Thank God for wonderful teachers.

Sister Emilia Viado, S.Sp.S. was a diminutive Ilocana nun and a very strict disciplinarian. She influenced me in many ways. For her, punctuality was the most important virtue and tardiness was practically a mortal sin. Influenced by her strong character, I imbibed this important life skill. I have since become an expert at time management, making sure I’m at a meeting venue a few minutes before it is supposed to start. I have also tried to inculcate this in my children and my co-workers because first of all, it shows your respect for those with whom you are meeting and second, time really is golden and in the workplace, punctuality is a clear indication of your personal discipline.

She also insisted that our posture in class bespoke the physical discipline we had over our bodies. We had to sit up straight with our eyes to the front of the class and our legs crossed at the ankles. She told us that if we slouched, our minds would be lazy. I have not always succeeded in following her admonitions on this but it has given me good stead when I have had to keep a clear head or concentrate on difficult problems.

When she left Mendiola, she kept me informed of her work among
the Aetas in Abra. Her stories fascinated me, especially about their having to walk on bridges made of vines from one village to another, literally from tree to tree. She encouraged me to be generous in helping the less fortunate. Inspired by her work and dedication, I sent her a crisp P20 bill, at a time when that was a small fortune for a child of 11, when a bottle of Coke was only 10 centavos. This was probably the start of my personal philanthropy, which became fully developed when I decided to join the world of social development.

In high school and college, I was extremely fortunate in having had a string of teachers in English Literature who instilled in me a love of reading and encouraged my interest in writing, like Miss Rosalinda Tan-Roll, Mrs. Agnes Tolosa, Miss Roxanne Mendoza-Bernardo, and Miss Isabel P. Hizon. Under their gentle tutelage, I thrilled at romantic plays, wept with the vanquished, and experienced the whole gamut of human experience through the written word. In response, I wrote my own poems, essays, short stories, editorials, news articles, and speeches, trying to capture both my dreams and my realities. I parlayed this command of the English language into an interesting job as the head of the Communications Department of the Management Services Division of Sycip Gorres Velayo and Co. In turn, that is where I learned most of what I know about business and management.

Miss Hizon not only helped me plumb the soul of literary works but also, in her quiet and soft-spoken way, demanded nothing but excellence in the writings we would submit. When out of laziness or other distractions, I would submit a piece that did not meet her standards, she did not get angry, but she did make me feel her deep disappointment in me. She made me feel that I let her down and that I did not do justice to myself and to my God-given talents. In a very real sense, she motivated me to always give my very best in whatever I decided to do.

Thank God for mothers.

My mother, Carmen de Santos Pineda, showed me what being a lady was all about. Despite her severe asthma, she tried to stand tall and erect. She was always simply, yet elegantly, dressed and made sure we were too. She loved to travel, as a way of educating one’s self in order to understand differences in cultures and philosophies, and to expand one’s horizons.

I caught the travel bug from her and went on a six-month tour of
the world all by myself, at the tender age of 22. This was at a time when there were very few women traveling and very few of those were Asian and certainly not by themselves. I learned a lot about myself during that trip. I found out that I could be independent, live on a budget (Europe on $5 a day was the rage), find my way around strange places, and make friends easily, but not to be too trusting of strangers. I also learned to be open to new experiences, to be curious about everything that I did not understand, and to be adventurous, yet prudent.

Between and among these angels in my life, and many more who have shared with me some pearls of wisdom, some timely advice, as well as their love and friendship, I have become what I am today—a woman driven to excel, committed to development, passionate about our country, and eager to enjoy life.

Dr. Isabel Hizon

Vicky Pineda Garchitorena is a dreamer and a sociopolitical and socioeconomic activist, whose career has found her in diverse involvements such as researcher at the Physics Department of the Philippine Atomic Research Center; as Head of Communications at SGV; as CEO of companies in the Aguirre Group, and finally as head of Ayala Foundation in the Philippines and the U.S. and member of the Management Committee of Ayala Corporation.