

For Raquel, Her Soul Sisters and Friends

By Rigoberto Tiglao

Introductory note:

Raquel Edralin-Tiglao, a woman who served for almost two decades countless women in defending their human rights, and inspired many other Asian women activists, passed away on 28 February 2001. She succumbed to cancer of the breast at the age of 53.

She is one of the pioneers of the Women's Crisis Center (WCC), the first counselling institution for victims/survivors of violence against women in the Philippines. She was also a devoted member of the Board of Trustees of Isis International-Manila.

In recognition of her contribution to advancing women's human rights, specifically in the area of violence against women, the WCC Board and staff renamed the recently set-up WCC Resource and Training Institute to The Raquel Edralin-Tiglao Resource and Training Institute on Family Violence Prevention.

This article is a reprint from the 14 March 2001 issue of the Philippine Daily Inquirer. The author, Rigoberto "Bobi" Tiglaio, is Raquel's husband. Bobi is a veteran journalist who had been with Raquel since their student activist days in the 1970s Martial Law years in the Philippines and is the current Presidential spokesperson.

I COULDN'T write in the past two weeks. And I wish I never had to write this piece.

But I want to tell the whole world about Raquel. She was my soul mate with whom I shared my entire adult life so far. Her life and her dying were poetry, and she had a message for us.

After a year of battling cancer, she asked to be brought to the hospital on February 24. Not because of any hope of treatment. She told me years ago how she pitied a family with a house where someone had died, as that seemed to permanently darken a home that had been full of life and laughter.

She didn't give up right away. The next day, she summoned all the strength left in her body, devoured by cancer down to bare skin and bones. Bedridden for three months, she stood up from her bed and walked a few steps.



courtesy of Raquel's family

She wanted to make a final heroic effort to beat death by the sheer force of her will and her love for us.

But nature is unfeeling. The next day, she asked me, my daughter Ria and my sons Xandro and Dart not to leave her bedside even for a moment. She was bidding us farewell.

Raquel asked us to embrace her, even if the slightest pressure on her cancer-ravaged bones was an agony for her. For the last time, in tears she said. She said again and again how much she loved us.

She then dozed off into a peaceful sleep, and our crying abated. While she, I, my daughter and my two sons slept through the night together in the hospital room, she fell into coma.

Even in her dying, she wanted to make things not too hard for us. She lay comatose as if she thought that the sight of her unconscious for a day would slowly ease us into the acceptance of her death.

The next day, February 28, at half past noon, Raquel drew her last breath. It was as if she even picked her day of dying, for our sake. It was a sunlit day with a deep-blue sky, which somehow mollified the nightmare of her death.

She even seemed to have calculated that her close friends and her brother Raul would likely pay her a visit at lunchtime. Raul, Teret, Princess, Oyie, Indai, Reena and even a long-lost friend Wendy did—but to watch over her body, help us make all the arrangements for her funeral and tell her many friends immediately that she had passed away.

Tell them not to bring flowers, she told

me matter-of-factly before she fell into coma. Just tell them to give donations to the Women's Crisis Center, they need the funds. It was the organisation she loved and devoted the last 10 years of her life to.

That was so much Raquel. She was no card-carrying do-gooder, definitely not the be-charitable-so-you'll-go-to-heaven type of person. There were people she just detested, whom she refused to be friends with.

But it was second nature for her to be so much concerned of others' needs and troubles, forgetting her own.

