I met Menchu in the early 1980s on my first day of work, also the first day of operations of a newly-established leasing and financing company, the wholly-owned subsidiary of a major local bank. We were a total of seven employees on that fateful August day, and I was hired to be the company’s only credit analyst at the time. Menchu was one of two marketing officers the company had on board.

From handling credit reports to industry studies, Menchu eventually took me under her wing and into the marketing department. There, she patiently taught me the rudiments of the business, from the complexities of our various financial packages, to the backgrounds of the various clients we dealt with. Among others, she helped me gain insight into the personalities who ran these businesses, as well how to deal with them and to handle their company’s requirements effectively.

That our relationship went beyond the professional level made the daily grind for me tolerable, even fun, as I recall. Like a doting mother hen, Menchu would often share her sumptuous home-cooked lunches with the rest of us. Our office back then was situated in what were still the grasslands of Ortigas Center, where the only source of sustenance was from a Burger Machine stand appended to the gasoline station just across our office. Almost everyone had no choice but to bring packed lunches, including, as the company grew, the single male employees. It was then a treat whenever Menchu would offer us a ride down to the newly-opened McDonald’s in Greenhills after we were all done with our packed lunches, to get our favorite hot fudge sundaes for dessert. Back then, that was the only place which offered the drive-through option in the area. Later on, we found ourselves heading to hot fudge trips more frequently, particularly during a period when Menchu was considered quite, well, prolific, being pregnant almost every other year and needing to give in to her cravings for more hot fudge sundaes.
She also never failed to offer me a ride during the evenings when I would head to U.P. Diliman to complete my MBA studies. Most of the time, her car would be packed with other coworkers from the same building who lived in the Diliman area. She seemed to welcome the company on her way home. All of us, in turn, truly enjoyed the lively banter that would eventually transpire during such trips, periodically punctured by Menchu’s infectious laughter along the way.

When my boyfriend, Argel, proposed marriage shortly after he returned to Manila from the United States, where he pursued his MBA, in, Menchu was so excited for me that she immediately planned a weekend trip to Divisoria to search for materials for my wedding gown. And not only did she offer to drive for me, she even picked me up in her newly delivered company car, which she got from the dealer just the day before. Later on, she threw me one of the most unforgettable bridal showers I ever had, which she hosted at our parent-bank’s newly-opened executive lounge with its very classy and elegant surroundings. She and my other female officemates gifted me with what they thought was everything I would need to make my forthcoming marriage work: a huge box containing brooms, a plunger, doormats, an assortment of rags, even a bunot and a walis-tingting!

On the eve of my wedding, Menchu was also there at my parents’ home with an assortment of my relatives from Batangas who had dropped by to take a peek at my wedding gown, the rings and the design of the arrhae, as elders during that time were wont to do. Since she and her late husband Andy had an orchid-growing business on the side at the time, she decided to bring me another gift, in addition to an extensive collection of cookware she had already given me: the most beautiful orchids fashioned into corsages – so many that even my flower girls, minor sponsors, even my gay couturier were able to wear one for themselves!

As I settled into married life, Menchu liked to call me into her room, not only to discuss an account but also to share recipes which would later graduate into child-rearing tips when my own babies started coming. To this day, I keep in my recipe box items labeled as “Menchu’s lasagna” or “Menchu’s siomai” apart from my other recipes because they turned out to be great hits with my own family. And just to show how much influence she had on me, I even named my first child Carmela, just like her eldest, because I developed a real liking for
the name, hearing her lovingly call her own child by that name every so often back then.

It may have been a bit of a surprise to her that I have kept all these fond memories with me to this day. Although we have both moved on professionally, I have the privilege of being with her at the Financial Executives (FINEX) organization, where I see that she has retained her bubbly, energetic, compassionate, and helpful self. Now with her own lending business, she once told me that she still serves lunch daily to her present staff. I can only say that they are a lucky bunch and I am sure that they will always look back and remember Menchu with fondness, as I have.

Bernadette Estudillo is the marketing group head in a leading leasing and financing company, the same position Menchu once held in their previous company. She really wishes she could do more writing upon retirement. Blessed with three children with husband Argel, the eldest, Carmela – named after Menchu’s own Carmela – is now an Economics junior at U.P. Diliman.