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Monrayo/Tomorrow's Memories

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Introduction

It is heartbreaking to watch my mother slowly and carefully move around the house. She is eighty-four, blind and physically weakened by a series of major surgeries, but she still insists on feeding and dressing herself, taking care of her personal needs, and getting around the house with her walker. Once in a while I look through our albums of photos, which she began collecting long before she married, and read an entry here and there in her diaries to help sustain my memory of her when she was energetic, enthusiastic, and independent.

I consider myself fortunate that my mother, Angeles Monrayo, began writing a diary when she was a young girl. It is a strange but moving experience to read about her childhood thoughts and life in Hawai‘i and then see her as she is today. Her first three diaries cover the years of her childhood in Hawai‘i from January 10, 1924, to her arrival in California, November 17, 1928, and her elopement. They end when she was expecting her first child.

Recently she surprised me by giving me five more books—one contains poems she wrote in the 1940s, and four are diaries from April 9, 1981, her third day in the hospital for a major operation (two weeks after my father died), to October 19, 1993, her last entry before she had undergone glaucoma surgery, which left her blind.

This introduction attempts to fill in some of the years before and after my mother's first three diaries. Work on the diaries was a strange experience for me. Whenever I stopped work on the

book to tend to that "young girl" now eighty-four, I felt I had stepped out of a time machine from the past back into the present, my mind and emotions caught between two dimensions.

Throughout my childhood until I left home to start my own life (and even then, once in a while she'd reminisce out loud when I visited), my mother told me stories of her childhood in Hawai'i, when she first came to California, the Depression years—stories about the happy and unhappy times of her life. I confess that when I became a teenager, sometimes I would only half listen to her stories. Now I am thankful for her storytelling and will introduce some of her stories here.

One of my favorite stories was told to her by my grandfather of an incident that occurred on the ship to Hawai'i from the Philippines in 1912.

My grandfather and granduncles were Sakadas—Filipinos recruited in the Philippine Islands by the Hawaiian Plantation Association (HPA) to work on the plantations. When they were recruited, my grandmother was pregnant with Mom and did not want to leave home until after her child was born.

Mom was born in Romblon City, Romblon, Philippine Islands, on August 2, 1912. On November 15, 1912, she was on her way to Hawai'i with her parents, Enarciso Morante Monrayo and Valeriana Motia Monrayo, five-year-old brother Julian Monrayo, two aunts (Motia), and two uncles (Monrayo) on the SS *Shinyo Maru*, a three-masted ship of the Maru Line.

Nanay woke up one morning to find her baby gone. In a panic, she woke up Tatay, crying, "Our baby Angeles is gone!" He immediately woke Julian and they searched each and every sleeping person. Julian found his baby sister sleeping between a couple. Tatay angrily woke them. The young wife, frightened and crying, said she was only "borrowing" their baby. She told them she and her husband had been married for years but never had a child. She just wanted to have the baby with her for the night and would have returned her in the morning. The incident did not frighten the woman, as she continued to take baby

Angeles now and then. After that, when Nanay awoke and saw her baby gone, she knew exactly where to go to get her back.

Some of Mom's early memories of Hawai'i were when Nanay sent her to the Chinese store on the other side of the Waipahu Sugar Mill every morning to buy freshly baked buns. Whenever Mom tells the story, she sniffs the air as if she can still smell the baking buns. Her route to and from the store was through the mill grounds, and the workers would smile and say hello or wave to her. Mom smiles when she talks of the days she and Uncle Julian played in the sugarcane fields, but she shudders when she mentions the ditches filled with water. When they had to cross a ditch, he would carry her on his back. She refused to walk in the ditch water because of the "bugs" (leeches) that would cling to her legs. Uncle Julian didn't mind the "bugs"; he just pulled them off.

She sadly remembers when her parents' marriage ended. She was six years old. Nanay, a victim of *coboy-coboy* (kidnapping or abduction of a man's wife by another man), had run away with another man, taking Mom with her. Uncle Julian was left behind because he wasn't around. Mom was ten years old when Tatay finally found them on the island of Kauai and took her back with him to Honolulu. Mom and Uncle Julian were boarded with a family whenever Tatay worked on the plantation. Although she lived with different families, she had to take care of herself and her personal needs. To this day, she is thankful to Nanay for teaching her how to cook, wash, and take care of herself.

Mom had nine full siblings, but seven died in infancy. She had four half siblings; one died in infancy and one Nanay had given away to the baby's godparents. Nanay had a child every year, and Mom remembers clearly the day Nanay gave birth to her half sister. She was about seven years old then. On the day her sister was born, she helped Nanay prepare for the birth by helping Nanay carry a big pot of hot water from the outside kitchen to the bedroom and placing a pile of clean rags by the mattress which Nanay had propped up against a bedroom wall.

