

**Introduction of the Guest Speaker during the FACSPS Scholarship Awards Program
May 14, 2005 at the Olympia Center
by Rufino S. Ignacio**

Beloved Awardees, Parents, Members of the Filipino American Community of South Puget Sound, respected Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen:

I have a very exciting role in this program. For the first time in my long experience of introducing Guest Speakers, tonight could possibly be the most unique. I am presenting to you a 92-year old, very much active, electric, and exceptional great-grandmother.

Consider these: Maria Aurelia del Valle was a practicing lawyer in the Philippines until the age of 81 when she immigrated to America to be with her children, Jazmin Nicolas and Boy del Valle, and grand and great grandchildren. She was born in 1913 in Tacloban, Leyte. She finished college with an education degree in 1933. She taught the grades in that city until the end of the Second World War in 1946. She remembers of having the most disciplined classes in the school. She had her own method of giving the pupils responsibility and leadership in the classroom. While teaching she kept on writing poetry and winning awards for her art.

After the war, Maria's family transferred to Manila. Those were trying times. In-between work she finished a degree in law. She graduated from the Manuel Luis Quezon University in 1954 at the age of 41. To this day, the University is famous for its law school. After hurdling the bar, she clerked for the court of first instance in Manila. She penned many of the decisions of judges in that court. Meanwhile her love for poetry and literature did not wane. She kept on writing and winning prizes in various national competitions. She married an Engineer, the late Julian del Valle.

Maria retired from her court job in 1979 at the age of 66 years old. One would think she would just rest and indulge in gardening or traveling for the rest of her life. No, she did not. In 1979, she opened her private law office in Manila handling civil and criminal cases. She argued cases for clients in the lower courts, and in various occasions in the Court of Appeals and Supreme Court of the Philippines. Maria took courses in business administration at the Far Eastern University and only lacked a few units for a master's degree. She was doing all these until 1994 when at the age of 81 she immigrated to the USA. However, while in America, she visited the Philippines several times to conclude her still pending cases in court.

In America, while helping take care of her grandchildren, Maria became a critic of current events and wrote letters to newspapers and magazines -- the Olympian published some of her letters. She wrote to the highest officials of the nation. President Clinton answered her letter with commendation of her poem "Fall of Bataan" and sent her an autographed photo. She wrote President Bush regarding the 911 bombing of NY, enclosing a poem "A Tribute to the Victims of the New York Tragedy". Later, she appealed anew to Bush for the bill to grant benefits to Filipino veterans of WW II. She commiserated with former Governor Davis of California,

enclosing a poem, on the latter's political misfortunes. Both Bush and Davis sent their official responses with autographed pictures. Maria's latest letters were sent to Pope John II in November 2004 and to fellow lawyer WA candidate for Governor Christine Gregoire. Christine acknowledged Maria's involvement in the *Federacion Internacional de Abogadas* for the promotion of welfare of women around the world. Maria's letter to the Pope suggested supplementary prayers to the Divine Mercy chaplets including diagrams where the prayers should be recited. The Pope responded by sending her a short personal greeting in his own handwriting, his picture, and a blessed rosary.

Maria still subscribes to newspapers and magazines. Although her speech is a little slurred, her eyesight has not given up on her. She takes down notes on her readings as basis for letters to editors. She spends more time reading and writing than watching television.

I asked Maria about her secrets to long and productive life because I, too, wish to live to 100 years and more. She said, "The secrets are my unwavering faith in God and love for fellowmen, lifetime dedication to learning and intellectual challenges, right food, moderation, and last but not least, devotion to family. She added, "One should remain active by being concerned with activities in the community and those happening in the world. To express one's opinion on events and people is a sublime exercise and is never futile. One should never be afraid of anyone for saying what is in his or her mind."

Maria wrote a short speech for us to be read by Imelda Ang. She also wrote a poem dedicated to the youth and the Filipino American Community. Please bear with her as she reads the poem. She asked that she reads the poem herself.

Before doing these chores for us, I am most delighted to present her the FACSPS President's Award for Lifetime Achievement.