

## **My Life Story**



**Josefina S. Raborar**



**DeAnn B. Holt, Storykeeper**

## Acknowledgements

The Ethnic Life Stories Project continues to emulate the vibrant diversity of the Springfield community. So much is owed to the many individuals from Drury University-Diversity Center, Southwest Missouri State University, Forest Institute, Springfield Public School System, Springfield/Greene County Libraries, and Southwest Missouri Office on Aging who bestowed their talents, their words of encouragement, their generosity of time and contributions in support of this unique opportunity to enrich our community.

The resolve and commitment of both the Story Tellers and Story Keepers fashioned the integral foundation of this creative accomplishment. We express our tremendous admiration to the Story Tellers who shared their private and innermost thoughts and memories; some suffering extreme hard-ship and chaos, disappointment and grief before arriving here and achieving the great task of adjusting and assimilating into a different culture. We recognize your work and diligence in your life achievement, not only by keeping your families together, but by sharing, contributing and at the same time enriching our lives and community. We salute you!

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Jim Mauldin

Ethnic Life Stories Project Coordinator.

**The Ethnic Life Stories Project....**

*-giving the Springfield community a window to its diversity through the life stories of ethnic elders.*

<b>Liewe Se Storie Afrikaanse</b>	<b>Afrikaanse (2)</b>
<b>ŌSŌ GAY HĀY WŌ TAN</b>	<b>Apache</b>
<b>قصص من الحياة</b>	<b>Arabic (2)</b>
<b>Ga-no-du Ka-ne-he-lv-s-gi</b>	<b>Cherokee</b>
<b>自傳</b>	<b>Chinese (2)</b>
<b>Life Stories</b>	<b>English</b>
<b>Histoires De Ma Vie</b>	<b>French</b>
<b>Mayer rah-Khaan Knee-Hindi</b>	<b>Hindi</b>
<b>生きてきた道</b>	<b>Japanese</b>
<b>나의 살아온 이야기</b>	<b>Korean</b>
<b>ഇവിത കഥകൾ</b>	<b>Malayalam</b>
<b>Povestea Vie Ţii Mele</b>	<b>Romanian</b>
<b>La Historia de la Vida</b>	<b>Spanish (4)</b>
<b>Kuwento Ng Aking Buhay</b>	<b>Tagalog</b>
<b>געשיחטע פון מאן לעבען</b>	<b>Yiddish</b>

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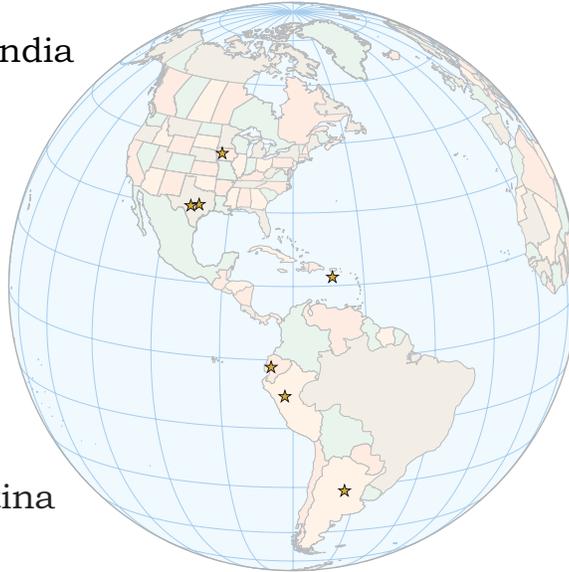
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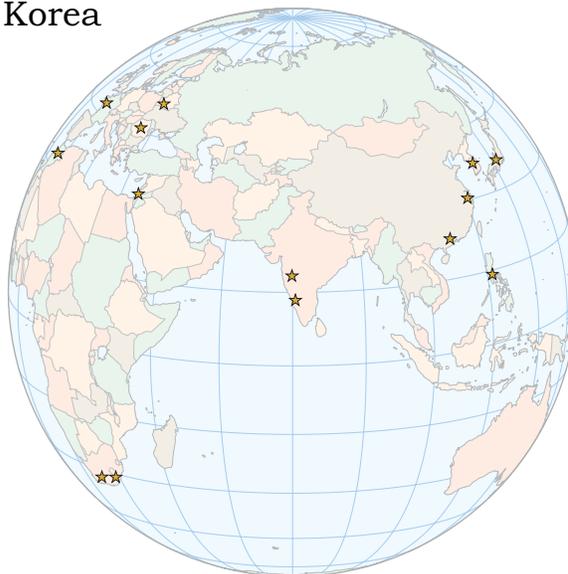
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g Kong Kaohsiung

Josefina S. Raborar  
Manila, Philippines



## **PREFACE**

When Jim Mauldin asked me to participate in his project of individuals' life stories, my initial reaction was, "Why me? Would the people of the community be interested in my life story? Naaaaaaah!" The next thing I knew I was in a room full of storytellers and storykeepers. As I scanned the room, I saw a familiar face: DeAnn Holt. She and I used to play doubles tennis with our husbands a couple of years ago, and lucky for me she had signed up to be a storykeeper. We ended up choosing each other to work on my story. We laughed, we cried, but best of all we had a great time. It was incredible that oftentimes after I shared an experience with DeAnn, she would say, "I had the same experience." I thank DeAnn for her gentle encouragement and for always saying the right words when I was feeling frustrated. To Jim Mauldin, for whom words are not enough to express what he has done and continues to do with this project. I am grateful to him for his kind support, dedication, and enthusiasm. He is right: everyone has a story to tell and each one is as interesting as the next.

## **DEDICATION PAGE**

To my parents who gave me life.

To my husband who shares in my life.

To my daughters, our treasures, who will forever brighten our lives.

## FOREWORD

Helping Josie record her life story has been a privilege and honor. She is a delightful person to get to know. We were already acquainted through tennis, but in the process of recording her life story this acquaintance has developed into a wonderful friendship. I have learned so much about the Philippines and the customs of that Asian culture. Josie described it as a mixture explaining how the Filipinos have assimilated some customs from each group of peoples who have come to their island country. This tradition of assimilation seems to have carried over into her experiences in the United States. Here she works hard to acquaint others with her culture of the Philippines while learning about the cultures of all the ethnic groups who make up our city.