Suddenly and quickly Nanay settled herself on the mattress and told Mom to run for the midwife. She said she ran as fast as she could. When she and the midwife returned to the house, Nanay was already giving birth and the midwife immediately went to help her. The women forgot about Mom until she started to cry. Mom said she became frightened when she saw blood coming out from her mother and thought she was dying. It took her a long while to get over the experience of seeing her mother give birth to her sister.

When Tatay and Mom moved to California in July 1927, her intention was to continue her education but they lived in an isolated farm in the San Ramon area and there was no one available to help her find a school, so she gave up on continuing her education.

Mom and Dad, Alejandro Salvador Raymundo, met on October 5, 1927. He was a salesman for tailor-made men's suits. Mom said it was love at first sight for her. A month later, when work was finished in the camp, she was ecstatic to learn that they were going to go to Stockton. She had not forgotten Dad, who had told her that he went to Stockton often. In Stockton, she began working as a pool-table girl in Menda's Pool Hall on Market Street. Her arrival raised the Pinay (Filipina women) population in Stockton to seven.

She and Dad met again when he came into the pool hall during her first week on the job. They began to see each other often. One day my father proposed to my mother, but Tatay was vehemently opposed to their marriage. With friends' help, they eventually eloped and got married on January 23, 1928. She was fifteen-and-half years old, he was one month shy of his twenty-fifth birthday.

Mom laughs when she tells the story about getting their marriage license in Modesto. Mom had worn a cloche with the brim turned down close to her eyes. When the clerk asked for her age, she immediately said, "Twenty." She said, "I don't know why I said twenty instead of eighteen. The man looked at me

and he said, 'You don't look twenty.' I tried to tell him that we Filipina women are not like white women, we don't look our age. The man behind the window shook his head and said, 'No, you are not twenty, but, oh, well.' Your Dad and Ninong and Ninang Roxas just stood by and didn't say anything."

Mom shudders when she tells of how she and Dad managed to stay just about "a half step ahead" of Tatay. In fact, he arrived at the justice of the peace five minutes after they left. On their way back to the camp, the wedding party stopped at a chicken farm to buy several chickens for their celebration dinner. After they bought the chickens, Dad decided that it would be a good time to find out how to raise chickens. This kept my parents at the farm for an hour or so. Mom believes that it was God's way of saving their lives, as an angry Tatay had been waiting for them at the camp with a gun. Mom believes he would have shot them, remembering how violent he was when he beat up Nanay and went looking for Delphin with a gun.

When Tatay finally, but grudgingly, accepted their marriage, he and Uncle Julian visited now and then, and then lived with my parents off and on—in fact, through most of the Depression years. But Tatay never spoke directly to Dad until his great-granddaughter was about ten years old. Anything he had to communicate about Dad he said to Mom in Dad's presence. Dad tolerated Tatay for Mom's sake, going about his business as if Tatay were not around.

When my parents got married, they lived with their Ninong (Godfather) and Ninang (Godmother). They offered Dad a place with their crew and Mom a job as assistant cook. One day Ninang Roxas, who was the camp cook, became ill and the kitchen responsibilities fell on Mom. She was frightened at first but with encouragement from the others, she said, "I gritted my teeth and took over and it didn't take me long to get into the groove of cooking for a small crew." The experience stood her in a good stead through the years in various camps when a cook was needed.

Their lives as migrant workers began in 1930, as they moved from camp to camp throughout central California. Once, when they moved to a camp, there wasn't a room available in the camp and no housing nearby. The largest things Dad had ever built were vegetable crates or boxes, but he was a man who would try anything once. He solicited the help of the *boys* (a crew or a group of Filipino men) to get lumber and build a house. Whenever Mom tells the story, she laughs because to this day she doesn't know where the *boys* got the lumber; it was good lumber. She never asked, but she had her suspicions. "I know those *boys*," she would say. Dad never talked about it. They went about building the one-room house as if they knew what they were doing. The one thing Dad did know was how to wire a house. "Thank God he was an electrician," Mom would say. When he and the *boys* proudly finished, it was a nice little house, although it tilted to one side. That didn't deter Dad. He moved his family in—it was a roof over our heads! I remember how they always laughed whenever they talked about that little house.

Dad had taken a correspondence course in applied electrical engineering from the Chicago Engineering Works and received his diploma in December 1926. (The certificate is still in our possession.) He was hired almost immediately after his graduation, and his job was to maintain electrical wiring in a business office. One day, he turned off the electricity and put on his rubber gloves. Just as he started work on the wires, the electricity suddenly came on, almost knocking him off his feet. His hands escaped injury, but his rubber gloves had been burned off his hands. He never again attempted to look for a job as an electrician. He returned to fieldwork.

