

Several delegates to the International Conference on the Philippine Revolution held in Manila in August of 1996 wanted to know what happened to Jose Rizal's widow, Josephine Bracken, who got married to a Spanish mestizo from Cebu.

Thirty-nine years after interviews for the *Philippines Free Press* with her daughter Dolores and her sister-in-law Ana, we don't know much more about Rizal's *dulce estrangjera*.

(Editors' Notes: "*LA DULCE ESTRANJERA*" is the original title of this article from a book, "*SUMAD: Essays for the Centennial of the Revolution in Cebu*," 1999, by Erlinda K. Alburo. She is the chairperson of the Cebuano Studies Center of the University of San Carlos. This was reprinted in the *Yimby.com*, the forerunner of *mabuhayradio.com* in March 2001 .)

A diary that Josephine was supposed to have kept for the years 1895-1900 was supposedly lost. But Brendan Lynch, an Irish journalist who came to Cebu three months after the international conference to trace her whereabouts at the time she was reported to be giving those English lessons to the young Sergio Osmeña, thinks there was no such record.

Those among us readers who would play detective will accept the "stranger" in the phrase Rizal used to refer to her in "Mi Ultimo Adios", but the cynics would question the "sweet". Sen. Raul Roco himself, in a keynote lecture at the PEN National Conference in Cebu at the time of Lynch's visit, said that Josephine was a bar girl whose relationship with her foster father was probably far from innocent.

Other questions to ask: Was Josephine's miscarriage due to a fall down the stairs? (The horrible follow-up is: did Rizal push her during one of their quarrels? and inevitably: did they

quarrel violently at all?) Was Josephine really buried in a pauper's grave in Hong Kong (a suggestion vehemently denied by her daughter and her husband's family, who could easily afford a decent burial, especially with her brother-in-law Jose also in Hong Kong)? What kind of wife was she to Rizal and to the Cebuano Vicente Abad? What role did she play in the Revolution against Spain? Why did Rizal's sisters, except for Narcisa and possibly Choleng, not like her?

Imagining Josephine Bracken may not be that difficult for women.

Imagining Josephine Bracken (a surname her own daughter would misspell without the "c") may not be that difficult for women. Her return to Dapitan after seeing her foster father off in Manila we can accept as the only alternative to continuing to serve him as his "eyes", which would have been a boring if not stifling way to be. When she made the decision to stay, she was still a teen-ager of 19, and if she were considered flirtatious, it would have been for a natural vivacity.

To recall, Josephine was born in Victoria, Hong Kong on August 9, 1876, the youngest of five children to a British army corporal named James Bracken and the Irish Jane MacBride. Her mother died a few days after giving birth to her, and her father asked her childless godparents, George Taufer and his second wife (a Portuguese), to take her in. Josephine never again saw her father, who had left Hong Kong after retirement and died at the hands of robbers in Australia (according to one source).

At 7, Josephine also lost her godmother (whose name, Leopoldine, was added to her own). Shortly after Taufer got married for the third time, in 1891, Josephine ran away because she couldn't get along with his new wife. She sought shelter in a boarding house run by nuns, but was taken back after two months. From there, we don't know anything about her until the visit to Dapitan in 1895, which must have promised greater stability for her, three years after Rizal had settled there in exile.

The Cebuano Julio Llorente, who knew Rizal in Spain, suggested that Taufer see Rizal about the former's worsening cataracts. Later, Rizal was to say that both eyes were beyond saving. Perhaps it was this news, added to Josephine's intention to stay with Rizal and the marriage in Manila of a daughter by his first wife, that led the desperate Taufer to slash his wrist, and not so much (as suggested) in a fit of jealousy.

Rafael Palma writes that Josephine was not a remarkable beauty, but "had an agreeable countenance because of the childlike expression of her face, her profound blue and dreamy eyes and abundant hair of brilliant gold" (though she has dark hair in the photos). More probably, Rizal needed some consolation (besides that of philosophy). As Nick Joaquin puts it,

in line with the thinking of Rizal's biographer Ante Radaic, Josephine was "Rizal's last emotional involvement" that proved him a man at last.

Rizal used Josephine as an inspiration in a plaster statue of her reclining, and the short poem "A Josefina."

Rizal used Josephine as an inspiration in at least two works of art: a plaster statue of her reclining, and the short poem "A Josefina," which reads in translation: "Josephine, / Who to these shores came, / Searching for a home, a nest, / Like the wandering swallows, / If your fate guides you/ To Shanghai, China, or Japan, / Forget not that on these shores/ A heart beats for you." This poem he gave her on their first separation, when she accompanied Taufer to Manila on his way back to Hong Kong.

Rizal also wrote a letter to his mother dated March 14, 1895, introducing Josephine as one whom he was about to marry with, of course, Doña Teodora's consent. He writes: "Our relationship has been broken at her instance, because of the great many difficulties in our way. She is a complete orphan; she has no relatives except very distant ones . . . Please treat Miss Josephine as a person whom I greatly esteem and hold dear and whom I would not wish to see imperiled and abandoned." But it was with Narcisa that Josephine stayed, the rest of Rizal's family being suspicious and suggesting that she was a spy for the Spanish friars.

