On some Wednesdays, my mother would pick me up from school in St. Theresa’s College-Manila to come with her to Baclaran for the novena to Our Mother of Perpetual Help. It would usually be in the afternoon when the church would be filled with a mass of pleading humanity. We were always late for the start of Mass, but Mother was never fazed by the shoulder-to-shoulder crowds. She would simply squeeze through, muttering, “Excuse me, excuse me,” as she elbowed her way to the front, for she always wanted to be near the altar where the action was. Or perhaps she felt she had an appointment with God. Not satisfied with reciting the kilometric litany where the faithful responded, “Oh Mother, ever help us,” my mother would stay behind to walk on her knees from the church door to the altar. She would be holding a rosary this time. On certain first Fridays, she would likewise jostle with the crowds and again, walk on her knees with other penitents in crowded Quiapo church.

Mother was always praying. In the car, I would be made to respond to her never-ending Hail Marys. I sometimes wondered if she actually meant what she was mouthing, for she would sometimes interrupt herself to admonish the driver, “Bilis, Milio! Huli na ako. Mag-potpot ka. Mag-overtake ka!”

I have picked up my mother’s habit of saying the rosary in the car. However, it would be inevitable that some text messages on my cell phone would interrupt my praying or a call would come in. A few times, I have found myself answering the cell phone thus, “Holy Ma… Ay, Hello!” Then I would burst out laughing at myself.

My husband and I used to gather our four children to pray in front of our home altar before they went to bed. It has occurred to me that I had been following my mother’s pious practices, for she always had
me join her in prayer in front of our home altar at bedtime while my father lay in bed, for he was not a practicing Catholic. Her greatest frustration was in his never coming to Mass with her on Sundays. He would reason that God was, after all, omnipresent, and that he could pray to Him under the tree if he wanted to.

My mother always began her day with Mass with one of her twin sisters, the youngest of eleven siblings, in tow. They would go to the Santo Domingo church, near the D&E Restaurant on Quezon Boulevard Extension (later Avenue) corner A. Roces. I guess she had imbibed her prayerful ways from her own mother who would gather her eleven children around the family altar in Gandara, Samar at 6 p.m., during the Angelus hour. Woe to the absent or late child, for he or she would be met with a spanking from Lolo or my own mother, who, being the eldest, acted as a surrogate mother to them. She would lecture her younger siblings, and later me, about the efficacy of prayer. And of course, on the virtues of persistence and determination, which she embodied. She would tell me, whenever I was discouraged over a task and wanted to give up, “But you must have stick-to-itnessness!” And she would add, “You can because you believe you can!” This was her mantra, pounded to me as I grew up, for she was the apotheosis of positivism. She abhorred negative persons, and would scold an employee whenever he or she would reason that something she had ordered was impossible to do.

Two early events come to mind. The Philamlife Insurance Company was inaugurating its offices in Baguio in the 1950s, and had contracted the D&E to cater to several hundred guests. Our Catering Manager, Remigio Canuto, who was my father’s cousin, said it was logistically impossible. Imagine having to truck tables, chairs, cooking and foodservice equipment, all the way to Baguio! But my mother was unfazed. She proceeded to tell him that they could and would bring all those equipment to Baguio on several trips, renting trucks, if necessary. She ordered them to stop in Pangasinan to buy fish, and procure the needed vegetables in Baguio.

When the Second Asian Games were to be held in Manila—at UP-Diliman—in May 1954, with over 1000 athletes and officials to be fed, mother wanted to be part of the action, in fact, to be its caterer. At the time, she and my father had only the D&E in T. Pinpin on the Escolta. It was a small restaurant with a seating capacity of 80 persons, and
a mezzanine meeting room for 20. But it had become the watering hole of media personalities such as Teodoro Valencia and Joe Guevara of the leading daily then, *The Manila Times*. The newspaper's boss, Isabel Roces, as well as her brother Joaquin, also patronized the restaurant, then named D&E Coffee Shop. Mother had cultivated their friendship, along with the businessmen of the era, Earl Carroll of the Philamlife Insurance Company, bankers Pio Pedrosa, Sixto Orosa, Jr., Chester Babst, and Alfonso Calalang, then Central Bank Governor. Now she parlayed this friendship to obtain the Asian Games contract, getting their endorsement to Dr. Victor Buencamino, chairman of the committee on food and housing. She submitted her bid along with other bigger restaurants like the Selecta, Aristocrat, and Carbunco. Then she made a novena to Our Mother of Perpetual Help.

