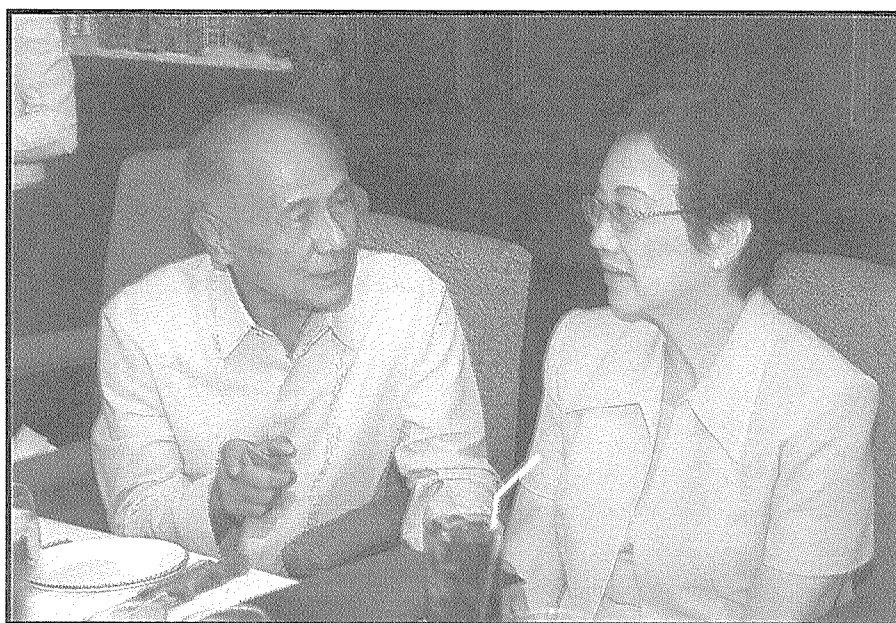


Photo courtesy of Mark V. Pangilinan

Dinner: Mark V. Pangilinan chats with his longtime friend former Philippine President Corazon Aquino during an October 2004 dinner at the Hy's Steak House.

A great LEADER, SISTER AND MOTHER

Guam leaders, residents bid farewell to icon of democracy

By Amritha Alladi
Bayanihan
aalladi@guampdn.com

Like a mother unable to choose favorites among her children, the late former Philippine President Corazon "Cory" Aquino wasn't one to take sides.

But like most mothers, she also knew that when her children fought amongst themselves that she would have to set an example and look out for their best interests, says Mark V. Pangilinan, a friend and ally on Guam.

In the case of Aquino, her children were her fellow citizens.

"She was neutral, she had no enemies," remembers Pangilinan, her host on Guam in 1994 and 2004, and president of the Filipino Community of Guam from 1967 to 1977.

"She only knows what's right or wrong."

Pangilinan knew Aquino since before the 1986 "People Power" revolution, and he had arranged support events for her in Guam. He says Aquino was looking to solicit funds from Filipinos here, as she recognized that they were a vital tool in securing victory for the non-violent People's Party Movement in 1986.

He recalls at one function discussing with her the role of Filipino immigrants to the Philippine economy. Pangilinan had told Aquino that the overseas Filipino workers



Meeting: In this photo from June 1994, former Philippine President Corazon Aquino, center, poses with then Guam Gov. Joseph Ada. Aquino was on island to celebrate Philippine Independence. From left; Filipino Community of Guam Board of Trustee member Emelio Uy; Tina Blas; Aquino; Ada; and then Lt. Gov. Frank Blas Sr.

were sending billions of dollars back home to their families, and that "without them, the country would be bankrupt."

Aquino had agreed that they were send-

ing substantial funds, but she was hoping they would be willing to help their communities and the nation, instead of just their families, he says.

"I pray with my heart and I work with my hands, and I leave the rest to God."

— Former Philippine President Corazon "Cory" Aquino to students of the Academy of Our Lady of Guam during an October 2004 visit

Still, she was very grateful for any help the Filipinos in Guam could provide the motherland, and former Guam Gov. Joseph Ada says she was eventually able to return the favor.