When Josephine returned to Dapitan after six months, they had Dona Teodora's permission to marry, which they could not do in church without a special dispensation from the Bishop in Cebu. She was Catholic, he was a Mason then, and the dispensation wasn't given. They married, as one account says, by holding hands in the presence of two witnesses. They stayed in an octagonal bamboo house just across Rizal's residence in Talisay, Dapitan. There, Josephine cooked for him and "turned the house into a love nest, stocking the pantry with preserves and pickles." This part we know from letters to Rizal's family that accompanied packages of food "prepared by the woman who lives in my house." The image of the sweet stranger we see in these letters, where Rizal avers that "she is good, obedient, and submissive" and that "when I reprove her she does not talk back."

The quarrels may have come much later, one of which, according to a 1966 article in the Free Press, was violent, leading to her miscarriage. The same article, written by L. Rebomantan, suggests that Rizal's days of consolation with Josephine were over and that his request for assignment to Cuba was also prompted by his unhappiness with her.

Josephine consoled Rizal with her letters during his jail days at Fort Santiago.

Josephine, however, continued to console him with her letters while he was on his way to the new assignment (via Spain) and during his jail days at Fort Santiago. In her letter of August 13, 1896, for example, she writes: "Love, I will love you ever, love, I will leave thee never, ever to me precious to thee, never to part, heart bound to heart, or never to say goodbye." (Quaint English that for a tutor in the language! And if you have viewed the movie Rizal sa Dapitan, that was the letter quoted.) Other letters typically included practical matters like sending his clothing or a hundred sweet santoles, which he loved, as well as cheese and lansones. During these months of waiting, she filled her time with tutoring in English and taking piano lessons from one of her 15 pupils.

As Rizal's widow she easily passed through rebel lines and brought some inspiration to the revolutionaries.

What do we glean of her life after Rizal? As Rizal's widow she easily passed through rebel lines and probably even brought some inspiration to the revolutionaries. Gen. Emilio Aguinaldo was reluctantly persuaded to admit Josephine into the military ranks, providing her with lessons in shooting and horseback riding. It was her suggestion to start a field hospital in the casa hacienda of Tejeros. When San Francisco de Malabon was captured by the Spaniards, Josephine, accompanied by her brother-in-law Gen. Paciano Rizal, left for Bay, Laguna, passing through forests and over mountains, many times barefoot and riding on a carabao. Of that period in her life we may ask: Did she join the Revolution to avenge Rizal's death, or for another personal reason like a sense of adventure that was lacking in her life before?

From Bay, she was summoned by the governor general, Camilo Polavieja. Given the general's ultimatum to leave the country or risk torture, Josephine left in May of 1897 and was once more in Hong Kong. She was not alone for long, though. One of the employees of Tabacalera there, Vicente Abad y Recio of Cebu City, became her second husband. A daughter, Dolores (who married the Ilocano Salvador Mina), was born in Hong Kong on April 17, 1900. When she was a year old, the family moved to the Philippines. Since Josephine died in 1902, Dolores does not have vivid memories of her aside from stories told by Josephine's in-laws, nor of her father Vicente, who died a year later of the same disease that claimed her mother's life, tuberculosis.

Vicente Abad y Recio of Cebu City, became her second husband.

Who is to say what Josephine's life was like after Rizal? Her sister-in-law Ana helps us in our imagining by describing Mrs. Abad as a very religious woman and Mr. and Mrs. Abad as a happy couple. There is a photograph, at least, accompanying a Free Press article of December 30, 1950, of the couple with a dedication at the back "to our dearest and affectionate Papa, from his loving Vincent and Josephine."

Josephine's brief stint as English tutor in both Manila and Cebu (where she taught the

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young Sergio Osmeña, though his biographer Vicente Albano Pacis doubts that he learned much from her) made it easier for Josephine to get a more stable job as public school teacher at the recommendation of Dr. David Barrows. But her ill health prevented her from working further. She had to go to Hong Kong to seek a cure.

Josephine died on March 15, 1902, where she was born. A small street is named in her memory somewhere in Quezon city, cornering España St. Her life story has yet to be written, in fiction, if nothing else is possible. That should be a challenge.

(Editor's Note: This piece was first reprinted in the Yimby.com in March 2001, per the permission of Dr. Alburo. This article was also read, discussed and dissected during the March 2001 meeting of the Philippine History Group of Los Angeles (PHGLA). Eventually the PHGLA, in cooperation with Filipino authors like Dr. Alburo and the history departments of several Filipino universities may rewrite, but not reinvent, Filipino history. This piece is a mere eye-opener on a new book about Jose P. Rizal, his life and loves. Readers who are serious students of Filipino history are invited to join this project that may eventually be termed as historic by itself.)

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