Josie is a shy and quiet, but very strong, woman. Her deep faith in Jesus Christ has been strengthened by Bible study, thought, and prayer. She has a delightful sense of humor - always ready to see the funny side of every situation. You can see these traits shine through in her story. You will enjoy reading it as much as I have enjoyed recording it.

Thanks to Jim Mauldin and his crew of hard working volunteers who make possible the printing of these stories to place in the libraries of Springfield so all of us can become familiar with these folks who are enriching our city with their presence. Too often we aren't aware of the people around us and how much our perspectives can be expanded by getting to know each other.

DeAnn B. Holt, Storykeeper  
May 2002

## **TABLE OF CONTENTS**

- Chapter One: **FAMILY HISTORY**  
Pilipino (Tagalog) Language  
Philippines, My Homeland  
My Parents
- Chapter Two: **EARLIEST MEMORIES**
- Chapter Three: **THE TEEN YEARS**
- Chapter Four: **ADULTHOOD**
- Chapter Five: **MY “ANGELS”**
- Chapter Six: **IN THE UNITED STATES**
- Chapter Seven: **THE IMPORTANCE OF RELIGION TO ME**
- Chapter Eight: **MY LIFE MISSION**
- Chapter Nine: **LIFE WITHOUT MY GIRLS**

## CHAPTER ONE: FAMILY HISTORY

My full name is Maria Josefina Oconer Salazar Raborar. Here in the United States for my legal name I use just Josefina S. Raborar. Maria is my maternal grandmother's first name. All three daughters in my family have Maria as the first name. Maria could be in honor of Mary Mother of God as she is greatly honored in our church. The Spaniards use "Maria" for both daughters and sons - for a daughter as a first name and for a son as a middle name. The name Josefina is for my father's sister who died either at birth or very young. Oconer is my mother's maiden last name as in the Philippines we use the mother's maiden last name as a girl's third name. Oconer sounds Irish but Oconer could be Dutch. When I went back a couple of years ago to the town where my mother lived there was a plaque on the church that said, "This town was invaded by the Dutch," so there must have been intermarriages somewhere a long time ago. Some of the members of my mother's family are brown skinned but some are also white skinned. Salazar is my father's family name. Salazar is not the actual name of the family of my father. The history of his family is that the original name was Ong, which is Chinese. My father's family has Chinese features, especially the eyes and skin color. I assume the family came from China to Philippines before the Spaniards. When the Spaniards came there was a decree that all Filipinos had to change their name to Spanish to identify the people as subjects of Spain. So that is how we lost our Chinese name! There was free movement back and forth of people from countries that surround the Philippines. The original Filipinos, called Negretos, were of short stature, had curly hair and dark skins. The Chinese, Indonesians, Malaysians, and people from the other islands had freedom to go back and forth. Many settled in the Philippines.

I was born at home on December 7, 1943, in Manila, Philippines with a midwife attending my mother during my birth. I was born exactly two years after the Japanese bombing of Pearl Harbor. The Philippines, where I grew up, is an archipelago nation made up of 7,100 islands, spanning 1,840 kilometers north to south. It is in southeastern Asia between the Philippine Sea and the China Sea. Neighbor to the north is Taiwan and neighbor to the south is Borneo. The three major Philippine island groups are Luzon, Visayas, and Mindanao. Manila is located in the central part of Luzon. With an island mass of 300,700 square kilometers the Philippines is considered a medium size nation, 2/3 size of Spain and a little larger than the British Isles, or for those who are more familiar with the American map, it is slightly larger than Arizona. Since I left the Philippines in 1967 the population has more than doubled to nearly 83 million. The religion of the people is 83% Roman Catholic, 9% Protestant, 5% Muslim, 3% Buddhist and others.

### *Pilipino (Tagalog) Language*

"Halo-halo" is a Pilipino word that literally translates "mix mix" but it means mixture. That's how I would describe Tagalog, the Philippine national language. Tagalog may have been based on the now extinct KAVI (old Javanese) and influenced by Sanskrit, Arabic, Hindustani and Chinese according to studies done at the Philippine Institute of National Language. Examples of Sanskrit words found are: hari (king), ganda (beauty). The language as it is today has five vowels: a, e, i, o, u while the consonants include: b, k, d, g, h, l, m, ñ, ng, p, r, s, t, w, y. Letters c,

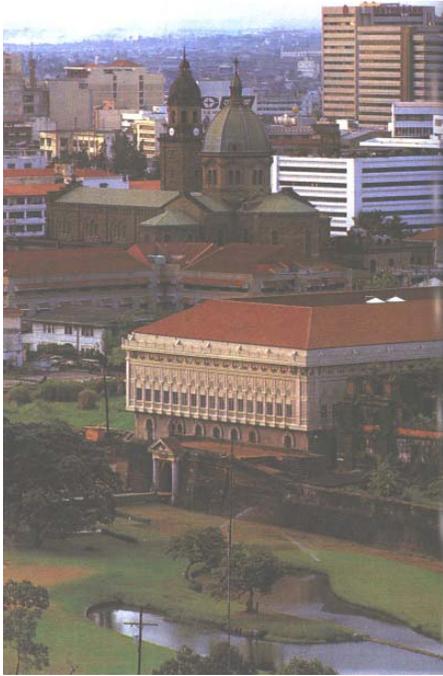
f, j, ll, n, q, x, v, z, are present in the language although not formally included in the alphabet. These letters are used in the Pilipino proper names, words and places. Examples are: my name Josefina, baño (bathroom), and Roxas Blvd. These nine letters excluded from the alphabet are Spanish letters. The result of 300 years or more of Spanish rule is the Spanization of Filipino names and incorporation of coined Spanish words in the language. Long before the Spaniards conquered the Philippines, Chinese merchants were already trading with the Filipinos. Today Chinese immigrants are the largest ethnic settlers in the islands. Their influence permeates in food, words, and customs. Example of Tagalog words "borrowed" from Chinese: bihon (bi-hun in Chinese) noodles; ate (achi in Chinese) older sister. When our Indonesian friends from Branson heard us speak in Tagalog for the first time, they picked up a lot of words similar to theirs. We started with salamat (thank you); puti (white); kanan (right); baboy (pig) and went on and on. We could not believe that we share exactly the same words. We also have the same physical features. One can be easily mistaken for the other. Frankly we should not be surprised because historically Indonesians moved freely to the Philippines before the Chinese and the Spaniards.

