

"POPSY" MANUEL LEELIN

Mr. Cool

Father of Goldilocks in Southern California

by CYNTHIA DE CASTRO
AJPress

FOR OVER FOUR DECADES, Goldilocks Bakeshop has established itself as the undisputed leader in the Philippine bakeshop industry. It has succeeded in creating a world-class brand that every Filipino can be proud of. From its first branch in Pasong Tamo, Makati City, in 1966, Goldilocks has grown to be among the largest bakeries in the world. Outside of the Philippines, the biggest operation is in Southern California, which was started by Manuel Tancioco Leelin, whose two sisters Milagros Leelin Yee and Clarita Leelin Go, founded Goldilocks.

Known to the Goldilocks family as "Popsy", Manuel has been on top of the SC operations until his retirement a few years ago. He was born on Dec. 23, 1929 in Nato, Camarines Sur. The Chinese-Filipino Bicolano took up Accounting in the University of the East where he was also the ROTC Corps Commander. That's also where he met his wife, Maria Teresa Magbanua Lee, his corps sponsor. They married on his 22nd birthday, on Dec. 23, 1951.

Manuel's outstanding business acumen was proven by the success of the businesses he established in the Philippines: Leelin Batteries, Leelin Motors, and Tamaraw Trading. He served as the Governor of the Development Bank

Philippines, Manuel sided with the opposition. He eventually opted to immigrate to California to start a new life in the US with his family. By that time, his two sisters, Milagros and Clarita, have successfully established Goldilocks in Makati.

Manuel decided to put up Goldilocks in South California in 1976, with the guidance of his two founding sisters and the help of his wife and children. It was a concentrated family enterprise with the whole Manuel Leelin family devoting all their time and effort in building Goldilocks in Southern California and expanding operations in the U.S.

"Momsy" Teresa, sons Menard and Mendrei, and only daughter, Carmela, baked the pandesal and other bread, cakes and pastries while "Popsy" took care of the administrative and finance side of the business. Manuel made sure each family member knows the various aspects of the business. Aside from his three children, his two daughters-in-law, Cecile Hizon and Yojie Buenaventura (Goldilocks' Executive Chef), and oldest grandchild, Michael (Menard's son and Goldilocks' CFO) all help in the business. For sure, his other grandchildren, Mendrick, Mendie, Melody, Monica, and Jantzen, will also someday be involved in the business in one way or another.

The modest family venture quickly grew as more and more branches were opened by the Leelins. Expansion included state-of-the-art manufacturing with the ability to provide products not only for its own retail stores but also other institutional accounts such as Costco Supermarkets, and the Marriott Hotel chain.

Manuel's son, Mendrei, who has been involved in Goldilocks like his two siblings but now devotes more of his time as the president of a major entertainment company, Rosy Cheeks Entertainment (which is behind the successful shows of the Society of Seven and Lani Misalucha in Las Vegas), describes his father as "the best". He shared with Asian Journal, "We have been blessed with the best father and mother any child can hope for. Thoughtful, loving and caring. When I was sick in the hospital, aside from my loving wife, Cecile, it was my dad and mom who really prayed and took good care of me. They even stayed at our house just to make sure I was ok. Their presence just made me feel so much better."

Menard, the company's Director of Operations, agrees that their "Popsy" is the best father a child could wish for, always putting his family first.

Cecile, Mendrei's wife, says what she likes most about her father-in-law is his "being kind, thoughtful, patient, honest and God-fearing. He always remembers us with fruits from his



Manuel 'Popsy' Leelin (third from left) and Teresa 'Momsy' Leelin (second from left) during their 25th wedding anniversary. Also in photo are the three Leelin children, from left: Menard, Carmela and Mendrei

backyard or from his favorite market."

Manuel's backyard garden in their home in Cerritos is his pride and joy, according to Michael. "He's there everyday, tending to his many fruit trees. There are grapefruits, the sweetest oranges, there's calamansi and so many other plants. He takes care of the garden all by himself, in the house where he has lived in since 1976," said Michael, married to Anavie and the father of Popsy's first and only great grandchild, Ever Marian. "I look up to him the most. My grandfather is a man of great patience and humility. I've never seen him lose his temper nor patience," he added.

No wonder the other name they have for Popsy in Goldilocks is "Mr. Cool". Cecile reiterates this as she describes her father-in-law. "He is very patient, a loving husband to Momsy, an understanding and fair parent. A warm-hearted father-in-law, an exemplary grandpa, really Mr. Cool," revealed Cecile.

