

THE OFFICIAL QUARTERLY MAGAZINE OF THE SUPREME COURT PUBLIC INFORMATION OFFICE



BENCHMARK

VOLUME 2 | NUMBER 1 | FIRST QUARTER 2017



175th

ASSOCIATE JUSTICE SAMUEL R. MARTIRES



176th

ASSOCIATE JUSTICE NOEL G. TIJAM





EDITOR'S NOTE:

In this issue, our first for the year, we welcome Number 175 and 176 (**Cover**), that is, the 175th and 176th Associate Justices of the Supreme Court, the Honorable Samuel R. Martires and the Honorable Noel G. Tijam, respectively, to the Court. Both did not expect to be members of the judiciary, having dreamed of other careers before life's twists and turns took both of them into a career in the law and later a path to the judiciary, through the Regional Trial Court for both, then the Sandiganbayan (for Justice Martires) and the Court of Appeals (for Justice Tijam) before the Supreme Court. ("**The Unplanned Magistracies**" by Jay B. Rempillo). Get to know both Justices Sam and Noel "**In their Own Words**" (also by Jay B. Rempillo).

For our featured Supreme Court office, we take a look at the SC Medical and Dental Services ("**Ensuring a Healthy SC Workforce**" by Cyd Kristine Daphne S. Libutan-Dueñas). And on the thirtieth year since its ratification, we look at the 1987 Constitution and the Supreme Court ("**The SC and the 1987 Constitution: Past, Present, Future**" by Atty. Maria Victoria Gleoresty Sp. Guerra).

We end this issue with a feature piece on 10 members of the SC family who completed their college education while working in the Supreme Court ("**Study Hard, Work Harder**" by Tiffany Ines C. Atendido, Darylle Evie Mae C. Catabay, and Hannah Jill C. Garduque).

We hope you enjoy reading this issue of BENCHMARK as much as we enjoyed producing it for you.

Featured Office:

The SC Medical and Dental Services Division: Ensuring a Healthy SC Workforce

By Cyd Kristine Daphne S. Libutan-Dueñas

“A healthy workforce translates into a happy workplace. A happy workplace produces better outputs,” says Dr. Prudencio P. Banzon, Jr., Chief of the Supreme Court Medical and Dental Services Division (SCMDSD).

The SCMDSD's primary concern is the health of the SC workforce composed of the SC justices, officials, and employees; as well as officials and employees of the Office of the Court Administrator, Judicial and Bar Council, Philippine Judicial Academy (PHILJA), Mandatory Continuing Legal Education Office, and the Presidential Electoral Tribunal. It offers out-patient and on-site consultations and treatments, first aid provisions, and specialty referrals. The SCMDSD also conducts neuropsychiatric examination for newly hired SC employees and, if necessary, dependents of the employees. The SCMDSD also attends to the medical needs of the examinees during the Bar examinations, the participants of PHILJA seminars, and visiting judges.

The SCMDSD was established in 1966 during the time of Chief Justice Roberto Concepcion. Its office was initially located at the lower ground floor of the Court's Old Building. It then just had one doctor, one secretary, and one janitor, and it only dispensed medicines for the immediate relief of acute medical conditions. In 1992, a satellite clinic was put up in the SC New Building to provide immediate medical assistance to the employees working in the said building considering its distance from the SC Old Building.

Fast-forward to the present, the SCMDSD now maintains a mini-laboratory for basic tests such as urinalysis, blood chemistry, and complete blood count through the use of a “Reflotron machine,” a diagnostic device designed for the quantitative determination of clinical chemistry parameters suitable for a primary care setting as that of the SCMDSD's. The SCMDSD also offers dental services, physical therapy, as well as diet planning and advice. Among its regular activities are annual voluntary blood-letting and flu vaccination and ankle-brachial index (ABI) tests.

In 2009, the Supreme Court acquired the services of its first Health Maintenance Organization (HMO) service provider. The SCMDSD provides initial consultation and specialty referrals to the employees to help them avail of the benefits given by the HMO service provider.



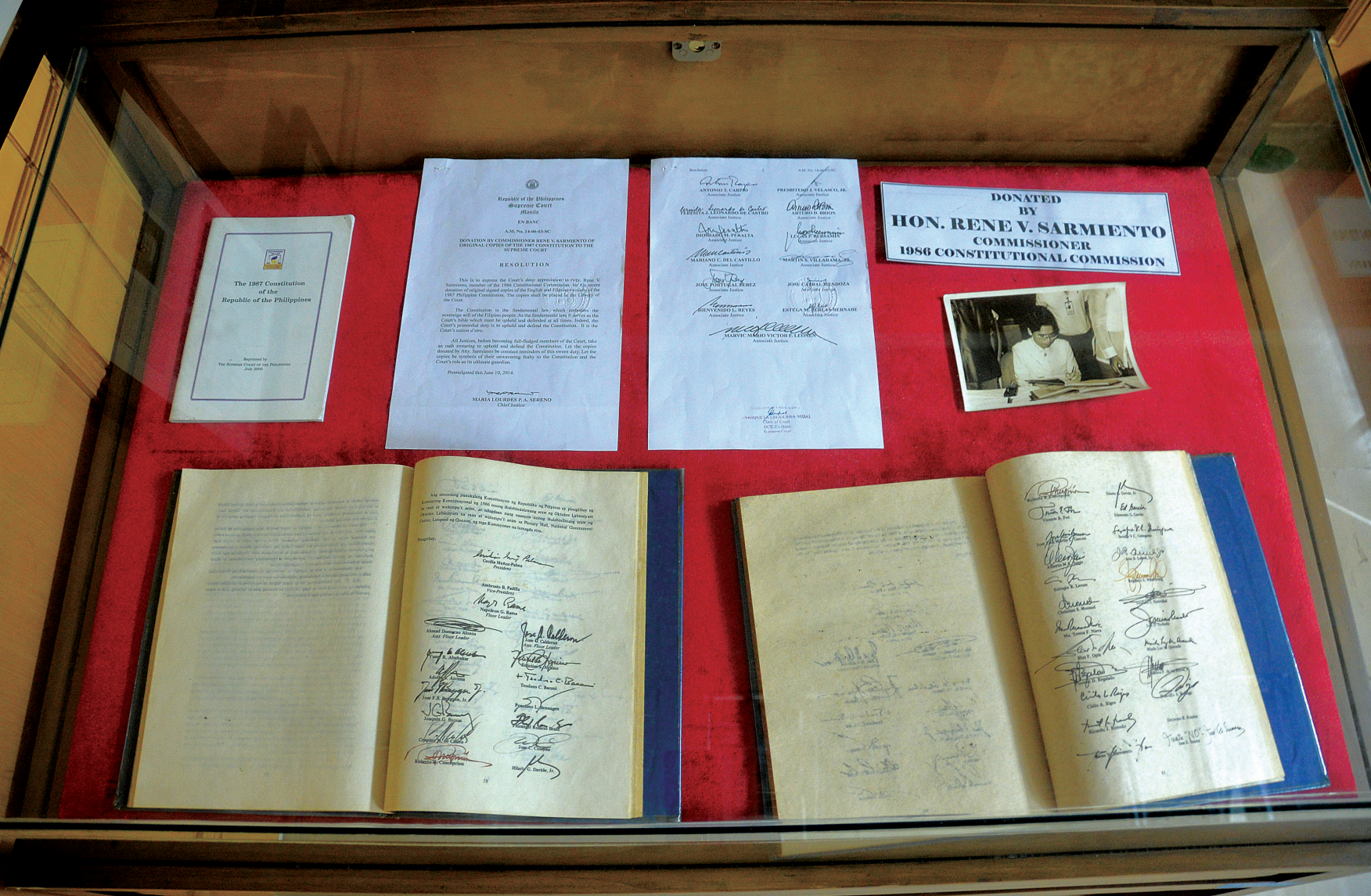
The SCMDSD has a 34-person complement distributed among three divisions: medical, dental, and ancillary. The medical division, occupying two floors in the SC Old Building and a satellite clinic in the Supreme Court New Building, respectively, is composed of doctors, nurses, a medical technician, a physical therapist, a psychiatrist, and a nutritionist. The dental division, housed in the second floor of the SC Old Building, has three dentists and two dental aides. The ancillary division is comprised of a