Filipinos speak American English as a second language. It is the language used in business and schoolwork. Filipinos have the knack of combining Tagalog and English words in a sentence. Hawaiians speak pidgin English; Filipinos do Taglish. When DeAnn, my storykeeper, asked me which language I use at home, my answer was I talk to my children in English, Tagalog between Art and me. Come to think of it we probably speak Taglish. There was this incident at the doctor's office when Rowena, our second daughter, was two years old. The doctor asked her how she is and her answer was, "Oh, I am fine. I only have a little *sipon* (meaning runny nose)."

### *Philippines, My Homeland*

Central Luzon, where I grew up, is a plain but as you go to the north there is a mountain range where you can see volcanoes. Mountains with volcanoes can also be seen to the south. In Mindanao, where we lived when I was four to seven years old, I remember seeing the mountains, a volcano actually, when I woke up in the morning. There are several active volcanoes in the Philippines. When I went back to visit a few years ago we saw a volcano within a volcano in the southern part of the island of Luzon. We could walk around the crater and see another crater in the middle of it.

The Philippines is still rich in natural resources. We have a lot of timber, petroleum, nickel, cobalt, silver, gold, salt and copper. Nineteen percent of the land is arable, 12% has permanent crops, and 4% is permanent pastures, and 46% forests and woodland. So that means there is still a major percentage of people who make their living by mining and farming. In addition to these ways of making a living, there are many service professionals, especially in the cities. In Manila there are lots of educational facilities - medical schools, engineering schools, teacher education schools. But in the Philippines the schools operate only for a profit and mass produce graduates with no regard for how many people are needed in any given profession. This means that many of the educated people must go out of our country to find work. In addition to the United States some go to the Middle East, Saudi Arabia, and Europe to find work. In some Asian and European countries Filipino college graduates can only find work as domestics. It is a big



***“Intramuros” (Walled City)  
Old Manila***

left behind. What the Filipinos did was to extend the jeep to make it a passenger vehicle. It is similar to a bus but you can still see that it is a jeep – like a car is extended into a limousine. Each owner would paint or do art work on the side of the jeepney. Since it is a Catholic country most owners would paint religious art work. That is how I got around when I was in school – the commute from my house to school was two jeepney rides. It was very affordable transportation.



***My Dad and his siblings. Left to Right:  
Estela, Alfredo, Lucila, Roman (my  
Dad), Dolores, Rufino and Elena***

problem that the government still hasn’t corrected. We consider ourselves to be lucky to have been able to come to the United States.

Manila is an old, old city. It was probably built when the Spanish came in the 1500s. There is a walled city, called *Intramuros*, where the Spaniards built their government houses. They separated themselves from the locals. When the Americans came they built up the city. They introduced democracy with the president, executive, legislative, and judicial branches so we have federal court houses, presidential palace, and congressional buildings around the city. That was how the Americans planned the city but then as soon as they left there was no zoning and planning so houses and businesses are all mixed together creating traffic problems. One of the distinct forms of public transportation in the city is the “jeepney.” After Philippine

independence there were a lot of green army jeeps



***Jeepneys Unique Philippine  
Public Transportation***

***My Parents***

My father’s name was Roman Salazar. He was born on October 6, 1910, in the province of Albay. My father was a city boy. When he was young his family moved to Manila. He is the oldest of fourteen siblings - seven died in childhood or miscarried and seven survived to adulthood. He was the first one in his family to get a college degree. My father and one brother were sent to college by his parents but others put themselves through college or vocational schools.

One sister became an accountant and the other a bank administrative assistant. Another sister got married and had her own family. Another stayed at home to care for her parents. One son was a “free spirit” - one funny guy. There is the story that when he was courting his wife and worked for a funeral home he would pick her up in a hearse! His father was a court translator. Court proceedings were done in English and then translated to Spanish at that time. (Today English is the only language used in the courts.)



***My Mom and Dad's  
wedding***

My mother’s name is Bienvenida Oconer. *Bienvenido* means welcome in Spanish. She was born on November 14, 1914, in the town of Samal, Bataan. She was the oldest of nine children. The traditional role of the eldest daughter in Philippine society is to be responsible for the care of younger siblings. This is necessary in large families where the mother cannot look after all the children. My mother remembers a housemaid doing the laundry and ironing, a houseboy doing errands and yard work. She helped her mother prepare meals, feed, bathe and dress her siblings. She commanded respect and obedience from her siblings because she looked after their well being and she acted as intermediary between them and their parents especially when house rules were too strict. My mother was so good with her deputy mother role that when mother got married, Bartolome, the youngest brother, who was only two and a half years old at the time, had to be taken to a neighbor's house so he won't see mother leave. But when he found out she was gone, he threw a fit and sulked for days. He acted as though he lost his mother. Mother's "deputy mother " role was a good training for her next role as wife. It is customary for newlyweds to live with the husband's family for at least a year. Breaking off from parents can provoke an emotional crisis. Filipino parents determine when the couple can be on their own. What we Americans prize as independence is frowned upon by Filipinos because it could be interpreted as a move that resulted from disagreement in the family. My Aunt Elena said that Grandma Maria loved mother more than her natural children. Mother helped grandma run the household, always respectful of the elder's position. She made sure the house was spotless since grandma was already frail at that time. Another reason they lived with grandma was that grandpa was already gone, passed away. My father, the eldest son, assumed the role of his father. He became the disciplinary figure, almost feared by his younger brothers and sisters.

My maternal great-grandmother passed away when grandmother was a teenager. Her father remarried her mother’s younger sister. The children perceived her as mean and cruel, like Cinderella’s stepmother. So grandmother married grandfather at age 17 to leave that house. My grandfather, according to stories, was the only child in his family who lived. Of course, as an only child he was spoiled so he was very lenient with his children too. He had a sweet, gentle, and mischievous nature. I was told that when my mother was one or two years old, my grandmother “caught” my grandfather serenading a pretty, young belle in town. At that time they were living in my grandfather’s mother’s house. My grandmother packed all their belongings and moved with my grandfather to another town. The role of disciplinarian fell on

my grandmother's lap. Whatever method my grandmother used, worked because all seven daughters and two sons turned out well.

