

# Conopio, Flor B. (1935–2000)

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## NICOLI R. RIVERA, AND DANA CONOPIO

Nicoli Rivera, B.A. in theology (Mountain View College, Valencia City, Bukidnon) is the youngest of the four children of Pastor Ultimino Rivera Jr and Rachel Rivera. In 2017 he worked as a youth pastor in Jimenez for one year. Currently, he is a student at the Adventist International Institute of Advanced Studies (AIIAS), studying for a Master of Religion degree with a major in New Testament, which he is expected to finish in 2021.

Dana Conopio is Flor and Merla's granddaughter through their son, Glenn Jordan. She is a nurse with a master's degree in education who is currently working for the Research Triangle Institute (RTI) International Luzon Health project in the Philippines.

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Flor Buendia Conopio was a long time serving editor of the Philippine Publishing House.

## Early Life

Flor Buendia Conopio was born in Lucena city on February 24, 1935 to Adventist parents, Lorenzo Sarmiento Conopio (born in Liliw, Laguna) and Lourdes Torres Buendia (born in Nagcarlan, Laguna)! When World War II broke out in the Philippines, Flor was just six years old. During this time, his father got sick and his mother became the sole breadwinner of the family. Flor, who was the eldest of four children, had to take care of his siblings and help out in the household chores—a huge responsibility at such an early age. Flor was baptized in April of 1949. His father died shortly after the war ended and his mother had to work hard to provide for the needs of the family. Despite the difficulties of the aftermath of the war, all the children finished elementary and high school at Philippine Union College (PUC) now Adventist University of the Philippines (AUP)<sup>2</sup>

However, Flor almost did not finish high school in PUC.<sup>3</sup> In his second year, his mother told him that she couldn't provide the money for him to continue studying in PUC and asked him to come home to Quezon Province to help her work and then save money so he could go back to school later. When school started in PUC that year, Flor was nowhere to be found. The PUC Academy principal Dr. Reuben Manalaysay asked Flor's grandmother *Nanay*<sup>4</sup> Paula Buendia to meet him and PUC President Dr. Andrew Nelson in his office. "*Saan po naroroon si Flor?*"<sup>5</sup> asked Dr. Manalaysay. Upon learning where he was and why he left, Dr. Nelson asked Nanay Paula to get Flor from Quezon and bring him back to PUC. Flor continued to study in PUC as a working student from high school through college.

## Education and Marriage

Flor completed elementary school between 1945 and 1950 at Philippine Union College, followed immediately by his high school education from 1950-1954. Throughout his life, Flor expressed his gratefulness to PUC's work education program which allowed him to finish his studies. He worked in various departments of the college as

a janitor, electrician, grounds crew, and security. He also worked at the woodworking shop and in the construction of the college auditorium. While juggling his classes and work schedules, he was also able to handle major extracurricular positions such as editor of the *College Voice*, *Alumni Golden Cords*, and the college yearbook, the *Balintawak Memoirs*. His college years (1954-1958) were also spent at Philippine Union College, and he graduated in 1958 with a Bachelor of Science in Education degree, with a major in English.<sup>6</sup>

Flor married his college sweetheart, Merla Fontelera Realin.<sup>7</sup> She was born to a Catholic family in Olongapo, Zambales. Her father, a US Navy serviceman, died in the war when she was young, leaving her and her sister Linda in the care of their mother. After being baptized in the Adventist Church, her mother sent Merla to PUC alone to study, while she went to teach in an Adventist school in North Luzon and took Linda with her.

Flor and Merla met in PUC as young high school students. They became peers and regularly saw each other on the PUC campus where Flor was a working student. One day Merla's mother, Arsenia Fontelera, noticed Flor working as a janitor and said, "This young man is going to be successful; he's not ashamed to work." Years later in college, Flor wrote Merla love letters; he was a gifted writer and Merla was smitten by his sweet words. They got married in 1957 and were blessed with five children; Celesti Conopio, born in Baesa on February 16, 1956; Linda May Conopio, born in Baesa on May 6, 1957; Glenn Jordan Conopio, born in MSH, Pasay on August 27, 1961; Dodge Rienzi Conopio, born in MSH, Pasay on November 4, 1962; and Jon Cedric Conopio, born in MSH, Pasay on October 15, 1964.<sup>8</sup>

## Ministry

With his experience and inclination to literary work, Flor applied to work for the Philippine Publishing House (PPH) as an editorial assistant shortly after graduating from PUC in 1958. In those days, it was unusual for a bright, young man to work in PPH. Back then, it was common practice in the institutions to assign or transfer those who were about to retire to PPH. Dr. Alvaro Roda, one of the translators at PPH, even asked him, "Flor, you're too young to spend your years in PPH. Why did you choose to work here?"

