My mentor was my father, the late Tomas Aguirre. I am probably not alone in saying that my father made an impact in my life, career, and business in one way or the other. After all, he was a successful businessman and a well-respected banker who was considered to be one of the drivers of the Philippine economy for several decades. He was well loved by his family, friends and business associates and was well respected among his peers in the Philippine business community.

Over the years, I have learned a lot from him through the regular candid conversations we had and the unceasing advice and guidance that he imparted to me. I believe that the biggest impact that he made in my life is through the boundless wisdom that I gained from just simply watching the life of this great man unfold before my eyes.

Because of his openness, lightheartedness, and genuine interest in people, it was not difficult for anybody to be drawn to him and to learn from him. He loved joking around with people, which is why I think it was easy for everybody to approach him. He was simple and humble yet very distinguished. He enjoyed interacting with different people from all walks of life and loved imparting his wisdom, values and experiences to those who sought it. Many say he knew everyone’s first names and loved to chat with whoever came his way. He actually found pleasure in listening to and learning from others, regardless of their age, stature or social class, which was amazing for a man of his stature.

My father always had the passion to help others and he believed that the yardstick for measuring his success was in the success of those
whom he has helped. I believe that the reason why he was a successful and influential leader was that he genuinely cared for people. I always caught him giving, not only professional advice but also personal ones, to different people from our organization. One of his many objectives was to provide employment to as many Filipinos as he could in order to help our nation. I remember he told me one day as I was urging him to give coins to a beggar on the street, which he did, that his father told him that if he really wanted to help the poor then he should create jobs for them. As the saying goes, “Give a man a fish and he will eat for a day; teach a man how to fish and he will eat for a lifetime.”

Early on in his banking career, my father taught on a part-time basis at the Ateneo de Manila University, De La Salle University, and the University of the Philippines with the hope of contributing to the development of the next generation of businessmen, bankers, and professionals. Despite a hectic schedule, he took time out to patiently guide and advise each of his students. He believed that an appropriate measure of a successful teacher is his ability to impart knowledge and wisdom to his students and that a failing student is a result of the teacher’s failure in fulfilling his duty as a teacher.

This attitude and mindset was in fact the cornerstone upon which my father founded Banco Filipino and later on, BF Homes. In founding these companies, he envisioned to improve the lives of Filipinos and to provide them with a means to own homes through affordable terms of financing. Once, a waiter from a restaurant he used to frequent told me that it was my dad who helped him acquire his first home in BF Homes through Banco Filipino. Through this vision, he successfully established Banco Filipino as one of the front running and premier banking institutions in the country and developed BF Homes to be one of the largest and most successful residential developments in Asia.

I don’t remember my dad to be religious and yet the things he taught me over the years were so biblical. Among the many verses in the bible that I’ve read that reminded me so much of him, the one that comes to mind now is in Proverbs 22:1 which says: “A good name is more desirable than great riches; to be esteemed is better than silver or gold.”

My dad once said to me that we should protect our name because it is our greatest asset. I remember an instance when he was talking to a former officer who was accused of something. He said to him, “Do
your best to clear your name.” This showed me how important one’s name really was to him.

When a person has a good name, it means that he has integrity. My dad taught me integrity through the many lectures and reprimands he gave when my actions fell short of his expectations. But I believe that the one with the biggest impact on my learning this very important lesson was seeing the way he lived his life. He was a man of integrity. This is how I know him and this is how I will always remember him.

In spite of all his accomplishments and stature, what impressed me the most about my father were his selflessness and his commitment to a life of simplicity, humility, and modesty. I hope that his life will be regarded as a testimony of success in touching the lives of many and will be an inspiration to you as it was to me.

Cathy Aguirre Hernandez

I am the only child of my parents, an unica hija. But never did I feel being the only one because of how events fell into place. I grew up with my cousins, comprised of three brothers and a sister. Their mother, Tita Boots, died at a young age. My mother, Fely, her only sister, kept her promise to raise Tita Boots’ young children as her own.

If the task is to single out one formidable mentor beyond one’s parents, my choice is Tomas Aguirre, my uncle. With the tragic loss of Tita Boots at such an early age, I guess he filled a profound gap by surrounding himself with family as often as possible, most specially at 237 Menlo Road where he stayed, while his children, my cousins, stayed with us at Sunrise Hill.

