

Sacrifice without regrets: Thank you, Dad

Written by BY SEN. BEN PANGELINAN
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A tribute to a life, lived with love for us on his passing

MY DAD never spoke of the sacrifices he made, and most of what I know was passed on to me from others. Like many Chamorro families, every person has their place in the family – especially the children. And with his firm rules at hand, there were very few times any of my two sisters and one brother became adventurous beyond our limits, including asking questions when we knew it was not our place to know the answers.

There were times when I deduced the information for myself and times Mom was willing to share a little bit more when, over the years, I came to see a picture of all my dad's decisions that remained untold. These were decisions that shaped our lives for the better, but his in a much different way. If you asked him, he would say that because our lives were better, so was his.

He had an interest in medicine and most certainly had the abilities. After the war, he was chosen by the Navy government for training and employment. From what I can gather, he was selected to come to Guam from Saipan for the dental officer training school. The school was established to train local citizens as dental officers for the Trust Territories. He successfully completed the program and returned to Saipan to begin practicing. I never really knew what he did before that first life-changing event.

He became missing from our everyday lives, and for what seemed like a very long time it was just mom, my two sisters, and my baby brother at the house. When we asked mom where was "Tang," she would soothe us with, "Soon ... we will be together soon."

He had quit his job as a dental officer and moved to Guam so he could better support us and to prepare a place for us in Guam. He had given up his chosen profession of dentistry and began working in construction, because it was the job he could get. This was another life-changing decision for my dad that changed our lives as well.

We joined him in Guam, where his first rule was, "We came here to give you a better education. Study hard, do well in school, and do not bring shame to your family." And off to work he went, every day.

Growing up, I met more people who knew my dad from his previous life. Some of my friends, also having moved from Saipan to Guam, shared how they used to be scared when they went to see him for dental work.

I remember during one Sunday Mass, Father Lee – in the middle of the sermon – said, "I want to say hello to my doctor ... welcome, Francisco," addressing my dad. I stayed for a short while after Mass, and he began to fill in more pieces of my dad's life, which my dad rarely ever talked about.

One day while rummaging through some of my dad's things, I came across some instruments.

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Not knowing what they were, I searched in the encyclopedia and found out they were all dental instruments. I finally got up enough courage to ask him to explain them to me and why he had them. He just said they were from a long time ago and were not important now.

Throughout the years, I finally fully understood what he had, what he gave up, and why he made the decisions he made. After leaving the field of dentistry, he led a hard life working in construction for many years and then in the maintenance shop of a shipping company until he retired. It was far different from his white coat days at the dental office and dispensary.

Just a few years ago, I asked him if he ever regretted the change and the hard life it brought to him. Wisely, he said the purpose of his life was to make sure he gave us the opportunities to make ours better, and because we all have taken those opportunities, he said, "How can I regret that? No ... no regrets."

Then he said, "I hope that you have done the same, son, and that the changes you have made in your life and the work that you have done have given opportunities for others to make their lives better."

Thank you, Dad. I love you, and I am proud of you. I hope you will see that in my life, I am my dad's son.

Adios, Tang, and tell Nang we still miss her and love her.

(Editor's note: Francisco Pangelinan, the father of Sen. Ben Pangelinan, died yesterday. Marianas Variety extends its condolences to Sen. Pangelinan and his family.)