

“Hitch Your Wagon to the Stars” The Saga of a Tomasino Family The Ferrers

By Primo Andres

It is not too often that we see a family with six physicians especially when five of them graduated from the same medical school. The Ferrers is such a family and what is even more amazing is how they got there.

Let us begin our story with a young girl named Constanca Orenca Asperin. Conching, as she was known to her family and closed friends, was born on June 19, 1901 and grew up in Agoon, La Union raised by very poor parents who could barely afford to send her through



Constanca Asperin Ferrer

primary school. Her dream of becoming a doctor someday drove her to study through the wee hours of the night under the dim light of an oil lamp. She graduated valedictorian of her 7th grade class at age 15 and became a “model teacher” that others came to observe.

Pursuing her ambition, she moved to Manila to attend high school. She worked as secretary to the General Manager of the National Waterworks and Sewerage Authority (NAWASA) “winning her job over other well-coiffed applicants”. Undeterred by the challenges in her life, she enrolled in night classes taking pre-medical courses only to find out later that she could not go on to pursue her ambition as there was no night school in Medicine. She shifted to Education at the University of Manila and became a teacher of English and Dramatics at the National University. It was there that she met and fell in love with a struggling law student, Narciso Ferrer, from Mangatarem, Pangasinan and they got married in 1926. They raised nine children in the next fifteen years, losing two of them in infancy.

When WWII broke out, Narciso, who was a Colonel in the Philippine Army, was incarcerated by the Japanese. That left her single handedly fending for the family selling rice in the black market buying it in Cabanatuan and bluffing her way through Japanese check points, risking her life to feed her starving family, actually getting caught once and would have lost her life were it not for the intervention of a kind Japanese officer. The war took its toll on Narciso though and he remained sickly even following the war and finally succumbing to cancer in 1973.

Constanca was a pillar of strength and the source of

inspiration to her children encouraging them to study hard and to “take up a high course like Medicine so that they would not have to worry about money when they got older”. “Nothing is impossible if you but try” was her response when the children would mention the obstacles that were almost impossible to overcome. She gathered the Japanese war notes that represented her savings and bought an empty lot in Sampaloc that was close to several schools and built a three story wooden house. She leased out a three door apartment on the ground floor and opened a dormitory on the third floor and the family occupied the second floor.

She promised to her ailing husband that she would pursue her ambition to become a doctor through her children. They mortgaged everything and owed everybody in the neighborhood, “even employing friends to help find loan sharks in order to pay for her children’s tuition fees on a timely manner” as written by Dr. Antonio Ferrer in his farewell letter to his mother. He also recalled how he and his mother could only walk to Ateneo elementary school while



Letter of Dr. Antonio A. Ferrer to his mother in the last moments of her life

his rich classmates were chauffeured on limousines but how she beamed with pride when he won all the school awards at the end of the year. She inculcated in her children the importance of education and she would wake them up at 3 o’clock in the morning so that they could study and prepare for school. One of her favorite slogans is “hitch your wagon to the stars”.

And hitch they did and so it was that the first born, Lilia, finished medical school. She immigrated to the United States and remitted most of her earnings to help the next child to finish medicine. The succeeding children perpetuated the cycle until all five of them graduated from the University of Santo Tomas College of Medicine, with their parents believing that it was “the best place to be educated in as doctors”. The youngest, Antonio, actually made it as a five-year full scholar of Metro Drug Corporation graduating in 1966, now a Golden Jubilarian. And the two who were not in medicine likewise did very well in their chosen profession. Indeed a parents’ dream come true through sheer diligence



Standing from left to right: Lilia Ibabao, Antonio Ferrer, Maria Theresa Rosen & Jesus Ferrer behind their mother, Constanca Asperin Ferrer



50th Wedding Anniversary of Narciso and Constanca Ferrer



Seated is the matriarch, Constanca Asperin Ferrer, standing from left to right: Lilia Ibabao, Rosemarie Schmidt, Ma. Theresa Rosen, Emma Marquez, Narciso Jr, Jesus, and Antonio Ferrer

and determination.

And this year, we would like to honor the entire Ferrer family with a special award, the *Benavidez Thomasian Loyalty Award*, beginning with our “Supermom”, Constanca Asperin Ferrer, who did not quite make it as a Doctor of Medicine but who definitely is deserving of an M.D. after her name, for Doctor of Motherhood.

Please join me in giving tribute to the amazing Tomasino family of Ferrer!



Mrs. Constanca Ferrer with some of her children and grandchildren

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| Narciso V. Ferrer + | Father |
| Constancia Asperin-Ferrer + | Mother |
| David A. Ferrer + | |
| Lourdes A. Ferrer + | |
| Lilia Ferrer-Ibabao, MD | First doctor |
| Emma Ferrer-Marquez | Businesswoman |
| Narciso A. Ferrer, Jr. | Economist |
| Jesus A. Ferrer, MD UST'58 | Forensic Pathology |
| Rebecca A. Ferrer, MD UST'57 | Psychiatry |
| Jose A. Ferrer | |
| Rosemarie Ferrer-Smith, MD UST'61 | Anesthesiology |
| Ma. Theresa Ferrer-Rosen, MD UST'65 | Anesthesiology |
| Antonio A. Ferrer, MD UST'66 | Anesthesiology |
| Florentino Ibabao, MD UST'51 (inlaw) | Surgery |