Tito Tommy’s fondness for fine food was just a cover-up for an insatiable need for gathering a “family” for the meals, as often as possible. Every day, the noontime dismissal bell at school meant that an exciting lunch at Uncle Tommy’s was ahead. At his home, the round lunch table provided a venue for a democratic exchange of ideas from an eclectic mix of adults and students.

Our host had a welcoming smile and presented his cheeks for kisses or a firm handshake extended from his rolled-up sleeves. Greetings
were personalized: complimentary comments about our appearance or questions inquiring about our interests. Headline topics evolved as lunch progressed. Educational books were distributed in multiples such as when self-hypnosis was introduced. New gadgets were gifted like Polaroid cameras and quadraphonic speakers so that we experienced technology. During these lunch sessions, Tito Tommy was conscious of how he would be affecting his various participants by igniting our curiosity and encouraging us to experiment, and more importantly, to accomplish something on our own eventually.

During these innumerable soirees, we were exposed to CEO colleagues, politician friends, long-lost relatives and fellow students, all of whom became friends for life. Tito Tommy was willing to bring us into his world in the short time frame of a dinner party. He burned into my consciousness what he and my parents espoused: “Self esteem comes from what you create and achieve, and not what you have or are given.” Wow! That rocked my value system so early that I began to discern, thankfully, that affluent people are exceptional not only because of money or wealth. Some shine because of the ideas they create and how they use their wealth to make a difference beyond themselves.

When he was forming Banco Filipino, Tito Tommy deliberately allowed us younger people to eavesdrop. Involving guests in his decisions, we were the first to hear about ideas that were hatched to make Banco Filipino a brand. When the sun logo was conceived, he allowed us children to vote on which shade of yellow-gold we preferred. Young people were important to Uncle Tommy and he wanted to encourage the habit to save. The “Happy Saver’s Club” deposit generation campaign catered to children and the then little-known character, Hello Kitty, was adopted as the mascot.

Banco Filipino soon grew to be the biggest savings bank in the country. Its all-women officers and staff became the biggest statement on women’s lib even before Ophra was talking about it. Soon Tito Tommy announced that he was going to create mass housing and finance the depositors of the bank so that they could own homes. His growth strategy was backward integration to develop support products and services for his organizations to function more efficiently.

But the pace of corporate building was temporarily interrupted when Tomas and Bobby were kidnapped. Military officers, security
experts and legal advisers replaced the usual corporate managers at the table. Meanwhile, we were protectively relegated to more private quarters. Immediate members of the family were housed together at Menlo while safety was an issue.

It was during this time when we were forced to cocoon that I had the privilege of private lessons from Tito Tommy. I was a freshman undergradate and he took the time to explain business to me beyond the theory learned in academics. He thoroughly explained his management philosophy, organizational structuring and projected his ambitious corporate vision. It was Filipino-oriented, masses-based and economically directed toward the ideal of increasing the earning capacity of the lower classes, blurring the economic class lines by expanding the middle class. “We should start economic improvement from the ground up. That’s why I locate all the BF branches near public markets to make saving accessible to the masses.” This self-made financial leader taught me Banking and Real Estate 101.

My cousin, Bobby Aguirre, took up from where his father, Tomas, left off in mentoring me. Bobby was my first boss. He hired me, an inexperienced 18 year-old, to tackle a sensitive position in treasury in the corporation he headed, the memorial park project, Himlayang Pilipino. Gently instructing me to learn the rudiments quickly, my task was to improve the collections. Charged with a critical role of trust, I was forced to be serious and prove my worthiness. Typical of Bobby, he discounted my inadequacies and challenged me to learn the ropes quickly. “Since you are young and related to Tomas Aguirre, you have to prove that you deserve your position. And you will!”

Bobby has taken on the mission not only to preserve his father’s estate, but also to make the assets grow. He is now focused on the mission to restore the Banco Filipino to its former glory and achieve a fair damage settlement for the management and shareholders of Banco Filipino.

