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The Sarmientos, by Virtusio

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The Sarmientos. By Romeo P. Virtusio. Makati, Metro Manila: Kayumanggi Press, Inc., 1993. 162 pages.

Vitarich Corporation. Sarmiento Enterprises, Inc. Sarmiento Industries, Inc. Sarmiento Foundation, Inc. These companies and their subsidiaries, located throughout the Philippines' key cities, are living legacies of the brothers Feliciano, Lorenzo, and Pablo Sarmiento, whom the Filipino business world considers as three of the country's most successful industrialists. How were they able to carve a business empire that continues to contribute to the economic growth of the Philippines?

Romeo P. Virtusio chronicles in the coffee-table book *The Sarmientos* the life of Feliciano, Lorenzo, and Pablo Sarmiento, beginning with the humble origins of the brothers in Bulacan where they lived as poor farmers in the early part of the century, and ending with their economic, political, and sociocultural contributions today, as carried on by their respective families. Virtusio has a clear insight into the lives of *The Three Musketeers* (p. 13). He presents, in concise narration, the milestones in the lives of the three entrepreneurs: their responsibility-laden but happy childhood; their hard-earned academic degrees; the beginnings of their profession and the foundation of their business enterprises; the devastation they suffered during World War II; their rise from the ruins of war; and the eventual success of their business ventures.

To weave a complex but inspiring tapestry of the lives of these men demands a knowledge of their character, attitude, and values. Virtusio rises to the challenge, and presents the brothers' complex personalities with ease and elegance, accentuating strong and positive Filipino family values and ideals such as hard work, *palabra de honor*, *kababaang loob*, *pakikisama*, and *pakikiramay*. The author extols these Filipino virtues, and uses their laudable qualities as threads that connect and bind the stories in each chapter. As a result, the book comes out not as a heavy biographical account of the Sarmientos but as testimony of the Filipino's time-tested skill and ability in entrepreneurship. Former Supreme Court Justice Querube Makalintal, who wrote the foreword, notes that "the country can do more with the likes of the Sarmientos."

Lorenzo Sarmiento, aside from building the family's logging and plywood business into the country's biggest, was a three-term congressman, while Pablo, the youngest, is acknowledged as the family's most hard working and most enterprising elder. The second generation Sarmientos include two incumbent congressmen: Rogelio, Lorenzo's son, congressman of the first district, Davao del Norte; Angelito, Pablo's son, congressman of the fourth district, Bulacan; and Renato, son of Feliciano, who now sits at the helm of Vitarich.

Since the second- and third-generation Sarmientos and the Sarmiento workers and employees who have come to love the founders are great in

number, the book will certainly serve not only as an entertaining "enlarged" family album, but also as a written legacy of the three men who proved that family solidarity and business stability can indeed coexist harmoniously.

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Tales For A Rainy Night. By Cristina Pantoja-Hidalgo. Manila: De La Salle University Press, 1993.

Cristina Pantoja-Hidalgo has been writing since she was in High School, has won Palanca prizes for both fiction and essay, and has worked as a writer, editor and teacher in six countries. Four of her books—*Sojourns* (1984), *Korean Sketchbook* (1987), *Five Years in a Forgotten Land: A Burmese Notebook* (1991) and *I Remember* (1992)—are collections of the autobiographical/travel writing for which she is best known, the result of fifteen years of living overseas.

This book is her first collection of fiction since *Ballad of a Lost Season* (1987). She considers this volume an experiment, an attempt to use the conventions of the fairy tales of her childhood to tell what Amelia Lapena Bonifacio, in her introduction, calls very sophisticated adult stories. "The book starts with two engaging tales. 'The Most Beautiful Woman In The Island' is about Alejandro's excursion into a strange island and his encounter with the mysterious Mrs. Monteverde, and 'The Birthday Gift' is about the purity of Manuel's selfless love for Cynthia. These two tales . . . are followed by two equally engrossing tales about love for animals. One is about the love of the enigmatic Sebastian for his fiercely loyal champion of a fighting cock in 'The Best Fighting Cock in the World,' while the other is about the young Cielo and her search for a pet in 'The Little Girl and the Dog Named Stella.' Two mysterious women characters appear in the last two tales. 'The Ghost of La Casa Grande' is about Lola Esperanza who reaches out to the present in order to protect the sanity of her grandchild, Ligaya. The last story, 'The Painting,' is about Consuelo who reaches out to the past and to a past love."

Critic and poet Ophelia A. Dimalanta says that this is "romantic realism spilling over into fantasy, a genre defying any labelling except that it provides the adult reader . . . with such reading pleasure as he escapes into his own brand of never-never land where gardens suddenly burst into cascading blooms of amethysts and garnets, beautiful ladies descend a staircase under a dripping crystal chandelier wearing lace and pearls, and where a favorite fighting cock emerges as tragic hero, resplendent in defeat."