pharmacist, two clerks, two data encoders, and two utility workers.

Dr. Banzon says that one of the difficulties facing the SCMDSD is “shortage in personnel.” He adds that SCMDSD “manages through resiliency, sacrifice, leadership, innovation, and professionalism. Another concern is the need to renovate and design the main and satellite clinics to improve the flow of patients, as well as to maintain high quality medical and dental equipment.

Dr. Banzon humbly states that “*Maliit lang ang papel namin dito sa Supreme Court. Basta gagawin namin nang mabuti ang trabaho namin.* Hopefully, in whatever way, *maka* contribute kami sa overall *na pag-usad ng ating gobyerno.* (We have just a small role in the Supreme Court. Nonetheless we need to perform our job well. Hopefully, in whatever way, we can contribute to the overall advancement of our government.)”



The SC and the 1987 Constitution: Past, Present, Future

By Atty. Maria Victoria Gleoresty Sp. Guerra

There is no other document more inextricably intertwined with the Supreme Court than the 1987 Constitution, which last February 2 celebrated its 30th anniversary.

ANTECEDENTS

The 1987 Constitution has its roots in the February 22-25, 1986 People Power revolution which unseated a longstanding president (Ferdinand Edralin Marcos) proclaimed under the 1973 Constitution. Stepping in his place was a president (Corazon Cojuangco Aquino) who, in the words of Jesuit lawyer and Constitutional Commissioner Fr. Joaquin G. Bernas, “turned her back on the 1973 Constitution whose officials had denied her the presidency.” This revolutionary president in a remarkable act of auto-limitation issued Proclamation No. 3 whereby she gave up revolutionary (read absolute) power to instead

govern under a constitution known as the “Freedom Constitution” to facilitate the transition to normal constitutional governance. The Freedom Constitution itself provides for its obsolescence by mandating the adoption of a new constitution to be drafted by a constitutional commission appointed by President Aquino and ratified in a plebiscite by a majority of the votes cast. Two of those appointed to the 1986 Constitutional Commission, Hilario G. Davide, Jr. and Adolfo S. Azcuna, would later be appointed to the Supreme Court.

The 1986 Constitutional Commission finished its draft on October 15, 1986, less than five months from the time it had first convened on June 1, 1986. Noteworthy is that in reaction to the Martial Law excesses under President Marcos, the 1987 Constitution provides for a strengthened judiciary. Its expanded definition of judicial power reads:

Judicial power includes the duty of the courts of justice to settle actual controversies involving rights which are legally demandable and enforceable, and to determine whether or not there has been a grave abuse of discretion amounting to lack or excess of jurisdiction on the part of any branch or instrumentality of the Government.

Exercising this power, the Court, in the case of *De Leon v. Esguerra*, settled the issue as to whether the 1987 Constitution took effect on February 2, 1987, the date when the plebiscite was held, or February 11, 1987, the date its ratification was proclaimed per Proclamation No. 58 of then President Aquino. In that case what was assailed was the designation of respondent barangay officials by the respondent OIC (Officer-in-Charge) Governor under the Provisional (Freedom) Constitution, which designation took place on February 8, 1987. In a decision penned by Justice Ameurфина A. Melencio-Herrera, the Court held that the effectivity date of the 1987 Constitution is February 2, 1987, the date when the plebiscite was held and not when the result of the plebiscite was known. It cited as its legal basis Section 27 of the Transitory Article of the 1987 Constitution itself, which provides that “This Constitution shall take effect immediately upon its ratification by a majority of the votes cast in a plebiscite held for the purpose and shall supersede all previous Constitutions.” It therefore declared as of no force and effect the assailed designation of respondent barangay officials as by that time the Freedom Constitution had already been superseded by the 1987 Constitution.

The foregoing is but one demonstration of the Supreme Court’s power to definitively interpret or to “expound on” the Constitution. It is chiefly through this power that the Court has over the years stood as the sentinel of the Constitution.

RAISON D’ETRE

The Court had further occasion to clearly state its role vis-a-vis the Constitution when it accepted the donation of Constitutional Commissioner Rene V. Sarmiento of his personal copies of the original Filipino and English prints of the 1987 Constitution.

In an *En Banc* resolution signed by all the Justices, the Court declared:

