



Lolita Diñoso Carter, Ph.D., 2004. (1927-2011)

AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF LOLITA DIÑOSO CARTER, Ph.D. Aug 2008.
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Finishing high school in a few months and graduating valedictorian in a class of 10 in a rural high school right after the Japanese occupation, was not the best preparation for the University of the Philippines in 1947. However, there I was with another sister taking classes in battered buildings of the UP in Padre Faura. It was exciting though with classmates from different parts of the Philippines. In my third year, UP moved to Diliman, which at that time felt like hundreds of miles away from the Manila. However, the abundance of buildings including Quonset huts for dormitories made up for many of the shortcomings of the old UP. Having to walk endlessly to different buildings for classes put an end to high-heeled shoes and nice clothes. Diliman was bare of trees, grassy lawns, movie houses and shopping.

In 1950, I graduated from UP with a B.S.E. Major in Physical Education. Wanting to be close to my home and my parents, I landed a job as a physical education teacher, a first in Jackson High School, Olongapo, Zambales. Teaching physical education at that time meant softball, volleyball, marching tactics, calisthenics and whatever you thought was good for the body. I hardly remember how I managed teaching out in the open but at the end of my first year, the school gave me a whole quonset hut for my classes in folk dance. A donation of a piano from the Olongapo Naval Base launched my interest in teaching nothing else but dance. My students were mostly girls but there we were – “Philippine Folk Dance” with me playing the piano for dance accompaniment which eventually led to an interest in creative dance. One minor accomplishment I remember with great pride was putting on a demonstration of the Tinikling with at least 50 pairs of bamboo poles with so many dancers in a big open playground!

A chance meeting with one of my former professors at a UP alumni reunion inspired me to apply to different universities in the United States. I decided to go to the Woman’s College, University of North Carolina, Greensboro, as suggested by the UP professor who had encouraged me to go abroad. Their dance program directed by Virginia Moomaw had a very good reputation and was well-known in the US dance world.

After a seemingly endless Pan American prop planes across the Pacific in 1955, and a stop to visit relatives in Honolulu, I landed in Los Angeles. I was met and hosted by relatives of one of my students at Jackson High School. A Greyhound bus from LA to Greensboro took three long and boring days. At the school, I was the only non-white student except for one from Hong Kong who came later. Black students were not accepted! I was learning things I never knew in the Philippines about race relations. My classmates in dance were mostly dance professors from different colleges or universities in the US.

During holidays I was invited to spend the holidays with a classmate from Mississippi, another from North Carolina and a friend of my mother in Washington, D.C. Two summers were spent working in a girl scout camp in upstate New York and in western Massachusetts. These were all interesting experiences.

The jobs helped me finish my M.S.Ed. with an Emphasis in Dance in June 1956. My Master's thesis, which was written in Labanotation "Philippine Dances Adapted to the Theater" is microcarded, University of Oregon. [Labanotation is graphic method of describing dances.] I owe a lot to different professors at Woman's College, especially Virginia Moomaw who spent many hours teaching me "Labanotation" and classmates who choreographed dances in which I experienced theater performance. In 1957, I spent the summer at the American Dance Festival, New London, Connecticut taking classes with modern dance greats Jose Limon, David Wood, Betty Jones, Lucas Hoving and Jennifer Muller.

With the help of my professors at the University of North Carolina, I was accepted to work on my Ph.D. at the University of Iowa, Iowa City, which at that time was one of the top universities for graduate work in Physical Education. Iowa City was a very small city in the middle of miles after miles of corn fields. It was a perfect place to study because there wasn't much to do or see outside the University. It was also the place where I met my husband, Lindsay Carter, a Fulbright scholar on leave from Otago University, New Zealand. I graduated with my Ph.D. in Physical Education in 1958. During those years, I supported myself with a teaching assistantship, and working at a beautiful camp for girls in a place called Hillaway-on-Ten-Mile Lake in upstate Minnesota during summers. The owners who were impressed by a dance concert I presented at the school cafeteria one summer, built me a stunning outdoor theater which I used the following summer! My husband got his Ph.D. in 1959.

Our wedding in June 1958, was a small one attended by two sisters (who were now studying in the US), classmates, professors and Filipino graduate students. It was held at the University of Iowa Danforth Chapel. My wedding gown of "jusi" was air-mailed by my parents. It was made by Rolando Tinio, who later became famous directing plays in theaters in Manila. My Filipino friends and the International House hosts totally funded the reception. My main expense was \$32 for a wedding cake. In 1958-59, I taught modern dance at Cornell College, Iowa, about 10 miles from Iowa City.