As governor, Ada visited the Philippines to recruit workers for Guam's construction industries, and he remembers Aquino was most accommodating to his requests. She expedited the process of finding skilled laborers to help develop tourism in Guam. He was greatly appreciative that because of her, 12,000 to 15,000 workers could facilitate Guam's economic boom.

The discourse between leaders of Guam and the Philippines have since then been constant.

In 2004, Pangilinan arranged an intimate dinner party for her so she could discuss her views with highly-placed figures in Guam. He wanted to invite only a select group of friends because he felt a larger gathering would not let Aquino mingle or express herself freely. The list of invitees in-

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cluded now Chief Justice Bob Torres, then-District Court of Guam Judge John Unpingco, then-Pacific Daily News Publisher Lee Weber, businessman Emelio Uy and other distinguished guests.

'INSPIRATIONAL'

During that October 2004 visit, Aquino also sang with the Dulce de Maria Cathedral-Basilica choir and spoke to the students of the Academy of Our Lady of Guam.

Sister Francis Jerome Cruz, who was president of the academy at the time, remembers Aquino's 30-minute speech as "inspirational".

"I get goose-bumps just thinking of what she was saying," Cruz says, in reference to the story of Aquino's rise as one of the first female presidents in the world. Aquino told them how she struggled with her husband's arrest, his confinement for seven years, and life after his assassination.

During the question-and-answer session, when the students asked her how she managed to become president, Aquino joked that the girls should marry someone heroic, have him arrested, and then "get millions of people to follow you."

Afterwards, as a thank you gesture to Cruz, Aquino sent back paintings of flowers that she had done herself. Cruz plans to decorate her office with those paintings now, although the chance for the students to meet a spiritual role model was gratifying enough, she says.

"She asked the students if they prayed every day and a lot of students raised their



"I feel I am losing a sister"

— Guam businessman and former FCG President Mark V. Pangilinan, a friend and ally of Aquino.

hands," Cruz says.

"She said, 'I pray with my heart and I work with my hands, and I leave the rest to God.'"

A SINCERE PERSON

As a devout Catholic and dedicated homemaker, Aquino was often seen as the loyal better-half of Benigno "Ninoy" Aquino. According to Ada, Cory Aquino's ability to take center-stage when she did not know what she was getting herself into sets her apart from other female leaders.

"She was a mother, her husband had just been assassinated, yet she had the courage to pave the way for democracy," he says. "She was put in that situation."

Ada's lieutenant governor, Frank Blas, says that not many spouses would be game for such a task.



Family friends: In this photo from 1986 in the presidential palace, Malacanang, Kris Aquino, former Philippine President Corazon Aquino's daughter, Popsy Mendez-Aquino, Cory Aquino's sister-in-law, pose with Mark V. Pangilinan during the Guam businessman's trip home to the Philippines.

"The bottom line is, if there was a Guamanian lady to be a leader in that capacity, I would like to have that kind of person," he says.

His interactions with Cory were brief, but even in those few instances, he remembers she was a very engaging woman. It was what he found most striking about her when they first met. He was impressed by her general personal concern for others, he says.

"I could tell her sincerity with just her first words. It wasn't flowery, just straightforward."

But her sincerity wasn't to be mistaken for naivety. Both Blas and Pangilinan recall that she had a strong will over people, and

that was what catalyzed her rise to the presidency. It was the people who persuaded her to take the post, and according to Pangilinan, she figured she might as well light the candle rather than to curse the darkness.

"They practically pushed her to the job saying, 'If you're not going to run against (Ferdinand) Marcos, we're not going to beat him,'" he says. "The people practically followed her blindly."

So she gave in to their clamor.

LOSING A SISTER

Three weeks after she gained the presidency, Aquino was able to reciprocate Pangilinan's hospitality by inviting him to visit the Philippines with his family. Today, his face glows as he flips through photos of his family's visit to the Malacanang Palace as

her personal guests.

But even as the leader of a country, Aquino continued to turn to her Guam friends for advice. Pangilinan was her confidant.

Pangilinan remembers she would ask him questions because she knew he had investments in the Philippines. Thus, he says with her passing now, he not only feels a void in the line of Filipino leaders, but also an absence in his family.

"I feel I am losing a sister, a close sister," he says. "On behalf of the Filipino community, we mourn the passing of a great leader, sister and mother."

