

We had put off our regular lunch. "Let us wait until after the end of school rush," we said. And summer was travel time so "let's do it when we get back," we said again. "Life is short" lunches we called them. But we didn't realize how short.

Our last lunch together was typical of lunches with Doreen, and I know many in this room have shared this experience: Doreen introducing us to the specialties of the house; the owner or the chef coming out to make recommendations that would be prepared specially for us. And indeed the food was great.

But it was not just the good food that characterized the lunches with Doreen. More than anything else, it was the wonderful, comfortable food for the soul. There we were, Doreen, Honey Carandang and I — three mature women, women of substance we like to think, in what Honey (and Erik Erikson) would call our generativity years — sharing something read or a place traveled by or yet another endearing or infuriating Pinoy trait and of course some exciting discovery — usually a person doing great things or someone with tremendous potential.

And the gossip! Doreen always had the latest juicy morsels (and I am not referring to the cuisine) on the rich and famous and pretentious. This was probably the part of Doreen that Danton Remoto fondly referred to as "acerbic, sly and wicked." And we discussed projects, not so much what we were doing (although there was that as well) but what else we could or would do. For Doreen was always the best support for any project. Dreams and schemes that were merely a glint in our eye, an idea struggling for clarity or support, were greeted by Doreen with encouragement, suggestions and offers of help. Always upbeat, even enthusiastic, Doreen was the perfect partner in an endeavor, as not only was she interested and positive, she was hardworking, fast and she always delivered.

Her columns in the *Inquirer* continued to appear during periods that she was critically ill and, recently, even after she died. The August issue of the *Philippine Journal of Education*, a magazine for teachers which I edit and to which Doreen has been a regular contributor for almost two decades, will still carry her column, "Book Talk." You see

Doreen, unlike you and me (well, me anyway), was always ahead of her deadlines.

We had a project we were working on, Doreen and I — an edited collection of my grandmother's essays. Paz Marquez Benitez may be best known as a short story writer, but in fact she wrote only a few stories. She, however, wrote hundreds of essays as editor of the *Philippine Journal of Education*. Doreen and I were collecting and sorting through these essays and we planned to put them together into a book. I guess I will have to work on this project without Doreen's help. Incidentally, I remember that my grandmother, although somewhat of a loner and recluse in her later years, always welcomed and enjoyed Doreen's visits.

At this last "life is short" lunch I referred to, I recall expressing my feelings of inadequacy and regret at not having written a book. Here I was with Doreen and Honey, both such prolific authors, and I was sadly unpublished and bookless. Doreen in typical fashion offered to help by conducting a workshop for an intimate group of friends who needed an extra push to write. Or just collect and show her what I had written she said, and she would help find the book in them. That too was put off. There is no book as yet but Doreen's encouragement felt so good.

Yes, Doreen had such a way of making people feel good. Not in the superficial pleasantries fashion but in the deep affirming way, as she found something to genuinely appreciate in most people — particularly her students. Both my children Carlo and Andrea had Doreen as a teacher at the Ateneo. While she had them in class, and even after, she would always have nice observations and accounts about them — little vignettes to warm a mother's heart. I always thought my two laid back children were so fortunate to have Doreen as a teacher. But listening to Doreen, bless her generous heart, you would think she was the lucky one!

But we were the lucky ones. We are lucky, you and I — all of us — for having had Doreen in our lives. And I thank God for that blessing.

Patricia B. Licuanan, Ph.D.
President
Miriam College
Philippines



What can I add to what has been said about Doreen G. Fernandez?

All of us here already know of her simplicity and her generosity, of her ebullience and quiet dignity, of her strength of character and love of life, which not even the threat of death could take away. (I was told that she had managed to watch two shows on Broadway before she fell ill.)

In the spirit of *pauca principia, maxima exempla* (few principles, many examples), a teaching principle that Doreen learned from the Jesuits and loved to apply, permit me to supply examples of what we already know about Doreen.