Like the polo fans rooting from the spectator’s row I will cheer Bob on to win the last chucker of victory for Banco Filipino and continue to support him like he’s supported me all my life.

Laida Adduru-Bowman
My first mentor was Mr. Tomas B. Aguirre, the founder and former president of Banco Filipino Savings and Mortgage Bank. I was a fresh college graduate when I joined the bank as secretary to the president. TA, as he was fondly called, was a workaholic, a trait that I acquired from working with him for many years. He liked to please people. He wanted to be sure bank clienteles and depositors were properly attended to and were happy with our service. He formed a group of Customer Relations Models or CRM's to carry out the objective of dispensing high quality service. CRM's were pretty and comely who appeared in the Bank's television and print advertisements. CRM's were popular among the depositing public and the criteria for its selection where stringent. They were the ambassadors of goodwill who would do anything for a client "except, perhaps accept a date?" I was one of the CRM's who was regularly tapped to appear on TV and print--ads endorsing the bank. I became a familiar face and many times, people would call me "CRM Rose". For how could they forget the print ad I appeared on behind A Million Peso bills in various denominations? The Bank grew by leaps and bounds because it delivered on everything it promised and through creative and aggressive marketing strategies of TA. It also honed and polished the talent of a young and promising advertising man who later on became a formidable force in the field of advertising. His name was Greg Garcia.

TA spent many hours in conference with Mr. Garcia brainstorming, conceptualizing, and reviewing the draft execution of ads. TA was hands-on. Many times, he would ask me to come to his office and ask my opinion and suggestions on a proposed concept and layout of an ad. He wants the ads to have a strong and lasting impact on the public and he considered me to be representative of "the public"! It almost became a pattern that Mr. Garcia decided to get my approval prior to making his presentations to TA. It must have worked for him as the times that I would be summoned by TA to give a critique on his work became rare since then. What TA did was a simple application of "test marketing" before implementing a new marketing campaign is adopted. Hence, Banco Filipino, with good service coupled by effective marketing, became the biggest savings bank in the early seventies.

TA ventured in real estate by organizing BF Homes, Inc. He bought sizable areas of raw lands in Parañaque, Las Piñas, Quezon City and Cavite. My exposure to the many meetings and transactions in real
estate that he conducted in his office broadened my knowledge in the field of real estate investment. The little experience I gained from my Mom who had been investing in real estate for many years was a good background to for me to grasp with ease the discussions and transactions that transpired in his office with realtors, property owners and his executives were invaluable experience that made me knowledgeable in real estate.

I applied what I learned from TA and together with my husband Ted, we started investing on real estate by building houses to rent that we eventually sold for a good profit. We repeated the same process until Ted started buying big tracts of land in areas where prospects for growth and development are good. It improved our equity that provided us with a good life.

TA's next venture was in the hotel business. With big tracts of lands in Parañaque and the slow prospects for growth in the area, he decided to prime up BF Homes Subdivision by building two hotels. Already promotable to a managerial position, I requested to be assigned to the hotel operations and worked in various capacities in Finance, Front Office and Purchasing. The long office hours of work at the hotel and my being childless after 15 years of being married was the biggest factor when I decided to resign and concentrate on having a family. A couple of years later, the sacrifice of leaving corporate life bore fruit. Ted and I were blessed with two children, a boy who is a splitting image of Ted and a daughter who looks like me! Having attained financial success in our late thirties enabled me to raise my children hands on.

What I learned from working closely for TA attributed a lot to what I am and do now. Secretaries are actually doing “OJT” to top executives. And through the experience gained, perseverance, hard work and with the right decisions, one can climb the corporate ladder.

Today, my husband and I own and operate the Doña Jovina, a hot spring resort and restaurant in Calamba, Laguna. In this new phase in my life, it is Ted, my husband who is mentoring me. He picked up from where TA left off. Just like TA, Ted's style is not all about business, he gives a personal touch to everything that he does and the business follows. As TA would say, “if you are good and kind to your employees, they would gladly do the job for and more!