In the summer of 1931, in Ripon, California, Dad and his friends were working in the sugar beets when the price for sugar beets drastically fell. For all their hard work, they received nothing. Broke and with no work available, they lived in a railroad junction building. Times were hard, the Depression had hit, but there was food on the table. Vegetables consisted of mustard

greens, mushrooms, and other edible greens from the surrounding field. Fish were caught and salted. Rice, mushrooms, mustard greens, and salted fish were our diet through the winter months of 1931 and 1932. Bud, my brother, was born on December 30, 1931. The camp cook had been keeping the *totong* (scorched bottom of steam rice) in burlap sacks hung on nails outside the kitchen. Mom said it was a godsend that he had the foresight to keep the *totong,* as it kept the *campo* in rice for the winter.

There was a turkey farm nearby, and Mom heard Dad and four men of the crew discussing how to get one of the turkeys. "The farmer has a lot of turkeys. He will not miss one," she overheard one of the men say. The men wore large rubber boots when they went to the turkey farm and came home with a huge turkey, which they cleaned and split among themselves. Dad preserved our share by packing the meat in lard inside two 4-gallon lard cans he had gotten from the cook. The suspicious turkey farmer showed up at the camp the next day with several policemen. The farmer said he knew how many turkeys he had and one was missing. Mom said the police were all over the place looking for evidence and measured everyone's shoes. They were too small for the big prints the police found around the turkey farm, and there was not a single trace of feathers anywhere. Mom never found out what they did with the boots.

In July 1932, we moved to Delano, California, about 200 miles south of Stockton, where we lived for a few months. Mom laughs when she describes the move. "It was like 'grapes of wrath,' but no one paid attention, as other people were doing it too." Our one big mattress and bedding were strapped onto the car's roof; the huge corrugated tub (used to wash clothes and bathe my brother and me) was strapped to the back of the car. Our large steamer trunk filled with clothes and a few possessions was in the rumble seat and next to it a container of rice and fish for our lunch. We were all in the front seat. It was a long trip with necessary stops and lunch along the way; we left early in the morning and arrived in Delano in the evening at the camp.

Dad was told there wasn't any room available in the bunkhouse for a couple. He told the boss the barn would do very well, as the weather was warm. The barn was filled with large grape-drying trays, three of which he stacked, placing the mattress on top for our bed. Mom said it made a comfortable bed.

The next morning, when we entered the kitchen for breakfast, the boss was surprised and upset when he saw me and my brother. He had not seen us in the car on our arrival. He scolded Dad for not letting him know he had children. "The barn is not a place for children to sleep in!" The cook lived in a tent next to the kitchen, and the boss told the cook to move into the bunkhouse with the crew. The cook was not happy but he did not complain. For the duration of the grape season, the tent was our home and Mom became the camp cook, to the relief of cook and crew. As the contractor said, "He is a better field worker than a cook." She was paid one dollar a day plus meals for her, my brother, and me. Dad paid for his meals from his wages.

When my brother and I became of school age, Mom's priority wherever we lived was to see to it that we attended school. She didn't want us to spend our lives working in the fields. When our enrollment was settled, she concentrated on making our living quarters a home—whether it was a room located at one end of a bunkhouse, a tent, a two-room shack, or a box car.

Our migrant life stopped when we moved to Salinas, California, in 1939. We lived in a labor camp for about three years until Dad was offered a job as an irrigator and tractor driver for Stolich & Company, one of Salinas Valley's largest farms. He was taking diesel mechanic classes in the evening, and his instructor was the chief mechanic at Stolich & Company and offered Dad a job as a mechanic. When he wasn't driving the tractor, he could work in the shop. We moved into a company house with an outside shower and outhouse. It was not the greatest, but my mother was happy because it had three bedrooms—my brother and I would have our own bedrooms. She was happy we would not be moving from one school to another

for a long while. Mom even joined the Filipino Women's Club and became an active member.

Mom said that once in a while she missed the camp life and the get-together after dinner when she, Dad, and several *boys* used to sit outside on the steps of the bunkhouse and sing in the cool of summer evenings. She knew how to play the ukulele and Dad knew how to play the violin and they sang along. I remember those days, sitting with them and listening to their singing.

In the summer, Mom, my brother Bud, and I worked in the field; when we were in school she and a friend worked in the fields. Once, for several weeks during World War II, they and several friends worked in one of the canneries in Monterey's Cannery Row, which was in desperate need of workers on the midnight shift. Soldiers from Fort Ord were also recruited to work in the canneries. One night Mom had fallen asleep but her hands kept moving. She was awakened by the noise of can hitting can and saw she was trying to stuff a can into another can instead of fish. She was embarrassed when some of the soldiers across from her smiled and shook their heads.