Doreen and I do not go “way back,” nor were our meetings many. But in that economy of company, she was to me what Beatrice was to Dante: less a constant companion than a steady anchor, a symbol around which to rally, an ideal, and an inspiration.

What impressed me deeply about her was her disingenuousness, which sometimes seemed to violate what other people consider proper behavior, especially for a Silaynon like Doreen. On at least two occasions, she asked me, in her usual matter-of-fact way, “Are you having an asthma attack? I can hear you wheezing.” Another time, I was telling her about how costly the library services at the U.P. had become. She said, “Do you need money?”

Those were not patronizing questions — not when it was she who was asking them, not with that smile and that tone of voice or with that chin propped on her hand. They were candid expressions of concern, sympathy, and kindness — what our National Artist Jose Garcia Villa once called Doreen’s “basic goodness.” It was refreshing to see somebody of her position treading so expertly, without tripping, the thin line between tact and hypocrisy, candor and bad taste.

Her graciousness was also extraordinary. She willingly went the extra mile without making one feel that she was. A day or two before the launching of *Feasts and Feats*, a *festschrift* in her honor, I found out that she was running a fever. Karen Cardenas, director of the ORP, was naturally worried, as was I. The invitations had been sent out, the venue had been reserved, and worst of all, the *lechon* had been ordered. But it would not make sense to launch the book without her. When I

called her to ask how she was, she said, calmly but firmly, "Don't worry. I'll be there." And there she was, limping a little but otherwise (to use her own words when she described Paz Marquez Benitez) "lovely, luminous, and lively."

I still do not know what medicines she took or how many prayers she said. Whatever it was that she did to pull herself through, I sometimes think that she did it less for herself than for the people behind the book. After all, she had had so many awards and tributes. But she knew how important the book was for everyone who contributed to its making. It was our way of saying thanks to her, and that she understood.

We are all of us the sadder for her passing away. But I am beginning to believe that the spirits of those we love remain with us.

On the evening that she passed away, I was preparing for my class on Chaucer. I had borrowed from the library a book of Chaucer criticism, and when I looked at the book card, I found out that the last person to borrow the book was Doreen Fernandez. (The due date was 5 March 1974.) The library had long been disposing book cards for barcodes, but this particular book card had been spared the trash bin. Was that coincidence, or was it Doreen, still playing teacher?

Doreen apparently enjoyed Chaucer enough to look up secondary sources, and so you will excuse me for ending with him. Here is something from the tale of the Knight, the first among the Canterbury pilgrims to tell a story — a passage reflecting on the seemingly unnecessary losses that make a "foule prison of this lyf":

No man mighte gladden Theseus
 Saving his olde father Egeus,
 That knew this worldes transmutacion,
 As he had seen it chaungen, up and down,
 Joy after woe, and woe after gladnesse,
 And shewed hem ensample and likenesse:
 "Right as there died never man," quod he,
 "That he ne lived in erth in some degree,
 Right so there lived never man," he saide,
 "In all this world that some time he ne deide.
 This world nis but a thurghfare full of wo,
 And we been pilgrims passing to and fro.

(No one could lighten Theseus of his care
Except his father, old Aegeus, there.
He knew the transmutations of the world
And he had seen its changes as it whirled
Bliss upon sorrow, sorrow upon bliss,
And gave his son instruction upon this:
“Just as there never died a man,” said he,
“But had in life some station or degree,
Just so there never lived a man,” he said,
“In all the world but in the end was dead.
This world is but a thoroughfare of woe
And we are pilgrims passing to and fro.”)

Doreen the pilgrim may have beaten us to the shrine, but she certainly made our pilgrimage well worth the taking while she was with us.

Jonathan Chua
Ateneo de Manila University
Philippines

*The editors of *Budhi* wish to thank Jonathan Chua for his help in creating this present anthology of Doreen Fernandez's writings.