I married at the age of 20 while Ted was 21, so we practically grew up together. Our marriage of 44 years as the saying goes, “rode off the test
of time". Through the years I have discovered the positive influence of Ted to become the better person that I am now. Having a very sensitive nature, it was not easy for me to owe up to my faults and shortcomings. I grew up self-centered who keeps things to myself. I did not volunteer to help people, even if I knew, I needed to unless I was asked. Ted, on the other hand is sensitive to the needs of other people and is generous with his time, empathizing or extending financial assistance. Husbands do not normally get involved in the problems of his in-laws but Ted is different. He makes it a point to know whenever a problem exists and helps in whatever way he can as he saw fit. Osmosis must have rubbed on me all through the years living with Ted that I have shared his heart for helping those in need.

Ted is the entrepreneur in the family. He has with a good measure of success moved from one business to the other. He is a risk taker, I am not. But along the way I have learned to understand his thoughts. My being a former treasurer in the hotel, I developed my skills in the area of finance and the attitude of a typical treasurer and it somehow complemented Ted’s macro view on the other hand.

Villa Jovita started as a retirement business when we were in our fifties. It grew unplanned with our hands-on style of management and complementing skills in handling business I take care of operations and together we work devise ways to improve it. We continued our journey of growing up and learning the business together. Any husband and wife team working together 24/7 can say it is a sure formula for failure in relationship. It is not so in our case. While Ted and I agree to disagree, over the years, he was able to let me understand and sometimes not totally accept, the logic behind his every business move and decision. But I trust Ted, and I would give him the upper hand in making the big decision while I make sure the funds are properly managed. There are many things I learned from Ted and I know there will be many more to learn from him as we continue our journey as a couple and business partner.

If what I had in life as mentors was not providential, then I must have attracted all the karmic luck in the world for the opportunity of working closely with a top brass businessman in TA during my waking time to my good fortune of sleeping with Ted at night who continues mentoring me where TA left off.

Rose Javier
While I do not consider myself to be the protégée of anyone, I was mentored by many on the way to becoming a corporate executive. Some were people I considered to be good role models, others trained me as part of their job, but I met the one person who took the time to mentor me when I was in my late twenties.

My corporate journey started when I passed the board exams on public accountancy. It also ended my aspiration to live among nuns in a convent.

After taking my oath as a Certified Public Accountant, Mama wasted no time and introduced me to Lita Logarta of Channel 2, the predecessor of ABS-CBN. Lita took me to the Programs Department and I became a television Video Jockey, VJ for short, for Saturday shows. Since my weekdays were free, I took a job in Banco Filipino Savings and Mortgage Bank, a growing thrift bank. My weekly television appearances made me popular among my officemates and bank depositors, who on Saturdays would watch me on Channel 2 at the bank's television that is sitting in the lobby.

I had a brief stint as a new accounts teller, before being transferred to the Auditing Department. When I passed the Bank’s competitive exams to identify ten trainees for the Electronic Data Processing (EDP) Program, I joined a new Division that was headed by the late Salvador “Buddy” Lim. Our team made banking history in making Banco Filipino the first “online” bank in the Philippines. It was under Buddy’s wing that I developed my skills in systems and programming. And it was during “lull” times that I developed computer games, a hit among my officemates. If I had pursued developing computer games at the time, I could have been part of the industry that made many young men rich.... but then again, who would have predicted that video games would become the billion-dollar business it is today?

Banco Filipino’s growth was phenomenal. There were many openings for supervisors and managers that management wanted to fill in that could not wait for the traditional on the job training and staff promotion. Nancy Ty, the charming and diminutive Senior Officer for Personnel Division thought of fast tracking training through seminars and workshops. She institutionalized a search program through competitive exams. I thought it was a good opportunity to get a promotion, so I signed up to take the exams. However, my husband refused to take me to the examination site. It was a Sunday, and I could
not make him drive all the way from BF Homes in Parañaque to Plaza Cervantes in Sta. Cruz. I decided to drive the two-cylinder Minica that I drive around the village and even agreed to give an officemate, who was my neighbor, a ride. I thought it was a good idea for the two of us to do some question-and-answer drill on the way to the Bank.