In hindsight, I would say that mother had chutzpah, for she didn't have the foodservice equipment to feed a thousand persons. All she had was her steely determination and abiding faith in God. However, she did have a track record to qualify for the bid, for she had been the official caterer to the 1953 Philippine International Fair, from 1 February to 30 April 1953, when she served hundreds who patronized the Fair. She confided to her friend, newspaperwoman Esther Vibal, that she would have to apply for a short-term loan from the Prudential Bank & Trust Company, then headed by her fellow Waray Pio Pedrosa who was from Leyte. She had no property to offer as collateral, except her Kamuning house that she knew my father would not agree to. She hit on the idea of pledging the Asian Games contract, should she win it. And by God's grace, she did! This was a creative solution to an otherwise impossible dilemma. Thanks to her good relations with Mr. Babst, who headed the Credit Department of Prudential Bank, and with Mr. Orosa, the bank's executive vice-president and general manager, she was granted the loan with only her catering contract as collateral! Mr. Orosa told me, when I interviewed him for my mother's biography that I was writing in the late 1990s, that my parents were excellent borrowers who "punctiliously paid their loan installments as these fell due."

I would say that I had somehow imbibed my mother's virtues of determination and persistence by the fact of my having hurdled an M.A. in Creative Writing at the University of the Philippines 35 years after my graduation from there for a Bachelor's degree in
Home Economics, major in Foods and Nutrition. What a quantum leap—from the sciences to the arts! I didn't have any background or undergraduate degree in English, except for my love for the language and my being a voracious reader, who occasionally submitted articles on the hospitality industry to magazines devoted to such. It took me all of five years to get my degree, because I had to take undergraduate subjects, such as Poetry, and would enroll in only one or two subjects per semester on account of my work in our company and my civic commitments.

My first semester as a graduate student was tough. After three sessions, I told Pacita Guevara Fernandez, my professor in Aesthetics and Literary Criticism, that I wanted to drop the subject because I just couldn't, for the life of me, comprehend her assigned readings on Aesthetics. I would read a paragraph of Herbert Read or Roger Fry's theories four times and still not get it. The subject was just too abstract. She riposted, “Linda, pag nag-drop ka, papatayin kita!” And since I didn't want my handsome husband to be a widower with a gaggle of widows and separated women running after him, I had no choice but to stick it out. I'm glad I did, because dear Prof. Fernandez gave me a grade of 1 for my stick-to-itiveness and assiduousness, which came at the expense of my social life. People began to talk that my husband and I were separating because I no longer accompanied him to social events we were both invited to.

Like my mother, whenever I had a daunting problem, I would go to Mass and attend novenas to St. Anthony on Tuesdays, to Our Mother of Perpetual Help in Baclaran church on Wednesdays, to St. Jude at this saint's shrine near Malacanañg on Thursdays, and of course, I always went to first Friday Mass as a matter of habit. But I could never imagine myself walking on my knees as my mother had done! Well, when one is desperate, one can do anything. I guess.

It was June 1986, the year of the PCGG sequestrations. My daughter Nicole was graduating from college at the University of Massachusetts-Amherst, and had been chosen to speak in behalf of her class. But my husband and I could not leave, for our names were on the Bureau of Immigration's “Hold Departure Order” List. Our lawyers had filed a motion with the Sandiganbayan to allow us to leave. My girlfriend Connie swore by the efficacy of walking on one's knees while saying the rosary in Quiapo church, and dragged me there. Connie had
warned me that it would hurt, that I would get abrasions on my knees from the dirt and tiny stones on the long, cement center aisle that we had to negotiate from the doorway to the altar. So I came prepared. I had my modista sew on a pair of big shoulder pads I had taken from an old blouse onto my old jeans where my knees would be.

It was 9:00 p.m., closing time; the crowd had thinned, when we arrived in Quiapo. Connie told me to say thank you to our Lord in advance, to show my faith and trust in His mercy. I did so as I kissed the Black Nazarene’s exposed foot that was sticking out of its glass cage at the back of the church. (This is the same statue that has caused deaths on its feast day of January 9; fanatic devotees had gotten trampled trying to touch it.)

I surmise that because I had cushioned my knees, the good Lord answered only half my prayers. The Sandiganbayan allowed only me to travel to Amherst. My husband had to stay behind as hostage.

When my brother Biboy’s 15-year-old son Enrique was diagnosed with leukemia last year, I told Biboy to walk on his knees in Quiapo church, and to go to Baclaran for the Wednesday novena. Desperate, he followed my advice. Because his knees are bony, I suggested he put knee pads on a pair of old jeans. I don’t know if he did. When I gave him a small statue of the Holy Infant of Prague and novenas to take to Singapore where Enrique was being treated, he remarked, amused, “You’re like Mommy. You’ve become like her!”
Linda Panlilio has been tireless in working for the empowerment of women through UNIFEM the Zonta Club of Makati & Environments. She is author of Teacher to Tycoon: The Life and Times of Trinidad Diaz Enriquez, awarded Best Biography by the Manila Critics Circle in the National Book Awards of 2001. Apart from writing, Linda is also a visual artist, a collector of antique oriental ceramics, and a founding member of the Oriental Ceramic Society of the Philippines.