

Three simple treasures from Prof. Tito P. Torralba

by Sandra V. Navarra

With his impressive volume of achievements and trailblazing attributes for every Filipino rheumatologist to emulate, Prof. Tito P. Torralba is truly a “man for all seasons”. A more intimate glimpse of the man is seen through 3 simple treasures I received from him.

My most memorable recollections of Dr. Torralba were during my younger years in the University of Santo Tomas (UST) Faculty of Medicine and Surgery. As dean for 7 glorious years, he was tireless, dynamic, and futuristic, allowing no room for mediocrity. Indeed, he made the most positive impact in charting the course of UST Medicine. During one of his light moments while musing over potential benefactors for Professorial Chairs, he called me to the Dean’s office and handed me an antenna-style pointer (*treasure #1*). What is now considered obsolete was one of the most useful necessities of a teacher at that time, symbolizing the dynamism and sense of fulfillment one can derive from being a dedicated teacher. He was a TEACHER to no end – continually challenging his student with more questions to every answer. I will remain forever his student.

He was – and continues to be – a man known to mince his every word, so that one must learn to read between the lines to fully grasp the depth and sincerity of his person. But when he does say “thank you”, it is certain to come from the heart. After a successful ASEAN/ Asia Pacific Rheumatology meeting where he was overall organizing chair and I was secretary-general - he presented me with an original sculpture (limited edition), a collector’s item by Italian master Barbella, as expression of his appreciation (*treasure #2*). This original work also symbolized Dr. Torralba’s personality signature – he paved, sculpted his way through the past 50 plus years in a constant SEARCH FOR EXCELLENCE - for himself, for Philippine Rheumatology, and for us his students.

When he returned from one of his foreign travels, he gave me a book entitled “Attila the Hun” (*treasure #3*) which embodied good leadership attributes. (For those not versed in history, Attila was a colorful leader in the 1st century who led the nomadic warrior Huns through one victorious conquest after another). Indeed, Dr. Torralba with his own style of LEADERSHIP – established national organizations and foundations for others to continue to build and grow on. As one of the pillars, he was largely instrumental in placing Philippine Rheumatology and Osteoporosis on the international map. In September 2008, during the Asia Pacific League of Associations for Rheumatology (APLAR) Congress in Yokohama – Prof. Torralba received the highest award in the region and again brought pride to the Filipino as APLAR Master.

Finally, it was no other than Dr. Torralba, who as medical director of the UST Hospital, established the “Trailblazer” legacy - so that by recognizing and celebrating the lives and examples of the likes of Mariano Alimurung, Hermogenes Santos and many others, young people may tread in their footsteps. Indeed, Prof. Tito P. Torralba has once again outdone himself – as trailblazer of all trailblazers!