

Ramon Aquino, Carolina Grino Aquino: A Journeyman's Tale

MENCHU AQUINO SARMIENTO



LESSON 1 – It's a blessing to make a living at what you're good at.

Our parents are our first teachers, primarily by example, through the lives they lead. Our father Ramon C. Aquino of Lemery, Batangas and our mother Carolina C. Grino Aquino of Leganes, Iloilo, were both Supreme Court justices. They wielded power in the worldly sense, but though they got it, they didn't flaunt it. They were simply very good at their jobs and that was reward enough. Neither had postgraduate degrees nor the vaunted connections that membership in fraternities or sororities brings. Our mother didn't even have a law school diploma, but she placed no. 1 in the 1950 Bar Exams. Our dad was the Chief Justice who swore Marcos in as President before the first People Power Revolution. They were both of the famed U.P. College of Law Class of 1939 but our dad was a working student in the evening class. The more privileged daytime students like Marcos and Potenciano Ilusorio respected Ramon C. Aquino's superior intellect and remembered him.

Our parents' professional and private lives were relatively uncluttered by behind-the-scenes power brokering and the typical sycophantic puffery that feeds upon the strategically dropped name and the frenetic photo op. After their first New Year's Eve ball in Malacañang, Mommy and Daddy realized they would not be missed among the glittering hordes of Third World wannabe's and arrivistes. They went back to spending New Year's Eve dining and dancing with their tried and trusted friends. They just made sure they'd be back home in time to watch us youngsters set off fireworks and exchange the year's first kisses.

LESSON 2 – Your children are not you but try to love them just the same.

Because our parents were such outstanding lawyers, people assume that we must be lawyers too, as though that were a matter of heredity, and not of inclination and ability. Our Daddy always warned us, “Don’t go to law school. Those failed practitioners who have to teach for a living will take it out on you that your parents were both successful.” So not one of their progeny became a lawyer. Not that either parent was ecstatic when I got a BFA majoring in Painting at the U.P. Mommy was especially perturbed that I could not be considered a professional since there was no Board Exam for art. My best friend made me mock business cards that said Artistic License. “Don’t you dare accept money for what you make,” Daddy further warned, certain it would violate my integrity, and perpetrate a con if I accepted lucre for any of the mystifying Abstract Expressionist or Conceptual conundrums that I produced upon their Ping pong table. However, I could count on him to trudge through Claro M. Recto, searching for acid-free Canson paper and other difficult to find art supplies that my course required.

Being blessed or cursed with an artistic temperament, I made certain decisions that my parents saw me live to regret. They didn’t say “We told you so,” but I could always be sure that with them, there I was at home.



Supreme Court Justices Ramon C. Aquino and Carolina C. Grino Aquino



Menchu Aquino Sarmiento is an award-winning writer. When she went to work for PAL, managing the Philippine Airlines Foundation, she got a BS in Social Work from the Asian Social Institute. She hasn’t taken the Social Work Boards so she is still not a professional social worker but that no longer worries her mother who continues to work, recently, on the late Chief Justice Aquino’s textbook on the Revised Penal Code.