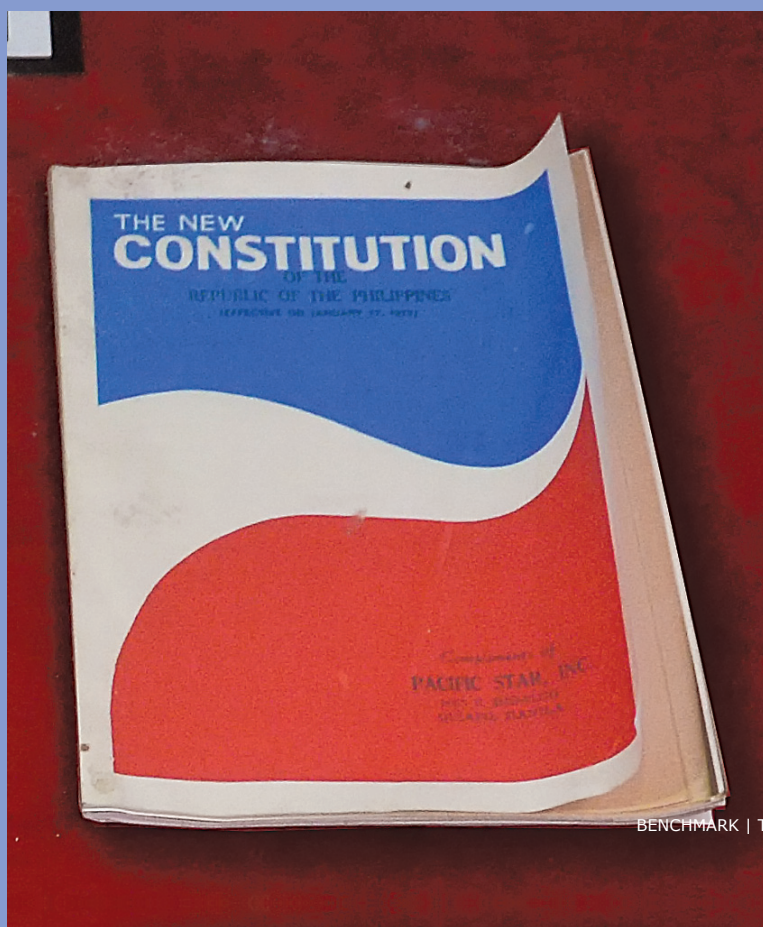
The Constitution is the fundamental law which embodies the sovereign will of the Filipino people. As the fundamental law, it serves as the Court’s bible which must be upheld and defended at all times. Indeed, the court’s primordial duty is to uphold and defend the Constitution. It is the court’s *raison d’être* [reason for being].

All justices, before becoming full-fledged members of the Court, take an oath swearing to uphold and defend the Constitution. Let the copies donated by Atty. Sarmiento be constant reminders of this sworn duty. Let the copies be symbols of their unwavering fealty to the Constitution and the Court’s role as its ultimate guardian.

FUTURE

For longer than any of the country’s previous constitutions, the 1987 Constitution has remained unchanged. Several attempts to do so have been scuttled by the Supreme Court due to non-compliance with the requirements in the 1987 Constitution itself. But, whatever its final fate, there is no denying the 1987 Constitution is serving its purpose. As Chief Justice Maria Lourdes P. A. Sereno noted in her statement on the occasion of Constitution Day 2017:

We consider that only a Constitution, such as the 1987 Constitution, that acknowledges cultural and religious diversity but stresses unity, nourishes liberty but allows dissent, protects national security but emphasizes human rights and human dignity may allow us to have a government that is stable, a democracy that is vibrant, and a rule of law that is consistent.



The Unplanned Magistracies

By Jay B. Rempillo

To serve in the judiciary was not at all in their plans. A young Samuel R. Martires dreamed of becoming a priest, a lawyer, and a psychologist, while a young Noel G. Tijam wanted to be a diplomat and join the Foreign Service. But life and fate had other plans for both of them.

Both would eventually sit on the Bench, first as trial court judges and later, as Associate Justices. Justice Martires would sit in the Sandiganbayan and Justice Tijam at the Court of Appeals. Both, with their birthdays two days apart and on their 68th year in 2017, would reach the apex of their judicial careers, as Associate Justices of the Supreme Court of the Philippines.

HON. SAMUEL R. MARTIRES, THE 175TH ASSOCIATE JUSTICE, THE PLAYFUL, HUMBLE SERVANT

When he was just five and a half years old, Justice Martires lost his father. Since this, his mother has been his wellspring of happiness and inspiration. He recalls with fondness how his mother would sing him *My Song of Love*, a Visayan *kundiman* (love song), and *Donna Bella* to lull him to sleep. It will not come as a surprise therefore that music became his favorite form of entertainment. Justice Martires even had his old vinyl records and cassette tapes converted into digital files for his music collection. When he is depressed, he listens to the Tony Bennett version of the song *Who Can I Turn To?*, dedicating it to the Lord and the Blessed Virgin. He starts his mornings with inspirational songs, particularly *Ave Maria*. He takes pride in sharing that he has a collection of the different vocal versions of *Ave Maria*, as well as its various instrumental versions.

At age nine, he wanted to be three things—a priest, a lawyer, and a psychiatrist. But when he learned that one must first be a doctor to become a psychiatrist, he focused on becoming a priest and a lawyer.

In his junior year in high school, he sought permission to enter the Franciscan Missionary from his widowed mother. The latter, however, discouraged him as he was her only child and would be far away when he becomes a missionary.

And so he pursued his remaining dream of becoming a lawyer. But even while at law school, the thought of entering the seminary never left him until he fell in love with Cecilia who would become his wife.

A native of Palapag, Northern Samar, Justice Martires fondly recalls bathing in the clean river near their house and playing near the artesian well in the plaza, the water of which was believed to have sodium that helps clean and heal wounds faster. He has had his share of mischiefs like most boys in their youth. He would be punished for his misbehavior by his disciplinarian mother who would make him kneel on mung beans or hit him with a rattan stick. He even skipped classes to learn about making copra and abaca rope at a neighbor's farm. Still the young Samuel was undeterred. "I did not stop [such behavior] because I had to learn what life is all about. What is it to be poor? Uneducated?" he recalls with a smile. Once, he did not do well in a hanger-making project prompting his high school teacher in vocational class to scoff at his dream to be a lawyer.

He was resolute in his desire to pursue college education in Manila against the idea of his relatives, who preferred that he instead study in Cebu and live with then Cebu Archbishop Cardinal Julio Rosales, a relative of his grandfather who purportedly could discipline him. Except for his mother, nobody believed that he was going to be a lawyer. He was eventually able to convince his mother to allow him to study in Manila. She told him that his late father would have wanted to send him to San Beda College as two of his father's cousins were Benedictine priests. And so he studied in San Beda, and the rest, as they say, is history.

