

THE KAPAMPANGAN POWER COUPLE WHO ROCKED THE WORLD

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Cory Aquino stood by her man during his military trial

Ninoy and Cory are now the object of revisionist attempts to denigrate their contribution to our struggle for freedom, especially in the cyber world

By Michael Charleston "Xiao" Chua

the country with their charade. That Cory was a weakling, who hid herself in the safety of a Cebu convent during the People Power Revolution, playing absolutely no part in it. That the couple were non-heroes who actually destroyed the Marcos dictatorship which was the most democratic and peaceful time in Philippine history.

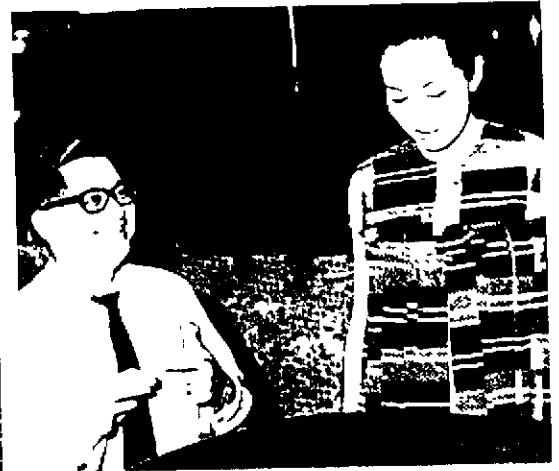
The milieu of the childhood of Benigno S. Aquino, Jr. (born 1932) and Corason Sumulong Cojuangco (born 1933) was the Kapampangan Tarlac political and economic elite circles. Both were Kapampangan and the two were actually childhood friends. If what they say is true that to be Kapampangan is to be cocky then Ninoy would be the quintessential Kapampangan. It is not surprising that Cory's first memory of Ninoy is this: "Ninoy kept bragging he was a year ahead of me in school so I didn't even bother to talk to him." His self-assuring attitude was rooted in his dear father's infamy as a collaborator to the Japanese during the war. He wanted both to clear the name of his father and to prove himself. Kapampangan Local Historian Lino Dizon said that Ninoy's family gave away their land in Concepcion, Tarlac to the peasants, and Frankie Sison Jose claimed that in later life Ninoy told him of

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Years after playing their part in a theatre called Philippine History, Ninoy and Cory Aquino are still the subject of academic discussions and even Facebook and Twitter posts. Considered icons of democracy and heroism, Ninoy and Cory are now the

object of revisionist attempts to denigrate their contribution to our struggle for freedom, especially in the cyber world. That Ninoy was a traditional politician, the same as Ferdinand Marcos, and that Marcos and Ninoy were actually very good friends to the end, fooling



Top, left to right, official wedding photo in 1954, a few years into their marriage, Ninoy started to put on weight, Cory settled into a quiet homemaker's life as Ninoy became more involved in national politics. Bottom, left to right: an emaciated Ninoy during his 40-day fast, Cory and Ninoy regaining peace and quiet in Boston, bloody end as prelude to rebirth of democracy

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His star rose fast he wrote about a war at 17, brought down one of the greatest rebels in Philippine history, Luis Taruc at 22, and was holder of major posts in government as the youngest Mayor, Vice Governor, Governor and Senator in a span of about only 13 years! His official biographer Nick Joaquin did not even hide the fact that he was a bragger and sweet talker—very much reflected in all video footage of his speeches, even up to the very last interviews he did before he was shot. He was once bragging about his walky-talkies, Arab stallions, helicopters and his hacienda (not his, his wife's) to foreign guests. As local leader, he was indeed a traditional politician by many accounts—a turncoat who used guns, goons and gold and who also worked with Kapampangan rebels to protect his interests. Close friends suggest that

Marcos and Ninoy were actually very good friends and that sometimes Ninoy would supply Marcos, his fraternity brod, ammunitions to win elections. He was a charmer, who courted the prettiest ladies at that time like the actress Dorothy Jones (a.k.a. Nida Blanca) and Imelda Romualdez herself.
But this most ambitious politician, who aimed at the presidency in 1973, was humbled by his experiences in his seven years and seven months of detention at Fort Bonifacio as the very first political detainee when Martial Law was proclaimed, especially his one month solitary confinement in Fort Magsaysay where he claimed to have found God. His source of strength was Cory and his family, who brought him his favorite Kapampangan food in prison. He in turn would prepare for them chicken spread on toasted bread. He loved to eat and this was evident with his size. But Alvin