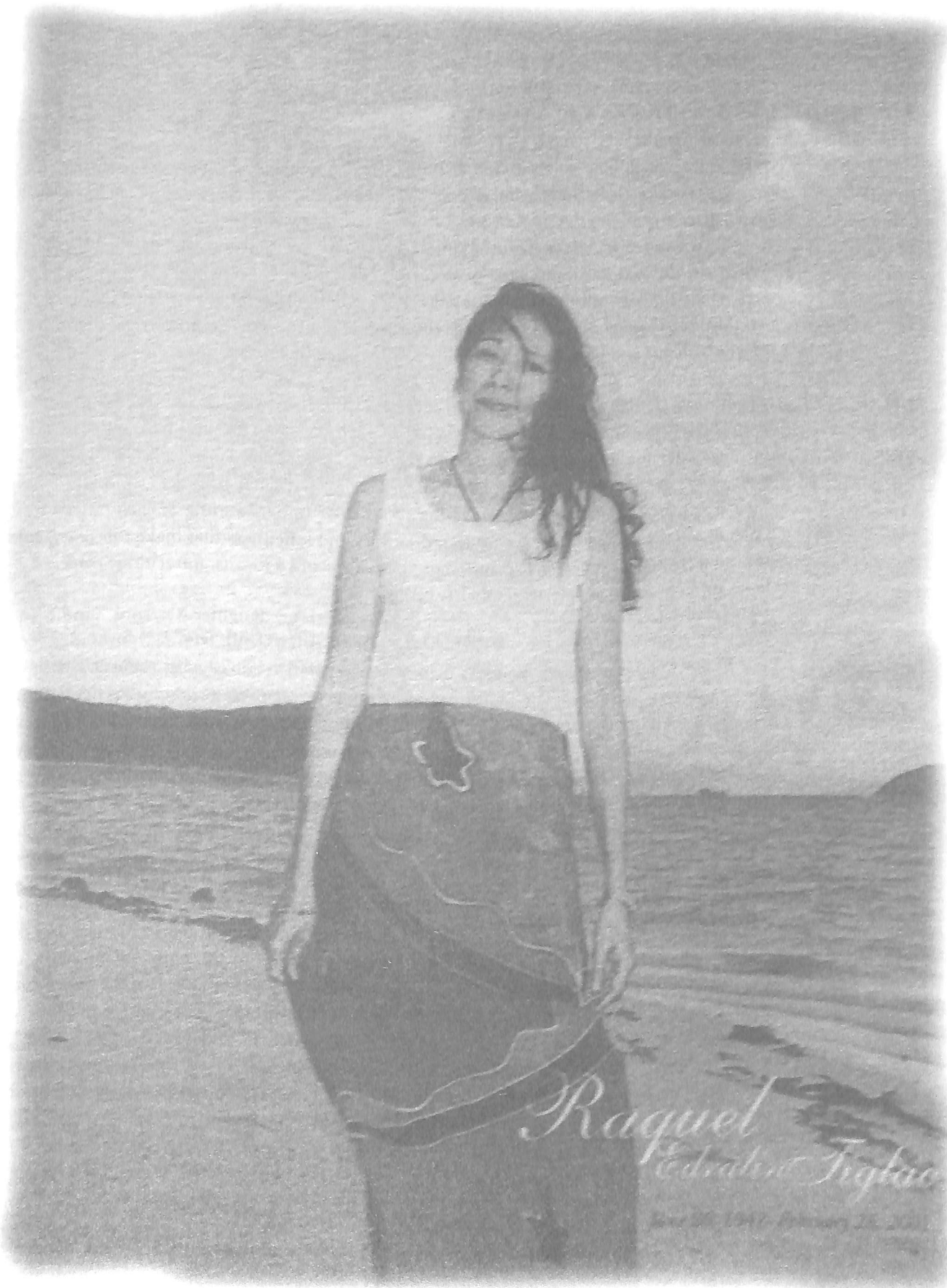
Two weeks before her death, when she could barely talk, she scribbled a note to a visitor, her close friend Vangie, whose husband Bert had been sick: "Thanks for visiting. Go home now. Take care of Bert. He needs you."

There are two images of Raquel which people of our world remember of her.

One is of Raquel the fearless student activist, at the frontlines of demonstrations in the 1970s against Marcos at the gates of Malacañang, or in a workers' strike, shouting invectives at the riot police, warning them to keep their distance or else. Because of that "Raq" got to be "Rock," then "Rocky."

She lived up to that nickname her friends gave her. Even when we were arrested in the middle of the night in 1973, and in the year and a half we were in Marcos' prisons, her steely courage earned the respect even of hardened military men.

