

The Man I Called Tito

Written by RAY ROGAN

Sunday, 15 March 2015 09:19



Bert and Linda Pelayo (left); and Ray and Aliena Rogan (right) pose with Zamboanga Archbishop Romulo T. Dela Cruz at Pontificio Collegio Filippino in Rome Italy, before heading to the Vatican for the High Mass of Pope Francis on June 29, 2014.

It is with great sadness that I write about one of my best friends, Bert Pelayo, whom I and most of his friends from Aklan have fondly knew him as “Tito” or “To.”

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It is still hard for me to believe that the 40 days since he was taken away from us has come.

As many of our mutual friends know, I happened to still be in the Philippines at the time of his passing and I was not here to say goodbye to Tito or see him laid to rest.

I cannot put into words how much I miss my friend.

When I started my importing business in the early 90s, it was Tito who willingly offered a space for me and my start-up company at the **Filipino Reporter's** office when it was located at 34th Street in New York City.

When politicians and government officials from the Philippines came to see Tito at the **Filipino Reporter**, I was also able to meet them because Tito introduced me to them.

I cannot forget when Tito cautioned me as I met these political figures that as a businessman, I should keep an open mind that while some could be kept as friends, many or most when they are no longer in power could simply disappear.

This was true that throughout life there were people that would come and go, but Tito was always there for me.

I truly valued that wisdom and advice.

I knew that I could trust Tito with anything and I respected him more than words can say.

As a newspaperman however, Tito said it's different.

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He has got to be welcoming and approachable to everyone and not turn anyone away.

And this is how he operated since 1972 when he started the **Filipino Reporter** and as it continues to this day with the same vigor and conduct by his family.

Throughout these years, Tito and I saw each other frequently.

Tito had become one of my best confidants.

In the past 20 years that I have been going back and forth to the Philippines during January (and making a trip every three months), it was my routine to always visit with Tito before my trip and see him again after my trip.

My most current and fondest memory with him was last June when Tito, *Nang* Linda, my wife Baby and I were privileged to be invited by our mutual friend Archbishop Romulo T. Dela Cruz of Zamboanga who was given the pallium by His Holiness Pope Francis at St. Peter Basilica in Vatican City.

It was a historic and religious trip with a lot of meditation and prayers for us.

Apart from seeing Rome our side trips also included visits to the shrines of St. Francis of Assisi, Sta Rita of Cascia, Poor St. Claire, the Holy Face and the most meaningful was Saint Padre Pio of Pietrelcinae.

A few days days before Tito was called back by His Creator, I had the opportunity to speak to him while I was in Aklan through the efforts of one of our common friends, Gab Reloj.

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In that short phone discussion, though I did all the talking, I pleaded on the phone “To, be strong and hold on.”

As we all know death is difficult and unfair.

As we reflect on our time with Tito we remember what it was we loved about him and what we will miss the most about him.

When Tito was called I know he was prepared to go.

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During Ben and Ed's retirement party in 2014. From left, Ray Rogan, Ben and Ed.