Oscar Cristobal:
...and the award goes to...

MARIA LOURDES CRISTOBAL

When I was much younger, I would imagine myself in some distant future winning something big—libre ang mangarap (dreams are free), we Filipinos like to say. I toyed with the idea of winning a Nobel Prize, a Pulitzer Prize, or whatever grand prize suited my fancy. However, it was not fame or fortune that enthralled me. It was the opportunity to stand before a crowd of glitterati and say “thank you” to the people who mattered in my life. The people who influenced me, the people who helped me—by virtue of what they did or did not do—those who helped me become the person I dreamed I was going to be. So even at an early age, I somehow knew that I needed to have role models or mentors who would shape and mold me in order to make a difference in my life.

My father always reminded us siblings about the value of one’s name. It must be unsullied. It must be kept pure. It must be protected at all cost. One’s honor and reputation, once lost, is lost forever. He was, by force of circumstance, my first mentor. Not in the sense of reading to me in bed, helping with my homework, or sitting down with me in heavy discourse about life’s trials and challenges and the paths to success. It was in the life he led and the examples he showed. My father was a government official who upheld the principles of and placed real meaning in public service. His work was not governed by time or day—I grew up seeing people in our house asking for his help during the first few hours of the morning and all throughout the weekends. He gave rather than received, and deemed helping others to be a reward in itself. By his actions, I learned the virtues of integrity, honesty, and generosity.

Then next mentor was my high school teacher in literature. She had
a love for the classics and great feeling for poetry. She possessed a way of connecting with her students so that heroes and heroines, swains and ladyloves, became alive. She made the epics, the mythologies, and the novels so captivating that I naturally gravitated toward reading and learning and pursued a love affair with books and a zest for knowledge that I continue to have. She set a high standard of academic performance in a positive, reinforcing way that I could not help but feel guilty and dejected if I failed to meet her expectations. She made me want to be my best at all times.

I joined Multinational Investment Bancorporation (MIB), a domestic investment house, straight after college. Joining MIB felt like being home. The institution put primacy in integrity, industry, and the complete absence of conflicts of interest in our professional acts. My superiors lived the ideals and values espoused by MIB—total personal commitment, self-reliance, the quest for excellence, teamwork, and respect for goals and deadlines. They inspired me to demand no less from myself. And what I learned from them, I now try to inculcate in the officers and associates of the organization.

I always tease my husband that I married MIB before I married him. So in a sense he is “just my second love.” For much of our wedded life, the demands of my office responsibilities took a lot of time and attention away from him. But my husband always understood and never put himself in the way. From my husband I learned the real meaning of love and unselfishness. He lightened my life, put sprightliness to my steps, and gave me the gift of laughter.

So decades after I stood before an imaginary crowd hugging an imaginary trophy, I now sit before the computer taking stock of an integrated life—where professional and personal values have fused—and saying thank you to my role models and mentors. They are the very special people who have enriched me, empowered me and, as the song goes, “put the wind beneath my wings”.
Lulu at home with husband, Oscar, only son, Mikey, and pet dogs.

Ma. Lourdes (Malou) Cristobal is president of the country’s oldest existing independent investment house, wife to Oscar and mom to Mikey (his papa and mama’s pride, joy and everything). Malou finds herself in a particularly good place in her life with a solid rock faith, fulfillment and continued challenges in her job, and bliss in the company of family and friends.