

TRIBUTE TO DOREEN GAMBOA FERNANDEZ

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Doreen was outstanding in whatever she decided to do. Writer, teacher, lecturer, food and literary connoisseur, theater historian, social scientist, etc. But what made Doreen cross the line from being merely outstanding to greatness was the simplicity, humility and efficiency with which she achieved what she did. Ralph Waldo Emerson must have been thinking of someone like her when he wrote:

“Nothing is more simple than greatness; indeed, to be simple is to be great.”

I first came face to face with Doreen after I had known her for sometime to be an accomplished and famous writer, professor, lecturer, scholar and food and theater connoisseur, when she was invited by Prof. Eric Torres to give a lecture on Philippine social structure at Sycip, Gorres, Velayo & Co. as part of its Liberal Arts Program. Outside of her 90-minute lecture from which we learned plenty, what impressed me most was the simplicity in her demeanor, language and dress. My reaction then was “Napakasimple naman nitong professor na ito kahit siya’y napakagaling at napakatanyag.”

I did not know then that she came from a very prominent and wealthy haciendero family in Negros. Otherwise, I would have added: “at kahit napakayaman.”

In the business world where appearance and artifice are essential tools of trade, the simplicity that encapsulated her capabilities and accomplishments was heartwarming if not startling.

I met Doreen next (at my first Board meeting) soon after I was unexpectedly and unceremoniously thrust into CCP’s presidency through the efforts of “Popoy” del Rosario, Jr. and the acquiescence of the then Board Chairman Chinggay Lagdameo.

At Board meetings, Doreen was a quiet presence as she was not given to long-winded perorations on non-consequential matters. But her opinions and contributions, given when necessary or sought, carried a heavy weight.

Her contributions were particularly valuable on matters pertaining to culture and arts policy and in providing a historical perspective on Philippine Art Forms. She had plenty to contribute to the CCP. She wrote the section on “Literature” of the *Tuklas Sining* publication and edited the Volume on Theater of the CCP Encyclopedia of Philippine Art.

She shared our light moments and laughed heartily especially at Father Perez’s irreverent jokes and my toneless singing.

Her real mettle was tested when the CCP charter, which every Trustee vows to protect when taking his oath of office, was wantonly violated in the pursuit of political and other non-cultural objectives of the deposed and discredited regime.

Unassuming, simply dressed, sincere, unpretentious but packing a behavioral and intellectual arsenal that could wallop any pretentious cultural parvenu, Doreen, without even being conscious of it, used this arsenal quietly, unobtrusively and so effectively in the long, difficult and costly fight that finally led to the triumph of right over wrong, the preservation of the CCP charter and the return of order and civility to the august halls of this institution.

Unknown to many, the battle was long, hard and painful. And also unknown to many, Doreen played a key role in the process in the manner she knew best. Even before we could discuss the matter, Doreen had already prepared a beautifully crafted statement setting forth the philosophical bases for the defense of the Charter.

In the months that followed, Doreen stood by my side (not behind, mind you) not in challenging the guards physically but by lending me her wordsmithing skills. Doreen’s golden hand worked wonders on my dull and often intemperate text. An additional phrase inserted here and there, a word or two changed, a sentence deleted or rephrased, or added would make my prose so much more elegant, readable and more myself. That was what I admired. Her ability to make my prose sound more like me than I was capable of.

ENDRIGA: *Tribute to Doreen Gamboa Fernandez*

The CCP owes Doreen much and I hope the entire CCP community recognizes her quiet, unassuming behind-the-scenes contributions which served as the laser rockets that ultimately restored the CCP to its rightful place with its charter and its values intact.

Doreen, we thank you for your commitment to a good cause. I thank you personally for the lessons in humility and communication that you taught me and we hope that wherever you are now you will continue to give us your benevolent guidance.

Goodbye.