My mother was a good student. She loved school and was outstanding in math. She could have been a great teacher but being the oldest, and a girl, she was sent to a vocational school after high school to learn dressmaking. The next three sisters did the same. They had a thriving dress shop when mother met and married my father. When mother left Pura, the second daughter, took over and she moved the shop to Manila. There her business flourished. Because of her talent, determination, and good fortune, she was able to send the younger siblings to college (two teachers, one physician, one engineer, and one auto mechanic).



***Our Family (Salazers) with my mother's family (Oconers), her parents, seven sisters and two brothers.***

A childhood memory is when I visited my maternal grandmother in Bataan Province, she had along her fence *sampaguita*, a vining flower with tiny blooms that look like stephanotis. It has a very sweet smell, not overpowering, but mild and sweet. My grandmother would string it into a lei to wear around her neck like her perfume when visiting friends or relatives. When she went to church she would string a lei to hang on the Blessed Mother statue. My other grandmother loved to use Johnson's baby powder! That is how I remember her! She was already bedridden, so when I bent to kiss her I would smell the Johnson's baby powder.

My father had a degree in electrical engineering from one of the best public universities in the Philippines. His class of ten was one of the first to graduate. After graduation he wanted to experience life in the country, so from Manila he became the town engineer in Samal. The story is that he was checking the newly acquired electric power to see who was cheating. Maybe he had heard that my mischievous grandfather was cheating! Father was checking the electricity in their house and saw my mother scrubbing the floor. That is how they met! He moved around to other places but when he married my mother they settled in Manila where he served as a city engineer until the war. Eight hours after bombing Pearl Harbor, the Japanese invaded the Philippines. Since my father worked for the government, he was in danger. There is the story that when the Japanese knocked at my grandmother's house, where they were living, fortunately he was not there. I think my father had heard that the Japanese were rounding up government officials so he and mother had already fled to her mother's family in Bataan Province. The story goes that as they were fleeing they could not use the regular route but had to go a river route. As they were crossing a river, they were stopped by Japanese sentry. To keep the sentry away they made up the story that father had dysentery, so my family was able to escape. One of his friends, another government employee, was at home when the Japanese soldiers came and was killed.

In the late 1940s, when I was four years old, my father took the job as the engineer at the Del Monte pineapple packing plant in Mindanao. When we moved back to Manila he worked for CALTEX Oil Company. I think his job was in another province so we would only see him on weekends for about five years.



***My Dad at 2 yrs of age, with my Grandpa Facundo.***

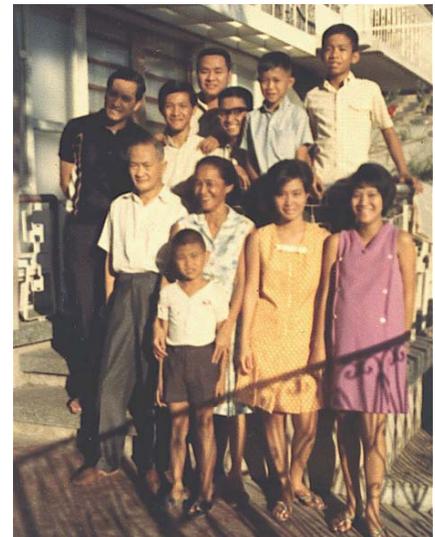
My great-grandfather's ancestors came from China, so he looks more Chinese with slanted eyes. They say my grandmother, Maria Javier, was more Spanish looking with fair complexion. She had a small, flat nose, which is where I got my small, flat nose, so I don't think she looked Spanish at all. My mother has beautiful eyes, darker complexion, and long black hair. In the Philippines we call her "*dalagang Filipina*" or the "real Filipina." She was "*mayumi*" which means "demure."

With ten members in the family Mother really knows how to stretch a peso. We had three square meals a day and I remember quite a selection of clothes in my closet although we seldom shopped for clothing. What she did was take my aunts' used clothes and alter or cut them to my size. I remember when my sister, Martha, was going to the school of nursing Mother took a roll of cash from her safety box and paid her tuition in full for four years.

I call my dad, "Mr. Clean." I remember his shirt and trousers always looked pressed with never a wrinkle in them. He would leave the house in the morning and when he came back from work his clothes still looked the same. He liked to read. In his private corner in the house, where his desk and bookshelves were, everything was neatly arranged. He bought his first car when I was in high school. It was a black Pontiac with light green leather interior. Every Saturday, I remember, Dad would lead my three brothers to the garage. The whole day they would be taking apart the removable parts of the engine to wash and clean them. So we had the cleanest engine in the block! I wish I had followed along with them to learn about cars but girls didn't do that!

My father passed away in his early 70s from a massive coronary. He had high blood pressure, diabetes, and arteriosclerosis. My mother is 88 years old and still living in the same house where I grew up, the one my parents bought when we moved back from Mindanao.

My parents' treasures are their children. There are eight of us: I am the third oldest. I have two older sisters and five younger brothers. Education was the best gift my parents gave to us. Their proudest achievement was putting each and every one of us through college. Lilia, Roberto and Rafael are



***My siblings and parents in front of the house in Caloocan city***

accountants; Roman Jr. and Antonio are mechanical engineers; Ruben is an electrical engineer; Martha is a nurse; and I am a dietitian. My parents' expressed their love for us through actions more than words. They sacrificed so much to raise us and put us through school. They encouraged all of us to seek better opportunities for ourselves; five of us found those opportunities here in the United States. (In addition, Antonio and Martha had the chance to immigrate at one point, but decided to remain in the Philippines and care for our parents as they got older.) Roman Jr., Rafael, Ruben and Roberto live in Carol Stream and Elk Grove suburbs of Chicago. The first three are happily married with eight children between them. Roberto is unmarried, but happy to be around family and play the part of proud uncle to his nieces and nephews.

Our parents visited us in the States in the late seventies. It was wonderful to be able to show them this very different culture, land and climate that I had made my home. I still remember the first time they saw snow: my Mom was so excited she wanted to collect it in a cup and make snow cones. They were overwhelmed by the vastness of land here. They had promised a friend in Manila that they would drop by their son's place in New York, not realizing it was a 3- or 4-day drive from Missouri. When we explained to them how long it would take to get there, they decided a phone call would suffice. The most notable difference they found between the Philippines and the U.S. was the absence of high, concrete fences. In the Philippines, the richer one is the higher one's fence for both security reasons and to keep nosy neighbors away. These fences are often topped with jagged shards of glass to prevent anyone climbing them; all in all they create a very ominous and threatening atmosphere. Here, my parents were delighted to find that we did not need fences to feel secure, and our neighbors waved and even dropped by to visit. It made them happy to find such a sense of community so far from home.

