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ATENEUM DE MANILA UNIVERSITY

School of Science and Engineering

Department of
CHEMISTRY



My personal memoirs: Life at the Ateneo Chemistry Department, 1965-67

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About the author: Dr. Cynthia Juan Jameson is Professor Emerita of Chemistry and Chemical Engineering at University of Illinois-Chicago, with research interests in Physical Chemistry, in particular fundamental studies in Nuclear Magnetic Resonance spectroscopy. She obtained her B.S. Chemistry from UP Diliman in 1958 and Ph.D. Chemistry from University of Illinois (Urbana) in 1963. She married Keith Jameson and the couple spent two exciting years at the Ateneo Chemistry Department from 1965-67.

In 1965 Keith was hired by Fr. Schmitt basically on the spot after he presented his credentials. Fr. Schmitt said that he was going to have lunch with the Rector and talk to him about it, but he did not see any problems with Keith's appointment. At that time the new building was just going through the final cleaning up and Fr. Schmitt going after the contractors for various remaining unfinished work here and there. You

know how he was; Keith marveled at his dedication.

In the period 1965-1967 that Keith was on the faculty, there were only Fr. Schmitt, Amando Kapauan, Modesto Chua, Anna Javellana, Edgardo Piccio and Salvador Balalta and Keith. Only Mody Chua is still around as Emeritus. It was the formative years for the department and Keith enjoyed the short time he was there. Keith acquired an MS student, Maria Christina Damasco (now Padolina). She had a BS in Chemical Engineering. Keith gave her the project of finding the optimum conditions for growing iron-oxidizing microorganisms (presumably *Thiobacillus ferrooxidans*) from Bingham Canyon UT efficiently (in large numbers in a compact system). Later, even sophomore students like Jose Carlos Jr. got involved. Christina's MS thesis "Microbial Metabolism in an Electrolytic Cell" was accepted in May 1967 by Ateneo. She is currently president of Centro Escolar University.

Keith's first graduating class (1966) at Ateneo consisted of Claro Llaguno, Benjamin Mandanas, Arturo Mateos, Salvador Ondevilla, and Luisito Tan. These 5 students spent many dinner times at our home in UP Village. I used to cook large batches of pancit bihon and grilled pork skewers for them when they came over. Keith made sure we had enough cold San Miguel beer on hand when they showed up. Keith thought these students were very good, and in the following year all except Ondevilla would go into PhD programs in the U.S. with his encouragement.

After some time, we decided that it was not possible for us to continue to do the kind of research that we wanted to do in the Philippines. As soon as we realized we were going to have to leave, Keith started to plan for the future of those students we were leaving behind. He recruited the best students in the chemistry curriculum at Ateneo, one freshman, some sophomores, juniors, and seniors, to attend a crash course that he taught at Ateneo (on his own time) in advanced physical chemistry. I asked him to let the star in my general chemistry class (Leni Lontok) take the crash course too. Outside of classroom time, including weekends, he taught them quantum mechanics, group theory and a bit of molecular spectroscopy. To be able to do this required careful planning, because the mathematics they needed also had to be taught for a rigorous approach to these topics. Among those in the crash course were Lawrence Que, Jose Carlos, Jr., Danilo de la Cruz, Eugene Varona, all of whom went to the US and completed their PhD degrees in Chemistry (University of Minnesota, Cornell, Iowa State University, Penn State University, respectively). Leni decided to not continue (she later did her PhD at Ateneo with Fr. Schmitt), and the very promising Ateneo freshman (I forget his name) eloped with his girl friend just at the beginning of the class and dropped out. Otherwise, the rest stayed through the whole period, which lasted until we were about to leave for the US by the end of May 1967. He gave them as much as they could handle if they worked hard at keeping up. And they did.

The graduates of 1966 Claro Llaguno, Benjamin Mandanas, Luisito Tan all left within a few days of the time Keith and I did, going to University of Illinois at Champaign-Urbana, Iowa State University, and Indiana University PhD programs, respectively. Arturo Mateos followed later, going for his PhD in Chemistry at Loyola University – Chicago when Keith was already there. Keith's MS student Maria Christina Damasco also left at about the same time. She tried to find a PhD program in the US in Chemical Engineering, but they weren't taking any female students at that time, so she went to get her PhD in Chemistry at the University of Texas – Austin. (She later married William Padolina who became DOST secretary.) The sophomores and juniors in the crash course followed later. Lawrence Que is Regents Professor of Chemistry at University of Minnesota.

There was incredible amount of excitement during our last year in the Philippines. Both Keith's and my students were applying to PhD programs at the same time. It seemed like we spent a lot of time attending despedida parties, going to the airport and seeing off one student after another. In fact, I have photos of us seeing off Claro Llaguno, Luisito Tan, and Ben Mandanas, one at a time, before we ourselves left.

Since we would occasionally invite them to dinner in restaurants, UP and Ateneo students got to know each other. My students who we encouraged to do PhDs in the US were Elma Caballes, Rudyard Enanoza, Luisita de la Rosa, Melinda de Guzman, Virginia Ramos, Anna Tan, and Linda Vergara. They went to U of Illinois, University of Notre Dame, Iowa State University, Ohio State University, University of Minnesota and eventually Purdue University, Johns Hopkins University, and Pennsylvania State

University, respectively. Claro Llaguno from Ateneo and Elma Caballes from UP went to the same PhD program and later married each other. Claro Llaguno later became Chancellor of University of the Philippines-Diliman.

The two-plus years we taught at UP and Ateneo constituted only a small sliver of our academic careers, but those years and those undergraduate students had a very special place in our hearts. We kept track of them for many years, as they went on their own paths.

Because of my having to go back to the Philippines owing to my J visa, Keith left his industrial research job at Esso and his MBA thesis unfinished. The time at Ateneo convinced him that he wanted a different career path. His colleagues on the faculty and the students made all the difference. And so he ended up at another Jesuit university, ha ha. But there are no other Fr. Schmitts in the universe.



In those days there was such a camaraderie among faculty and students. This is a photo taken on May 1st 1966 when we all went to the airport to see Mody Chua off to Bonn where he would be doing his postdoctoral fellowship with Professor Rudolph Tschesche sponsored by the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation. In this picture are Rolf Kleindienst of the Ateneo Economics department, myself, Keith, Fr. Schmitt, Benjamin Mandanas, Mody Chua, Claro Llaguno, Luisito Tan and Jose Carlos Jr.





After seeing Mody off at the airport, we all headed directly to Malabon where Arturo Mateos was preparing a feast for us (a seafood spread on banana leaves) which we cooked right there. In the photos, you see Fr. Schmitt, Art Mateos, Ben Mandanas; on the other side, Keith and myself; Fr. Schmitt enjoying fish right off the grill. We also had oysters, crabs, and shrimp. Those were the days!