

Dear Esteemed Friends and Supporters of Philippine Expressions Bookshop: Paulino, Giselle, Prosy, Carina and Lisa,**

I am happy to share ...

The Good News during this time of the pandemic!

I have received the official letter from the Philippine Consulate General in Los Angeles informing me that I am one of the recipients of the 2021 BANAAG AWARD as part of the Presidential Awards for Filipino Individuals and Organizations Overseas (PAFIOO).

BANAAG AWARD

THIS AWARD IS CONFERRED ON FILIPINO INDIVIDUALS OR ORGANIZATIONS FOR THEIR CONTRIBUTIONS WHICH HAVE SIGNIFICANTLY BENEFITED A SECTOR OF THE DIASPORA, OR ADVANCED THE CAUSE AND INTEREST OF OVERSEAS FILIPINO COMMUNITIES.

Thank you, Giselle, for the Nomination and the Letters of Support that you all wrote. This would not have been possible without your encouragement and support!

This award does not belong to me alone. It also belongs to all members of our Filipino American and Filipino communities all over the US and in the diaspora, who have expressed their appreciation for the work I have been doing thru Philippine Expressions Bookshop. By December 31, 2022, when I retire at age 85, I will have spent thirty-eight years in Los Angeles as a cultural activist, and twelve years in Manila when I established Casalinda Bookshop in 1972. A total of fifty years, so I guess it is really time to retire. :-) And this Award is much appreciated, as I close my lifetime career as a gatekeeper of Philippine culture in Los Angeles.

Not everyone really knows my story; allow me to share it with you.

It was during the height of Martial Law in the Philippines when I resigned from a wonderful job as Operations Manager of Merrill Lynch, Pierce, Fenner, and Smith which was then, the world's largest stock brokerage company. MLPF&S was an international company based in Geneva,



Switzerland, and I worked in their Hong Kong office in the sixties; they also sent me to New York to observe, train and experience the New York Stock Exchange market operations. In 1968, they opened their Asian Regional Office and Manila Office, where they transferred me to become the Operations Manager. I was one of only three women Operations Managers in the whole international office of the company. The other two were based in Munich and Panama. The sixties was the time when the term "breaking the glass ceiling" for women was just coined and was slowly becoming a reality. It was an honor to work in a mostly male-dominated industry!

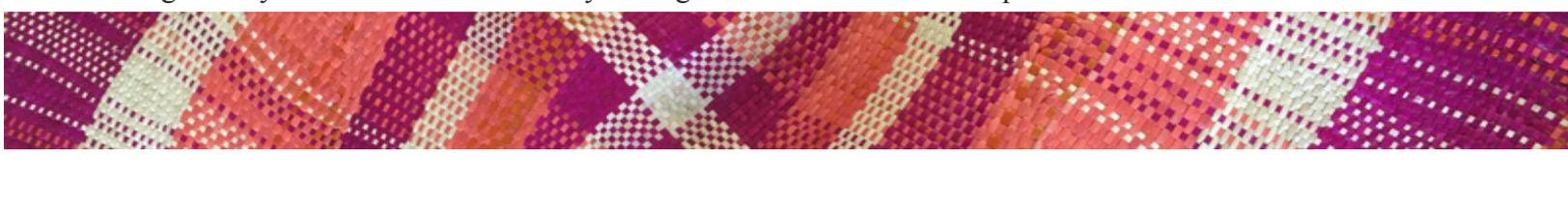
However, in 1972, when Martial Law was declared in the Philippines and the government curtailed all stock market operations of foreign companies, I decided to resign in order to experience history being made in the country of my birth. Friends said that I was a fool to leave a lucrative job during uncertain times. But with the guidance of the Holy Spirit, I decided to do just that, and I stayed in Manila instead of seeking a new foreign assignment. How would you react when your country is in crisis? Others would leave the country and let the country solve its own problems. And just come back when the crisis is over. In my case, I decided to stay, opened a Filipiniana Bookshop, and lived thru the crisis. Thus, my first bookshop, Casalinda Bookshop was born during the turmoils and uncertainties of the time! BTW, the bookshop was not named after me. It was named after the beautiful Toda mansion where our home office was located in Calle Leveriza, Pasay City, Metro Manila.

In 1968, when I returned to Manila after my Hong Kong sojourn, there were only two bookshops in Manila; the rest were variety stores that sold textbooks, school supplies, and many other varied items. Since they also sell books, they were referred to as Bookstores. Erehwon Bookshop and Solidaridad Bookshop inspired me to open the third specialty bookshop in the city. To make my operation a bit different from them, I carried antiquarian Philippine materials: books, prints, and maps that catered to Filipino collectors.

At that time, I felt that young Filipinos were not expressive of, nor impressed by their ancient cultural heritage and I wanted do my share in improving the situation. I also promoted contemporary books written only by Filipino authors, and some written by foreign authors but whose subject matter is focused on the Philippines. I organized literary soirees so that young people will have a chance to meet known authors. And the following quote from Gandhi inspired me so that I can help strengthen their interest in our culture:

"You must be the Change that you wish to see in the world!"

