

## EULOGY FOR HAYDEE YORAC \*

*Minita V. Chico-Nazario \*\**

At many necrological rites, eulogies are like fish stories. Mean people are suddenly remembered as good-natured, self-centered people as generous, sinners as saints. Positive traits are exaggerated, negative ones swept under the rug.

But today, it is not necessary to stretch the truth. With Haydee, what you saw was what you got.

In St. Paul's first letter to the Corinthians, he says of love, "Love does no evil, it does not rejoice over wrongdoing but rejoices with the truth. It bears all things, believes all things, endures all things. Love never fails."

If there is any person I have known in my life who can honestly be described by these lines, it is Haydee.

On this gathering in Haydee's memory, I will speak of how this amazing woman — who was among the most intelligent people I have ever known — used her brilliance in service of her love of country and her love for others.

I got to know Haydee at the University of the Philippines law school. At that time, though, she was often more interested in what was going on outside the classroom than what was being discussed inside of it. But in spite of this, and to no one's surprise, she placed eighth in the bar examinations. After law school, I worked as a legal researcher for Judge Pedro J. Bautista of the then Court of First Instance of Pasay City. When Judge Bautista asked me to invite other graduates of the University of the Philippines College of Law, I immediately thought of Haydee. Of course, Haydee, being Haydee, was admitted. But she was seldom at her desk, and I worried that she would miss her deadlines for cases kept piling up on her desk.

There was one time, I remember, when she had a stack of six or seven cases submitted for decision and pending actions. I pointed this out to her, and in typical Haydee fashion, she told me not to worry about it. The next day, she planted herself in

---

\* Delivered September 21, 2005.

\*\* Associate Justice, Supreme Court of the Philippines.

her desk at seven o'clock in the morning, and didn't move out until I left at around seven that night. The next morning, she had a neat pile of reports on all seven cases, which all later met with Judge Bautista's approval. Even then, Haydee did not know how to fail.

Sadly, she stayed a little more than six months. She would later describe herself as a "natural-born anarchist," and I think that even then, her temperament sought the passion and action that advocacy would provide which the judiciary, by its very nature, could not.

It is as an advocate that most of our countrymen know her, and respect her, and hold her in the highest regard. She called evil by its name and spoke the truth even when her life and liberty were on the line.

Haydee refused to play games with people and she was adamant that she "didn't have time for nonsense like politics and petty disputes." What she *did* have time for was people and her country. When we stop to think about it, Haydee's preoccupation in life was her country and her fellowmen. She was amazingly attuned to the needs of our times.

She believed, with the faith that only the truly pure of heart can possess, "that the light of truth is the most beautiful thing, and that it is worthy for a person to sacrifice one's life for it." Her courage and brilliance magnified this light so that it shone like a beacon across the dark and troubled beaches of the martial law years.

One of my lasting images of Haydee goes back to the 1970's. It is an image of Haydee surrounded by a crush of demonstrators with arms locked around the arms of other people, pushing forward with all their might to stop the military vans from driving towards the demonstrators.

I see an image of Haydee standing at the mass burial grounds of our fallen brothers and sisters during those darkest years of our country.

I see Haydee's image marching through the streets alongside people of various cultures and persuasions who had gathered to demand the return of democracy to our land.

I see Haydee's image inside a rotten cell where she had to suffer imprisonment for three months for the unbending spirit she had displayed in fighting for freedom and justice.

She took setbacks in stride, small and large ones alike. One time, we were having lunch together and she expressed to me her frustrations over the conditions of our country. She saw the seeming hopelessness of the situation. Eventually, Haydee just shrugged her shoulders and remarked "Well, making a difference is enough."

Haydee's commitment to the ideals of freedom, justice, and humanity also extended to her intellectual work and teaching. This is reflected in the type of courses she taught during her fifteen years or so at the University of the Philippines. Courses like Political law, Constitutional Law, International law. She had inspired countless students over the years. One of Haydee's particular contributions was her guiding of her students during their early academic careers and through their post-graduate studies. I know her students will sorely miss her enthusiasm, her intellectual insight.

She was a woman that was non-judgmental. She accepted people largely for what they were and for who they were. Her many friendships crossed the barriers of social position and educational background. This trait was to deepen her affinity with people from oppressed regions and cultures. She was a passionate empathizer with people who were not free and she expressed this in her actions.

Haydee loved her family, her siblings, nephews and nieces. And oh, how she adored her dogs! And she let them *know* she loved them. Since almost all of her siblings and her mother are staying abroad, she would grasp at every opportunity to visit them as frequently as she could.

Haydee was a master of a thousand small kindnesses. During her three-day wake at the Santuario de San Antonio, Makati, all testimonials about her never failed to mention the small and big things Haydee had done for them. I myself was a recipient of such generosity. Not in financial terms but in emotional support and professional advancement.

As a friend, how can I describe the particular warmth and quality of Haydee's friendship? It's her thoughtfulness at unexpected moments. It's her out of the blue calls when you were down in the dumps. It's simply when you had not seen her for quite some time and she'd greet you with a big "HELLO," give you a simple gift from abroad where she had just been.

She charmed us with her own personal fashion movement — her trademark messy bubbled haircut which we believe she was most comfortable with. With her famous hairstyle, she cut quite a figure in the crowd.

Outrageous? Sometimes. Inappropriate? Rarely. Cool? I think so. Dull? *Never!* Haydee had a unique sense of humor. Her dry observations accompanied by chuckles often provoked gales of laughter from people around her.

It is because of all the above things about Haydee that her friends and colleagues in the profession — are grieving today.

There is no need for me to reiterate the praises heaped upon her by a grateful nation for the dedication, the passion, and the professional zeal with which she served as an advocate, teacher, Commission on Elections Commissioner, Chair of the National

Unification Commission, and Presidential Commission for Good Government chair. Yet it would not have occurred to Haydee that she would be so popular, that she would be missed by so many. And to us who knew her, the weight of her loss is heavier to bear, for even as she was achieving so much in the public front, she always had time for friends. Many feared her plain-speaking and her brutal frankness, but between friends, truth is a priceless commodity and honesty an indispensable prerequisite, and she had both in abundance.

All of us have a hero — “beautiful, brilliant, sublime, but implacable, fierce and demanding.” Haydee was and — is — mine. *In all*, she was a consummate public servant, an exemplary lawyer, and an unflagging defender of human rights. She was a Christian without hypocrisy, an ally without treachery, a friend without artifice. The life she led was full; spent among the places, institutions, and people she loved.

This woman, who is lying here, while she was alive, never stopped trying to make a difference for the love of her country. She was herself a very troubled woman inside. Contained deep within her was something so intensely painful that nothing and no one, it seems, could ease it for a very long time. And our hearts and understanding go to her. It is perhaps a terrible paradox that Haydee’s pain was part of her driving force, her life force.

A light has gone out in the world, and it is a colder place with the passing of Haydee Yorac. Her death has stunned, bewildered and agonized our country. Her voice will no longer be heard, but her image as an incorruptible freedom fighter will continue to linger in the country’s corridors of power. We will miss her terribly, we all will. Sooner or later, we need to come to terms with her death and accord her the great measure of dignity she deserves. While she gave much to us, I’d like to believe that our various friendships with her gave her much happiness too. Her passing will not leave us in the dark, for she lit in the troubled hearts of this country an undying spark of hope that one day, we will once again be “the land of the morning.”

As you approach the throne of glory, my friend, we can say in the closing words of the atonement service:

Go get your bread with joy, and eat it;  
Drink your wine with a merry heart:  
For God has already accepted your works.

Peace to you dear friend! We bid you farewell!

- oOo -