Art and Cynthia are dear friends from younger years. We met again recently during a visit to another friend battling cancer. Inevitably, the conversation for the night was laced with philosophical meanderings— even some spiritual musings, which replaced our usual bantering and joshings of long ago.

Someone suggested to Al, “write a book- as an “in-your-face” riposte to the ravages of the big C. Another urged, “make it a love story, yours and Marisol (she passed on a few years back)”. “Make it a legacy, a bequest to your family, relatives and friends.”

As we bade Al goodbye for the night with a pray over, Cynthia slipped in her request for me to contribute a short essay on what wisdom, lesson, even technology, I have gained from mentors—I imagine as a possible space filler for her book. Immediately, what came to mind was “here I am, a grizzled, scarred veteran of many a life’s battle, now a retiree and going downhill fast—how in heaven’s name would I recall long forgotten mentors, specific wisdoms and lessons learned, much less technologies acquired?

It seemed so daunting then I decided to meet it the same way I would any daunting task—I procrastinated! Then she followed up, with an e-mail.

And I saw the light! It became very clear to me that learning from mentors, wisdom-reaping and technology acquisition, are continuing, dynamic processes. They are not just one, significant, transforming, life-event. They don’t even come from a single person or institution although they could, too – but actually are a series of day-to-day, even

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1 Al Y. Glinoga succumbed to cancer a few weeks after our visit. To the end he was steadfast in his faith and cheerful. He spent his last days texting friends and former associates- forgiving and asking for forgiveness. He was at peace.
moment-to-moment acquisitions and experiences.

Cynthia demonstrated and taught me one lesson right then and there: if you want something done, follow-up! This is actually a simple demonstration of the old management axiom “only what gets monitored, gets accomplished”.

Al gave me another. He had always been a religious person. And his faith was undiminished, despite his illness. But he confided—when facing a terminal illness as he was then, he sometimes wondered— is there really a God? The lesson Al imparted was that of integrity and honesty. How it would have been so easy for him to hide that feeling under a veneer of religiosity. Or worse—take the opposite, which is—to curse and blame and deny. But no. He steadfastly hang on to his faith and his trust while fearing and worrying, even doubting. Through Al, I understood Mother Teresa’s agony which she described as the “dark nights of her soul”. The honestly faithful man (and woman) is the one who despite his fears, misgivings and doubts still have the courage to plod on and stay true.

Until quite recently, which means until I retired, I never could learn to work the computer. The reason was, I always had a secretary or someone who worked the computer for me. When my secretary was gone. I felt like a car owner so used to having a driver he never learned to drive. The feeling of helplessness and impotence was scary. So I forced myself to learn. I have always envied the young staff of the Life Insurance company my wife and I work with in our retirement business, who could do what I thought were magical things with their laptops, I decided to master the damn technology. And I did. I can now prepare my own letters and memos, surf the web, do email instead of snail mail, do presentations, compute via Excel—why I can even create my own power point modules, with clip arts and animations. It’s exhilarating. The lesson? Age doesn’t matter. Just do what you want to do and you can do it. Nike said it best—Just do it!

Our household head, Bobon Topacio, (CFC, Camp Aguinaldo Chapter) is a personable guy, quite successful in his business. He is on top of the pyramid as an interior fit-out contractor although he is neither an architect nor an engineer (His dad was). Why and what made him a success? He demonstrated it to me unwittingly in a story he related to us. One lazy afternoon, as he recalled, was going through his business cards collection and one card fell-out whose owner he
couldn't place or recall. So he picked up the phone and said "Hi! I was going through my VIP card file and your card was red-tagged. For the life of me, I can't recall where and how we met? Can you help refresh my memory?" Instead of being offended, the chap he called up burst out laughing and said, "Bobon, nag duet tayo sa Karaoke sa Tower Club". "And I've been trying to locate your card which I misplaced."

"We have a nice little collaborative project to do." That project netted him a few, cool millions. The Lesson: saying the right words can spell the difference between success and failure.

My agency manager, an icon in the life insurance industry is a mentor of recent vintage. She's 80 years old, always dresses up to feel good (she claims), regularly cooks gourmet food for her associates and guests, travels extensively, guest-speaks frequently, ball-room dances, and just recently, licked the big C in just a couple of months. She even finished her valedictory- while battling cancer, an elegant coffee-table book titled Lulu (Del Mundo), A Full Life. Her book launch was a glittering affair. How does she do it? Very simple. Her mantra is "Stay green". Yellow or ripe she says is just one step away from rotting, from dying. So, in her day-to-day life, she always keeps an eye out for something new—be it an idea, a new word, an adage, a new best seller, a new way to do an old thing, and she puts her utmost into it. Never less than 100 percent from this grand lady; she greets each day with the expectations of a child.

My very first mentor was my first boss. He was a school-teacher before he became an executive. I was a brass young lawyer from a top-notch law school. So I had an attitude. Some would call it superiority complex. My boss put me in my place, subtly but quickly. He sicked his secretary on me—an auditor type who went through all my work. Every computation, every memo and every highlighted typo, every misspelled word and grammatical error, every wrong addition—my boss would simply return the audited, red pock-marked work back to me for revision. He never dressed me down, never insulted, he just showed me up. After I eventually won his recommendation for a coveted promotion, I asked him how come I got his nod when I was, I thought, a very shoddy worker? With legs jiggling he replied, "Pol, the easiest chore in the world is to find fault!". I leave the reader to ponder this and find the embedded wisdom. It's deep, very deep. It guided and served me well throughout my career.
Pol Llorente is a retired lawyer and insurance executive. He now runs a mini insurance agency called Unit, with his wife, also a retiree, just to keep their days full and away from boredom, God willing. He says, he prefers to “go with his boots on.”