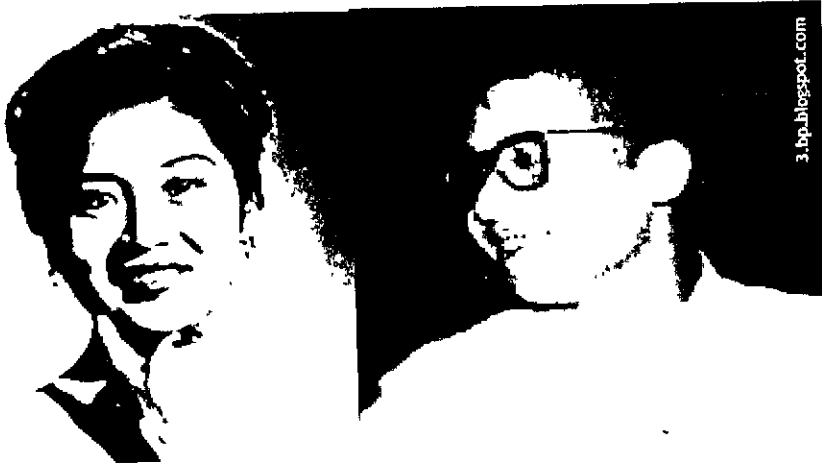
Campomanes, who is doing his thesis on Ninoy, said that the greatest evidence of Ninoy's sincerity to fight Marcos, that they ceased being friends by Martial Law, was that he abandoned his love of food and fasted as a protest for 40 days. He almost died in the attempt and this was definitely not a stunt. He chose to suffer with the people and did all his best to fight for their freedom.
After the three happiest years as a family man while in exile in Boston, Massachusetts, he returned to Manila on 21 August 1983 knowing he could do something about the worsening situation in his country. Whether or not he still wanted to be president was beside the point, he willingly gave up his life for the country. When he died, People Power—which had started even in the seventies with the heroism and martyrdom of a few thousand freedom fighters, including Ninoy himself when he

NINOY & IMELDA

SUMMER FLING IN MAGALANG

By Robby Tantingco

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Who would have thought that Ninoy Aquino and Imelda Marcos met and nearly fell in love on the banks of the Parua-Bamban (Sacobia) River?

In 1950, Daniel Romualdez, newly elected congressman from the Fourth District of Leyte (later Speaker of the House), invited his first cousin Imelda Romualdez to try her luck in Manila. The college-educated beauty was already popular in Leyte as the "Rose of Tacloban" because of her looks and singing talent. Danieling wanted her to conquer Manila, too.

Danieling was married to Pacita "Paz" Gueco of Magalang, Pampanga, heiress to vast tracts of farm lands owned by the Chinese-Filipino Gwekoh (Gueco) clan. She was an aunt of Ninoy Aquino of Concepcion, Tarlac just across the Parua (Sacobia) River.

Ninoy was 18 and Imelda was 21 when they first met during a family picnic and swimming at the Parua River. Danieling wanted to show her off to his in-laws in Magalang, and Paz wanted to play matchmaker for her popular nephew, who had just been decorated with a Legion of

Honor medal from President Quirino for his exploits as a reporter in the Korean War.

Imelda and Ninoy met again before that summer ended, during a dance in the Gueco house in Navaling, on the boundary between Magalang and Concepcion. All the local boys came to the dance to meet the visitor, but none dared to dance with her because they were all intimidated by her beauty and height. None, that is, except Ninoy.

Back in Manila, Ninoy continued her pursuit of Imelda, picking her up from work and bringing her home in a taxicab. The love affair fizzled out because Ninoy's sisters (except Lupita) thumbed down the Rose of Tacloban in favor of Corazon Sumulong Cojuangco, province mate and scion of the wealthy and powerful Cojuangco clan.

Ninoy married Cory in 1954 and Imelda married Ferdinand Marcos also in 1954.

was still in prison—intensified with the participation of millions in the struggle that eventually brought down the dictatorship in two years.