My passenger regretted coming with me when she noticed I was “nouveau” at driving and yet had the guts to take a two-cylinder Suzuki Minica onto the freeway for the first time. The poor lady was speechless and held on to dear life all the way through my erratic driving. She rode with someone else going home and word got around the Bank that she did not pass the qualifying exams because she was traumatized by my driving! I felt sorry for her because I made it to the top three! We became friends again and she eventually became a habitual passenger in my car. Indeed, the saying, “No guts, no glory” held true for me. The experience made me independent and self-reliant. It made me feel good to know “I can do it if I have to!”

My first job was as supervisor to the late Hildebrando Badiola, Senior Officer of the Branches Department. Since the Department has no manager, I was “sort of” second in command. Mr. Badiola’s style of empowering subordinates gave me the freedom to express my creativity. He supported my ideas to install a standard reporting system for branch accounting and a rewards program for adherence and timely submission of reports. He empowered me to coordinate with heads of various departments and branches to improve efficiency in operations and work processes. My staff and I had fun opening new branches, even though we had to work late at night preparing for the event.

During this time, three other Senior Officers, Nancy Ty, Antonio Quion, and Renato Dizon were closely observing me. Without consulting each other, they recommended me to Doña Remedios Dupasquier (RD), an officer of an affiliated company of the Bank who was in search for an assistant.

One morning, Mr. Badiola received a call from the late Don Tomas B. Aguirre (TA) to send me to his office. There I met RD, the sister of TA who was Treasurer of the Pilar Development Corporation. She was leaving the country to rejoin her husband Pierre, a P&G Country Manager who took a new job in France. She needed someone to fill in her position during her absence. Her management style was nurturing.
and I looked forward to her visits. She treated me like a friend despite our disparity in age and social status.

Soon after I was heading both Finance and Sales Departments. Eventually I had two companies to manage, concurrent officer positions in other companies and several board seats, all in the Aguirre conglomerate. The company grew so fast. New companies were organized and I recommended my friends and acquaintances for officer positions. They were: the late Emily Tigliao, Zorayda Amelia “Mel” Alonzo, the late Roberto Tigliao, Claire Fragada, and Atty. Elizabeth “Ebitte” Palma. They were a dynamic group and their exposure to TA enriched their knowledge in real estate.

It was at this time that TA became a mentor to me in the truest sense. He would be in my office before 10:00 a.m. everyday and stay until noontime. He would sit at the head of my conference table and over a cup of freshly brewed coffee he would bring out his thoughts before leaving for lunch. Our conversations covered a wide range of topics. He was like a guru who would answer all my questions, no matter how trivial they were. He left nothing unclear in the way he expressed his thoughts and way of thinking. It seemed to me that he was sharing everything he knew. His smiling face and soft, reassuring voice made me look forward to those morning sessions.

There was one morning when I came in just as when he was arriving in my office. I felt a little embarrassed knowing I was sort of late so I offered to tell him that I had to prepare meals for my family before going to work. He smiled and in his usual soft tone said, “Aling Cynthia, you have to make a decision if you want to be an executive or a cook.” Of course I wanted to be an executive! I hired a cook!

I learned a lot from TA, some of which are the following:

TA regarded contractors and subcontractors as business partners. He pointed out that with contractors, our production capacity can be flexible without having to hire or fire employees. Companies can remain lean and mean in any economic condition. Contractors are more productive because they constantly monitor the performance of their employees and they closely watch their costs and expenses. They have to make sure the margins that they projected are attained. However, this set-up has to be coupled with in-house quality control. He advised me to make sure contractors are given comfortable profit margins for every job they have with us to enable them to turn around
and be there for us for the next contract. He stressed that squeezing contractors into accepting work with marginal returns will eventually put them out of business, which is akin to killing business partners.

Today companies have discovered the cost-benefit of “job outsourcing”, the modern term for “subcontracting”. And with open trade, the world is a wide market to search for the best and the most cost-efficient way to get jobs done.

TA considered real estate brokers and agents as good vehicles in getting the best deals in real estate. Since commission motivates brokers and agents, they work harder than anyone on salary basis. They were his allies, with whom he spent hours in conversation, sharing with them what he feels will sharpen their skills at negotiation. He taught them how to get him the properties that he liked, under his own terms. He would sit down with them and teach them how to talk to property owners. It was through them that he was able to acquire vast tracts of land in Cavite.

