

# Remembering: The 95<sup>th</sup> Birthday Celebration of Francisco Sionil Jose

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Rita B. Gadi

Certain episodes leave indelible marks that remain etched in our hearts. Francisco Sionil Jose was signed across the landscape of my life, without erasures or editing. It is in the remembering of the many years you and I have worked together that, in this brief telling, we may continue to dream our world through your amazing writings.

*Comment Magazine* was the publication when I first worked with you. The office was at the mezzanine of the Benipayo Press. It was spacious, cozy, and professionally arranged by Tita Tessie, your lovely wife, who was class and heritage, gently blended. Zeny Roldan, was the “etcetera” secretary for the multi-tasks she dexterously handled. Even then, I knew that I was walking on the carpet of an extraordinary writer.

When we transferred to Padre Faura, Solidaridad Publishing House was born and became the cerebral coffee meeting center of the cognoscenti and intellectuals.

You were a truly gifted man whose vision stretched beyond your essays and novels, reaching for that level of perfection in every genre of writing. You were very strict with grammar, syntax and the over-use of adjectives and superlatives. The editing you taught was that of a sculptor, carving out the mass to allow the image to surface by itself: clearly defined, pure, aesthetic. You were unrelenting with castigating words, your eyes staring intently, your voice close to a high pitch exclaiming: “Watch the splitting of the words; get the correct spelling; do not change the context; write simply from the heart,” and so forth.

Interviews and essays about our national artists like Fernando Amorsolo, the painter, and Leonardo Locsin, the architect; and Akira Kurosawa, who was in Manila to receive the Ramon Magsaysay Award for film direction, were some of my awesome experiences because of you.

You have the kindest, gentlest hands of a literary professional who guided, coaxed, lectured and taught me how the written word is sacred and that publication is open to the world for the betterment of lives and not for the selfish satisfaction of the writer.

Through the years, I wove in and out of Solidaridad as your Assistant Editor: from college days, through my family life, and a brief hiatus in Kidapawan. My thesis on the war in Mindanao was confiscated by the military during Martial Law, but you braved publishing the original notes for Solidaridad Magazine, and the Bangsa Moro history unfolded from there.

Solidaridad can never leave my heart.

To have worked with you, Sir Frankie, instilled in me the discipline and the devotion that a writer should have. Your novels had me enter the world of the oppressed, their struggle for justice, and the interminable search for an honorable, decent life. You surfaced the depths of suffering and the hope for the resolution of conflicts.

We celebrate you and a truly outstanding life with the magnitude of greatness: a National Artist Award as a national treasure; a library of your novels, essays, short stories, and other writings; a Book Shop and an office that have welcomed, entertained and influenced the best and finest minds of our time; a family of accomplished children and grand-children; a devoted, loving and beautiful wife.

You are a legacy of masterpieces translated in several languages.

Salute, Mr. Jose, my indelible memory.