Cory, who used to be just by the side of her husband, took center stage walking and talking in rallies. Boy, she could talk. And when it became apparent that Marcos was still strong and no opponent could actually beat him, she sacrificed her privacy and accepted the mantle of leadership of the opposition in the 1986 snap elections, even acquiring the services of the political consultancy group



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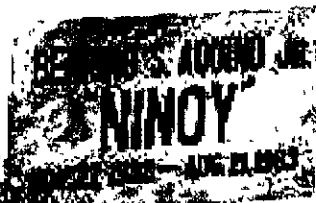
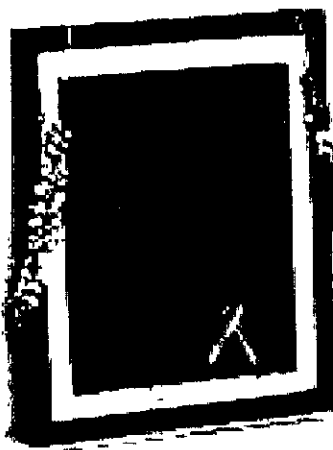
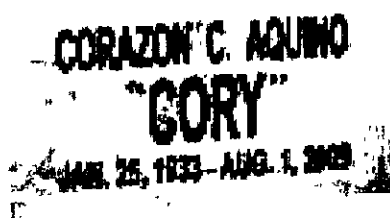
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Ninoy courted Imelda for a while but eventually married his sisters' choice, Corazon Cojuangco, while Imelda married the rising star from Ilocos Norte, Ferdinand Marcos. Both weddings occurred in the same year, 1954.

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Ninoy (d. August 21, 1983) and Cory (d. August 1, 2009), together forever.

Sawyer Miller to improve her craft for the cause. Protesting the fraudulent conduct of the elections and her defeat, she called for a boycott rally at the Luneta against the better judgment of her advisers who feared that the people would not come, but a million came. According to Angela Stuart Santiago, if the EDSA Revolution did not happen, the government would still fall because so many had stopped drinking Coke and San Miguel and had withdrawn their deposits from crony banks. People Power happened because Cory's call for peaceful civil disobedience which was going on for about a week already, prepared the people for full participation in People Power. On the second day of the revolution, 22 February 1986, Cory insisted on returning to Manila from Cebu, being driven beside the tanks going to EDSA. On the third day, she insisted on going to EDSA where she briefly stayed with the people near Ortigas-POEA, a fact documented by newspapers accounts the next day. She didn't have to be there because the people were already shouting her name, but she came nonetheless. The peaceful change of regime that moved Filipinos to show their best qualities in four days and was inspired by this Kapampangan couple, was imitated by other peoples freeing themselves from dictatorships in

the next quarter of a century, calling their movements "People Power."

Cory heard Ninoy predict that the next president who came after Marcos would have a very difficult job handling the country. It was like turning over a broken car after using it. Little did she realize that she would be the one.

Although her administration was marred by different crises, like the unfortunate Mendiola Massacre of 1987, the human rights violations of the post-Marcos Armed Forces who probably had a hangover from their heyday, the nine coup attempts that rocked her administration, the power crisis, the 1990 Luzon earthquake and the 1991 Mt. Pinatubo eruption which buried the Kapampangan region, she should be credited for facilitating the difficult task of opening the democratic space which paved way for the development of cyberspace and the proliferation of different NGO and volunteer groups who are now hand-in-hand in helping the less fortunate. She also made a strong front against military adventurists who wanted to grab power. Two decades of decay cannot be overturned overnight and a lot of people realized that although hers was not a perfect presidency, she did her best as president. There was even a popular clamor for her to run

again but she peacefully stepped down and passed the baton to her elected successor in 1992. She continued to play an active role as Citizen Cory, promoting micro-finance among the poor and playing a key role in different protest movements during her post-presidency until she died in 2009. She was no saint, and didn't claim as such, but she was a staunch and true defender of the kind of democracy she knew and tried to stay personally incorrupt as a public official. The world recognized and admired her for it. The continued popularity and political stability in the presidency of their son Noynoy is a testament of how many Filipinos revere the memory of these two Kapampangans.

Ninoy and Cory are two of the only few Filipino leaders known the world over. With their place in history secured more so even in demystification, this Kapampangan power-couple will continue to inspire countless others to share the light of their candles as they did, and to do what they can when they know they can.

23 September 2012
40th anniversary of the
announcement of Martial Law

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