

RODOLFO C. AQUINO

I joined the International Rice Research Institute (IRRI) particularly Varietal Improvement Department in March 1962. I worked with Plant Breeder Dr. Peter R. Jennings as part of the group of researchers he was heading for the first few years when he started IRRI's rice breeding program, subsequently with Drs. H. M. Beachell and W. R. Coffman for the next few years after Dr. Jennings left IRRI and later on with Dr. Gurdev S. Khush until my early retirement in March 1997. In April 1963, I enrolled in the University of the Philippines College of Agriculture now part of University of the Philippines at Los Banos (UPLB) Graduate School to pursue further studies as a part time student with IRRI's consent. In May 1966, I graduated with the degree of Master of Science in Agronomy, major in plant breeding. I worked for 35 years as a member of the team in various capacities starting as Research Aide and eventually as Senior Associate Scientist when I left IRRI. I have done works involved in practically every step or phase of breeding rice singly or jointly with fellow researchers and other workers. I have also worked with Dr. S. S. Virmani for a short period in conducting initial studies for IRRI's hybrid rice breeding program. I have served as a member of the IRRI team that collaborated with the National Seed Industry Council in evaluating and identifying promising rice breeding lines for release as varieties to the farmers. I served as short term consultant in few Asian countries' rice breeding programs including my almost 2 ½ year stint as Rice Breeder in the International Institute of Tropical Agriculture in Ibadan, Nigeria.

I hope that I have contributed and helped developed together with IRRI rice breeders and researchers the "miracle" rice IR8 and many other improved varieties that combined high yield with disease and insect resistance and good grain quality. Wide adoption of the varieties has led to major increases in rice production in many countries such that in the words of Asia Week magazine's senior correspondent Mr. Antonio Lopez in his article published in the same magazine's June 2, 1995 anniversary issue "Asians have their fill of their favorite grain" and of Manila Times newspaper's correspondent Mr. Joel Adriano in his article published in the newspaper's July 3, 1995 issue "Asia's decade -old fear of rice shortage can be put to rest", both of whom I thank sincerely. Additionally, the genetic materials developed at IRRI are contained in modern rice varieties.

My love for rice plant started during my childhood days in barrio San Jose, Binan, Laguna which was a rice growing area before. As a lad, I would often go to the rice fields to watch the farmers do their tasks. I would also join my parents when they harvest a certain portion of the rice crop of a land owner and get a share of the harvest. In doing so, I have learned the rudiments to plant and harvest the crop. Thus, rice fields, plants and farmers including carabaos and pieces of rice farming implement neither one of which belonged to my family were part of the environment where I grew up. I studied in Binan Elementary School and Lake Shore High School also in Binan. Influenced by this environment, I ambioned during my high school days to study agriculture in college, work in the village after graduation and stay with the rural folks. Finishing fifth among more than 200 graduates in high school in March 1956, I, with the consent and support of my parents, Mateo and Asuncion enrolled in the same year in UPLB. I partnered with two town mates and two friends and together we stayed in a low cost dormitory with kitchen in Grove St. near UPLB gate. As a group we cooked our food alternately according to our class schedule. During my third and fourth years I majored in rice agronomy. I graduated with the degree of Bachelor of Science in Agriculture (Honors Curriculum) in April 1960. Shortly after graduation, I was hired by my thesis adviser, Mr. Felipe Santos as Emergency Research Assistant in the Department of Agronomy. Three months later with his consent, I was taken by Dr. Pedro Escuro of the same department to conduct in UPLB experiment station the National Science Development Board-funded experiment designed to compare the Margate, Masagana and traditional methods of lowland rice culture. The project lasted for 1 ½ years. Shortly before the project ended and upon recommendation of Dr. Escuro, I was recruited by Dr. Jennings.

After retirement, I continued my interest in rice by producing rice for consumption and seed as a Bureau of Plant Industry accredited rice certified seed producer on small scale in Pila, Laguna. Due to declining vision caused by unsuccessful cataract surgery in 2001, I stopped farming in 2002 and went home to Binan.

I am married to Rosalie A. Ramilo. We have four children namely Rhodora, Raul, Berlinda and Hector, three of whom are married. We have four grandsons namely Juan Carlos born to Raul and Susan; Hector Miguel, Hector Mateo and Hector Manuel born to Hector and Lilibeth and a granddaughter named Chloe Abigail born to Gary and Berlinda. At 75 and visually impaired, I usually stay at home with my family.

I am grateful for the opportunity to have worked with IRRI. It helped me fulfill my dream to be a rice researcher and worker. I experienced working with people of different nationalities and fellow countrymen with diverse origin and background. I have been honored and presented awards some of which are Outstanding Performance Award by IRRI on May 9, 1980, Honorary Fellow Award by Crop Science Society of the Philippines on May 18, 1990, Performance Recognition Award by IRRI on December 21, 1990, Plaque of Appreciation by the National Seed Industry Council and Philippine Rice Research Institute on April 18, 1997 and 2000 Distinguished Alumnus Award by UPLB Alumni Association on October 7, 2000.