

SUNDAY, June 18, 2006

SUNDAY MORNING READ

BELATED GIFT FOR 'DADDA'

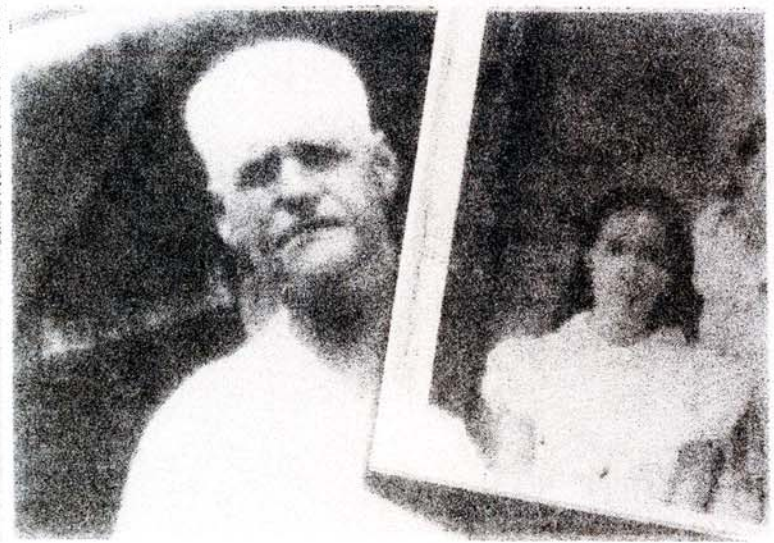
Daughter of U.S. civilian taken prisoner in Japan is preserving her father's legacy.

Thelma Santiago was 14 at the end of World War II, a survivor of the Japanese occupation of the Philippines. Her father, William Charles Clark, spent three years of the occupation in an internment camp in Manila while his wife and six children from his second marriage scraped by. Santiago, the oldest, always

liked to sketch and to write in her diary. Before he died in 1947 from an illness that stemmed from his imprisonment, her father asked her to record what the family had been through. Santiago promised him she would.

Six decades later, a promise to her "Dad-da" is a promise kept.

STORY BY THERESA WALKER ON NEWS 4



CINDY YAMANAKA, THE REGISTER

UNBREAKABLE BOND: Thelma Santiago was a young girl (17 in picture on right) when her father, William Charles Clark, died (photo at left taken in 1941, when he was 63). Clark was taken prisoner by the Japanese in World War II.

Thelma Santiago promised her father all those years ago that she would share in writing what their family went through under the Japanese occupation of the Philippines during World War II. Her father, William Charles Clark, endured the worst hardship in an internment camp at Santo Tomas University in Manila where the Japanese held some 4,000 American civilians.

A strapping 6 feet before the war, Clark came home after three years of imprisonment, bone thin, pale and sickly. While imprisoned, he developed an intestinal disease that would take his life on July 4, 1947. In the two years between the end of the war and his death, Clark planted the seed of legacy in Thelma's mind. He told her one day in 1945, after he'd come home, that she should write it all down.

Santiago was 14, the oldest of six children in Clark's second family. In the peaceful times before the war, Santiago would sit quietly in a corner after supper, sketching her father surrounded by her younger brothers and sisters. Clark sat in his big chair with the radio behind him, bending to flick a rubber band or a marble, playing the Filipino games his children loved.

When she married and moved to the city, Santiago left her diary and sketches behind, planning to return for them someday. Somehow, it was all lost. In 1971, Santiago's family moved to the United States.

Still, she never forgot her promise to "Dad-da." Six decades later, she has kept her word. Santiago, 75, began making notes again, piecing together what she remembered. Sometimes she'd call her brother Edward James, or "Jimmy," to ask him a few questions. She joined the Life Tapestry writing class at Leisure World, Seal Beach, where she and her husband, Marciano, settled 11 years ago. She typed up the memoir, haphazardly, going this way and that.