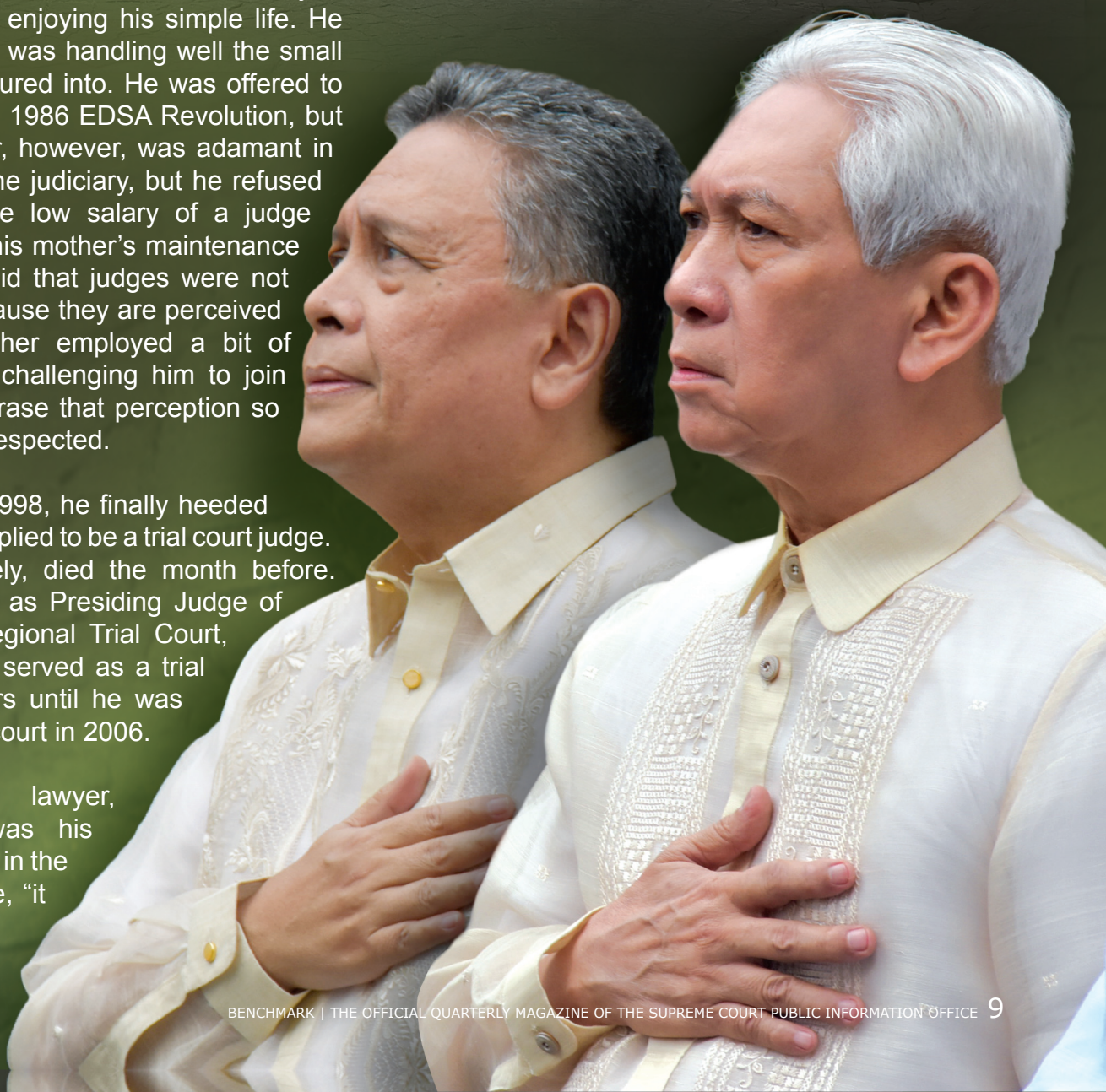
"I am the first lawyer in the family. Everyone was happy when I passed the Bar. I did not take it against anyone (who doubted I would be a lawyer) because that was a learning lesson in life. You will never go wrong if you become objective at everything that you do and be fair," shares Justice Martires. And yes, he did meet again that teacher who told him he would not succeed in becoming a lawyer and who is now singing his praises.



Justice Martires engaged in private practice after passing the Bar in 1976. He had no desire then to join the judiciary as he was enjoying his simple life. He was very contented and was handling well the small businesses he had ventured into. He was offered to be a judge following the 1986 EDSA Revolution, but he declined. His mother, however, was adamant in convincing him to join the judiciary, but he refused still thinking of how the low salary of a judge could not even pay for his mother's maintenance medicines. When he said that judges were not respected anymore because they are perceived to be corrupt, his mother employed a bit of reverse psychology by challenging him to join the judiciary and help erase that perception so judges would again be respected.

By the end of June 1998, he finally heeded his mother's wish and applied to be a trial court judge. His mother, unfortunately, died the month before. He finally took his oath as Presiding Judge of the Agoo, La Union Regional Trial Court, Branch 32 in 2000. He served as a trial court judge for six years until he was named to the anti-graft court in 2006.

As a practicing lawyer, he claimed that it was his conscience which he put in the forefront. But as a judge, "it





was more of what are the facts, what are the evidence presented, and what is the law applicable.”

Justice Martires strongly supports the judiciary’s stand to purge the Bench and the Bar of corruption, stressing he would not be caught possessing something borne of illegal means. Most of all, he takes pride in sharing that he has more friends from the lower strata of society whom he says have higher moral values. “The only worth of a poor man is his reputation. That is the only worth that he has to protect. To be fair and honest—that’s the only way that people will trust you,” he shares.

HON. NOEL G. TIJAM, THE 176TH ASSOCIATE JUSTICE, THE HARDWORKING ACADEMICIAN

A full-blooded Bicolano, both parents being natives of Nabua, Camarines Sur, Justice Tijam was actually born in Manila but spent his growing up years in Bicol when his father decided to relocate the family to the south. His father was a professor at the University of Nueva Caceres in Naga where a young Noel Tijam finished his elementary and secondary education.

But when he was about to enter college, his family decided to return to city where he could take his tertiary studies. It was by chance that he got into San Beda College.

“I actually wanted to enroll in UE (University of the East) or UST (University of Santo Tomas). But when I went to the school to enrol, the place was too crowded. *Ang haba ng pila*. (The line was long.) I had an aunt and *yung anak niya* (her son) was a member of the Benedictine community in San Beda. *Sabi niya* (she said), why don’t you study in San Beda, *mas malapit*

pa (it’s nearer our home). That’s the reason why I enrolled in San Beda,” recalls Justice Tijam who earned his AB Philosophy Political Science degree at the age of 18, graduating *magna cum laude*.

Most of his college classmates decided to go to law school, also in San Beda. And with him “not wanting to go to work immediately,” he joined the bandwagon except that when they were in the sophomore year, he started teaching at the Philippine School of Business Administration. At 22, he finished law school, *cum laude*.

“[Becoming a lawyer] was not a childhood dream. My ambition when I was a student was to join the Foreign Service...to be a diplomat. But I found law to be more challenging and exciting,” shares Justice Tijam. He adds that San Beda at that time was also topping the Bar Exams, citing the likes of Antonio Eduardo Nachura (former Solicitor General who became the 158th SC Associate Justice), (former Senator) Rene Saguigag, and (the late Senator) Raul Roco. “It inspired most of us to go to law school,” he says.

And just like entering San Beda, it was also serendipitous when he joined the judiciary. “It was by accident,” reveals Justice Tijam who adds that it was his former boss in the Government Service Insurance System (GSIS), former Quezon City Mayor Feliciano Belmonte, Jr., who broached to him the idea of applying for judge. In 1994, at the age of 45, he was appointed Judge of the Regional Trial Court, Quezon City, Branch 221. In March 2003, he was promoted to the appellate court. Fourteen years later, he was elevated to the highest court of the land.