The second image of Raquel is a front-page newspaper photo in 1970: she, tightly embracing a crying, fellow activist in a violent



Raquel
Edra de Tiquia

June 26, 1947 - February 25, 2011

courtesy of Raquel's family

rally, as if to shield her from the truncheons of the riot police all around them.

Both images truly represent Raquel. When she devoted her last decade to women's rights, she was still the audacious activist, this time threatening to cut the balls off of wife-batterers and rapists.

But what many would remember of Raquel was her warm smile, which she kept on even after the left side of her face was marred by her brain tumor excised in 1981. They'd remember the way she wrapped her arm around the shoulder of a person in sadness or in pain. The hours she spent sympathetically listening to people, who told her of their problems.

Words weren't necessary. Raquel's message was there: "I'm here, your soul sister. I feel for you. I know your pain."

For the person she comforted, everything else then flowed like a refreshing stream in a desert. The realisation that there's another soul who's holding your hands in your darkest hours. And with that, the rediscovery of courage and hope.

Raquel defied the brain tumor and cancer that tortured her body for most of her years, to live a full and meaningful life.

She touched many people's lives with her kindness and compassion. As intense though was her anger toward cruel people and oppressors, and her passion for a just society, which inspired many to struggle on.

Raquel's life is a message to us who knew her, expressed in lines in a poem she wrote in 1977:

*"Without that total, sensitive awareness
Would knowing bring about true understanding?
Oh, but for a drop of kindness
To soften and solve this sadness."*

Raquel taught us that there's more, much more to life than just our own pains, our own wishes, our own dogmas, our own things.

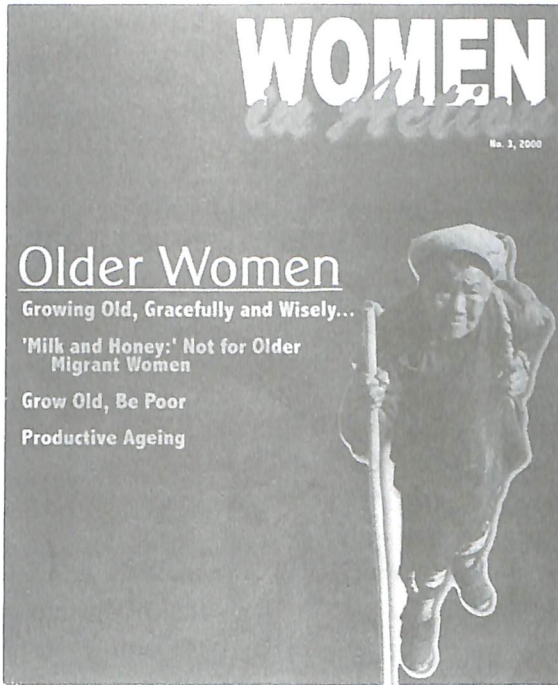
It is the drops of kindness we give others which, by some mystical alchemy, expand to create the ocean of our lives. It is the compassion for our fellow travelers through life, the sensitive understanding of each other's troubles and loneliness that make this crazy, cold cosmos still a joyous, miraculous place.

With my daughter Ria, sons Xandro and Dart, I thank our friends, comrades, colleagues and relatives who mourned with us Raquel's death. We're grateful to her doctors Suillan Sy-Naval, Conrad Cajucom and Edwin Cruz, who showed a kind of sympathy I had thought people who see death every day in their work lose.

We would like to especially thank Raquel's soul-sisters, friends and colleagues at the WCC and KALAYAAN, for the care and love they showered on her in her last year on this earth. Two of the happiest moments of her entire life were last year when the WCC with her feminist comrades, and then the First Quarter Storm Foundation with our *kasamas* (comrades) in the 1970s each gave her a party to wish her recovery, and to raise funds for her treatment.

Never will I ever see the intensity of love and friendship they had for Raquel.

And we may never know in our lifetimes such a kind, beautiful soul such as Raquel.



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