

Written by Bobby Reyes

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Perry Was Our Peer: How Dr. Calica Touched the Lives of Filipino Americans

A Eulogy by Bobby M. Reyes,

media advocate and founder of the Media Breakfast Club of Los Angeles There's a little of Dr. Perry Calica in every one of us. For we share his dreams of good things for the family, his friends and country.

From time to time, Perry Calica would invite us, writers and community activists, to his residence. There he and his wife, Fely, fed us not only with food but with dreams as well. Dreams that were possible to achieve if only we put our hearts into them.

(Editor's Note: Bobby Reyes delivered excerpts of this eulogy on April 15, 1996, during the memorial service at the Church of the Hills, Forest Lawn -- Hollywood Hills, Memorial Park in Los Angeles, Calif. Dr. Calica's fellow writers organized it.) Dr. Calica was full of ideas. He probably nurtured so many fine ideas when he was yet in high school or college, or even when he was this tall. His ideas were pragmatic. As a member of the Media Breakfast Club (MBC), he joined two of our other members, Leo Pandac and Rollie Ecarma, in opposing a Los Angeles-based casino in becoming our corporate sponsor. He reasoned that there was no way we could justify the use of casino dollars to the youth whom we were trying to reach. He said that he preferred that we remained poor and principled rather than moneyed but flawed in character.

Perry Calica also refused to see the dreams of others die. The Philippine Town project was a good example. When Publisher-editor Nena Aragon-Decena met difficulty in getting support for the Philippine Town project, Dr. Calica joined her in trying to save the project. In March 1994, Ms. Decena died. But the Philippine Town project did not die with her for Dr. Calica picked-up the pieces. We now hope that Dr. Calica's death will not mean the end of the Philippine Town concept.

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Perry Calica stood by his friends. He was one of the Media Breakfast Club's original supporters. He showed his true grit when some Philippine government officials advised him to stop supporting its founding chairman, Bobby Reyes. They said that Reyes was becoming controversial because of his anti-government positions and various advocacies. They did not like his support of the Media Breakfast Club. They said that it would probably jeopardize his projects in the Philippines or those that required the help of the Philippine government. Instead of listening to Reyes's detractors, he accepted the MBC's offer to become its moderator in October 1995. He stayed on as presiding officer of the media club's meetings until he entered the hospital in March 1996. Dr. Calica said that he would attend the MBC meeting on April 10, 1996. He died the day before the meeting.

The MBC sponsored a Freedom exhibit at the West Covina county library in February 1995. The American Legion's Manila Post 464, under the command of Dr. Calica, was the only Filipino-American veteran group that joined the festival. He told Bobby Reyes that he wanted to share the MBC's idea of providing an answer to a common question asked by military veterans. Their question was, "Who will remember us after we are gone?" When the next Freedom exhibit comes in February 1997, it will be a testament to Dr. Calica's foresight and perseverance.

The hymn "We Remember" is appropriate for this occasion. The last three phrases in its refrain say "We remember. . . we celebrate. . . we believe."

Yes, we remember Dr. Calica's works and his generosity not only of his resources but more importantly, also of his time. We celebrate Perry Calica's reunion with his lord and master, Jesus Christ, and with the eight Los Angeles-based writers who died ahead of him. We believe in his dreams, plans and programs. We believe in his belief that ultimately nobody can put a good man down.

Watch out, Saint Peter. Perry Calica is now in heaven. He has joined Nena Aragon-Decena. Maybe they will be pushing the designation of a small part of heaven as "Philippine Town." A Philippine Town in paradise that is run like heaven by American souls of Filipino ancestry. Of

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course, Perry Calica would not prefer a Philippine Town in paradise run like hell by Filipino politicians. One never knew how hellish it would be.

Farewell, Dr. Calica. We bid you good-bye. We assure you that for as long as the Media Breakfast Club meets on Wednesday mornings at the Aristocrat Restaurant or elsewhere, we will remember you. We will always celebrate your stint with us. We will not forget your death anniversary. We remember you during All Saints' and Memorial Days, just as we do recall the lives of the eight other Filipino writers and journalists who died earlier in Los Angeles. Now that you are gone, we, your peers, remain to push our common goals. Nobody will forget your dreams for the betterment of the Philippines and the United States and the whole of humanity. For we are one and that you are a part of our history. # # #

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