Justice Tijam discloses that when he took his oath of office as CA Justice at the Supreme Court in 2003 before then Chief Justice Hilario G. Davide, Jr., his father shared with SC Justice Presbitero J. Velasco, Jr. that he (the father) has been fervently praying he would not die until he sees his son appointed as Justice. His father died several months after his CA appointment. He learned of this story from Justice Velasco later. His mother, who died in 1979, did not see him become a judge. “Anything and everything that has happened in my life, I always connect it to something that is a grace or a blessing from God. Even pitfalls and misfortunes,” he shares.

He emphasizes that spirituality plays a very big and important role in his life. “Yes I am spiritual not only because of training but also because of the experience and comfort I get [from] being spiritual. And probably, on hindsight, I have many near death experiences when I was younger. But I survived all of those. *Mayroon akong* (I have a) guardian angel. Somebody is taking care of me. Even my scholastic honors, I do not ascribe that to myself *na magaling akong estudyante* (that I am an excellent student). I think God and even Mother Mary inspired me to study hard. Even my [judicial] appointments. *Wala sa* career path *ko yung* judgeship. *Tapos pumasok ako sa* judiciary (Judgeship was not my chosen career path, but it turned out I did join the judiciary),” says Justice Tijam who underwent a heart bypass procedure in 2005.

He sees his SC appointment as “commitment on (his) part” as he plans to do in the remaining two years of his judicial career “something more important like convincing members of the Court

to take bolder steps to institute reforms in the judiciary to hasten the resolution of cases.”

Justice Tijam has been conducting Mandatory Continuing Legal Education (MCLE) lectures for years now. In 2003, then a CA justice, he had the opportunity to travel nationwide with then Court Administrator (now Supreme Court Justice) Presbitero J. Velasco, Jr. to conduct lectures on pre-trial and modes of discovery.

As a lecturer, he is an advocate of judicial reforms, particularly the re-orientation of lawyers as officers of the court and as peacemakers. “Lawyers are supposed to assist the parties settle the disputes. As officers of the court, their primordial duty is to the court rather than to the client. They should help the court finish as soon as possible the cases. Let’s re-orient the thinking of lawyers that they are peacemakers and are there to help parties settle disputes, not to aggravate their conditions,” he says.

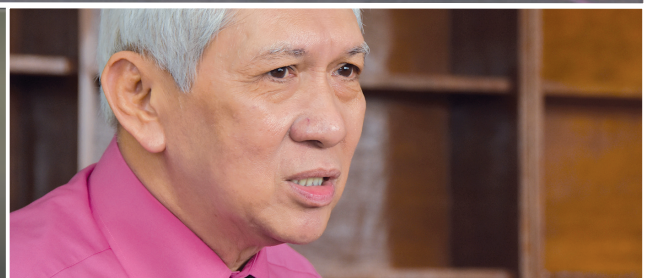
He is also advocating the empowerment of judges “to have the authority to dismiss cases if on its face they are not meritorious.” He, however, laments that some “judges do not do that because they are cowed, they are apprehensive, they are afraid of lawyers who might initiate administrative and disciplinary actions against them if they dismiss a case.”

He laments the “travails of litigants” who bear the consequences in these situations. “There are many horror stories in the courtroom only because there is delay,” he says. As Supreme Court Associate Justice, he vows to do his part in slaying that particular dragon.



JUSTICE MARTIRES

at a Glance



- 1949** – Born in Palapag, Northern Samar on January 2
- 1971** – Finishes Bachelor of Arts at Manuel L. Quezon University
- 1975** – Finishes Bachelor of Laws at San Beda College of Law
- 1976** – Works as Legal Officer at the Department of Public Works, Transportation and Communication
- 1987** – Engages in business and private legal practice
- 2000** – Becomes Presiding Judge of Regional Trial Court, Agoo La Union, Branch 32
- 2006** – Becomes Associate Justice of the Sandiganbayan
- 2017** – Becomes 175th Supreme Court Associate Justice
- 2019** – Set to compulsorily retire on January 2



JUSTICE TIJAM

at a Glance



- 1949** – Born in Manila on January 5
- 1967** – Finishes AB Philosophy Political Science *magna cum laude* at San Beda College
- 1969** – Teaches Business Law, Philosophy, and Political Science at the Philippine School of Business Administration until 1976
- 1971** – Finishes Bachelor of Laws *cum laude* at San Beda College of Law
- 1974** – Works in the private sector
- 1987** – Starts working career in the government, which includes stints; holds various government positions including in the Manila Hotel Corporation, Government Service Insurance System, and the Philippine Senate (*as Legal and Technical Assistant of Senator Victor Ziga*)
- 1994** – Becomes Presiding Judge of the Regional Trial Court, Quezon City, Branch 221
- 2003** – Becomes Associate Justice of the Court of Appeals
- 2017** – Becomes 175th Supreme Court Associate Justice
- 2019** – Set to compulsorily retire on January 5

IN THEIR OWN Words

By Jay B. Rempillo

JUSTICE SAMUEL R. MARTIRES

1. I WAS NEITHER HAPPY NOR SAD WHEN I FIRST LEARNED I GOT APPOINTED TO THE SUPREME COURT. I thanked the Lord and I asked him for more blessings to give me strength, and guidance. *Yun bang, tulungan mo ako, nilagay mo ako dito, ano bang purpose mo* (Please help me, you've put me here, what's your purpose)? You guide me.

2. MY HEROES (both fiction and non-fiction; real or otherwise) are Marcelo H. Del Pilar and Andres Bonifacio.

3. MY COMFORT FOOD OR DRINK are hopia and Skyflakes (a local brand of crackers).

4. THE THREE THINGS I ALWAYS BRING WITH ME when I leave the house are a rosary, a handkerchief, and my driver's license.

5. I DON'T HAVE any hidden talent.

6. THE LAST NON-LAW BOOK I READ WAS *The Second Sex* by Simone de Beauvoir, it's about psychology of women

7. THE ONE MOVIE I'VE SEEN MORE THAN ONCE OR THAT INSPIRED ME A LOT IS MADAME X (a 1966 drama film starring Lana Turner)

8. THE BEST TIME FOR ME TO WRITE DECISIONS IS AT NIGHTTIME. *Masarap magtrabaho pag gabi, pag tahimik.* (It's conducive to work at night when it's quiet.)

9. THE CHEAPEST BUT MOST PRIZED POSSESSION I HAVE is my rosary which I bought in Rome. This was the same rosary I was holding during the JBC interview.

10. IF I WOULD BE LEFT WITH JUST ONE SENSE or faculty, it would be my sense of touch.

11. MY FAMILY, CLOSEST KIN, AND FRIENDS KNOW everything about me.

12. MY FAVORITE FORM OF ENTERTAINMENT IS music. I like ballads.



13. MY BIGGEST GUILTY PLEASURES are DSLR cameras.

14. MY GO-TO VIDEOKE SONG is *Babalik Ka Rin* [an old *kundiman*, not the Gary Valenciano ditty on OFWs].

15. IF I WERE NOT A JUSTICE I would be a priest.

16. MY BIGGEST FEAR IS *mawalay sa pamilya ko dati* (to be separated from my family before). But basically, *wala* (none). *Kasi matanda na ako.* (Because I am already old.)

