

# “Wanmers,” a pioneering community

BY BENITO V. SANVICTORES JR.

The Cervanteses were among the first residents of the then flourishing UP Diliman (UPD) campus.

*The whole brood in front of the house, Christmas 1964. Photo from Cervantes*



From left: UPD College of Social Work and Community Development Dean Sylvia E. Claudio, Cervantes, Rolly Peña, Ofelia Tequi, National Artist for Music Ryan Cayabyab, and John Lesaca. Photo from Cervantes



“We are considered pioneer residents because after the World War II, UP President Vidal Tan

appealed to the then UP Manila (UPM) faculty and administration who could build their own houses in Diliman and start the community. This was no more than 20 at that time. And very few survive to this day,” Bernie Cervantes narrated.

Cervantes is the daughter of UP alumnus Domingo Cervantes Jr., son of former Secretary of the University Domingo Cervantes and retired faculty member Gregoria Cervantes.

As a university administrator from UPM before Diliman was built, one of Domingo’s responsibilities was assigning university-built houses and remaining Quonset structures to the moving staff.

They arrived on the sprawling Diliman campus when the acacias were but the width of a human arm. “The PABX was run by an operator from the admin, and our number was a 3-digit phone line. Newspaper was delivered daily, and milk from carabaos at the farm alongside the Veterinary Medicine (VetMed) compound was delivered weekly in glass bottles. We could borrow ponies from VetMed and rode them across the campus for their exercise. Parachuters practiced from the lot behind the Athletic Oval. Then, there was a golf course and Butterfly Club housed at the end of the University Avenue,” Cervantes said.

**CLOSELY KNIT.** They treated each other more than neighbors. “The community was, as you said, ‘community.’ Academic and administrative staff considered each neighbor family. In front were the Agbayanis, behind us, the Alvarezes, Mequis, and Julianos. Usually, all the kids were playmates, and these kids in turn were students of the resident faculty members.”

Her favorite days back then were the weekends.

“Saturdays were art lessons from Mrs. Agbayani, ballet lessons from Mrs. Piñon, piano lessons from Mrs. Maceda, and swimming lessons from Ms. Violanda,” she said. She explained that these were loosely arranged, much more like fun classes, different from the academically-scheduled ones “because we knew everybody, and teachers were gentle, much advanced mentors.”

“Sundays were Sunday school for Protestants and catechism for Catholics. We usually all met up after that and walked home together, then split up behind the Protestant Church before lunch,” Cervantes recalled.

They liked playing “chato,’ ‘teks,’ ‘trumpo,’ ‘piko,’ and ‘taguan,’ which would stretch as far and wide as the players allowed. We did not have fences then, only a line of plants that defined the houses. In the early ’60s, a basketball court was put up in the vacant lot across the Daza’s house so the bigger boys would be playing there. Growing up further, there was the Butterfly Club, the Basement, then the Beach House.”

During Christmas season, each area had a choir that would sing at the Church of the Holy Sacrifice (now known as Parish of the Holy Sacrifice) during the early morning Mass. “There were puto bumbong and bibingka by 4 a.m. The Lantern Parade was the best traditional event during our time,” Cervantes said.

**TROUBLED TIMES.** “The FQS [First Quarter Storm] was a challenge because a few houses got raided in Area 1, not just once but twice. Since we had two gates, there were two Metrocom [Philippine Constabulary Metropolitan Command] trucks at each and a barrage of soldiers came in. They swept through the garden at 8 p.m. and spent some time going through the dark sections but was stopped at the door by my librarian aunt as the person they were looking for never really lived in our house. The Nemenzos’ house on the right was entered into, so was the Ferias’

house. And they got books, papers, and photos,” Cervantes narrated.

