

Sunday Variety



WELCOME THE SHEEP, GOAT, RAM PG 12

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The Bubble Era

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What happens "If You Give a Donkey the White House."



FREDE IS MOM AND NANA, TOO: CENTRAL TO OUR FAMILY LIFE

// I TINAOTAO
MARIANAS

By Rlene Santos Steffy



Frede and grandchildren, from left: Megan, Cinie, Jac'Lyn, Jessi, Frede, Franki, Danni Jo and Tara. Second row, from left: Jonah, Maile, Charli. Back row: Phil and Alec. Not shown: Bob, Bill, Spence, Senator and Savannah.

Loing Souder explained in my last two articles how her Nana's wisdom taught her a great deal. This week it's about the wisdom of my Nana, the central figure in our lives. My 83-year-old Mom, Frederica "Frede" Flores Santos is now Nana and we are doing all we can to keep her active. We are very fortunate that she never had bad habits to haunt her in her old age. She has inherited long-life genetics. The Floreses in her generation live well into their 80s and some almost to a hundred years old.

Mom, who has reached the age to be Nana, goes to aerobic classes at the Agana Pool Tuesdays through Fridays and rides her stationary bike every day for five to 15 minutes. I remember being with her when visiting a chiropractor who told her the condition of her spine was off the charts. Well, it's not her genes that caused that. Mom enjoyed life in Saipan at their Chalan Kiya ranch and climbed trees and ran all over the ranch and enjoyed the animals there. Their property butted up against Susupe Lake and she has described their ranch as if it was the Garden of Eden. It provided all the food for their growing family.

Nana's spinal damage was the result of an adventure when she was 50. She jumped off the roof of the house to the ground. That's right, our own Evel Knievel. Mom! What on earth possessed you to do that? "I wanted to see if I could still jump like I used to." Like you used to? "But that time it hurt very much. I grabbed my head after I landed on the ground it hurt so bad." And you can be sure that she

didn't see anyone about that pain. So, that is why Nana's spine condition is off the charts! She didn't mind the pain because it never hurt before. Ai Adai, all those years of jumping has caught up with her.

Nana was juicing before it became a healthy trend. She defined recycling before it became a law, she is a WWII survivor, born and raised in Saipan where she acquired her love for the outdoors. Nana said her mother told her to plant a tree every day. Every day! Did my Nanang Tamuneng know about global warming and was trying to prevent it on Guam? Well, we don't know, but we do know that my Mom listened to her Nana. For as long as I can remember, Mom was outside planting something, or raising animals. She even had the Filipino contractors build a small duck pond so that the ducklings had a place to bathe. She was also our Ol' MacDonald.

I think that Mom would have been happy living in a tree house. I was a teenager then and would go down to the valley or behind the house to kiss her good bye on my way out. I was amazed at how happy she was. She wore a bandana to keep the sweat off her face and hair tied back, hat on top of that, long-sleeved shirts to protect her from the sun, baggy pants so she wouldn't scrape her legs, and rain boots to protect her feet from all the - you got it - animal droppings. I was always shocked at her choice of colors and patterns. Mom was wearing colorful psychedelic prints and headscarves' before Pucci became a

designer. Much like Maile's psychedelic taste as a child. Oh how I remember Tara dreading to leave the house unless I changed Maile's choice of clothes. Oddly enough, Maile had the same pleased look on her face that Mom had.

So now that Mom is Nana, it's natural for her adult children to be protective of our aging parent. We've learned that protecting Mom's dignity, which means to allow her to decide how she wants to live out the rest of her life, is the greatest sign of love and respect we can give her. Mom has set a great example. She took care of her aging mother and her father's loyal houseboy Rusai until his family took him back to Yap, where he died and was buried. She was heartbroken because she didn't see him off. She wasn't informed because she was not his next of kin. Maybe not by blood, but Nana was Rusai's next of kin for all her life. With her Nana, Mom wasn't at the hospital for Nana's surgery because Mom was delivering our youngest brother Frank. Nana died within days of Frank's birth. It was a great blow to Mom not to have been there for her Nana even when she was delivering a baby. She wanted Nana to see her baby.

Mom told me tearfully one day, "All I want is to have my kids and grandkids around." And that is what she gets. She was excited for every birth of a grandchild and great-grandchild and couldn't stand to be alone after Dad died. So, one day she said to me, "Rlene, give me the baby at night and I will bring him home every morning

before I go to work. You didn't give Tara to me except for a little, but not Maile, not at all. Please give me the baby."

So, when Spencer was around 15 months old, I nursed him, bathed him and got him ready to sleep over at Nana's. She brought him back before heading to work at Bob's. She'd let Spence in the house and remind him that she'd be back to pick him up after work.

Nothing gives her more pleasure than a visit from her children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren and we all stop by almost daily, especially when we are near or passing her house even if it's for a short visit. We have to start making appointments for her meal dates because everyone wants to take her to lunch or dinner. She always says, "Ai, I just ate." I tell her to go anyway and enjoy their company.

The growing list of Nana Lovers includes my husband Bob, Phil's fiancée Debbie who loves Nana more like a sister than a sister-in-law, and Frank's wife Tracy for all they do for Nana. And, my son-in-laws, Paul Packbier and John Lizama who call her Nana and show her love and respect.

She told me that her friends compliment her and ask, "Frede what did you did you do to raise them that way?" and Nana said, "I don't know how to answer them." I said, "Tell them it's because our father loved you very much. He was our life example. But it's you too, Mom, you showed us by your example that it's our obligation to take care of our parents - but it's also because we all love you."