

DOMESTICS' CROSS-CULTURAL NEWS

INTERCEDE for the Rights of Domestic Workers, Caregivers and Newcomers

February 2007

Toll Free 1-877-483-4554



FELY VILLASIN: FILIPINO-CANADIANS LOSE A RIGHTS CHAMPION

By: Rene Ciria-Cruz

Fely Villasin, a leader of Toronto's Filipino community, women's rights activist, playwright and theatre director, died on December 27, after a 3-year battle with cancer. Born on Dec. 24, 1941, she was 65. Villasin had served as coordinator since 1987 of Intercede, an advocacy group that champions the rights of domestic workers, care givers and new immigrants. She was a ceaseless campaigner for a landed status and workplace protections for domestic workers, slowing down only after starting treatment for colon cancer.

For more than a decade, until the downfall of Ferdinand Marcos' dictatorship in the Philippines in 1986, Villasin was an outspoken critic of the regime and a militant organizer of opposition in Toronto's Filipino-Canadian community.

As a founding member of the Kababayan Community Centre and Kapisanan Philippine Centre, as well as an originator of the annual Philippine National Day celebration, Villasin was an energetic presence in Toronto's vibrant Filipino community.

Villasin's political activism was often mirrored in the productions of the Carlos Bulosan Theatre, now a professional theater group she helped found in 1983 and for which she wrote, directed and acted.

Villasin was also well known in the Canadian women's movement, having been a member of the executive committee of the National Action Committee on the Status of Women (Canada) in the 1990's.

A tenacious campaigner against rape and sexual abuse as well as domestic violence, she led many culturally targeted initiatives for prevention in immigrant communities.

"It takes a full court of doers to fill the void Tita Fely has left behind," says Romeo Candido, a second generation Canadian-born Filipino filmmaker and musician, and also a close friend of Villasin's daughter, Nadine.

Villasin arrived in Toronto in 1974. Her then-husband, Ruben Cusipag, a journalist was among the first people arrested by the Philippine military when Marcos installed himself as dictator in Sept. 1972.

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**We are inviting everyone to join
INTERCEDE to celebrate**

***The International Women's Day March
on March 10, 2007
and
INTERCEDE Anniversary
Breakfast Fundraising
on March 18, 2007***

Full details to be announced on the next issue

Sunday, February 11, 2007, 3-6 p.m.
At Cecil Community Centre, 58 Cecil St.
(one block south of College cor. Spadina)

Black History Month

*All Domestic/Caregiver workers, Newcomers and those
on Temporary Work Permit are welcome to attend*

Apply for/renew your membership - \$10.

Villasin, who had a "good job at the Asian Development Bank," told friends that her middle-class life was disrupted, "There were no newspapers, and martial law brought dread. I lived in insecurity for the first time."

The couple tried to leave the country for two years after her husband's release from prison; they were able to immigrate to Canada with the help of a friend, bringing their baby Nadine, now an actor and the artistic director of Carlos Bulosan Theatre.

Many influences shaped Villasin's political activism. A brilliant student who skipped grades in high school, she graduated from the prestigious University of the Philippines when she was 15, with a Bachelor of Science in Foreign Service.

She earned a French government scholarship for the Sorbonne and studied in Paris for four years. Living in the Latin Quarter with Algerian and Vietnamese students at the height of the Algerian war and the French counter-insurgency in Vietnam, Villasin learned about cultural awakening, rebellion and anti-colonialism. When the Philippines fell under a dictatorship a few years later, it was clear to her that resistance was the only option.

Friends and colleagues remember Villasin as a "determined, courageous fighter" who is "larger than life," "funny," "lively" and a "highly skilled organizer."

"If you're ever in trouble, or you have a real challenging job to do, Fely is someone you would want to be with you, on your team," says Geline Avila of Oakland, California, who was the national coordinator of the U.S.-based Coalition Against the Marcos Dictatorship in the '80s.

Villasin worked with Avila in the coalition's national office in the San Francisco Bay Area, helping plan and direct the activities of the opposition movement in the U.S. and Canada.

Returning to Toronto after Marcos' ouster, she devoted much of her time to Intercede and the Carlos Bulosan Theatre. She also traveled frequently to the Philippines, building ties with the women's movement and the democratic left in the country.