## CHAPTER TWO: EARLIEST MEMORIES AND CHILDHOOD

My Mom and Dad gave me the nickname, “Nene,” which means, “Baby Girl.” The custom in the Philippines is that we retain our nickname until the day we die, unlike over here where once you get to school you aren’t called by your nickname anymore because you would be made fun of. Right now there is a chief of police in the Philippines whose nickname is “Joker” with last name Arroyo - he is still called Joker Arroyo. Would one trust an enforcer of the law, let alone a chief, with a name like “Joker”? That is the difference with nicknames.

On a typical day in my family no one is allowed to sleep late. We wake up very early. Each one is assigned a chore. I usually do housecleaning and that means particularly the floor because we had hardwood floors. We have a Philippine floor polisher, which is made out of the outer husk of the coconut cut in half and shaped to fit the arch of the foot. I scrubbed back and forth with them on my feet. We call it “*bunot*.” The girls also do ironing and cooking. My mom just let us help with the dicing and cutting of the vegetables. She didn’t allow us to cook the entire meal or else, if we waste it, there goes our meal. The budget is very, very tight! The boys do yard work and errands.

For entertainment when we lived in Mindanao, where Father worked at the pineapple packing plant, we saw movies on Saturday night. Since it is an American company, we see lots of cowboy and war movies with stars like John Wayne and Allan Ladd. Well, one time I fell asleep in one of those war movies so was punished -- no movies for a month!! Because of seeing movies my brother and I would play soldiers after school in the ravine behind our house.



*Josie at 3 yrs old*

The house in Mindanao was provided by the company. It was a bungalow with a porch in front. The living room and dining room were on one side with the two bedrooms on other side. We had the kitchen and bathroom – for the first time a flush toilet.

Always we had the same rules – all of the children are best seen, not heard, we speak only when spoken to. You are a bad child when you talk back or express your opinion. You are a good child when you are quiet, follow orders, and are helpful.

I shared my room with my two older sisters and younger brother - four of us at that time. The only pet I remember is my father tried to have a goat at one time – he wanted to experiment making goat cheese. I remember Mother’s rose garden in the front yard. She loves flowers. There were vegetables in the back yard - peanuts and green beans. Also I remember the avocado tree because I climbed it often.

When I was five years old I started in first grade. I knew how to read before first grade because before we went to Mindanao my mom sent me to a reading school where I learned how

to read "See Spot Run." One of my baby sitters, who took me to school and picked me up, gave me a gift of one of those books. After I had read it I told him to return it and get me another one! At the school in Mindanao we had regular classrooms for each grade one through six. It is called the plantation school. It looks like you may have seen in Hawaii - built on stilts with a corrugated tin roof. That is where I learned how to read, write, and do my arithmetic. I usually walked to school because on the compound where we lived the plant was at one end with a park behind it and the row of houses, church, high school, and elementary school around the park. I just walked across the park to school. Most of the time I would walk home for recess and lunch time.

Mostly the religious holidays were what we celebrated. I remember Easter time because it was scary to me! The Easter celebration that really made an impact on me was the one celebrated in the provinces. On Good Friday there are those penitent men who would flagellate themselves using a whip tipped with pieces of glass to cut their backs. There are also men who would cover their heads with a sack cloth then roll on the ground. That was very scary to me! All over the Philippines there would be a house at the end of each road with a cross where women would chant the passion of Christ for the whole day. Some men would replay the Stations of the Cross carrying a real cross and even being nailed to it. These are some Easter celebrations that are different from Easter celebrations here. Christmas is different also in the Philippines. The country celebrates it the longest because it begins on December 16 and ends on January 6. Beginning December 16 we have mass at dawn for nine days -- from the 16<sup>th</sup> until the 24<sup>th</sup>. December 25 is the Christmas celebration. Normally the 25<sup>th</sup> is the day children would visit their godparents. The godparents would give them some gifts but the parents would give the children their gifts on January 6, which is Epiphany. Maybe we got this tradition from Spain. I remember having cake on birthdays when I was young but as we got older we celebrated with noodles for long life.

Weddings are entirely different too. We have a large entourage. Normally there are the godparents of the bride and groom – godparents can stretch from two to ten or maybe more! Then we have the sponsors – the cord sponsors, the veil sponsors, and the candle sponsors. The lighting of the candle means unity. The cord sponsor would put a cord over the head of the bride and the head of the groom in a figure eight. This means being united also. The veil, put over the heads of the bride and groom too, symbolizes being one. The groom gives the bride a bag of coins to signify that the woman will keep the household finances in order. We also have a ring bearer who carries a pillow with the ring tied to it. There is also flower girl, maid of honor, bride's maids, and groomsmen. The godparents donate money to the church in honor of the bride and groom. Another difference is that the groom's family shoulders the expense of the wedding, not the bride's family. The bride's family pays for, here it is called the rehearsal dinner, but there it is called "*Despedida de Soltera*," which means "goodbye to the blessed single" or "goodbye to being single." This is the reception the day or night before the wedding.

Being a Catholic country each province, or even town, has a patron saint and we celebrate a fiesta in honor of the patron saint. Most of the time we would go to my mother's town, Samal, in April to celebrate their Patron Saint Catherine. We would have games, a fair with carnival, even a beauty contest for Miss Samal. I remember all the houses are open with lots of food for

everybody who walks in. My grandmother used to hire people from another town to fix the food for the whole day so the family could participate in the fiesta.

I was closer to my brother when I was young than to my older sisters. For some reason my sisters lived with my grandmother in Samal for a while when they were young and started their elementary school there. My brother and I were not school age yet so we're home the whole time and played together. I remember one time; I got my very first spanking because I had given my brother a haircut! Someone gave my dad a hair cut at home. Then I said, "That looks fun!" so I did it to my brother. Oh boy, did I get it!!! That was my first spanking. Then the following week my dad came home with a doll for me and an engine truck for my brother. Know what I did with the doll? I pulled off the head! Guess I was still mad from the spanking!! I played with my brother until I was old enough for paper dolls. Brenda Starr was my favorite paper doll.

