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Aida Asuncion Memorializes Daughter with UC Scholarship



"She was one good kid," says Aida Asuncion of daughter, Grace, pictured above, at right.

By ADRIENNE FIGUEROA

(Feb. 19, 2004) Twelve years ago, Aida Asuncion's 20-year-old daughter, Grace, died tragically – the victim of a homicide on the campus of UC Berkeley.

Today, Asuncion, director of Wayside Systems, continues to memorialize her daughter, a molecular cell biology student, through a college scholarship fund named in her honor.

Asuncion and her husband Edward, a retired industrial engineer, for years had considered starting a scholarship foundation in Grace's memory, but were unsure how to begin. When Asuncion was approached with the idea by one of Grace's college friends in 2000, the wheels were finally put into motion.

'It fit right in'

"The California Alumni Association at UC Berkeley called and asked if we wanted to set up a scholarship," Asuncion says. "They had the same thoughts that we had about setting up a memorial scholarship for her, so it fit right in."

On the 10th anniversary of Grace's death in February 1992, the Asuncions and California Alumni Association/Pilipino American Alumni Chapter launched the Grace Asuncion Memorial Scholarship at the northern California campus.

The Asuncions have worked with the group to advertise the scholarship and organize fundraising events. Together, they must raise \$25,000 before the endowment can become a permanent establishment and funds can be distributed to students.

Last December, they were \$8,000 away from their goal. Then, on Jan. 31, the Asuncions organized a very successful fundraising event called "Mardi Gras for Grace," which raised approximately \$10,000. That provided enough money to finally permit the foundation to start awarding scholarships, perhaps as early as this fall.

Meeting people's dreams

"This is all about helping people to meet their dreams and their goals," Asuncion says. "If the scholarship wasn't available, then some people would not be able to go to college."

Asuncion says helping UC Berkeley students finance their education has helped her to deal with her daughter's death.

"Doing this really gives me a lot," she said. "I'm accomplishing something for the good of someone else. This is a rewarding experience."

Grace is remembered among friends and family members as a good student and a responsible individual.

Musician and runner

A 1989 graduate of Agoura High School, she was involved in the Key Club, played the piano and the violin and won awards in the United States Academic Decathlon for her writing. As a senior, she was a runner for school's cross-country team, which won the California State Championship that year.

"She was very focused," Asuncion said. "She was one good kid."

Besides raising money for the scholarship, Asuncion is working to develop scholarship criteria that her daughter would want for fellow UC Berkeley students.

"This is all designed to what we thought Grace would want to have," she said.

EDITOR'S NOTE: Aida and Edward Asuncion have three other children. John, 34, a graduate of UC San Diego, is a transportation planner; Mark, 33, who graduated from Berkeley, is a naval aviator serving in Italy; and Danielle, 23, a graduate of UC Irvine, is a biologist with a biotech company.