Overflow crowds came to pay their final respects at the closed-casket viewing at Scott Funeral Home in Mississauga. Friends and community leaders took to the front to speak warmly of Villasin. In accordance with a tradition that Villasin would have loved, some visitors brought platters of Filipino delicacies for the mourners.

Distraught domestic workers wept openly but vowed to finish a project they had planned with Villasin, to honor her memory, reported Genie Policarpio, a woman Fely mentored at INTERCEDE.

"Fely was a devoted mother, and a relentless advocate for justice. She lived her life well, was an avid movie-goer, and was a fun and caring person to be with," says Martha Ocampo, her best friend in Toronto.#

Rene Ciria-Cruz is an editor at Pacific News Service/New America Media and a satirist for Filipinas Magazine.

FELY IN BERNICE'S EYES

The first time I actually met and interacted with Fely was when INTERCEDE started the first advocacy workshop six years ago. I was one of the participants and she did the orientation and facilitation of the workshop.

After I completed the workshop, Fely asked me if I would be interested to sit on INTERCEDE Board of Directors which I gladly accepted. I sat on the board for one year and with Fely's guidance, I started doing volunteer work within the Black Community. Then she gave me my big break when she encouraged me to apply for a job posting at INTERCEDE as a Counselor which I got .

During these times, I got the opportunity to know Fely on a personal, spiritual, and professional level. The longer I worked with her, the more I learned about her as a friend and as a person and there were times when I wished I could be like her. She was a tiny person with full of strength, courage, and integrity and most of all she was a fighter and an advocate of women's rights.

One of my fondest memories of her is her love for food. She enjoyed cooking and at the same time she enjoyed sharing it as well. Fely really knows how to appreciate food.

She lived her life gracefully and did things that make her happy. She was truly loved by staff members and will be truly missed by all.

*Congratulations to our 60/40 winner, Ms. Helen Federico, who won \$157.20,
holder of ticket no.:102, drawn on December 3, 2006.*

JSW Profile

FELY VILLASIN

By Vicky Policarpio

Who is Fely Villasin? Many caregivers who come to INTERCEDE for assistance most likely know more the counselors than the brain and boss of INTERCEDE, Fely Villasin.

Fely Villasin, who was a true social worker co-founded organizations like Kababayan Community Centre, Kapisanan Philippine Centre, Carlos Bulosan Cultural Workshop just to name a few. She was always after the welfare of the oppressed minority group such as caregivers. She led countless rallies on the street to send messages to people in position of power. Never afraid to fight for women's rights, she successfully changed the mandate of INTERCEDE from a social organization to an organization that fights for the rights of the caregivers and domestic workers. She made sure that the Job Search Workshop is a workshop that provides training and information to the target groups served by INTERCEDE. A woman of principle, she discouraged accepting any forms of presents from people/clients who are provided assistance by the organization.

She touched many lives in different ways, including mine both as a person and as JSW facilitator. I was a caregiver who found inspiration from this special person, a facilitator, an advocate, a coordinator, a leader, a mentor and friend.

Your subtle guidance has immeasurably influenced all that I do, and all that I will ever do.

Your strong spirit has inspired me to be what I am, and that I will ever be.

And so it is that when I help anyone, your helping hand is there too.

When I ease the pain of someone, she owes it to you.

When I show a person a better way, either by a word or example,

you are the teacher who taught me to.

Because everything I do, reflects value learned from you.

For all that you are and all that I am now, thank you.

Free Tax Clinic at INTERCEDE's Office

234 Eglinton Ave. E., Ste. 405

on April 15, 2007, Sunday , 1:00 to 5:00 p.m.

****Ask your employer for your T4 now****

FREE JOB SEARCH WORKSHOP FOR CAREGIVERS & NEWCOMERS

WHEN: SUNDAY
February 4, 11, 18 & 25, 2007
March 4, 11, 18 & 25, 2007
April 1, 15, 22 & 29, 2007

TIME : 10:30 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.

WHERE: PROLEGAL
164 Eglinton Ave. E., 3rd Floor
(West of Redpath, Walking distance from Eglinton Subway station)

Please call (416)483-4554 ext. 30 or 21 to sign up.

Seating is limited.

Funded by Citizenship and Immigration Canada

INTERCEDE

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Genie Policarpio - Intake & Administrative Assistant

We wish to thank: Citizenship and Immigration Canada - ISAP and Job Search Program; the Municipality of Toronto CSP, and The Ontario Solicitor General's Office for their financial support.

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