

By [Benjamin Maynigo](#)

I was about to write my column with a different theme when I heard the news that Maria Mabilangan Haley suddenly passed away due to an aneurysm. I immediately changed the topic and decided to pay tribute to her instead.

Editor's Note: For Facebook members, you can please see a photo

of Ms. Haley in this hyperlink,

<https://www.facebook.com/notes/benjamin-maynigo/maria-mabilangan-haley-model-in-the-strictest-sense/10150371901639804>

I never knew her until she made a surprising call one day. She introduced herself on the phone as she described her involvement with the presidential campaign of then Governor Bill Clinton of Arkansas. She invited me to an

event in New York and  
even guaranteed a photo-op with the governor. She also asked me to join the campaign and asked for names in the Filipino community whom she should call to help.

I remember mentioning David Valderrama who was then the first elected Filipino State Delegate (Assemblyman) in Mainland, U.S.A.; Gloria Caoile who was the assistant to the president of AFSCME (Association of Federal, State, County and Municipal Employees); and Belen Macaranas de la Peña, president of PACAS (Philippine American Culture and Arts Society). I told her why they were the right leaders to contact.

David Valderrama later on became one of the campaign managers targeting Asian Americans. Of course, he had to coordinate with Marilou (as many friends called her). Although the Table of Organization did not show, Marilou was indeed high up there in the Table of Power as far as the Clinton campaign and presidency is concerned. I learned this later as the campaign was in progress.

Meanwhile, there was also a presidential election in the Philippines. Then Secretary of National Defense Fidel Ramos who was endorsed by President Cory Aquino just got elected and was going to be inaugurated on June 30, 1992

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Helping Dave in his duties, I came up with an idea that I thought would endear Mr. Clinton to the Filipino-American voters and automatically elevate him to an almost presidential status. The idea was for Presidential Nominee Clinton to send a message to the new Philippine President Fidel Ramos, appoint Dave as his Ambassador to the Inauguration and to hand carry Governor Clinton's message.

Dave presented it to Maria Haley who liked it and referred it to Tony Blake, Clinton's foreign and national security affairs adviser. The latter, who became President Clinton's National Security Adviser, immediately arranged for his deputy to meet with Dave and me at the Capital Hilton in Washington, D.C., where we discussed the plan.

Maria Haley was a woman of action, a team player who knew how to leverage power or influence in achieving specific goals as shown in later years.

The fact that the incumbent Secretary of Foreign Affairs was Raul S. Manglapus at the time of the Presidential Inauguration was of course, a big bonus to our plan. He was already a friend of David Valderrama. Ramos ran and won under the banner of Manglapus' political party, NUCD. But most importantly, it turned out that Maria Haley and Secretary Manglapus were already friends' even years earlier. The fact was, the latter had introduced her to her husband.

I accompanied Dave to the Philippines. With the help of our friends there, Dave was treated Ambassador-like both at the Inauguration where we were seated at the stage and at the Inaugural Ball where Dave personally handed over Clinton's message which was drafted by Tony Blake with the help of Maria Haley. Cabinet Secretary Elaine Chao headed the delegation representing President George H.W. Bush.

This happening got substantial publicity both in the Philippines and in the United States especially in areas where many Filipinos reside. We attained our goals and eventually, Mr. Clinton became President.

Upon hearing the news of Maria Haley's death, Former President Bill Clinton was the first to release a statement related to Haley's death. Clinton noted:

“Maria Haley was a great public servant, a wonderful person, and my friend for more than thirty years.

“When I was Governor of Arkansas, Maria was invaluable in opening foreign markets to our products, recruiting foreign investment in our state, and supporting my work in the National Governors Association. After I became President, I nominated her to the board of the Export Import Bank of the United States

. During her service, from 1994 to 1999, the Export Import Bank doubled financing for small business exports.

“Before and after her time at the Export Import Bank, she served as Special Assistant to the President and as Deputy Director of the Presidential Personnel Office, helping other qualified and dedicated people serve in important positions.

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“Maria was really a world citizen, who never lost contact with her native nation, the Philippines, where she served as an adviser to President Gloria Arroyo. Thousands of people in Arkansas, throughout the United States and in the Philippines, benefited from Maria Haley’s life-long commitment to bring economic opportunities to more people. As we mourn her passing, we also must be very grateful for her life.”

Marilou was known for being an educated and smart Karilagan Fashion Model in the Philippines before getting established in Arkansas. A successful exponent of Free and Fair Trade as proven in her stint in Arkansas and in the U.S. EXIMBANK, and never forgetting her Philippine roots, she has become a Model for Filipinas in particular, and hardworking women in general.

Gov. Mike Beebe who appointed her as Executive Director of the Arkansas Economic Development Commission (AEDCO) said it best: “Maria Haley did more for the State of Arkansas than most people will ever know. Her tireless mission to create and keep jobs in Arkansas was a primary factor in our ability to ride out the recession as well as we have. After living all over the world, Maria made Arkansas her adopted home, and dedicated herself to its betterment for more than 30 years. She was one of the first people I wanted on my team when I became governor, and she will be dearly missed as a friend and colleague.”

Born in the Philippines and daughter of a Filipino diplomat, she was educated in India, Pakistan, France and Spain. She was multi-lingual.

Marilou was awarded the Ron Brown Award for Advancing Trade Opportunities by the U.S. Small Business Exporters Association, and the Philippine Presidential Award by the Commission on Filipinos Overseas. She was the recipient of the 2000 Stan Suyat Memorial Leadership Award from the Asian American Government Executives Network and received the 2006 Corporate Leadership Award from Filipinas Magazine.

She made us proud!

Our condolences to her family, and we offer our prayers as she enters the Pearly Gates of Heaven. # # #

## **Maria Mabilangan Haley: A Filipino-American Model in the Strictest Sense - MabuhayRadio**

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