

Jessie Lichauco at 98: Feasting by the Pasig, dances with memories

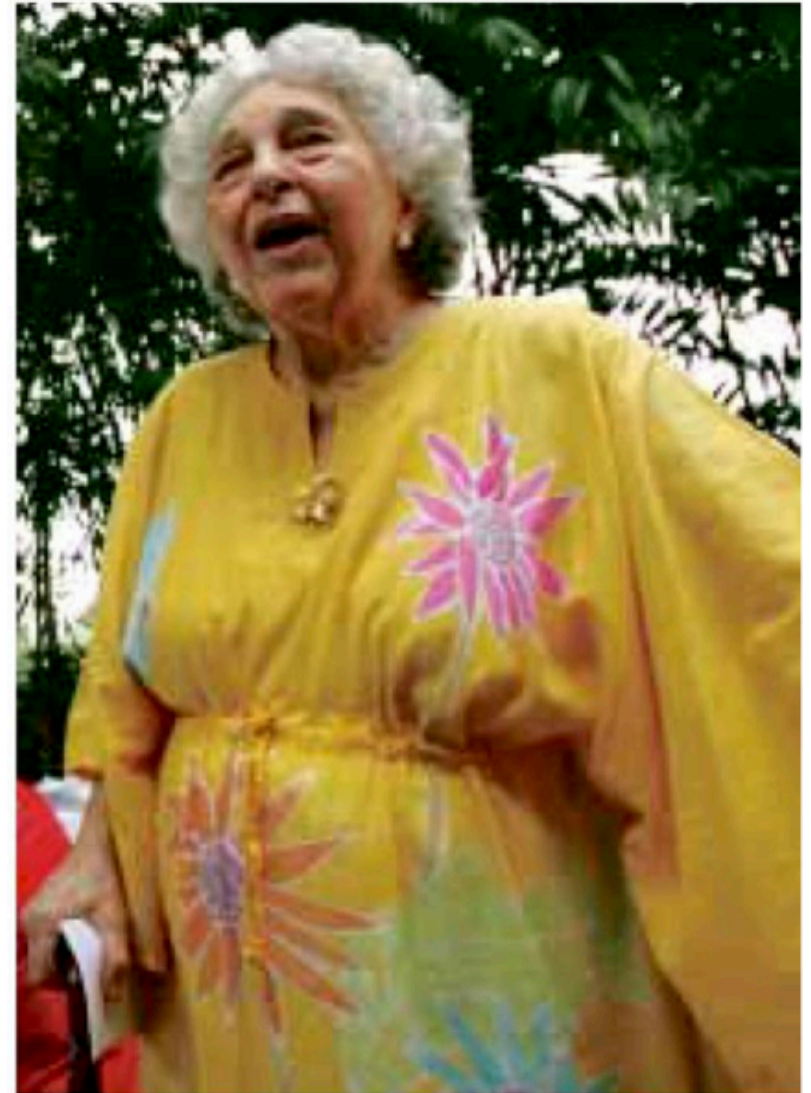
By Sunshine Lichauco de Leon
Contributor

WHEN SOMEONE ASKED THE “BIRTHDAY GIRL” TO DANCE, her fair skin almost blushed and a dreamy look came over her gray-green eyes. She said, “thank you, but I am dancing with my memories.”

Together with a hundred guests of all ages and from all corners of life, Jessie Lichauco celebrated her 98th birthday last Jan. 10.

Talented 7-year-old Hannah sang the Philippine National Anthem in the garden of an ancient home along the Pasig River. *Tita* Jessie then personally greeted each guest with an energetic smile and spry movements, her ageless body moving in rhythm with the live big-band music provided by The Executives, whose selection of music from days gone by provided backdrop to the ever-flowing conversation.

JESSIE/ CI



THE BIRTHDAY GIRL between the 250-year-old Banyan tree and the Pasig River of her affections



JESSIE Lichauco blows out her 98th birthday cake, to 98 years of curiosity, adventure and love! With her are Jade Lichauco, Sylvia Lichauco, Marcial P. Lichauco Jr., Nelly Fung and the author

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each friend or relative was there because this lady had left an unforgettable imprint on their lives.

Larry Henares recounts, "When my wife Cecilia died of a sudden heart attack while we were in Paris, I was so devastated that I could not bear the thought of telling my children about their mother's death. The first thing I did was call *Tita Jessie*—I knew she would know the best way to tell them and comfort them at the same time."

Curiosity, adventure, love

When Jessie Lichauco, my grandmother, first came to the Philippines in 1933, she was 18 years old. The population of the country was 8 million, and many people

'I am at the age of self-preservation,' my grandmother says. 'A sense of humor is very important'

still traveled in horse-drawn carriages.

She became the wife, and later the widow, of lawyer-diplomat Marcial P. Lichauco. Her life during the past 76 years has allowed Jessie to witness and interact with people, places and events that make up a

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