TA would take me and Maria Amelita “Girlie” Villarosa to Cavite to inspect properties he planned to buy or had already acquired. We would have long walks along barren lands, sit on rocks, ride on carabaos across creeks and just feel the wind and the earth. He shared his plans and vision for those areas with us. He asked for our opinions, as if they would make or break the project. Later on, I realized he was trying to develop our intuition, a major component in the decision making process in the Aguirre conglomerate. The trips to Cavite, a known lair for criminal elements, gave me some measure of confidence to do land inspection in other areas, including Mindanao!

TA believed in women. He pioneered the all women bank in the 1960s with the opening of the Bank’s San Juan branch. He had a good number of female executives when other institutions were just starting to discover that women have good managerial skills. He used the vast reservoir of our talents to help propel his Bank into the Number One savings bank in the country in the 1970s to the middle part of the 1980’s. He had Nancy Lim-Ty, a bright, and young U.S. graduate to head the Bank’s Personnel. He knew she could hire, train and make us proud of Banco Filipino. Aside from having good looks and personality, applicants had to pass the height and weight requirement, aside from having to pass an entrance exam. It was therefore not surprising to find many good-looking men and women among its employees. As a
consequence, there were many intermarriages among bank personnel. Nancy’s protégée, Perla Toledo, now heads the Personnel Department of the dynamic Banco de Oro. Many Banco de Oro officers and supervisors were formerly from Banco Filipino.

At the height of his legal battle with the Central Bank, I asked him how he could take it. He said, “It is not good to fight, but when thrust into a fight, one must learn to enjoy it!” He had a way of turning everything into a game and he plays to win! When I told him about my fears that a prolonged court case could render the case of the bank mute and academic, he said that it should not be a cause for worry. With certainty, he told me that one day the courts would have to make a decision and that decision would be fair. He said the bank would reopen and its lost business opportunities would be restored! When former Central Bank Governor Jose “Jobo” Fernandez passed away, I visited Don Tomas. After I broke the news to him, he said he already knew and in a sad tone he also said that “everyman is entitled to make a mistake in their life.”

I had never seen TA become angry because he always said, “When angry, you lose.” It is therefore not surprising that he seems to win all the time. After his death the court cases he filed in behalf of Banco Filipino were decided favorably, although the decision has yet to be implemented.

The companies in the Aguirre conglomerate were known in the real estate industry as the “Aguirre Academy,” where its former executives, through the guidance of Don Tomas, have pioneered the setting up of the country’s first and secondary mortgage market. His dream of helping every Filipino family own a home became a reality.

When a lady executive of the company within the Aguirre group was proposed to be transferred to Pilar Development Corporation, RD related to me that TA told her “It’s not easy to train; with Cynthia, I’m not yet done.” It was then that I realized that he deliberately went to my office every morning to teach me everything he knew about business, management and real estate. He taught many other officers in the company and he did so “one on one”. He communicated his ideas, dreams, aspirations and goals because he knew it would take beyond his lifetime to realize and achieve them. They were big and so he mentored us, graduates of the “Aguirre Academy” to continue the work he started.
Don Tomas Aguirre paid it forward by mentoring me and others and I have decided to give back by mentoring others.

Cynthia V. Subijano

Tomas Banzon Aguirre

Cathy with dad Tom

Cathy Aguirre is an equestrian at heart, one of the finest in the country. She is wife to Jerome Hernandez and mother to three beautiful girls. She is currently the Executive Vice President of Banco Filipino Savings and Mortgage Bank.
Laida Adduru-Bowman is an international business consultant. Her East/West orientation is not only geographic but also reflective of her personal lifestyle and eclectic career.

Rose Javier is presently co-managing with her husband the Villa Jovita Hot Springs Resort, a retirement business that they own.

Cynthia V. Subijano, a retired corporate executive with over thirty years of experience in the field of Finance, Marketing and Operations. Ewie, her pet name, is also a songwriter with many compositions recorded in collaboration with Prof. Polding Silos under the Villar label in the mid-1960s. She is a person who cultivates all her God-given talents and this book project is her first. She has contributed articles for some major broadsheets and magazine.