Flor loved working at PPH. He loved it so much that he spent 36 years working there. He was appointed Assistant Editor in 1960. In 1971 he was made an Associate Editor and was ordained into the ministry in 1973.<sup>9</sup> In 1978, the Far Eastern Division and the PPH Board appointed him Editor-in-Chief.<sup>10</sup> There were other Filipinos who were appointed Editor-in-Chief before him, but he was noted to be the editor who held this position the longest; by the time he retired in 1994 he had held the position for 16 years.

During his editorship, the *Health and Home* magazine gained general public acceptance and was widely circulated. "Flor was the most senior publishing house editor within the Far Eastern Division then, and one of the most senior in the world field. His ministry was marked by many motivational lectures among publishing leaders and literature evangelists."<sup>11</sup>

Flor worked especially hard to improve operations between the PPH and the literature evangelists out in the field. He created the Philippine Progress Team. He also spearheaded the first of four Adventist Seminar Workshops in the Philippines in 1984. "As an editor, one of his most important contributions to the publishing program was his persistent desire to help motivate and train many others to write."<sup>2</sup>

In 1985 he was sent as a delegate to the 54<sup>th</sup> General Conference Session in New Orleans, Louisiana and served as a member of the nominating committee. He wrote the "History of Adventists' Work in the Philippines" chapter of the book, *Light Dawns Over Asia*, published by the Far Eastern Division in 1990.

In January 1992, the 6<sup>th</sup> National Convention of Philippine Literature Evangelists was held at the Baguio Convention Center in Baguio City, Philippines. Flor was the main man-in-charge of planning, executing, and maintaining the punctuality of schedules. He wanted it to be perfect, and the guests were very impressed with his leadership. Those who worked with him recalled that he never raised his voice or was unpleasant even under immense pressure. He is remembered to be a strict but compassionate coworker and leader.

Just before he retired, he presented a paper entitled "Philosophy of Adventist Editing" at the Adventist World Editorial Council in Frankfurt, Germany in 1993. His contributions to PPH and the *Health and Home* magazine are still remembered today by those who worked with him in PPH and in the field. He was very passionate about the publishing work.

## Other Accomplishments

1962 – awarded two Certificates of Award from CLIPPER CREATIVE ART SERVICE, sponsored by the Multi-Art Services, Inc. Peoria, Illinois, USA for "meritorious achievement in art and layout"

1967 – awarded Certificate by the Foundation for Administrative Research, USA for completion of the course, Systematization on Basic Forms Design

1970 – 1971 – awarded Certificate for the completion of Approaches to College English from the University of the Philippines

April 1973 – awarded Certificate in Dale Carnegie Course in "Effective Speaking and Human Relations" conducted in Manila, Philippines

July 1978 – attended Editorial Council in Denver, Colorado

August 1979 – awarded Certificate in Peter Drucker's course in "The Manager and the Organization" in Manila, Philippines <sup>13</sup>

## Later Life

In 1994, Flor and Merla retired from work at PPH and moved to the United States. After three years of dialysis and years of taking insulin, Flor succumbed to diabetes on December 4, 2000, and was laid to rest in San Diego, California.

Early in his life, Flor realized that the Lord had an elaborate plan for his life and allowed God to lead him to a fulfilling and successful career in the publishing ministry. His work did not only involve the PPH; he reached out to the literature evangelists who were at the forefront of the publishing ministry, he shared his knowledge and expertise by writing training materials and giving workshops, and dedicated his life in service of the Lord.

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### SOURCES

Conopio, M. *God's Guiding Hand: Mirroflot: Mini Biographies of Alumni of PUC/AUP*. Azuna, CA: Sari Art and Printing Inc., 2017.

"Flor Conopio." File: "Information – National Workers," Year: 1986, Southern Asia-Pacific Division archives, Silang, Cavite, the Philippines.

"Flor Conopio." File: "Personal Date Sheet," Year: 1984. Southern Asia-Pacific Division archives, Silang, Cavite, the Philippines.

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### NOTES

1. "Flor Conopio," File: "Information – National Workers," Year: 1986, Southern Asia-Pacific Division archives, Silang, Cavite, the Philippines.
2. M. Conopio, *God's Guiding Hand: Mirroflot: Mini Biographies of Alumni of PUC/AUP* (Azuna, CA: Sari Art and Printing Inc., 2017).
3. Unless otherwise stated, this and other information in this article come from personal knowledge of the author as Flor Conopio's granddaughter.
4. Filipino term for mother. Filipinos often call elderly women in the family 'Nanay.'
5. "Where is Flor?"
6. "Flor Conopio," File: "Information – National Workers."
7. Ibid.
8. Ibid.

9. Ibid.

10. Ibid.

11. Ibid.

12. Ibid.

13. "Flor Conopio," File: "Personal Date Sheet," Year: 1984, Southern Asia-Pacific Division archives, Silang, Cavite, the Philippines.

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