When we moved from Mindanao my parents bought a house in the outskirts of the Manila in the next town called Quecon City. At that time it seemed far away from the city - two or three jeepney rides. I remember it looking like a long house. In the front door is the living room with a sofa and my father's desk and bookshelves. Up the steps is a big room where my mother and father had their bed. Up a few more steps was a space where the boys sleep. The girls sleep on a mat on the floor next to my mother and father's bed. Further back down some steps was the dining room and kitchen. Further out was the bathroom with shower and commode. That was our house until I graduated from high school. While I was in college they tore down the old house, maybe because of termites, and built the house my mother still lives in. In the Philippines they call it a "one and one-half" house. Living room, dining room and kitchen are on one level with the four bedrooms, two on top of other two, and a bathroom between each pair of bedrooms. With nine members in the family we were excited about finally having two bathrooms instead of just one! I remember a huge yard that after we built the second house became very small – just front yard and back yard. Then my mother decided that instead of grass we would cement the back yard! The house is surrounded with very high hollow-block fences for privacy because houses were getting too close. We also have decorative wrought iron grills on the windows to discourage burglars.

### CHAPTER THREE: THE TEEN YEARS

The school system in the country did not have kindergarten then yet. I went first grade to sixth grade, no junior high, then to high school. I stayed in the public school system throughout my elementary years. My parents decided girls should go to the Catholic all girls' school for high school - a parochial school connected to the parish church in Manila.

I always loved to read books. A particular American literature teacher got me started reading poetry. I especially liked "The Raven" and "Annabelle Lee" by Poe and there is one by Matthew Arnold. For some reason I just fell in love with poetry.

As a teenager in the summer I would go to work in my aunt's dress shop. She would let me do some hemming of garments. She had many wedding gown orders so sometimes I would sew beads and lace on wedding gowns. During high school and college years what she would pay me was my pocket money for the whole year.

Because our television programs came from the United States, we watched "Bewitched," "The Patty Duke Show," and "Father Knows Best." I often dreamed of having Robert Young as my father because he talks to his children! I don't remember my father talking to us. He just tells us what to do – we never had those deep conversations! If there were any problems, he would just say, "Talk to your mom." That's it! The favorite magazines of my aunt, the dress maker, are all the movie magazines. I really enjoyed going to her room and flipping through her movie magazines. One time I saw a spread on Sandra Dee so I wanted my hair to look like hers. I think for a while I had the Sandra Dee look! I copied her clothing style too for a year.

Filipinos, in general, think of people with Chinese features as unattractive and they consider those with European, especially Spanish, features very beautiful. I grew up thinking I was the ugliest person on earth! My close friends and relatives would make fun of my eyes. My mother would say, "Are those open yet?" Or about my flat nose, "Can you breathe in those tiny holes?" That really impacted my life – especially as a teenager, when your self esteem is not there yet.

There is general practice in the Philippines that sons and daughters are considered adults at age 18. Usually parents would invite families and close friends to a get-together to honor an eighteen-year-old daughter. I don't recall a rite of passage for a son. When I asked my husband, he didn't think there was any ceremony for sons. This seems unusual because in Asian society men are more valued than women. Depending on the family's income it could be simple or extravagant. Simple would be celebrated at home with close relatives and friends. Lavish would be in a first class restaurant or country club setting. Well, I had neither because my parents did not believe in ceremonies!

## CHAPTER FOUR: ADULTHOOD

What I really wanted to be was a nurse like my second sister, but because I had five brothers after me my mother said she could not afford to have another nurse in the family. Come to think of it, I could have insisted because I was high school salutatorian, second in my class, so the University of Santo Tomas (St. Thomas Aquinas - established in 1511 is the oldest Catholic university in Asia) that I attended gave me a half-tuition scholarship. I could have insisted! I was only sixteen years old when I finished high school so I couldn't plead my case to my parents. My older sister just said, "Okay, take this class, take this, there's a degree that when you finish it you can apply to any hospital in the United States." That was dietetics. I liked studying dietetics, but didn't like working as a dietitian afterwards. It was a four-year course for a bachelor's degree with a major in nutrition. I worked as a dietitian when I came to the United States in Lorain, Ohio, and in New York City. Actually the hospital where I worked in Bay Village, a neighboring town of Lorain, was a well-known hospital because that is where Sam Sheppard used to work as a doctor! He was the physician accused of killing his wife in 1954. His case was sensationalized by the press because he was young, well-respected, and successful. He was handsome and she was drop-dead gorgeous. I remember reading about this case in the Philippine newspapers.



*Wedding Day Arteso & Josie, with  
Josie's cousin Loretta*

I lived with my parents until age 23 when I left to come to the United States to marry my sweetheart. After college I did a one-year dietetic internship at one of the hospitals in Manila. At the same time my husband-to-be, Arteso, was also doing his medical internship. I was visiting a patient when Arteso saw me and tried to get to know me by asking one of the orderlies to hand me a piece of paper to write my name and phone number on. I said, "No, no." Of course, I refused to do that – you see, no one had courted me before! I thought that was rude! I tried to avoid him for a number of weeks. I finally received him in the reception area of the residence where all the dietetic interns stayed. This was in a suburb of Manila. Arteso lived in an apartment further away from the hospital and commuted every day.

I immigrated to the United States in 1967 to marry Arteso Raborar. He was already living in Lorain, Ohio, on an exchange program for medical graduates in training for his pathology specialty. We were married Cleveland, Ohio, nine days after I arrived. I got there on December 7 and we were married on December 16. Arteso did all the preparation for the wedding. Most of the people in our entourage were from the hospital where he worked and I met them at the wedding. He even chose our principal sponsors.

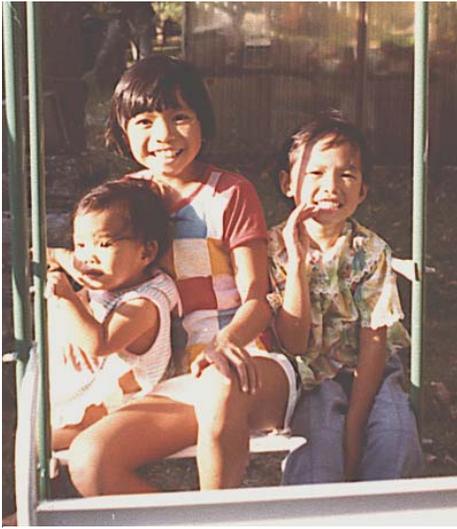
The only one in the wedding I knew was one of flower girls, who is my cousin. I think my Aunt Aleli helped Arteso with the wedding planning. She had lived here a year or two. Her husband was my escort and gave me away. I don't think we had a wedding rehearsal. We threw in some Filipino traditions such as a cord sponsor and a veil sponsor that symbolize unity, so the priest was probably wondering what was going on! I brought my sleeveless wedding dress from the warm Philippines not realizing that December in Cleveland would be so cold and snowy! We had to buy a coat for me after I arrived. I was a tiny 90 pounds at age 24! We waited until June to go to Niagara Falls for our honeymoon.