Through hard work, I was able to catch the interest of many who slowly delved into their roots and began to regain their pride in Being Filipino. I had opportunities to travel to Europe and bought antiquarian books, maps, and prints of the Philippines in London, Germany, Spain, and the Netherlands. I felt that these antiquarian materials are the patrimony of our people and I decided to bring them back to the Philippines because they are valuable research materials. I am glad they are now home where they belong and are accessible to Filipino scholars. I also teamed



up with Gilda Cordero Fernando who published beautiful and fully illustrated coffee table books on various aspects of Filipino culture. Casalinda Bookshop was the distributor of her books. Together, GCF Books and Casalinda Bookshop revived the interest of our people, who rediscovered the beauty and value of our culture. Due to strict control of media as well as books relevant to politics, Culture was a safe topic to write about during the Marcos Regime. As pioneers in the introduction of valuable and well-researched tomes that have now become collectors' items, we paved the way for other Filipino publishers and distribution outlets who have followed our footsteps!

In 1984, I brought my bookshop to Los Angeles. It is funny to think that I opened my first bookshop because of Martial Law, and I had to bring it out of the country due to the same reason. While I was not a rabid political activist during Martial Law, I did have rabid friends whose fates were sad; some of them died for the Cause. During the 1983-84 period, several men in uniform would come to the bookshop which elated me when they first started coming. I thought they were book lovers in uniform. But such was not the case. They came to scrutinize the books on the shelves, looking for subversive materials! I was afraid that someone might plant subversive materials in the bookshop; and even more afraid that I would be brought to one of the military camps where political prisoners were held. So, I decided to just pack up and I left Manila in early 1984. BTW, we referred to the prison camps as the ABC Camps: A - Camp Aguinaldo, B - Camp Bonifacio/Bicutan, and - Camp Crame.

When I landed in LA, my plan was to build another home for Philippine writings across the Pacific, in the same way, that I had built a home for them in Forbes Park, San Antonio Plaza, Metro Manila where my original bookshop was. I redefined my plans and reinvented myself while building a new home for Philippine writings in America. The collection by now had included some writings by Filipino Americans and Filipinos in the diaspora. I dedicated the bookshop to them, especially to young people who were in search of their roots. It was not an easy task rebuilding my bookshop but I chose to do so and renamed it "Philippine Expressions Bookshop." My vision was that the bookshop will carry all the expressions, sentiments, and emotions of the Filipino people, embodied in volumes of History, Literature, Art, Social Sciences, and other categories. With my training in the US stock market, I could easily have found a job in a financial institution in the US. Instead, I decided to follow the road less traveled.

Filipinos have been in America for over 200 years and there was no bookshop dedicated to the writings of Filipinos. I followed my heart and was inspired by this quote from Ralph Waldo Emerson:

"Do not go where the path may lead, go instead where there is no path and leave a trail."

Looking back now, after spending more than half of my life in the book trade, I can truly say that I have blazed the trail for Filipino and Filipino-American writings in America. In 1984, when I started, you can count on your ten fingers the number of authors who were published in the US.



And now in 2022, and with the advent of self-publishing, I have lost count of how many authors and their books have passed through the portals of Philippine Expressions Bookshop. And many students who came to the bookshop to research and to buy books are now PH.D. holders occupying good positions in the academe! And some of them became authors, too!

Let me end by saying that "***I found a field, cleaned it and planted seeds which have grown into big trees, now bearing fruits for everyone to taste and enjoy.***" This is my legacy to our community. And may the generation that follows enjoy the fruits of my labor, and continue to light the path so that others will also see their way!

For teaching me ideals of patriotism and love of country and service to humanity, I thank my father* whose faith in God had embedded in me the same faith; he was one of the statesmen who witnessed the signing of the Declaration of Independence during the 1946 Independence of the Philippines from America. My father must be beaming with pride from above knowing that he has taught his daughter well and she has lived to his name! Indeed, I am my father's daughter!

Likewise, I thank the Committee that had chosen to give me the prestigious BANAAG AWARD. I will cherish the honor and may the Awards you have been giving to Overseas Filipinos will continue to bring out the best in BEING FILIPINO, wherever they go in this vast earth.

Maraming Salamat at Mabuhay tayong lahat!

Linda Nietes-Little
Founder & Owner
Philippine Expressions Bookshop

P.S.

A special thanks to my husband Lt. Col. Robert J. Little, USAF (Ret.) who have stood with me all the time in Causes that concern the Philippines!

*Emigdio V. Nietes, Congressman for the Province of. Antique, 1946 - 1949

**Giselle Tongi, Executive Director of FilAm Arts

Dr. Paulino Lim, Professor Emeritus, University of California, Long Beach, and 2016 Banaag Awardee

Prosy de la Cruz, Fil-Am activist, author, columnist, LA Asian Journal

Dr. Lisa Tolentino, Adjunct Faculty, Fine & Performing Arts in Arizona

Carina Montoya Forsythe, author of *Los Angeles's Historic Filipinotown*, and *Filipinos in Hollywood*.