My husband returned in 1960 to his job at Otago University, Dunedin, New Zealand where he taught kinesiology. Two things I had to adjust to quickly in Dunedin was the lack of sunshine, cold winters without central indoor heating, and eating New Zealand lamb or "hogget", both of which I later learned to love. I felt that I was the only Filipino in the whole country! Physical Education teaching jobs were few or not available. I obtained a job at the Medical School Hospital as an occupational therapist. Later on, I took a more interesting job at the Health Department presenting lectures on Health Education in small towns in South Otago. The thing I enjoyed most about the job was traveling throughout the beautiful countryside with its scenic landscape of neat farms and grazing sheep. To satisfy my need for creativity and dance performance, I joined the Orchesis Group based at the University of Otago as co-director, choreographer and dancer. I did this for three years before my husband and I decided to go back to the U.S. for better opportunities. He took a job in September 1962 as professor at San Diego State University. A few months later, I joined him in San Diego, taught for a year at Kearny High School, and was offered a job to build a dance program at Grossmont College, El Cajon, in 1964. The College, which was brand new, had a dance studio which allowed me to develop a program based on my years of working creatively in dance. There were no Filipino students at the College until the late 60's when Filipino Navy men started bringing their families to the US

and San Diego. I taught Creative Contemporary Dance at Grossmont for 23 years giving yearly dance concerts at the East County Performing Arts Center. I retired in 1987. During this period, from 1978-1982, I was also co-director, choreographer, founder and dancer with the San Diego Dance Theater,

In 1974, the Council of Filipino Americans of San Diego County invited me to teach Philippine Folk Dance in their Youth Program. I decided to volunteer part-time as a community service. The Samahan Philippine Dance Company was the result of a few years working and teaching students from San Diego State and neighboring schools in National City. Samahan was the name selected by my students who were in the Youth Program of COPAO. When Ruby Chiong arrived in San Diego in 1975, she was invited to join Samahan as a dancer, teacher and choreographer. A few years later, Samahan separated from COPAO and Ruby Chiong and I started training a small group of skilled dancers. We began producing shows for theater performance. In 1978, we obtained our non-profit status and started applying for grants to help support the Dance Company. We received a grant from the National Endowment for the Arts that same year which was matched by the Pacific Scene, the biggest developer in San Diego at that time. It was also at this time that Bayani Mendoza de Leon, a member of the well-known family of musicians in the Philippines arrived in San Diego to take graduate work in creative composition at the University of California San Diego. He helped us train musicians to play Rondalla music and Kulintang for the Dance Company. A few years later, Danny Kalanduyan, a Muslim guru based in San Francisco helped train Samahan's musicians with authentic Maguindanao and Maranao music.

At present, Samahan operates the whole year round presenting programs of Philippine Folk Dance in schools, libraries, festivals, senior centers, community events and outreach programs. The Philippine Cultural Arts Festival which is one of the earliest festivals in San Diego is a showcase of Philippine culture. Samahan started presenting it in 1978 at the Scottish Rite Center, Mission Valley, San Diego. It will celebrate the 24th year in Balboa Park the first weekend of August, 2008. Samahan has presented an annual Gala performance, a concert of dance and music in major theaters in San Diego County for 34 years. For the past four years, it has presented its annual concert at the Joan B. Kroc Theatre, San Diego. Samahan has worked hard and has earned its respected position as a member of San Diego's Performing Arts.

Some notable awards to Lolita Diñoso Carter include: Scholarship Chairman, Valentin Grasparil Scholarships funded by Pacific Scene 1978-86; Most Outstanding Woman, Philippine American Association of Professional and Business Women, 1979; Community Service Awards, Council of Filipino American Organizations of San Diego County, 1982; Professor Emerita, Grossmont College, 1988; selected as one of San Diego's Most Powerful Women, Women's Times, 1993; Outstanding Filipino Artist, Filipino American Lawyers, 1995; Recognition Award-Artistic Leadership Women Together, 1998; Lifetime Achievement Award, San Diego Dance Alliance, 2000; and Meritorious Community Service Award, University of the Philippine Alumni Association in America, 2005.

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