The story was filled with keen details and deep emotion. With the guidance of a documentary filmmaker whose sideline is helping ordinary people preserve written legacies of their lives, Santiago polished that promise into a 54-page manuscript titled "Dad-da Come Home."

She wants to make copies for her brothers and sisters. She wants to share it with her seven children and 11 grandchildren, and the 12th one on the way. "I promised my dad, so I've got to do it," Santiago says with determination. "I want him happy. He told me, 'Write it.'"

How did Clark, a New York native, end up in the Philippines? He was born in 1878 to a blacksmith who wanted him to carry on the family business. Clark wanted to go to college. A teenage Clark ran away, taking refuge with his sister and her husband in Omaha, Neb. At 17, he lied about his age and joined the Nebraska National Guard.

In 1900, the Army sent the 22-year-old captain in the signal corps to the Philippines to fight in the Spanish-American War. At war's end, in 1901, Clark decided to stay. He liked the weather.

He worked as a fireman and policeman while studying to become an engineer through correspondence school. Then he got a job with the Manila Electric Co.

By the time Santiago was born, her father's first wife had died and he was already a grandfather. Clark met Santiago's mother, Carmen Maquez, when he moved into a home rented for him by the electric company. The neighbors often invited Clark over for dinner.

Clark, 51, and Maquez, 19, married in 1929. They raised their family in a big house - four bed-

rooms and a yard filled with bananas and papaya trees - in the *barrio*, or village, of Botocan.

Clark loved being a soldier, Santiago says. He dressed and spoke like one decades after his discharge, donning for his everyday pants a pair of tailor-made jodhpurs and an Army-style hat. His morning greeting to the work crew he supervised at the electric plant: a smart salute and a "Men, fall in."

With his children, Clark was both gentle and firm.

Santiago remembers him getting up in the middle of the night to soothe her siblings. He walked the floor, rocking the babies in his arms and making a shushing sound that Santiago likes to think would remind them of being in a mother's womb.

His children didn't dare toy with their food at dinner. Santiago did that once, and her dad made her leave her plate and go to bed.

"So guess what?" she says, with a mischievous smile on her face. "I'm going to wake up at 2 o'clock and get some food. But guess what? He is sitting there by the refrigerator. 'What are you doing? Go back to bed.' You never do that again."



PIECING TOGETHER THE PAST: Thelma Santiago of Seal Beach was a girl when her father, William Charles Clark, died. He's pictured above and on the piano in Santiago's living room. Clark was imprisoned by the Japanese during World War II.

A PROMISE TO 'DADDA'

Thelma Santiago is fulfilling a pledge to tell her father's story, a memorial forged 61 years after his death.



TEAMING UP: Santiago sought help in writing a memoir of her father from documentary filmmaker Loren Stephens, right, who helps others transform the stories into keepsakes for generations.

The Japanese invaded the Philippines three days after the attack on Pearl Harbor. Santiago's family evacuated to Manila.

The trip took a week in a station wagon filled with 13 people - Clark's brother-in-law and his family came with them. Under blackout, Clark drove with his lights off, slowly zigzagging down

hilly roads in the dark. He told his scared family, "We'll be fine." And he hummed while Santiago's mother prayed aloud, "Dear Lord, don't let any harm come to us."

"As long as I heard my dad, as long as I knew he was there, I knew I was OK," Santiago recalls. "All he had to do was look at me and wink."

In Manila, they moved into an apartment furnished only with a dining table and some chairs. Her father left every day to help guard his company's electric plant in Manila.

"Then one night, he didn't come home," Santiago says. "The Japanese took him."

The family had been in Manila for about a week. They learned where Clark was weeks later when a stranger knocked on the door and handed them a slip of paper, the kind used to roll tobacco for a cigarette. Her father had written on it: "I need a mattress, food, everything..."

He was being held at Santo Tomas University.

