

Boomer | November 2007

IN THE SPOTLIGHT

A VITAL STATISTICIAN

UNM demographer's contributions extend beyond her research

BY ANNE E. WRIGHT

For the Journal

Fifty-seven is fairly young to receive a lifetime achievement award.

However, spend a few minutes conversing with Dr. Adelamar Alcantara — or Dely, as her friends and colleagues call her — and it's no surprise why this woman of boundless energy and interests received such an honor from the Rio Grande Chapter of the Filipino American National Historical Society. No surprise to anyone but Alcantara herself, that is.

Members tried to keep Alcantara, who founded the local chapter in 1998, from knowing who would be this year's lifetime achievement award recipient for as long possible. When she discovered the truth, her first reaction was to think "there must be someone more deserving."

Alcantara was born in 1949 in a small Filipino town about two hours north of Manila. Because her father was in the military, and her mother usually traveled with him, she spent much of her childhood living with her grandparents. She says it was their generosity and commitment to community service that influenced her from a young age.

While still in her early teens, Alcantara helped organize food drives and raise funds to assist local families in need after floods caused by the annual monsoons razed parts of their area.

Alcantara was the only person from her hometown at the time to gain admission to the highly competitive University of the Philippines. She graduated from college at age 19 and began teaching ethics and philosophy at a local university soon thereafter.

Alcantara left that job after just one year because she says she felt she was too young to hold such a post. She asked herself, "How can I be teaching ethics to people who are older and have more experience than me?"

Higher education

Alcantara returned to Manila, where she landed a job as a research assistant in demography while taking graduate courses at the university. After earning her master's degree in demography, she was awarded a scholarship to the University of Hawaii, where she earned a Ph.D. in sociology — and met her husband, Dr. Ted Jojola, who was originally from Isleta Pueblo.

The couple split their time between Manila and Hawaii for the next few years while working on a number of population studies and surveys, before settling in New Mexico in 1988.

Now the senior research scientist and demographer for the University of New Mexico, Alcantara says her department's current mission is "to get the U.S. Census Bureau to accept our estimates (for New Mexico) as an alternative to what they produce by Census 2010. Our goal is better enumeration so that New Mexico does not get underfunded."

Outside of work, Alcantara has contributed to New Mexico's cultural life in a variety of ways. In 1998 she founded the Rio Grande Chapter of the Filipino American National Historical Society — a group devoted to researching and documenting Filipino/American historical heritage.

In 2001 Alcantara took an active role in the Filipino American Foundation of New Mexico, more of a social and cultural organization than the historical society. Under her leadership, the foundation obtained sponsorship from the city of Albuquerque for the annual Santacruzian procession through Old Town each May.

Took charge

Alcantara says her ability to take charge, negotiate and get things done is attributable to her upbringing. As the oldest of six children, she says she "was socialized to be a pseudo-



Dr. Adelamar Alcantara, 57, recently received a lifetime achievement award from the Rio Grande Chapter of the Filipino American National Historical Society. She is the senior research scientist and demographer for the University of New Mexico.



SHAMINDER DULAI/JOURNAL

As the senior research scientist and demographer for UNM, Dr. Adelamar Alcantara has turned her sights to the 2010 Census.

Bataan memorial her finest triumph

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parent,” and that she learned how to mediate and be fair quite early in life.

However, the maturity that resulted in such early professional success for Alcantara did make for a less than carefree childhood. “I was old before I was young,” says Alcantara.

It was her only child, Manoa, who was named for the Hawaiian town where his parents met, who made Dely feel youthful. “I said to my son, ‘You have to explain things for me,’” she says.

In 2000, Alcantara faced a parent’s worst nightmare. Manoa, an 18-year-old Albuquerque Academy student, was killed by a driver fleeing police in a high-speed chase. It was a tragic chapter in what so far had been a rich and fulfilling life for Alcantara.

Work on memorial

The triumph Alcantara is most proud of is her role in the creation of the Bataan-Corregidor Memorial, which now stands at Lomas and

Tulane in Albuquerque.

During World War II, the Japanese took thousands of prisoners on the island of Bataan and marched them almost 100 miles to POW camps. Thousands died, including many New Mexican soldiers. Alcantara’s father, who is 89 and still lives in the Philippines, is a survivor of the Bataan Death March.

So when Alcantara was elected president of New Mexico’s Bataan-Corregidor Memorial Foundation in 2001, she had perhaps a personal incentive to see that the memorial, which had been originally promised to the Bataan veterans in 1943, became a reality in time for the 60th anniversary in 2002.

She successfully lobbied the state Legislature and the city for the necessary funding, and the memorial was completed for the anniversary.

The 2002 commemorative service at the memorial was “touching and cathartic for the vets,” she says.

“I think it was destiny that a Filipino would be the one to make it happen in time for the 60th anniversary.”