

PASSAGE



**ROMEEO B. ESPIRITU, MD**  
1931 to 2006

PHILIPPINE ophthalmology has lost one of its pillars. Dr. Romeo B. Espiritu, chairman of the Philippine Board of Ophthalmology and founding president of the Vitreo-Retina Society of the Philippines, died on May 7. He was 75. He left behind his wife Bella, sons Cesar, Noel, and Eric, and their families.

Considered among the Filipino giants in ophthalmology and the leading subspecialist in retina, Dr. Espiritu had a distinguished record as a physician and educator. Only last year, at the Philippine Academy of Ophthalmology's observance of the 60th year of organized ophthalmology in the country, he was bestowed the Dr. Geminiano de Ocampo Outstanding Researcher in Ophthalmology Award and the PAO Ophthalmic Educator Award. Last December, the University of the Philippines Medical Alumni Society also honored him as Outstanding Educator.

Dr. Espiritu served as president of the Philippine Society of Ophthalmology from 1972 to 1974 and the Philippine Academy of Ophthalmology and Otolaryngology from 1984 to 1985. He also served as regional secretary of Asia-Pacific Academy of Ophthalmology from 1978 to 1979. He founded the Vitreo-Retina Society of the Philippines and chaired the department of ophthalmology in three hospitals.

As an educator, Dr. Espiritu was well loved and respected by his students, residents, and fellows who trained under him.

Dr. Espiritu was also a prolific writer and researcher. He authored or coauthored six books in ophthalmology and more than 80 papers published in scientific journals, the last of which—*Correlation of ocular ultrasonography with histopathologic findings in intraocular retinoblastoma*—appears in this issue.

## Gentle, Simple, Humble

*Delivered in behalf of Dr. Salvador Salceda by Dr. Pacita Ramos-Salceda during the necrological service given by the Philippine Academy of Ophthalmology, Philippine Board of Ophthalmology, and Ospital ng Maynila, Loyola Memorial Chapel, May 9, 2006.*

BADDOY cannot be here tonight per doctors orders, but he would like to convey to Bella and family this message.

There are a few people who have truly touched Badoy personally and professionally; one of them is Romy Espiritu.

Romy's brilliance is only surpassed by his intellectual honesty, transparency, and integrity—rare commodities these days. His friendship is genuine and enduring, slow to take offense and generously forgiving. Truly a gentle, simple, and humble human being, he is untouched by fame and fortune, not one to wear on his sleeves recognition, honors, and trophies bestowed on him by his peers

and grateful disciples.

Bella, be consoled by the legacy he leaves behind—a life well-lived. Truly, he made a difference, and we he left behind are better off as human beings because of him. He lives on in the life and success of his myriad students and colleagues he nurtured.

Now, in the glow of the after-life, we feel his all-embracing love.

Thank you Bella for sharing him with us all.

Thank you Romy—and until we meet again. May God hold you in the palm of His Hand!

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# The Gentle Giant

*Delivered by Ma. Dominga B. Padilla, MD President, Philippine Academy of Ophthalmology*

I HAD a difficult time organizing my thoughts on Dr. Romeo Espiritu for tonight's necrological service. I didn't quite know how or where to start. But I guess such a feeling is understandable given the greatness of the person in question.

I am one of the many students of ophthalmology who owe Dr. Espiritu so much. I am one of his "spiritual children" who looked up to him, not only as a teacher, a role model, and an inspiration, but also as a friend and an ally. And as I grew in years and experience, the years bringing as they did the inevitable joys and sorrows, victories and defeats that come with life, I grew to appreciate this man even more.

Dr. Romeo Espiritu was the "gentle giant" in many of our lives. He was a giant, not only in terms of physical stature, but especially in terms of what he had accomplished in his chosen field. These accomplishments need no elaboration or explanation. And yet "big" as he was, he was gentle. He was gentle not only because of his ready, wide smile and kind eyes, but more so because he had the distinctive air of the truly Great among us—that of true humility.

In a day and age where deceit abounds and nobility is difficult to find, even humility is suspect, and not surprisingly so. Because the "humility" we often encounter nowadays is false modesty, nothing more than vanity disguised, and therefore a lie. But with Dr. Romeo Espiritu, one came face to face with the real thing.

Three quotations immediately come to mind at this time. There is an old Chinese proverb that says "The higher the bamboo grows, the lower it can bend." Edmund Burke once said, "Great men are the guideposts and landmarks in the stars." While Henry Thoreau once wrote: "Humility, like darkness, reveals the heavenly lights." All these quotes aptly describe the man we remember tonight.

Dr. Romeo Espiritu was a bamboo tree as tall as one can imagine in the world called Philippine

Ophthalmology, but he never hesitated or grew tired of bending to accommodate his students and his colleagues. And even more than simply accommodate us, he guided us along our paths whenever we needed him; a steady and constant star on whom we could depend. And always, he encouraged our individual lights to shine. He took pride and joy in our accomplishments, like a doting father; never taking credit for any of it; even happy to take backstage, but proud just the same. He was always ready to praise us when we excelled, redirect our paths when we went astray, and even defend us when most seemed to be against us.

And this is how I shall remember him. This is how many of us will remember him.

The coming midyear meeting on May 20 is very special. Dr. Espiritu was very much involved in its preparation, particularly on the part on ethics. He was so involved that he even asked us to add a portion that he could discuss aside from being a panelist. He pointed out that it was missing, and indeed it was. And we did add the part. Unfortunately he will no longer be around to deliver this talk. We will, however, dedicate the entire meeting to his memory, and the message he would have wanted conveyed will still be shared in a special tribute to him at the start of the meeting. It is our hope that by doing so we would also set the right mood for the day. It is a simple gesture but one that we believe he would appreciate.

Finally to Dr. Espiritu I would like to say, "Thank you, sir." Thank you for the lessons, the wise counsel, the laughter, the hugs, the ready smile, and the twinkle in your eyes. Thank you for the all-out support, for your kind words, your constant encouragement. Thank you for never tiring of listening to our problems and for your repeated assurance that you will always be there for us when we need you.

Thank you Dear Dr. Espiritu, for the gift of your inspiration. Thank you.