I met Carmeling for the first time when I enrolled in her Financial Management II class in the first trimester of my MBA at the University of the Philippines. I had heard her name when I was working in SGV and I had been hoping to see the lady with “brushed up hair” as she was described to me. When I finally met her, she became a mentor in the strictest sense of the word. I managed to get better than average grade at the end of that first term, despite the warnings from my friends that I was in for a hard time in my first term in the MBA program. Some months after I earned my Master’s degree, I was elated to get a job offer from her to join the Chemphil Group. And this was the second, longest and the most important “class” I had with her.

I was in my mid-twenties when I joined Carmeling in the Chemphil Group. I had worked with my father, my other equally important mentor, with SGV briefly, and with the Central Bank. So this part of my career was my first in the corporate world.

Now, thirty-one years later, I am married with grown-up children and am semiretired with a business in a completely different industry from where I devoted most of my professional career, yet I am still able to sum up the lessons I learned from her. And maybe, with this, I will be able to pay a debt of gratitude, in part.

In the field of finance, I learned that one could stand one’s moral ground in dealings with the government and the various stakeholders of the company. Even in small monetary amounts, one need not compromise and there is a way of doing it, however difficult at times. She taught my peers and me that this really could be done.

I also honed my administrative skills as she had diagnosed me at the start as “soft.” I learned to be tough but, I have to admit, that I knew it was because she was behind me. I had to toughen up if I had to go up the corporate ladder, from an Assistant Manager of a Company in the Group to a Senior Vice-President for Finance in the Chemphil Group and then to be the Chief Financial Officer (CFO) of another related
company twenty years later.

I also learned from her that I would learn more easily from my mistakes if I wrote down my “Notes of Experience.” Some of my meetings with her had grammar and pronunciation lessons interspersed between computing internal rates of return (IRR) and returns on investment (ROI). One important lesson I learned from her is developing my other God-given skills outside of work. She congratulated me in one of our division meetings for having obtained my driver’s license, especially since I was a slow learner in this area. She also encouraged my weekend hobbies like baking when I brought her samples to taste. No wonder I am now in the food manufacturing business, which is so completely different from my professional training that people I meet in the industry are surprised that I am an accountant by profession. Thanks Carmeling!

The more important lessons I learned from Carmeling had to do with the most important priorities of life. When it came to a choice between work and family, I understood from her, even if she was my boss, what my priority should be. One unforgettable lesson I learned from her when I was anxiously expecting my first baby was that “childbirth is a very natural process of life.” She also allowed me time for my young children’s school activities and needs. All of these, however, did not violate the dictum that we had to give justice to the company we worked for.

As this is the story of Carmeling as my mentor in University, in life and beyond, this would not be complete if I do not mention that Carmeling had been instrumental in my discovering my vocation where I am called to practice the Christian virtues and to sanctify my work. This completes her being my mentor in the most important lesson of all, that what really matters is to reach one’s true goal beyond this life.
Malu Yu, after years in the field of finance, set up a food company that produces jam and raw materials for bakeries. She is also presently Vice-Chairperson/Trustee of the Foundation for Professional Training, Inc., a private foundation which owns and operates five TESDA-accredited vocational and technical schools in Metro Manila, Laguna and Cebu for underprivileged women who are given full scholarships.