

Robie V. Zantua, MD (1951-2021)

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It was a challenge to write about my father without going through a mixture of emotions and memories. Our father-daughter relationship was far from perfect; we had our fair share of misunderstandings—him being the disciplinarian of the family, and me being the youngest and rebellious daughter. My father was an introvert—he would rarely say “I love you” or give us hugs growing up. Rather, he would show his affection for my sister and me through his subtle but caring ways. I can still vividly remember one afternoon when we were kids, he came home from the hospital and my sister and I welcomed him home with hugs, only to be rejected by him. After seeing us with sad faces (and prodding from our mother), he had to explain the reason why he didn’t return our hugs was because he didn’t want to pass on the microbes which he may have been exposed to at the clinic. In retrospect, there were a lot of times I would misinterpret his well-meaning paternal actions.

Youngest in a brood of four, and born of a family of lawyers, Robie Zantua chose to become the first doctor among his Velasco-Zantua roots. While his older siblings would spend secondary school in Manila, he was left in Talisay, Camarines Norte under the care of his maternal aunt for his primary schooling. He would laughingly tell us that because he was a year younger than his classmates, his teacher had to test him before accepting him in school — he was able to read “*buto*” (seed) without difficulty (*buto* is ‘penis’ in his native dialect). In hindsight, it was probably because he grew up alone and had to do things independently at a young age that as an adult, he found it hard to ask for favors from others. On one occasion while I was still a medical clerk, he invited me to observe his emergency OR (a case of foreign body impaction of a *balut*). When we arrived at the ER, we saw that the patient was yet to be prepared for OR—he was not yet even hooked to the I.V. fluid. To my surprise, he asked for I.V. needs from the ER nurse and inserted the I.V. catheter himself, hooked the I.V. fluid; and on to the operating theatre we went. Years later, I realised if that happened in the government hospital where I trained, it was a sure Sunday duty for the ER resident; but *Tatay* did not make a fuss out of it and went to address the more important matter— performing the emergency procedure. He was ‘*tubong Bicol*’; his original plan was to return to Camarines Norte after his ENT residency training in PGH—a promise he made to the late Dr. Mariano Caparas. This plan however had to change, to Dr. Caparas’ dismay, in order to grant my mother’s request that they build their medical practice and start a family in her hometown at Santa Rosa, Laguna.

My mother and father became a huge part of each other’s lives. My parents were not expressive when it came to their emotions for each



other, but it was a marriage filled with love. In fact, up to the last remaining days of my dad in the ICU, the family distantly celebrated our parents’ 41st wedding anniversary with cut flowers from the garden which he religiously tended. They shared the same undergraduate course— they were both B.S. Pre-medicine majors in UP Diliman— and then later on became classmates in the UP College of Medicine Class of 1976. Their love for each other were shown in the simplest ways, and these would turn to be the finest memories with *Tatay*. When they would do their morning strolls on *Bagasbas* beach, they would do so holding each other’s hands. Of course back then I cringed at the sight but deep inside, I hoped for the same when I became married. Later in

life and especially during the pandemic, my parents would complement each other’s tasks at home; my dad would lovingly prepare meals for the household and tend the garden while my mom would mainly take care of the grandchildren. My father was a homebody, a great family man, and as my mother would say, he did simple things in extraordinary ways, especially those which involved his grandkids.

When he wore his work hat, he was strict and at times difficult, especially when he was passionate about a certain topic. He could be ill-tempered and be a source of conflict, and this was because he was strong-willed, and vocal about his ideas. His boon and bane. As an ENT consultant, he became active in the academe, research and established his practice in Laguna and Manila. He was invited by the late Dr. Llamas to teach in the UST College of Medicine and helped establish ORL as an independent department. Later on, he joined the University of Perpetual Help College of Medicine along with Dr. Fita Guzman. He spent the majority of his working years as an active faculty in two institutions, a laudable feat which only the hardworking ones can pull off. He also became the president of AHNOP and was very passionate in the field of head and neck surgery.

While it was very unfortunate that my father succumbed to COVID and its complications, I choose to remember him as a man whose life was dedicated to us, his family. We were blessed to have him as the head of our family, we are forever grateful for the man we call *Tatay*— the man who would tirelessly cook Bicolano dishes for us, the man who would patiently and lovingly make sure we were always safe and healthy, the man who would go out of his way and put himself last just to make sure his family was well taken care of. His love was definitely felt by everyone in the family, and I sure hope he felt the same way. May his legacy live on through his children and grandchildren. We love you beyond words, *Tatay*.