

Who Will Help Rodolfo Soriano?

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"Pass the pancit . . . please," I signed. I always feel a bit silly making the sign for pancit since it looks so much like the sign for "sucker" that some of the New York deaf use, only the sign for pancit uses the "I" hand instead of the index finger (moved back and forth in front of the mouth). Anyway, I do love pancit . . . it's got all sorts of vegetables and meat mixed up with Chinese noodles. And if food represents a country's history, certainly pancit reflects the Chinese heritage of the Filipino people; some spices could be added to reflect the country's Spanish heritage, too!

But what am I doing eating pancit? Well, it is about 12:30 p.m. on the afternoon of May 27, 1973, and I'm sitting at a table with about 10 deaf friends. The occasion is the second wedding anniversary of our host and hostess, Rodolfo and Celia Soriano. Rodolfo loves pancit, too, and both of us have the bellies to show for it! All of the deaf at the table are lucky; one's an artist, another works in a factory. But I guess Rodolfo is the luckiest. In a country where the state school for the deaf graduates students whom we would consider "functionally illiterate" Rodolfo presents quite a contrast. He is, for example, the only deaf Filipino I've met who was educated after the war and who can sign in correct English order and make use of the different shades of meanings of English words! And his written English is like that of a hearing person!

What makes Rodolfo unique, of course, is his education. At the close of World War II, Rodolfo and his parents traveled to the United States for the medical treatment of his father. Rodolfo was enrolled in the Michigan School for the Deaf while his father underwent treat-

ment. By the time Rodolfo returned to the Philippines he had acquired enough language to succeed in his remaining studies in the Philippines . . . and his remaining studies included a Bachelor of Science degree from Far Eastern University (major in accounting and management; minor in economics). Rodolfo is the only postwar educated deaf Filipino who has a college degree in a field other than fine arts. This is even more of an accomplishment when you realize that in the entire history of the Filipino deaf community only one deaf person has graduated from college abroad, in fact, from Gallaudet!

More than for his education Rodolfo is unique because of his curiosity and ambition. He has developed a tremendous interest in computers and studied computer programming on his own, as well as taking an IBM key punching class. (The endless string of "Why" signs I get from Rodolfo drives me up a wall sometimes!) Rodolfo is also fortunate in having a challenging "desk job" at the country's most prestigious printing firm, Cacho Hermanos, Inc., where he has been working for nearly six years. If this doesn't seem like much of an accomplishment remember that most of our deaf people are lucky if they get a job as waiter or dishwasher at the "Coffee Shop of the Deaf." (Where they serve, by the way, very delicious pancit!)

As a deaf Filipino it is obvious that there is little else Rodolfo could ask or hope for. But it is Rodolfo's uniqueness that makes me write this article. Being as well educated as he is, Rodolfo is in somewhat of a vacuum; in another 25 years those deaf educated before the war will no longer be with us and it will be left to Rodolfo's generation to carry on



Rodolfo and Celia Soriano. Rodolfo, the only non-fine arts college graduate among the Philippine deaf, seeks more training and experience abroad so that he can better serve his people.

the work of the deaf, for it is only the deaf who can (or should) advance themselves. But without educated deaf who will carry on this work? Will we ever have deaf teachers? Will we ever have deaf individuals in positions of leadership in the organizations of the deaf? Or will we wind up as waiters and dishwashers while hearing "know-it-alls" control the lives and work of the deaf.

Positions of leadership can be filled only with competent persons and that is what we lack. It will be another generation before total communication and updated educational techniques make an impact on education of the deaf. In the meantime we must depend on some hearing people and, of course, on Rodolfo and other deaf who can be trained.

Still, you ask, why does Rodolfo need help? We need Rodolfo. He is one of our few hopes for self sufficiency in our deaf community. But Rodolfo needs more training and experience with the deaf in a developed country, such as the United States. He needs to see and learn how the deaf conduct their own affairs, how the deaf meet the needs of the deaf . . . themselves. And he needs more education—education Gallaudet style. I hope that somehow, some way, Rodolfo will be able to live, work and study in the United States for three, four or five years and then come back here and help build up and organize the deaf. How wonderful it would be to see a Philippine "deaf power" movement!

Perhaps one of you reading this will be able to lead Rodolfo to the job he needs, the support he needs to travel and study in the United States. Or perhaps you may just have some encouraging words of friendship. You may write directly to:

Rodolfo Soriano
127 Scout Gandia Street
Quezon City
Philippines

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Rodolfo Soriano's present position is a "desk job" at the Philippine's finest printing firm, Cacho Hermanos, Inc.