

Dr. Erle Singson Castillo

In Memoriam

By Erwin Castillo

It might have been his mother,
with her abiding sense of inclusion,
who remanded us to his care,
that he might look after us –
perhaps even grow to love us -
that sad day we became orphans in common.

And so it was.

To see again ourselves in those far off days
is to realize how young, how boyish, he was
when he - faithful to this unexpected duty –
accepted responsibility for us,
whom he barely knew,
and who had suddenly, then until forever,
become his family.

And we, in turn arriving, marveled to find
we were but a small part of an even larger public,
a multitude of patients he was serving quietly,
even then.

Not only in the clinics, the hospitals, the shared wards,
but among all his neighbors, barrio-mates,

assorted walk-ins with bewildered faces,
an entire community - living, growing –
that was his inheritance.

We watched all those needy people,
lined up in desperate droves, who pilgrimaged to see the good-
hearted doctor of Renaissance,
who freely gave them a chance at healing,
a draught of hope.

He seemed never to take himself too seriously.
While he was studying, learning, researching.
While he shared his hard-won expertise
in remote and dangerous places
to earnest, expectant learners.
While he fought his lonely battles
in defense of a wounded world that needed
to be purged from the poison of greed.

Even then, there was a sense this was all too good to be true.
For we felt it was selfish for us to take too much
of the attention and the precious time
of this amazing, gifted man
who obviously deserved the honors and the glory of the world.

Surely, he had worthier deeds to accomplish.
Surely, beyond the hill, there were patients who, unlike us,
actually paid for their doctoring!

And yet he stayed. We were his life's mission.
He became, for us, God's thoughtfulness personified.
One modest, funny, sensitive and compassionate man.

The poet might have lauded him thus.

Bred to a harder thing than triumph

Be secret and rejoice

Because of all things known

This is the most difficult.

He died the morning of the largest, grandest
full moon we in our lifetimes will ever see,
a fitting illumination over a changed and grieving world.
A world less safe. Less happy. Less loving.

But to despair is to contravene the meaning
of his brief and wonderful life.

For that morning was the morning
of the Equinox of Spring.
When life, in defiance of all odds, stirs again,
growing, bursting, flowering,
everywhere around us.

So in spite of our heartbreak and sadness, we hope.
We hope ourselves somehow to match
his saintly fidelity, in the humble, little things we do daily.

And we hope that some of these young children
here among us, whom he loved
and who loved him dearly,
may someday take the same solemn,
magnificent oath he lived by,
and by their forthcoming deeds
give us solace, comfort, healing and joy,
as our beloved Erle did while yet
he tarried, smiling, among us.