I have been married thirty-five years in December with the same man. Arteso is a great guy! When I met him he made me feel beautiful for the first time in my life. He said when he saw me for the first time in the hospital there was like an aura around me. He even said there was angel coming down – he might be just hungry or without sleep at that time and seeing things!! Being married to him now for long period of time I know he is a good provider for our children and me and also for his mother and father. He never fails to be the first one to respond when his siblings need help. I really admire him for his honesty and loyalty -- not only to his family, but also in his profession. I remember when we moved to Springfield there were five partners in his pathology group working for St. John's Hospital, with Art and another partner managing the medical laboratory. There was a time when some of the partners wanted to let another partner go because there were a couple of cases against him. Art stood up for him and the group split, but the laboratory continued to thrive with just Art and one partner. I really admire him for that! Sometimes when I think as though a situation has a practical solution, Arteso will step up and say it has to be done this way “because of the principle of the thing.”



***Josie and Art,  
30 years later***

## CHAPTER FIVE: MY "ANGELS"



*Our young daughters in the backyard of our Springfield house.*

My husband, Art, likes to call our daughters--Aileen, Rowena and Farrah--his "three angels" (a play on his favorite 70's TV show, "Charlie's Angels"). I, on the other hand, like to think of them as our "triple blessing." In Hebrew, there are no words "better" or "best," so these terms are expressed by doubling or tripling the descriptive word. I feel that Art and I are "triple blessed" with three daughters who are beautiful, smart, and talented young women.

Aileen, our oldest, is married to a wonderful man: her childhood sweetheart, Dennis Dressler. They live in Chicago and both are very busy with their careers (she is an architect; he is a lawyer). Whenever they want to unwind, they turn to music: Aileen plays her cello, and Dennis plays his guitar. Though they love to travel, they also simply enjoy the company of close friends and relatives that live nearby.

Rowena, our middle daughter, loves to tackle the challenge of the fast-paced world of internet technology. She lives in San Francisco and commutes to work in Redwood City. A consummate nature-lover, she balances work by biking, hiking, and running regularly, as well as through her daily yoga routine and her new-found passion for the drums.

Farrah, our youngest daughter, has a real passion for creating music (I think she will be the next Carly Simon or Tori Amos). Just last month, she recorded and released a CD with six of her original songs. She currently lives in New York but is moving to Los Angeles in the near future.

We have a common last name, but our zip codes span the continental US. My daughters live hundreds of miles away, but we stay connected through the internet and our weekly "check-up" phone calls. I'll admit, it's tough being so far away from my kids, but I can't help but be a proud "mother hen" when it comes down to it. I think my family must



*Our daughters,  
Aileen, Rowena and Farrah*

have an exploratory spirit pulsing through its veins: as a young woman, I left the Philippines to make a new life for myself in the US, so it is only fitting that my daughters should branch out and find their own paths in new places as well.

They never cease to amaze me. Our girls, who once were seemingly incapable of fixing their beds or replacing the bathroom tissues, now are surprisingly self-sufficient: paying their rent, utilities, and credit card bills, and being remarkably knowledgeable about current events and goings-on in the world. When Art and I come to visit, instead of the "mess and mayhem" that we knew so well when they were younger, we are greeted by tidy living spaces and delicious welcome dinners. And they plan such wonderful visit activities for us: Aileen gave us an architectural tour of Chicago, Rowena took us to watch an impressive San Francisco Ballet performance, and Farrah brought us to see Mozart's Don Giovanni at the Met.

My daughters will keep me young forever. I will never tire of listening to their bright, innovative ideas; every moment with them is a special one, and leaves me with a smile in my heart.

## CHAPTER SIX: IN THE UNITED STATES

When I came the United States Immigration had opened quotas for people from Asian countries to come, mainly professional people – doctors, nurses, dietitians. The president wanted to improve the health system but US medical schools couldn't fill the need so they recruited from other countries. It was a great opportunity for us because of the over-supply of medical professionals in the Philippines. I applied and was granted a green card, which means I can immigrate to the United States and apply for permanent residence here. I didn't know at the time that Arteso's plan was not to stay but to return to the Philippines to practice in his province. But there was a turn of events! President Marco was in power in Philippines with martial law in place so there was a feeling that the freedom of people was limited. Art said that it isn't good to go back home to raise the children. Martial law should be a temporary measure only but Marco's reign of control extended twenty years! That kept us from going back, so after finishing his studies Arteso decided to volunteer with US Army for two years. First he was assigned to Fort Carson at Colorado Springs, Colorado. At that time when we heard "fort" we thought of Indians! In boot camp he tried to switch with someone but couldn't, so we ended up in Colorado and found out that is really a beautiful place. That is where Rowena was born – we always tease her by telling her she was "born free" in Colorado! During his tour of duty Art was able to become a naturalized citizen. The following year I received my naturalization papers. He had his swearing in Colorado and I had mine in New Jersey because after a year in Colorado we were transferred there.

## CHAPTER SEVEN: THE IMPORTANCE OF RELIGION TO ME

As a "cradle catholic," religious traditions and ceremonies have always been part of my life. Ever since I could remember I've attended services and did all the rituals that Catholics do like fasting and abstinence during Lent and Advent. However, I didn't feel the depth of meaning in these rituals until six years ago when I joined an interdenominational women's Bible study group called Bible Study Fellowship International. For the first time in my life, I really came in contact with women who are very in touch with their spirituality and learning from their example and wisdom, I became closer to our Lord Jesus and to God. In my experience with Catholicism, especially with how it is practiced in the Philippines, I felt my attention was scattered among the many venerable saints that we celebrated and thus my devotion was divided, unfocused, and confused. Through my Bible study group I feel that I am better able to focus on God alone and thus helped me to become a better Christian.