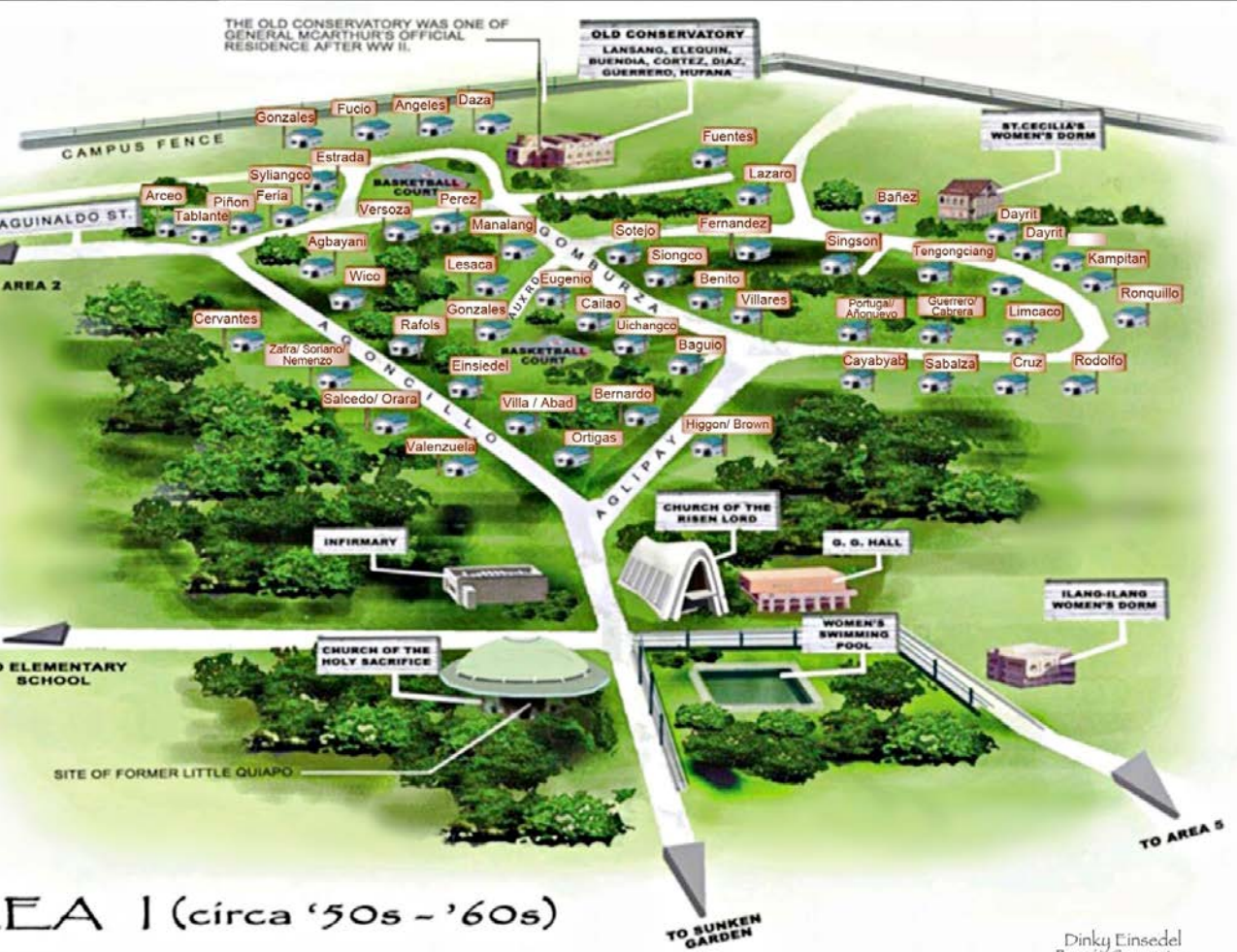
The Area 1 children saw these because there were no classes, and they were told to stay home. When the barricades were put up, the kids from the area were deployed to the houses making sandwiches, and some were asked to help fold gauze and make cotton balls in the infirmary. “Since we were not allowed to go near the barricades, we were on lookout at the Carillon. At some point, the kids were evacuated, and we were sent to UP Los Baños because Manila was also having some incidents,” Cervantes added.

**OPEN BOUNDARIES.** Changes are inevitable. But are they for development, she asked.

She believes that there are areas on campus that have improved a lot. The Academic Oval seems safer because of the enhanced lighting, and the UP Health Service is better equipped now. “As a child, I had an accident at UP Elem, and I lost consciousness from a brain concussion for 48 hours. I was



*This was the area that became a restaurant in the late ’90s. The round arena at the back was where students went to dance on weekends. Photo and caption from Cervantes*



## EA 1 (circa '50s - '60s)

Area 1 circa 1950s-1960s. Image from Cervantes

turned away in the infirmary and had to be brought to the PGH,” she recalled.

Students no longer have to line up at midnight for class enlistment, so “you will worry less for their safety. The Main Library is so much better now; even the collection is so impressive. Water flow is also much better now.” Due to better environmental information dissemination, birds have increased in numbers. “We have owls, hornbills, orioles, guaiaberos, mynahs, and many others in Area 1.”

**AN “HONOR” COMMUNITY.** Area 1 had the most number of National Artists and Scientists that “we grew up with – Jovita Fuentes (Music), NVM Gonzalez (Literature), Jose Maceda (Music), Amelia Lapena-Bonifacio (Theater), and Andrea Veneracion (Music). Ryan Cayabyab (Music), at one time or another, lived in Area 1 and mentored the kids in the

neighborhood. They were also parents who raised one another’s kids. Those were such memorable times,” she reminisced.

Her paternal grandmother Gregoria, a UP faculty member of more than 40 years and a pioneer resident of the campus who built the house with her husband, still resides in the old house. “When I am in the country, I still go there every Sunday and spend the day with my grandmother Gregoria,” said Cervantes.

“We still hold reunions of old Area 1 residents, or ‘Wanners,’ at the house of Lesacas, another pioneer family, every January except during this pandemic. Old residents, even if they are out of the country, meet up anywhere around the globe.... Children and grandchildren of residents still study on campus and thus have widened the Wanner sphere,” she said.