17. WHILE TRAPPED IN AN ELEVATOR I would like to converse with God and Blessed Virgin Mary *para makalabas ako sa elevator* (how to get out of the elevator). (*Editor's Note:* Justice Martires was once trapped in an old elevator while on vacation in Portugal)

18. THE MOST VALUABLE LESSON I HAVE LEARNED so far is be fair and honest in your dealings with every person.

JUSTICE NOEL G. TIJAM

1. **WHEN I FIRST LEARNED I GOT APPOINTED TO SC**, my reaction was “Thank you, Lord! Finally, I was given the opportunity in the remaining years of my judicial career.”

2. **MY HEROES** (both fiction and non-fiction; real or otherwise) are my parents, teachers—I respect teachers, the people who educated me, molded me—, people who render public service, doctors, nurses, even lawyers who defend the rights of others. The common people are the real heroes who despite challenges, difficulties are able to survive and do something for the community.

3. **MY COMFORT FOOD** is a tuna and egg sandwich.

4. **THE THINGS I ALWAYS BRING WITH ME** when I leave the house are my cellphones.

5. **I DON'T HAVE A HIDDEN TALENT** but I sing occasionally.

6. **THE LAST NON-LAW BOOKS I READ** were John Grisham novels.

7. **THE MOVIES I'VE SEEN MORE THAN ONCE** or that inspired me a lot were *Ben Hur* (a 1959 historical drama film starring Charlton Heston in the title role) and *Ten Commandments* (a 1956 Biblical film starring also Heston in the role of Moses).

8. **THE BEST TIME FOR ME TO WRITE DECISIONS** is daytime—morning or afternoon. At nighttime, I read.

9. **THE CHEAPEST BUT MOST PRIZED POSSESSION I HAVE** is a rosary.

10. **IF I WOULD BE LEFT WITH JUST ONE SENSE** or faculty, it would be my sense of touch.

11. **ONE THING WHICH ONLY MY FAMILY AND CLOSEST KIN AND FRIENDS KNOW ABOUT ME** is I'm impatient. I don't like waiting. For example, when I have an appointment, I'm usually early, *nahihiya akong malate* (I'm embarrassed to be late). But I have learned as a judge to curb, temper my impatience. As a judge, you become more understanding, you learn to listen, to wait.



12. **MY FAVORITE FORMS OF ENTERTAINMENT** are music and playing with my six grandchildren.

13. **MY BIGGEST GUILTY PLEASURE** is local food during travels.

14. **MY GO-TO VIDEOKE SONGS** are *Where is Tomorrow?* by Cilla Black and Tom Jones and Engelbert Humperdick songs.

15. **IF I WERE NOT A JUSTICE** I would be a teacher.

16. **MY BIGGEST FEAR** is when I was younger were death and what would happen to my family. But you know, if you are religious, you believe in God, you believe in Heaven, you don't fear death anymore.

17. **WHILE TRAPPED IN AN ELEVATOR** I would like to converse with the supernatural being, I'd say “God, can you send your guardian angel *kung hindi kayo puwede* (if you are not available)? Send your guardian angel just to hold my hand and to reassure me that everything will be okay.”

18. **THE MOST VALUABLE LESSON I HAVE LEARNED** so far is that life is a blessing. Make the most out of it. Seize the day. And I learned that, succinctly, that if you are young, aspire. So that if God tells you, you are to wait, at least *makakapagwait ka pa* (you can still wait). You have to be good to people, you have to be kind to people.



Composite picture by BENCHMARK

Study Hard, Work Harder

By Tiffany Ines C. Atendido, Darylle Evie Mae C. Catabay, and Hannah Jill C. Garduque



MS. LEIZEL C. HABANA
Information Officer I
Public Information Office

MS. HONEYGRACE A. CALINAWAN
Clerk III, Office of
Administrative Services /
Property Division

MS. AGNES MADONNA Q. DELAS ALAS-LONTOC
Administrative Officer I,
Office of the Bar Confidant

MS. MARILEN B. RAMOS,
Stenographic Reporter IV,
PHILJA-Chancellor's Office

MR. ARTURO G. RAMOS
Property Custodian, OCA-
Office on the Halls of Justice

MR. ARCHIMEDES P. JIMENEZ,
Computer Programmer II,
(PHILJA)-Administrative Office,
Information and Systems Division

MR. ROY C. NATULAN
Cash Clerk III, Office of the
Court Administrator (OCA)-
Cashier Division

“Mag-aral ka nang mabuti, ‘yan lang ang maipamamana naming mga magulang mo sa ‘yo. (Study very well. That will be the only legacy we, as parents, can give you.)”

Countless times have we heard those words from our parents who tirelessly remind us to study hard, stressing that education is something that no one can take away from us. That would have been easier if we were all given the chance to be full-time students with all the financial support we could get from our parents and/or relatives. The sad reality, however, is that in our country it has become a privilege to enter college, much less graduate on time. Some have to juggle studies and work, while some end up dropping out of school to work full-time due to financial considerations. Still some, with hard work and luck, get a good job and return to school and eventually graduate.

There is no shame but only pride in being a working student. In the Supreme Court, if you get the nod of your Chief of Office and file the necessary study leave, then you can pursue a college degree. We met some kind-hearted and committed employees who generously shared their stories to us how they had balanced a life of a public servant, a breadwinner, and a student all at the same time.

Meet some of the Court's (hard)working students who successfully managed to earn a college degree while in SC employment: Mr. Al D. Acurato, Process Server, Office of the Clerk of Court (OCC) En Banc; Ms. Honeygrace A. Calinawan, Clerk III, Office of Administrative Services (OAS)-Property Division; Ms. Agnes Madonna Q. Delas Alas-Lontoc, Administrative Officer I, Office of the Bar Confidant (OBC); Ms. Leizel C. Habana, Information

Officer I, Public Information Office (PIO); Mr. Archimedes P. Jimenez, Computer Programmer II, Philippine Judicial Academy (PHILJA)-Administrative Office, Information and Systems Division; Mr. Ariel P. Manalili, Clerk III, Judicial Records Office (JRO)-Docket Division; Mr. Roy C. Natulan, Cash Clerk III, Office of the Court Administrator (OCA)-Cashier Division; husband and wife Mr. Arturo G. Ramos, Property Custodian, OCA-Office on the Halls of Justice and Ms. Marilen B. Ramos, Stenographic Reporter IV, PHILJA-Chancellor's Office; and Mr. Neil Leonard C. Saguid, Utility Worker II, OCC En Banc.

