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Dear classmates,

Have you ever wondered what's it like to venture into a world of unknown – leaving your love ones behind – to pursue your dreams and aspirations of a better future? That was the question I asked myself time and time again before I left my home town of Bais City for good; bound for Australia, a country abound with opportunities, now a place that's been home to me and my family for nearly 30 years. When I reflected back on my life after all those years, I can truly say that I have so much to thank for the many blessings that came my way through the grace of a loving and merciful God. Life hasn't always been that easy though. I have experience more than my share of failures, of botched opportunities, of letdowns from relatives and friends which at times left me with a feeling of hopelessness and despair. But somehow these experiences did not have lasting adverse effects on my life; rather they strengthen my resolve not to commit the same mistakes all over again. A great man once said: "Our greatest glory is not in never falling, but how we rise up each time we fall".

I really felt proud to know that many of our classmates have so far led very successful lives. As for me I have lived in struggle street for far too long than I care to admit that I would be hard-pressed to consider my life any more than ordinary. However to my credit, I made quite significant headway in my career in later years which made me think that perhaps I haven't fared too badly either. I believe that most of us can take comfort if we associate success with happiness and fulfilment in life rather than purely on wealth. With such a mindset, then what really matters is not how successful you are but how significant you are to others. What will matter is every act of integrity, compassion, courage or sacrifice that enriched, empowered or encouraged others to emulate your examples. I once read a story of a Mexican doctor who migrated to the U.S.; where he started work in a farm tilling the soil with his hand but later went on to become an eminent brain surgeon and a professor of medicine. At one time a reporter asked him a question of how he felt if the surgery was unsuccessful. He replied: "It doesn't matter whether you're successful or not. What matters is that you gave the world your best and the best will come back to you".

My dear classmates, Joel's words on the introduction of life stories have inspired me to share with you my life story. It's not much but it's the sum total of what I've become from when you knew me from high school. The great man, Sir Winston Churchill had said the following after leaving public life: "History will be kind to me for I intend to write my life story". I hope that you've feel that way for me as well and may it strengthen the bond between us after knowing more about me.

I would like to start my narrative from where we left off – after our high school graduation. As we all know, that was the year 1970; Nixon was returned to the White House for a second term, the Carpenters won the Grammy for Best New Artist, and the Chinese celebrated the year of the Dog. For me though it was decision time; I wasn't really focused then on what career I intended to pursue to prepare my life for the future. I guess I always had an inclination towards a law degree; after all, my father is a lawyer. If my memory still serves me right my hometown friends had much to do with my eventually becoming an engineer. At that time a number of my friends were already studying in Cebu City, and the lure of adventure and the excitement of a bigger city were too much for me to resist. When we got to Cebu one of my friends suggested I take up engineering at San Carlos University. Although engineering was one of the courses I had in mind it made me feel uncomfortable to think that I couldn't quite figure out what Mr. Lachica meant by saying the words "if and only if" every time he explains a trigonometric theorem to us. Anyway I somehow convinced myself to give it a go; I thought that I can always shift to another course if the going really gets tough. And as it came to past my fears of Mr. Lachica's words turned out to be unwarranted as I muddled through 6 years of study and without much fanfare

I earned myself a double degree in mechanical and electrical engineering. Admittedly I did have some fun along the way; those beautiful nursing students in Velez Medical College were continually the source of distractions. Hoo boy! It didn't help when some of them told me that I have such a beautiful smile and made it abundantly clear that nurses were really meant for engineers as partners in life. When I mentioned this to my wife she was quick to reply: "In your dreams, kiddo". Ay, chihuahua! I guess I must have learned enough of the fundamental principles of engineering for I managed to pass both the board exams for mechanical and electrical engineers, albeit only just.

My professional career started in 1977 when I landed a job as Electrical Engineer in a sugar mill in Manjuyod which just started operation in that year. The knowledge and experience I gained from working there for almost 5 years puts me in good stead for the next phase of my career. During that time I got married to Lilia Bajamunde and we were blessed with our first son in 1980. The opportunity to migrate to Australia came to us when my elder sister married an Australian whom she met in Manila then later moved to Sydney with him. We were quite fortunate that our application for migration was approved after a year because at that time Australia wanted to take in more migrants to boost its very small population. Together with my wife and 18-month old son I arrived in Sydney in 1981 to start our new life.

After many years of living in Australia, I think it is fair for me to say that "I've been there, done that", whenever I got myself into discussions of how we got started and what were the difficulties we have to face. I told my story many times to my relatives arriving as new migrants in the hope of making them realise that success doesn't just happen, they really have to work hard to attain it.

