

Amor Valiente-Cook, former OB Nurse, dies at 69

When Amor tagged along with a friend who was going to apply with OB, she had no intention of going to Laos. While filling up the application form, the friend said that since Amor, a nurse, was already in the OB office, why didn't she go ahead and fill up an application too.

One thing led to another, finally to Vientiane in 1958 where Amor found herself among the first volunteers who had arrived a year earlier. She stayed for two years, then left for the USA, and was back again in 1963, this time sticking it out for the next 12 years to the very end of OB's service in Laos in 1975.

"Those were some of the best years of my life," she would tell Bill, her husband. There were assignments in provincial stations where living conditions were spare and spartan. And some harrowing episodes such as the all-day, all-night surgeries in the Vientiane hospital in December 1960. Outside the hospital, feuding soldiers of the Lao armed forces were battling each other in the city streets. An estimated 1,000 civilians died in what became known as the Kong Le Phoumi Nosavan Battle of Vientiane. Many of the victims were rushed to OB, where operating room nurse Amor, surgeon Pete Gonzales, and nurse anesthetist Josie Flores tried mightily to cope with the heavy influx of the wounded.

During her time with the Vientiane hospital, Amor was named head of the nursing service from 1963 to 1972, then was in charge of nursing education and inservice training from 1972 to 1975.

She was very effective as a teacher because "magaling mag-Lao" said Vitoy Naranjo, OB project manager.

"She was such a lady, so caring, we became very close friends" remembers Bounnong "Bonnie" Vongsouvanh, who, together with Amor, shepherded Mahosot Hospital student nurses through their internships at the OB Hospital. A nurse herself who trained in Montreal, Canada, then taught nursing at Mahosot's school of nursing, Bonnie fled Laos in 1980, spent six months at the Philippine's refugee camp in Bataan before she immigrated to the USA.

Now living in Modesto, California, six hours by car from Amor's home in Saugus, Bonnie would visit Amor frequently during the latter's last months of losing struggle with cancer. "We talked much about Laos, about our nursing colleagues we left at Mahosot especially Chandy Saramany and Mimala Sengahandavong."

Amor met her husband Bill Cook, 58, an oil drilling rig maintenance technician, while she was the head nurse supervisor at the American Red Cross in Los Angeles. They married on March 16, 1960 aboard the cruise ship Queen Mary when it was docked in Long Beach. Bill's company, Welltech, is based in that city. Amor retired from the American Red Cross in 1996.

"We had a wonderful, wonderful, happy marriage," said Bill. Amor died July 22, 2004 in his arms at their home in Saugus, with Bonnie at her bedside.

Amor is survived by three sisters Veny and Grace who live in Los Angeles, and Dolly who lives in Germany. She has three brothers Jun, a doctor in Boston; Remilio, a doctor in Canada, and Dennis, a registered nurse in Los Angeles.

She was born July 9, 1935 and earned her BSN degree at the University of Santo Tomas in Manila.

A funeral mass is scheduled at 1 pm on August 4 at the San Fernando Mission in Mission Hills, California (Tel. 818 361 7387). Viewing is on August 3, from 5 p.m. to 7 p.m., also at the San Fernando Mission.

Condolence cards can be sent to:

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By Pete Fuentesilla