THERE ARE NO LIMITS

Entering the workforce as an undergraduate was never a hindrance to these individuals. Mr. Manalili has been with the Supreme Court since 1992, and it did not matter then that he did not have a college diploma when he was detailed as Utility Worker I to the OCC First Division headed by Atty. Virginia A. Soriano; nor did it matter in 2008 when Mr. Jimenez started working in the Programs Monitoring Division, Academic Affairs Office, PHILJA as Computer Operator II. Being employed out of financial necessity constrained them to put their studies on the backburner.

Still they did not view the circumstance as a limitation on their dream to be a college graduate. Looking back on what motivated them, besides self-fulfillment, to pursue

be a parent, an employee, and a student, all at the same time; it must have given them the idea that it was really difficult. They saw which should come first." Similarly, Ms. Calinawan, who also got married and had a child before she finished her studies, says: "There was just something in me that wanted to graduate from college. It was also one of my parents' conditions to my then boyfriend when he proposed for marriage, that I first graduate. I'm happy and proud that I fulfilled this and even if my dad was sick. He cried when he saw my graduation picture."

In the same way, Ms. Ramos reveals, "Even though *kumikita na ako* to support myself and my family, I wanted to finish my studies. (Even though I was already earning to support myself and my family, I wanted to finish my studies.)" Similarly, Ms. Habana discloses, "First, to make my parents proud; [second, it was also] my dream; [and third,] *yung mga taong mababa ang tingin sa akin na hanggang dito na lang ako*, I proved them wrong. (First, to make my parents proud; second, it was also my dream; and third, those who looked down on me and thought that I could not further my education and career, I proved them wrong.)" Mr. Manalili shares the same sentiment: "Personally, this was for the people who unintentionally motivated me."

Others were motivated by the desire to advance their careers: "professional growth" was Mr. Natulan's stimulus, while Mr. Ramos' was "for promotion *kasi napag-iwanan na ako ng mga kasabay kong pumasok sa Supreme Court* (for promotion because I was already getting left behind by my contemporaries in the Supreme Court.)"

Lastly, Mr. Acurato discloses, "I wanted to be self-sustaining and be more productive as a person. I want a better future," while Mr. Saguid says he wanted an "edge in job opportunities."



MR. NEIL LEONARD
C. SAGUID
Utility Worker II, OCC En Banc

MR. ARIEL P. MANALILI
Clerk III, Judicial Records Office
(JRO)-Docket Division

MR. AL D. ACURATO
Process Server, Office of the Clerk
of Court (OCC) En Banc

a college degree, the common answer was to make their parents and families proud. Mr. Jimenez reveals, "My parents wanted me to receive the education they failed to provide due to certain circumstances. My wife was also very supportive. So when I started working in the Supreme Court, I made it my goal to finish my degree not just to make them proud but also to become an inspiration to others." The same goes for Mr. Ramos, who shares, "Of course, for my kids, *gusto ko maging role model sa kanila*. (Of course, for my kids, I want to be a role model to them.)"

Ms. Delas Alas-Lontoc, who got married before graduating and had five children before she started working, says: "I just wanted to emphasize to my children that even if I am already working, finishing school is another thing. I wanted to show them that education is still a priority. I continuously remind them not to do the same thing I did. I guess when they saw how hard it was for me to

NOT HAVING A CHOICE

Deciding to work even if they have not finished studying was not really an option; most of them agreed it was because of financial matters and obligations to their families. Ms. Habana adds, "My father lost his job. My mother did not have a stable source of income either. As the eldest among four children, I decided to work to support my family." Mr. Natulan reveals he wanted to help improve the standard of living of his family, "*saka hindi na mahirapan ang aking mga magulang* (and to ease the burden of my parents.)" For her part, Ms. Calinawan shares: "I had no choice. My dad was all of a sudden diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease....I started working full time to help out my parents." Mr. Jimenez for his part says, "I wanted to make good use of all the knowledge and skills I have acquired from previous studies and trainings, and contribute to the society to make a difference." Ms. Delas Alas-Lontoc echoes this, saying, "[Since] I married early, it had been a compromise between my husband and I that given a chance, I will work mainly for self-growth."

LIFE IS A BALANCING ACT

When asked what challenges they had encountered working and studying simultaneously, all of them gave similar answers, which were summed up in the words of Mr. Jimenez: “difficulty in managing time and balancing [our] job, studies, and family.”

Mr. Saguid cites waking up early and arriving home late and at the same time being productive and finishing his workload at the office every day as burdensome at times. Ms. Calinawan, Ms. Delas Alas-Lontoc, and Ms. Ramos, who are all mothers, had a hard time juggling everything while taking care of their kids. In addition, Mr. Acurato, Ms. Habana, and Mr. Manalili mentioned dealing with financial constraints. Ms. Delas Alas-Lontoc also says that her “health was somewhat compromised due to time constraints and sleep deprivation.”

Two of our interviewees also shared their unfortunate experiences while in school. Mr. Ramos, who was already 37 years old when he went back to school, shares, “*Nandiyan din ‘yung hiya mo na dahil may edad ka na, napagkakamalan kang professor.* (Not to mention the humiliation I felt when I often got mistaken for a professor due to my age.)”

Meanwhile, Ms. Calinawan shares that she experienced being harassed in public transportation during her commute from her home in Rizal to her then school, Jose Rizal University (JRU) in Mandaluyong City, to attend night classes in Management. This prompted her at one point to stop studying.

QUITTING IS NOT AN OPTION

There came a time when most of them thought of quitting their studies instead of their work due to problems and stress.

Mr. Natulan says: “When there were assignments that I had to finish and could not do sa sobrang busy sa trabaho, naisipan ko rin tumigil sa pag-aaral. (When there were assignments that I had to finish and could not do them because of too much workload, I thought of quitting my studies.)” Mr. Saguid also considered giving up his studies due to financial problems. Ms. Delas Alas-Lontoc discloses: “Giving up my job hardly came into my mind. Next to my family, my job has been a part of my life and I’ve learned to embrace and love it already. Besides, I think somehow, my earnings helped in raising our family...I felt like should give up school instead.”

Despite all of these, they decided not to give up for the sake of their families, as Mr. Ramos says: “*Kung hihinto ako sa pagtatrabaho, paano ko mabibigyan ng support ang pamilya ko?* I was willing to give up ‘yung pagpasok ko sa school kaysa mapabayaang ko ang needs ng pamilya ko. (If I stopped working, how could I support my family? I was willing to give up going to school rather than neglect providing for my family’s needs.)”

On the other hand, Mr. Manalili considered quitting his job “in order to concentrate and eventually finish [his] studies.” However, he says that it would “only aggravate [his] family’s bad financial situation.” “You will do anything to balance everything to pursue your dreams,” says Ms. Ramos. Mr. Acurato adds, “It was very rewarding when I finally got my college degree.”

SEEKING OTHER OPPORTUNITIES OR STAYING IN THE SC

Working at the Supreme Court is a privilege for those who seek to work in the government, have a stable income, and have a flexible schedule.

