My Dad was Editor-Publisher of the Bohol Chronicle, one of the country’s oldest community newspapers that turned 55 years old last May 2009. My Dad died six years ago.

His name was Zoilo or “Junior” as he was called. He started the paper as a one-man army: editor, proof reader, advertising man, and collector. An elderly priest thought then that neither the paper nor Dad would last. “They would both die—one after the other, in any order,” he predicted; the paper, from lack of business; my Dad from sheer exhaustion. Of course, my Dad and the Bohol Chronicle outlived the priest many decades longer.

For a man dedicated to newspaper deadlines, time to him was gold. He detested “Filipino time”. It was to him a sign of disrespect for other people’s schedules to be late. He was always twenty to thirty minutes ahead of any meeting schedule—whether meeting with the rich or the poor. His work ethics was impeccable—first to arrive in the office (in tennis garb yet) and last to leave, sometimes staying up to midnight. “Duty first before pleasure” was his motto. I got a public dressing down when, attending a Saturday night-fever party, I failed to monitor Au-Au Pijuan winning the Miss International title for our “Just before deadline” section of the Sunday issue.

“Junior”, let’s call him that, was a man given to subtlety—he mentored by example, only sometimes by edict. The best gift to him was to emulate his style and person—though everyone always fell short. He left no room for mediocrity, and woe to the staff who committed spelling and grammatical errors and failed to proofread. He was an instant (tor)mentor for those who did not have perfection in vocabulary. But his outfit had churned out governors, cabinet officials, media stars, and entrepreneurs from among the staff, and they now refer to Dejaresco’s University of Hard Knocks when asked about their success fundamentals.

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Given the financial and logistical limitations of a provincial paper, the Bohol Chronicle, nevertheless, never missed a single issue, except the one week immediately succeeding the imposition of martial law in 1972. “Junior” would sometimes spend a fortune dictating his editorial by long-distance from Tokyo or abroad. At that time it took a whole day to contact Bohol and extreme vocal skills to have yourself heard on an antiquated telephone system. That was the 1960s.

In those days, when TV was not yet around in the province and the national papers came in the afternoon, “Junior” pioneered the Special editions for late-breakers for the city to read—even though it meant financial losses for the paper. He taught us that media work was missionary work, first and last.

Dad’s efforts were recognized when he replaced the late Don Chino Roces as president of the Philippine Press Institute—the first provincial man to be appointed so. When he was in Manila for meetings, he would drive himself in an aircon-less Volkswagen Beetle, an austerity feature that was one of the many that marked his life as a person. No work was beneath him and he had no inclination for posturing.

Junior was a lawyer, though he never practiced. Scrupulously honest, he probably didn’t want to have the epitaph that many lawyers had on their graves: “He lies, still.” Dad taught me that newspaper work is a public trust, a belief that laid the foundation for his passionate love for his craft. He proved this to all by example.

He detested corruption. He talked to me one day and asked me, “what would I prefer in life, a good breakfast or a good night’s sleep?” This was a metaphorical riddle for selling one’s press badge for thirty pieces of dirty silver. Dad taught me the right path: always choose the good night’s sleep because a man rested well will find any food on the table the next day palatable. Moral subtlety was Junior’s middle name.

The war years must have taught my Dad the virtue of valor as he served as secret courier of the guerilla movement against the Japanese invaders. One day, he was caught with a secret message sewn inside the folds of his shirt by the Japanese. A Japanese lieutenant asked Junior to kneel before him with bowed head and was poised to strike off his head with a shiny Japanese samurai. Dad waited for a few minutes and realized his head was still connected to his anatomy—and so he lived to tell the tale. Otherwise neither I would be around to write this tribute.

Because of his journalistic chores, the Dejaresco family had often
alienated many families, including relatives especially in the crusade for good government and responsible community stewardship. Warlords would bang .45 pistol guns on our news desks and death threats became daily meals. Junior stuck to his guns—and died a natural death, not from his opponent's guns.

Dad's calm attitude to even the fatal threats of the trade made all of us siblings assume a certain fatalistic attitude when it came to newspaper work. I know this especially now that I have assumed editing the paper and writing editorials via fax and e-mail, after his demise.

To be able to accept the possibility of death with one's boots on, a trait Dad taught, is a very liberating feeling. Unlike Dad's enemies who were sometimes men of few words and even fewer thoughts, when it came to mentoring virtues in life, he let his actions do the talking.

This is rare indeed for a man who was a wordsmith.

The author, Bingo P. Dejaresco, is now The Bohol Chronicle's editor-in-chief, a position passed on to him by his father, Zoilo. Bingo is a former bank executive who went through Citibank's training program as Citytrust officer, is currently a financial consultant, political strategist, a media practitioner who writes a column for various newspapers, and an active member of FINEX (Financial Executives Institute of the Philippines).