In "Dad-da Come Home," Santiago describes the chaotic scene at the university, where people pressed against the fence, holding up cardboard signs, shouting and whistling for the prisoners:

"I saw Dad-da standing apart from the group of prisoners. He was disheveled, but he had a smile on his face. I could not help noticing his short beard. I had never seen Dad-da unshaven before. He was always well groomed. He tried to say something but there was so much

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Daughter looks to transform past into living history

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shouting, we could not hear each other. I thought he said, 'Tell your mother I'm all right.' I tried to fight back my tears as I nodded my head."

A few weeks later, the Japanese took her father back to Botocan and the family remained, hanging above the spot where their piano once stood. Six months later, the Japanese returned Clark to the Santo Tomas internment camp. The family went back to Manila. Clark was imprisoned for two more years.

Food became scarce as the war dragged on. Santiago says Clark told her that by 1944, he was eating rats that he killed with a slingshot.

"I asked him how he

cooked it. He said, 'barbecue, of course.'"

His family suffered, too: "Christmas 1944 was the worst. We were getting weaker every day. We became thin and scrawny. I don't remember smiling at all. The depression was overwhelming. I was afraid I was losing hope, but Mama kept us focused on the return of the Americans."

When her father came home, his appearance shocked Santiago: "Bones. Skin and bones. He was a walking skeleton," she says. But his can-do spirit hadn't changed. "He said, 'We're going to get some food.'"

Clark's failing health forced him to stop working in January 1946. Santiago quit school.

"I'd stay with him every minute. I didn't say anything, I'd just sit next to him."

Clark passed along little

bits of wisdom. Don't hold grudges, he'd say. Don't raise your children to be helpless.

Santiago remembers watching him being carried out on a stretcher on his way to the hospital before he died. "He said, 'Goodbye, girlie.' He called me girlie. I said, 'You'll be back.' He never came back."

He was 69.

Once she started writing down her wartime memories, it took Santiago about a year to finish 60 pages. Then she spotted a newspaper story about Loren Stephens, a Los Angeles-based, Emmy-nominated documentary filmmaker who had started a memoir-writing service

called Write Wisdom. Stephens loved Santiago's story from the start. Mostly, she did some editing and retyped the manuscript so it was more orderly. She suggested that Santiago add ages, dates and background facts.

"This is a beautiful and important story and a part of history," Stephens says. "Not only the family history but the larger history."

Stephens, who wrote a memoir about her mother's life, believes these personal stories are a more important legacy than material gifts.

"What really endures is a person's philosophy, what they stood for, how they endured, what they overcame," Stephens says. "This is one way of passing that on."

Above the piano in Santiago's living room is the same portrait of her mother and father that looters left behind. Taken in 1934, it shows

William Charles Clark seated in a chair while his wife stands beside him in her favorite green taffeta dress, her hand on the shoulder of his suit jacket.

Santiago recalls her parents arguing once and her mother got so angry she cut Clark out of the picture, leaving only his shoulder beneath her hand. A week later the portrait was repaired.

It later became a source of amusement, Santiago says. "My dad would point to it and they would laugh."

That's another story for her to write down.

MORE ONLINE

For excerpts from Thelma Santiago's story, go to www.ocregister.com/news

CONTACT THE WRITER:

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Tips for memoir writing

Memories fade. Journals, photos and other documents get lost. People die.

Loren Stephens, founder of Write Wisdom Inc., provides information on getting started on memoirs before it's too late at www.writewisdom.com.

Stephens conducts research to provide historical context, holds memoir writing workshops, does personal coaching and line editing, and ghostwrites.

Here are her suggestions:

- People tend to want to look good and avoid the tougher circumstances that may have shaped their lives. Find a way to ask a question or relate what happened so that it is not hurtful, says Stephens, a documentary filmmaker, writer and former editor for Houghton Mifflin.
- Stephens experienced this with her mother who, in the beginning, did not want to talk about how her own mother had tried to kill her. As Stephens' mother became more comfortable telling her story, she opened up.
- Don't be afraid to express feelings. Too often, Stephens says, people leave out emotions that personalize a story.
- Try to think visually. Bring readers to a scene, then take them through it.

- Theresa Walker, The Register