Asked whether he is now looking for opportunities outside of the Supreme Court, Mr. Natulan responds, “No. I believe that working at the SC was the best opportunity given to me.” Ms. Delas Alas-Lontoc, who mentioned how she “could not imagine [herself] working elsewhere,” enthuses, “I think when I earned my degree, it was a matter of giving back the glory and honor first and foremost to God, my family, and to SC.”

Mr. Acurato, Mr. Natulan, and Mr. and Ms. Ramos all say that they are happy working at the SC. Ms. Habana, Mr. Acurato, Mr. Jimenez, and Mr. Manalili say that leaving SC “never crossed [their] mind[s].” Ms. Habana shares that happiness and contentment depend on one’s disposition in life, saying, “When work feels like play, you’re more likely to enjoy other aspects of your life better, too.” Mr. Manalili enjoys being around people and has a heart for the less fortunate. “I will always be grateful in whatever job I would have or what I would become,” he said.

Mr. Acurato states that he “did not have any other choice” because he is the breadwinner of his family. Ms. Delas Alas-Lontoc has no regrets in life. She is happy and thankful for graduating from college; she refers to this as “one of the best decisions” she has ever made in life. For Mr. Saguid, “Any job will do as long as I can find my inner perfection and satisfaction...It is better to stay and work and use my knowledge and skills to improve my work performance and be more productive.”

Of course, it is inevitable for some to have alternative plans in mind when it comes to pursuing a different career or path. Mr. Jimenez admits that he “never closed [his] door for other opportunities outside SC” because he “love[s] to explore and learn new things.” He adds that he may opt for other possibilities where he can hone his skills if his present job does let him “reach new heights.”

Meanwhile, Ms. Calinawan shares her plans of leaving the SC and pursuing teaching later this year, saying, “I know I wanted to continue working at the Supreme Court, but I’ve always left everything to God’s will and plan. Things just fell into place...I am ready to move on with the next phase of my life through God’s guidance.”

THE FINISH LINE

Most of the working students we interviewed pursued Bachelor of Arts in Business Administration, major in Public Administration (BAPA) at the Trinity University of Asia (TUA) due to its suitability for those working in the government who wish to finish their studies, as classes were held in the evening on weekdays and on Saturdays. Mr. Acurato, Ms. Calinawan, Ms. Habana, Mr. Jimenez, Ms. Delas Alas-Lontoc, Mr. Natulan, and Mr. and Ms. Ramos were among them.

Ms. Calinawan shares that she originally wanted to finish Political Science and take up law because she belongs to a family of lawyers. She studied this for two years at Centro Escolar University before deciding to stop studying. She then studied Management at the JRU for two semesters before finally taking up BAPA because it is related to Political Science, according to her. She graduated in 2010.

They had similar reasons for choosing their course. Ms. Habana explains: "I chose this course because for me, it seems interesting. You are given the opportunity to choose whether to work in the public or private sector, and you will also develop your passion in helping others." She graduated in 2011, along with Mr. Jimenez, Ms. Delas Alas-Lontoc, and Mr. Ramos. Prior to taking up and graduating with a degree in BAPA in 2011, Mr. Jimenez finished a two-year course in Computer Systems Design and Programming at the AMA Computer Learning Center in 2001. Likewise, Ms. Delas Alas-Lontoc chose this track because she saw it as an opportunity to be able to finish college. She graduated in the same year her eldest son graduated in college. Mr. Ramos cites that working in a government institution prompted him to take up this course. Prior to this, he studied Mechanical Engineering at the Polytechnic University of the Philippines for five years but stopped because he enjoyed working more than attending school.

Mr. Natulan chose BAPA because it could "help [him] a lot in [the] advancement of [his] career in government." He graduated in 2012.

Ms. Ramos finished a vocational course on Information Technology and is set to graduate with a BAPA degree in June. She says, "I chose this [course] because of the schedule, and it is also related to my work as a government employee."

Mr. Acurato previously studied Computer Science at the Perpetual Help College of Manila and BS Business Management at Arellano University but was not able to finish. He resumed his studies in 2011 with additional units and shifted to BAPA, then finally graduated in 2012.

Mr. Saguid initially took up a two-year course in Computer Technology at the Asian Institute of Computer Studies in Bacoor, Cavite but he went on to pursue a Bachelor's degree in Information Technology at STI College-Taft in

2010. He, however, stopped for a year, transferred to Informatics College Manila in 2012, but again stopped for a year in 2014. He enrolled again last year and is currently a junior irregular BS I.T. student at Informatics College Manila. On the other hand, Mr. Manalili graduated with a degree in Public Administration at the Universidad de Manila in 2015 and is currently a graduating student of Masters in Public Management and Governance. Asked whether their work at the Supreme Court was the main reason why they took their course, a majority said "yes." One of the underlying reasons for their choices is career advancement as shared by Mr. Jimenez and Mr. Natulan. Ms. Ramos also cites the importance of a flexible work schedule. Mr. Ramos for his part says "yes" because he is already in the government service, and "no" because he has always dreamed of becoming a mechanical engineer.

As for Mr. Manalili, "the environment at SC really affected me in choosing my course." For some, their education or interest in their chosen field was their main target. "My job was mostly clerical but I am more inclined to the technical aspects such as repairing and troubleshooting computer hardware as a System Developer, so I took up B.S. Information Technology," Mr. Saguid shares. Meanwhile, Ms. Habana's and Ms. Delas Alas-Lontoc's "utmost concern was to finish school and earn a degree."

PIECES OF ADVICE

For those who are currently in the same situation, our interviewees offered some words of wisdom. Mr. Jimenez states: "Time is gold when you decide to become a working student... You need to separate yourself from distractions." He stresses keeping one's priorities straight and focusing on your goal. "*Maging determinado tayo sa mga bagay na gusto nating ma-achieve.* (Let us be determined in the things we want to achieve,)" Ms. Ramos conveys. "Never give up on your dream. Work hard and study hard for the future," Mr. Ramos adds. "Try and try and you will succeed," according to Mr. Natulan.

For many, God is the stronghold of their tenacity. Ms. Habana puts it this way: "Being a working student is never easy. Challenges and obstacles will come your way. But if you have determination, perseverance, and faith in God, everything will work out for the best for those who believe." Mr. Manalili encourages those on a similar path to "always put God first in every endeavor they want to take and have faith in themselves. Lastly, always have a firm stand for what is right." Likewise, Mr. Acurato advises them to "never lose hope, never give up." Having family obligations in addition to their work-study commitment should not discourage one from finishing his or her studies, according to Ms. Calinawan, adding one should not dwell on failures and should be always positive.

There is no guarantee that reaching your goal would be an easy journey. Ms. Delas Alas-Lontoc explains it best. "The struggle is real but when it's over, it's over. You get to smile looking back to those days."



THE OFFICIAL QUARTERLY MAGAZINE OF THE SUPREME COURT PUBLIC INFORMATION OFFICE



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