This virtue of being "cool" is what Mendrei wants to emulate most in his dad. He explained, "My dad is always relaxed and always tells us we should never worry about anything. In life, there are only two kinds of problems- a problem you know you cannot

solve and a problem you know you can solve. If you know you cannot solve a problem, why worry? If you know you can solve a problem, then why worry?"

Perhaps a fine example of his father's easy-going and worry-free mindset happened during his parents' golden wedding anniversary, as shared by Mendrei. "When my folks were celebrating their 50th wedding anniversary, somebody asked my dad, 'what is your secret to your successful marriage?' His answer was, 'Early in our marriage, I told my wife that since I am the man of the house, I will make all the big decisions. So far, after 50 years, it's all been small decisions,' he said," recalled Mendrei, with a laugh. ■



Popsy and Momsy Leelin attend a function in Los Angeles

of the Philippines (DBP), and Director of the National Marketing Corporation (NAMARCO), the People's Homesite and Housing Corporation (PHHC), and the Development Bank of the Philippines. Manuel Leelin also served as one of the advisers of several past Philippine Presidents: Ramon Magsaysay, Carlos P. Garcia, and Diosdado Macapagal.

During the early years of martial law in the



Popsy and Momsy at the MegaThirty Concert. AJPress Photo by Ted Talag

Pinoy dads reflect on fatherhood in the US

by JOSEPH PIMENTEL
AJPress

FATHERS, who grew up in the Philippines, have their hands full when raising their children in the US.

The differences of their own upbringing – in a traditional environment and way of life in the Philippines – compared to that of US cultural ideologies have some Filipino dads pulling their hair off while other Pinoy fathers embrace the differences in child parenting.

"Raising your child in the Philippines and raising your kid here in the US is very different," said Bert Jaurigue, whose son was born and raised in the US. "In the US, kids tend to be more independent than those back home [in the Philippines]."

"While in the Philippines, children are more respectful to their parents than kids here," he added.

Jaurigue arrived to the US when he was 17-years-old. He recalls while he was growing up in San Pablo City, he was taught that the world revolved around whatever his parents decided.

"It's like your more restricted growing up in the Philippines," he said. "You always have to wait for your parents approval and decision...opposed to a child here in the US, where from a young age they can pretty much make their own decision."

In the Philippines, if you're parents tell you the sky is green,

you believe it's green, added June Adorable.

"Even if you know the sky is blue, it's still green because of them," said Adorable.

Adorable brought his two children to the US in 1986. His son was 13 and daughter, 7, when they arrived.

Adorable said that it was an eye opening experience when he saw his children's attitude change as they became more assimilated to American culture.

"They were more childish when they were growing up and they were very obedient in the Philippines," he said. "When they got here, let's just say, they became very independent."

And Adorable quickly found this out himself.

Christmas in the Adorable family is a special time where the family spends time with each other. Growing up in Luzon, Philippines, he always spent his Christmas at home with family.

But Adorable said when his son turned 16, and was able to drive, that was it.

"It was the first time in my life that I didn't spend the whole Christmas day and New Year with my kids," he said.

Enrique Morales said that it's easier to raise a child in the Philippines.

"They are more respectful, they obey what you say," he said.

"Not like here where they talk back to you."

Morales recalls the first time his five year-old son spoke back to him. Morales said that he asked his son to get him a drink of water from the kitchen, in which the son replied, "You get it."

The response shocked Morales.

"What can you do?" Said Morales shaking his head disapprovingly. "It's just funny because the kids here have a different atmosphere and different values than when I was growing up."

Morales said the main difference he's observed between growing up in the Philippines and raising a child here in the US is respect.

"It goes back to the family ties," he said. "In the Philippines, many of the families are very close. You're close to your dad, and mom and the respect is there. And you see it everywhere around you in the culture, in school and everywhere. You always respect your elder. That's the difference. You don't see it here in the schools or the surroundings in the US."

Jarigue disagrees. He said that it's better to raise your children here.

"The kids here are trained to be more independent," said Jarigue. "Here they are taught that they don't have to wait until after college to make their own decisions."

"It's harder for people to adjust to parenting here in the US especially if they were raised in the Philippines," he added. "Back home, they might not have done anything because they had their own maids and cooks. Some were very spoiled at home. Too many yayas."

Adorable said that it doesn't really matter where the children were raised. He said the bottom line is it all comes down to good parenting. ■



Popsy with first great grandchild, Ever Marian Leelin.