



Joseph Anthony R. Rivera, MD (1980-2016)

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It is an honor to write this tribute to Dr. Joseph Anthony 'Otep' Rivera (1980-2016) – a friend, colleague, teacher, brother, uncle and son.

How do you describe a person, a friend, who led an extraordinary life, that the loss of his companionship and example defies measurement?

Can his life be measured by his accomplishments in his field of work, patients' illnesses dispelled and injuries healed? Perhaps. As important as his labor was though, as certain and measurable his accomplishments are, what remains of Otep in our memories will be his warmth and humanity.

Otep and I were batch mates and anyone familiar with the circumstances of this unique relationship knows there can be no small degree of friction and quarreling on occasion. We had our share but he would drop any issue of contention to help me in times of need.

Otep had a relaxed approach to problem solving, displaying initiative and ingenuity in organizing the resources needed to solve any challenge. His passion for community service was recognized by his colleagues and deeply appreciated by the people he helped.

He had a charismatic personality that drew people to him. People listened to him, followed him. What made him special was his love for people, all people. This was apparent by the work he chose.

Yes, he was a doctor. Yes, he trained to be an ear, nose and throat specialist. However, this was not enough for him. He devoted his extra time working as an emergency medical technician, responding to emergency calls. He also found time to be a firefighter during his days off. I don't know how he found the time. Given his other responsibilities, it simply defies the laws of physics. After residency, aside from establishing his private practice, he taught clinical ENT to medical students at Our Lady of Fatima Medical University. He also worked as the Chief Medical Officer of the Municipality of Apalit, Pampanga. His work as a rural health provider left the people of Apalit not only with better medical care but also with the awareness they now had a new friend.

During residency, we remember Otep as a dependable, resourceful, committed friend who loved life and all it offered. His passion for cars was legendary. If you had car trouble, you asked Otep. If you want to trade or buy cars, you asked Otep. You could ask Otep, even if you were stuck in traffic (he had a solution for everything). In addition, he was fun to work with, always ready to tell an anecdote or two to lift one's spirit and make the workplace atmosphere enjoyable.

His life may have been cut short by an incurable illness but to me it was a life well lived. Otep was a cherished friend to many, an awesome brother and uncle and a loving son—he will be missed but never forgotten by those who are fortunate enough to have known him.