I often think on the phrase "God is not done with me yet." I like to visualize it as me being rough around the edges with God always beside me, patiently smoothing those edges with gentle nudges. I often learn lessons in humility and faith through everyday situations in which I know He has a hand. A few weeks ago, while Art and I were driving home from Kansas City, we started discussing Christ's apostles. During this conversation, I commented that there were female apostles as well as male ones, at which point Art stated that as far as he knew, there are 12 apostles and they were all men. I said I'd show him the chapter and verse in the Bible to prove my point. (We got home very late and it slipped my mind.) Six days later, we met a nun from St. Joseph the Worker Catholic Church in Ozark at an eighty-fifth birthday party for a mutual friend. Arteso and I asked her about the existence of the female apostles and she responded, "Of course, Mary the Mother of Jesus and Mary Magdalene were the very first ones." That was an amazing answer to a situation in which Arteso and I would usually lock horns. God knows that Arteso is not a student of the Bible yet; my chapter and verse answer will not placate him. Through this situation, God reminded me to lean on Him and not rely solely on my ability.

## CHAPTER EIGHT: MY LIFE MISSION

During the Spanish occupation, most Filipinos were forced to change their natural surnames to Spanish ones. My family was no exception: we were forced to change our name from Ong to Salazar. The loss of our true last name has since confused our sense of family history and identity. My brothers, who carry this given name Salazar, still experience rejection as a result. For instance, my brother Roman Jr., who works with a lot of Latinos in the Chicago area, constantly gets questioned about his ethnicity. "How can you be named Salazar when you look Chinese?" they ask him. What it feels like is, "Are you authentic? Are you in touch with your real ethnicity?"

Being in touch with our ethnicity is only half of it. Being an immigrant, I've constantly felt the pressure of having to both retain my ethnic heritage and simultaneously assimilate wholeheartedly into the American society. It has been frustrating, scary, and downright tiring experience at times.

I believe in multiculturalism. I believe that America was founded on the idea that one country can be greatly enriched by many customs, languages, and ideas that its people bring from other cultures. But I don't believe that we have fully realized the basic concept of learning from, respecting, and accepting one another's differences upon which America was founded. It is still very apparent today that European immigrants who bring their culture, traditions, and ideas to this country are readily welcomed into the American culture, but Asians and Pacific Islanders continue to be written off as foreigners even those who are born here. (Asians as a whole have been in this country since the early 1800s.) Take the Wen Ho Lee scandal from a couple years back for example. No matter how good of citizens we are or how hardworking, we are looked upon with suspicion.



***Josie coordinated this project. She and 40 others presented dance, music, drama, crafts, games and demonstrations.***

Seven years ago, I decided I had to do something about these cultural misconceptions. Educating the children of Springfield about people of different ethnic and cultural backgrounds has been my goal since then. I have been very involved in a multicultural project sponsored by the Springfield Public School System. The ethnic groups that have participated thus far are Filipino, Mexican, Japanese, Chinese, Native American, Indian, and African American. Our first project was to fill a trunk with artifacts that represent our respective cultures. These trunks are available to be checked out from the school system. Through these trunks, children and parents alike get a glimpse of the daily experiences of people from those parts of the world. Another project I took part in was a Filipino Cultural Day at the Discovery Center in December 1998. There were many Philippine items on display. We assisted the

children in making their own *paroles* (star shaped Christmas lanterns), played games that Filipino children delight in, and demonstrated some traditional folk dances. The project I most recently finished was putting together a permanent exhibit of collected artifacts and historical information about the Philippines and the contributions of famous Filipino Americans, which is currently housed in Cherokee Middle School Library. In the future it will be permanently kept at the Discovery Center's World Tour or Global Village.

*"Ang hindi lumingon sa pinanggalingan ay hindi makakarating sa paroroonan"* is a Philippine proverb that translates, "You cannot see your future unless you reconcile with your past." I believe that children and parents of ethnic minorities should feel comfortable in their own skin and their identities so that they can reach their full potential as vibrant members of this community. People of Asian heritage are not allowed to assimilate into American society as quickly as Europeans simply by virtue of their skin color and exotic looks. But by working to change these views and educating our children to respect all of our origins and the experience that shape our views, I hope to help make our future as a society a little brighter and our world a little better, even if it is one child at a time.

## CHAPTER NINE: LIFE WITHOUT MY GIRLS

My girls are all grown up...and I like it! Sure, I experienced "empty-nester's syndrome" for a while when they'd all moved out of the house. But now I realize it's time to rejoice and be proud because my daughters have grown into confident, self-sufficient, and independent adults. They're SO independent that when one of them is sick, I hear about it days later when it's water under the bridge--I get no time to worry about their health or if they're eating right or getting good care because they won't allow me to any longer! All I can do is shrug and chalk it up to the "natural order of things." I'm not so much saddened by the fact that they no longer depend on me as...pleasantly bemused that they're doing all right on their own two feet. And so far, I like the having more space to myself and more peace and quiet at home now. I have a long list (twenty-plus years in the making!) of things to do on the house: many, many repairs, work which Art and I put on hold while putting the girls through college. I thought I'd have time to tackle all of those things in a year. Little did I know that God had other plans for me. He sent me "angels" -- friends I've met along my way whom I consider gifts from God -- who have taken me on a wonderful journey of book reading, community involvement, church activities, and [rousing] games of tennis. Two of these "angels," Gail Holand and Peggy Glazzard, invited me to join an organization called the PEO Sisterhood. The primary mission of the Sisterhood is to assist disadvantaged women in getting their education, and through so doing enabling a better life for them. Some have even gone on to become successful entrepreneurs. Through the Sisterhood we develop strong ties to one another. I am happy to call the twenty-plus women I've met through the program my "sisters." God also sent me Kathy Sammon as the spark that re-ignited my love for reading. She called me one day and asked me if I wanted to join her book club. She assembled a club of six dedicated women who meet once a month at 7 a.m. to discuss a designated book. While we are still able, Art and I plan to do a lot of traveling. One of our goals is to see all fifty states (and re-visit ones of which we're particularly fond). We dream of doing a cooking tour of New York, a wine sampling tour of California, and a gardening tour of Georgia. All in all, the possibilities for my life are endless. I can't wait to see what's just around the corner for me, because even though it's often a surprise, it's always an exciting one.



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