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Profile of a Filipina Lawyer by MANNY VILLON

As a young boy from Lapog, (now San Juan) Ilocos Sur where I grew up, I knew Atty. Manuel Albalos Argel of Vigan, Ilocos Sur. He obtained his Bachelor of Laws Degree from Georgetown University in Washington DC, USA as a working student and was an inspiration to many young men of our town. He became President of the Ilocos Sur Lawyers Association for 10 years, and defended clients, rich or poor.

He served as Judge of the Court of First Instance (now called Regional Trial Court) of Caloocan City, Metro Manila before he retired. Prior to entering the judiciary, he was twice elected Board Member and was Acting Governor of Ilocos Sur.

Atty. Manuel Argel married Atty. Paz Jaramillo Lahoz of Vigan and Sto. Domingo Ilocos Sur. She served the Philippine government as Deputy Commissioner of the Land Registration Commission, having been Register of Deeds of Ilocos Sur for many years. Her Bachelor of Law degree was from the University of the Philippines.



Imelda Argel

Although Judge Manuel Argel and Deputy Commissioner Paz Lahoz Argel have now passed away they have left a lasting legacy of good values through their children. Being respected in civic, religious, government and social circles, especially in Manila and in Ilocos Sur, their four children appreciate the importance of honesty, integrity and sincerity in their respective careers. The eldest, Pacifico, is a businessman. He owns a pre-school and a funeral service. The youngest, Rosario, is an Information Technology contractor in Sydney. Judge Manuel Argel Jr. is currently Judge of the

Regional Trial Court of Laoag City, Ilocos Norte. Imelda is a Sydney based Solicitor.

In the last seven years, Imelda Argel has been in private practice as a solicitor of the Supreme Court of New South Wales, the Australian Capital Territory and the High Court of Australia. She is an Attorney-at-Law in the State of New York, United States of America.

Imelda is also a registered migration agent and has been appointed by the Migration Registration Authority as Auditor for Continuing Professional Development Programs for Migration Agents.

Before Imelda Argel came to Australia, she had a well-established legal career in the Philippines. She was Managing Partner of the law firm Argel, Guevara & Associates based in Makati City. She was also General Counsel of a large multinational corporation. She previously worked in the Corporate Finance Division of the Ayala Investment and Development Corporation after more than three years of corporate practice at law

firm, Teves, Campos, Mendoza & Hernandez in Manila, Philippines.

In April 1988, Imelda Argel migrated to Sydney, with her 9-year-old son, Victor. After departing her successful legal practice in Makati City, she was somewhat taken aback that she could not practice in Australia immediately upon arrival.

Expressing what she felt during her early days in Australia, she said, "It was a bit of a shock to me. I had a couple of degrees from the best schools in the Philippines: - a Bachelor of Laws degree from the University of the Philippines and a Bachelor of Arts Degree from St. Theresa's College, Manila. I had come from being a corporate lawyer for a major multinational corporation and other large Philippine corporations. Despite my qualifications being recognised also in New York, USA and awards from the Legal Management Council of the Philippines, I was not entitled to practice law in Sydney."

"I had to work during the day and study at night in order to gain Australian accreditation to practice. Being a single parent, I also

did the housework for my son and myself and had to re-establish a place for us in society. My family background and my political connections in the Philippines seemed irrelevant at that time. I had to adapt to a major change in lifestyle," Imelda said.

Imelda worked as paralegal at Baker and McKenzie and later as legal officer at the Department of Conservation and Land Management in Sydney while completing her bridging course for admission as Solicitor of New South Wales. Imelda Argel then went on to obtain her Master of Laws Degree from the University of Sydney, after which she decided to establish her new legal practice.

"It was difficult to start", Imelda said. "I did not have contacts with big corporate clients like the ones I had in the Philippines. The fact that I had negotiated and drafted large build operate and transfer contracts and consortium agreements in Manila did not seem to be appreciated in Sydney."

"I had to refocus my area of practice from corporate and commercial law to

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community and personal areas - conveyancing, immigration and employment law. What made this change of client base possible were my friends, my neighbours, my colleagues, UPAAA alumni and my family". Imelda Argel acknowledged. As the practice developed, satisfied clients provided referrals and ongoing business.

Imelda Argel's son, Victor Guevara has been working as manager of her legal practice while studying at the University of Sydney. Victor has now completed a Bachelors Degree in Chemical Engineering (with First Class Honours) and Bachelors Degree in Commerce with an average of distinction in both degrees. His secondary education was at St. Ignatius' College, Riverview, where he obtained a TER of 98.55 in his HSC. Victor will commence work at Procter & Gamble in Australia starting February 2002.

The writer, Mansueto (Manny) S. Villon, J.P., B.A.,

B. Comm., B.Ed., L.L.B. is Chairman of the Board of Trustees of the Philippine Australian Community Foundation, Inc. He is the awardee of the Outstanding Filipino in NSW. He was born in Tarudud, Lapog, Ilocos Sur, has personal knowledge of the family and is a client of Imelda Argel and Associates in Australia and abroad.