During the lettuce season, she and another Pinay friend talked a labor contractor into hiring them as thinners. Thinning lettuce seedlings is a back-breaking job. They were determined to work with the men, who were getting 25 cents an hour, instead of with the other women and children hoeing weeds for 10 cents an hour. The contractor argued that the farmer did not like women doing such work in his fields. They argued that, dressed like the men with bandannas wrapped around their heads topped with large hats and shirts and work pants, they would look like one of them and promised they would not look up whenever the farmer came to the field. He finally gave in. When Mom tells the story she proudly says, "We showed them we were as good as the men. We kept up with them."

It was not all work for my parents. They had their social life. They loved music, loved to sing and, best of all, loved to dance, especially Mom. At every opportunity, they attended dances,

picnics, and special Filipino celebrations, such as marriages, births, christenings, July 4, and Christmas; the most important day was Rizal Day on December 30.

I do not remember the Depression years very well. I vaguely remember little incidents here and there, the few friends left behind when we moved, a cabin in Delano with cockroaches, a run-down three-room shack in Visalia whose floor my mother washed and scrubbed with buckets of hot soapy water. I have fond memories of baths in that house in the corrugated tub placed in the middle of the kitchen floor. I can still see the kitchen warmed by the wood-burning stove and rags stuffed under the doors and around the one window to keep the winter cold out and the heat in—those bath times were "nice and cozy" to me.

I don't look back on those years as "the good old days"—not when I now understand the hardships and deprivations. I constantly wonder how my parents and their friends ever made it through those years. Single men and families lived together in camps or in a house, supporting each other. Whoever was fortunate to find a job supported the others. Mom said no one she knew was on welfare. I found out much later that Filipinos were considered aliens and therefore did not qualify for welfare.

World War II was the beginning of the end of the comradery and family of the Filipino community I had known, the *campo* life when the *boys* and families were a "family." Those years of love and care disintegrated when many Filipino men went into the army to form the First and Second Filipino Infantries, others with families moved to the cities to work in shipyards, and children graduating from high school found office jobs in town.

Prior to World War II, many single Filipino men separated from their families in the Philippines tended to adopt families. We children called them *tios* (uncles).

One of Mom's stories is a good example of the deep sense of family and love for children. I was about seventeen months old. The Depression was about a year old. Work was hard to find. At the time Dad and three men were labor contractors of a let-

tuce-cutting crew. Their hard work was for nothing, as the market for lettuce fell and the lettuce they worked so hard to cultivate was left to rot in the field. They were left penniless. One of the partners, Manong Pedro, in his late sixties, "adopted" our family and stayed with us instead of moving on as the other partners and some of the *boys* did. He always made sure I had milk. Mom never knew how he was able to get milk and he never told her, but every day he had a bottle for me. One day it had been raining heavily and he came home soaked and cold, but he had my milk. That evening he came down with pneumonia. After a couple of weeks, Dad and one of the *boys* took him to the hospital. He died in Dad's arms on the way to the hospital. Dad, with the help of the hospital, contacted relatives of Manong Pedro. Dad did not tell Mom of Manong Pedro's death; he told her he was being cared for in the hospital. It wasn't until a month later through a chance meeting with a friend that she found out Manong Pedro had died. She had never questioned his month-long "hospitalization" as it wasn't uncommon in those days for a patient with pneumonia to be in the hospital a month or longer.

Mom has another side. She loved to read and write. She said that whenever she could, she read. She stopped writing in her diary when she had her first child, saying she was too busy caring for her family and working, but she did manage some writing—lyrics of popular songs of the day and even some lyrics and poetry she wrote herself. She was also an avid pen-pal and has photos of pen-pals from Alaska, India, England, and Hollywood in her photo albums. She began diary writing again in 1981, after my father died, until 1993, when she became blind.

She has a good collection of photo albums—pictures of friends and places were treasured. One of her albums she started in the 1940s contains brief written comments beside each photo. She has a collection of news clipping albums from 1928 to 1949 of Filipino friends, events, and especially of World War II. She is also a collector of mementoes. With all the moving about she

managed to keep a couple of large pots and few utensils from her *campo* cooking days. She kept several of her crocheted items, bleached rice sacks, an electric coffee percolator set, a radio, a few treasured dresses, and gifts of ceramics, vases, and figurines. She still has her collections of coins and stamps from the 1940s. How she managed to keep them through the years I don't know. I remember Dad grumbling about her boxes taking up room whenever we moved, wondering out loud why she didn't throw some of the old things away. She would wonder just as loudly about his old fishing poles, reels, and tackle boxes taking up just as much room and why he didn't throw the old things away. She kept his fishing poles, which are still hung up on one of our garage walls, and his tackle boxes, which are still on a high shelf in the garage where he last placed them.

Mom passed away on September 15, 2000. She was eighty-eight years old. This book is a memorial to her and to the Manangs who are gone but have left us a legacy of their fortitude and strength.

Rizaline R. Raymundo
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