Australia in the early 1980s was a very different place to live compared to what it is now. Back then most of the migrants came from Europe; British, Polish, Greeks and Italians were the dominant groups. If you are of Asian appearance you'll stick out like a sore thumb amongst people of the Caucasian race. Yes, the colour of my skin made me generally felt inferior, perhaps because I perceived myself to be one during that time. Fortunately today Asians are treated as equals in all respect. Initially my biggest hurdle was to understand the Australian accent. Yes, I heard you say what could be so hard about that - it's plain English. But how the Australians pronounced their words and the use of their slang can be quite confusing to the uninitiated. I almost got knock back on the job that I applied for because I was wrong in interpreting the instructions during qualifying exams. I was fortunate that the examiner was a very considerate person after learning of my situation. That's how I got my first job as a power plant operator in a company employing more than 10,000 people at that time. I stayed in that job for about two years until the station was completely shut down. After that I was transferred to the system control centre, a place where all the power system operations was centrally controlled. The control centre was equipped with the most advanced technology available, all controlled by a mainframe computer system. It was there that I got my first exposure to computer systems, both operating system and application programs. Over the next three years, I was involved in maintaining and developing the application programs which performs the task of dispatching electricity to all industrial, commercial and domestic users. Although I was doing highly complex technical work the path for career advancement was very limited because I didn't have the required qualification. I made several attempts to have my engineering qualifications recognised, but all I got was an Australian qualification equivalent to a trade certificate - like that of electricians, carpenters or plumbers. The Institution of Engineers - the body charged with making the assessment - advised me that the only way that I would be able to work as a professional engineer is to study all over again at the university then pass all the qualifying exams. Luckily within a year I was offered a place at the University of Technology, Sydney to study electrical engineering, initially obtaining a credit of half-way through the course. The 4 years of part-time study were the most difficult and challenging times of my life. It's hard to understand what I've been through unless you've actually been through it yourself. I think I would have given up my study along the way if my wife haven't put up with all the hardship of keeping the family afloat while I spent all my spare time to study in the university library.

When I look back on my life during all those years I can say with all honesty that it was a continuous struggle to make ends meet. However with very prudent management of our income and expenses we were able to realise our dream of owning our own home. The Australian government is quite generous in helping out people like ourselves in securing our own home by giving us \$10,000 cash and the costs associated with taxes and others were waived. The arrival of our second son in 1984 was a most wonderful blessing for our family. Without the stress associated with part-time study my outlook and demeanour in life gradually changed to a much more positive and optimistic view. I was feeling pretty confident that I was now ready to compete with my colleagues at work on a level playing field.

My career started to take-off in 1991 when I finally got a job as a professional engineer in the planning section of our company. Because I already possessed considerable experience with computer software development, it didn't take me long to obtain a senior role within the group.

During the 1990s, the electricity supply industry worldwide made a very significant shift towards breaking the monopoly structure to give way to a competitive market in all facets of electricity supply. This was started in California then followed by PJM (Pennsylvania/New Jersey/Maryland). A study commissioned by the Australian government has claimed that a saving of more than a billion dollars a year could be realised if the market was opened to competition. Thus Australia came on board the gravy train of competitive electricity markets. The market in Australia took nearly 5 years to implement and for all that time I was at the forefront of designing the framework right up to the trial runs. We had the advantage of avoiding all the flaws that led to the melt-down of the market in California in 2001, while adopting the best features of the PJM markets. After 8 years of operation the Australian market is considered to be one of the most efficient competitive markets in the world. Our system became a model for many countries in the world to follow. We were being sought after to provide consultancy work in China, Hongkong, Vietnam and Malaysia. The competitive electricity market now implemented in Metro Manila was based on our design.

Nowadays I'm mainly involved in planning the future operation of power system to make sure that we have sufficient capacity to meet the demands from all users of electricity at the cheapest possible cost. In simple terms my job is to keep the lights on. I'm now in a position where I can retire within 5 years and maybe take on part-time consulting work after I turned 60 or earlier. Or maybe just retire altogether and like Phil fade away quietly. My two sons are now both married, and I already have two grandchildren from my younger son – a girl aged 4 years and a baby boy, just 6 month old. My wife and I are truly blessed with both our sons having fairly good jobs and a home of their own. Our eldest son Sheldon now works as a lawyer in one of the top law firms in Sydney. He graduated law with a summa cum laude which is a testament that we Filipinos can be the best of the best when the opportunity arises. Our younger son Shaun is an IT System Engineer.

Australia is really a wonderful place to live and we love this adopted country of ours. And who can blame us? The people are cheerful, extrovert, quick-witted and unfailingly obliging; our cities are safe and clean and nearly always built on water; the food is excellent; the beer is cold and the sun nearly always shines. Life doesn't get much better than this.

Bye as for now. I hope and pray that someday, someplace we will have a chance to reminisce the good old days right next to each other and have a good laugh.

Thanks for the memories.

Your classmate,

Enrico Garcia