

## From the FANHS Family to the Montano Family: Remembering Joe Montano (1968-2016)

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**Three Generations of Community Based Mentors:** Joe Montano (standing, center) with left to right: Uncle Bob Santos, FANHS Founder & Executive Director Dorothy Laigo Cordova, FANHS Vice President Emerita Edwina Bergano, FANHS Trustee Ray Obispo, FANHS Hampton Roads Chapter Founding President Emeritus Allan Bergano, FANHS Vice President Emily Lawsin, and FANHS Founding President Emeritus Uncle Fred Cordova, at the FANHS National Office in Seattle, 2001. Photo: FANHS National Pinoy Archives (NPA)

The Filipino American National Historical Society (FANHS) is a 30+ year old grass roots community based national network of 34 chapters all run by volunteers. As an ongoing labor of love, FANHS founder and executive director Dorothy L. Cordova / “Auntie Dorothy” (84) still runs the FANHS national office in Seattle, Washington.

At FANHS, we are family.

This sad week, so many of us at FANHS are heartbroken by the recent death of Jose “Joe” Montano, Jr. (47) - part of the FANHS Hampton Roads (Virginia) extended family for 23 years.

FANHS wants the Montano family to know that friends from all over the USA love Joe and now send love and prayers as we grieve together. We’re inspired by Joe’s parents, Jose and Loreto Montano / Uncle Joe and Auntie Lori, for raising loving children – Benji, Amy, and Joe. We believe that Joe’s spirit – as a beloved son, brother, uncle, cousin, nephew, ninong, compadre, kapatid, mentor, colleague, and friend - will be with us forever. To Uncle Joe and Auntie Lori: We thank you for *so much* - for decades of sharing Joe with FANHS and so many communities;

for sharing with us your stories and wonderful Filipino hospitality - opening up your home to students, veterans, friends and all. Joe greets the world with the same openness and love.

When I first met Joe at the FANHS HR symposium in 1993 – a day when college students engaged in role playing Filipinos’ pre-WWII struggles for land rights in Yakima Valley, WA - Joe and his GW friends stood out as leaders among many other college students from throughout the region. (They are still leaders and remain among Joe’s BFFs =Best Friends Forever). Joe continued to read more histories and would use his knowledge to frame current events, aware of how specific regional and historical contexts influence the activist moments or movements for each generation. His own activism would move fluidly between geographies and cultures.

Dr. Allan Bergano, who founded the FANHS Hampton Roads Chapter with his wife Edwina, organized decades of programs – conferences, book projects, symposia, workshops and more – for the Hampton Roads community. As mentors to Joe and many other young people, Allan and Edwina flew in guest speakers like the late Uncle Fred Cordova and urged groups of students to travel with them to FANHS national conferences. Allan says:

*“FANHS gave students consciousness, identity and pride through Filipino American history. Joe and his crew participated in FANHS programs, workshops and as disciples of spreading the good news that we do have a history and we have the responsibility to write, document and teach.”*

Indeed, Joe worked on FANHS HR’s oral history projects, and convinced his Dad to be interviewed. At times during his interview, Uncle Joe would stand up to sing or to dramatize his stories of Navy life and his job as a steward in the White House. Joe beamed, his expressions a mirror of his dad’s. (The apple does not fall far...) Thanks to Joe and the intergenerational project teams, both Uncle Joe and Auntie Lori have valuable stories and photos included in both books published by FANHS Hampton Roads. (You’ll find Joe’s high school prom photo among other priceless memories in *In Our Aunties’ Words: The Filipino Spirit of Hampton Roads*.)



**Proud Father and Son:** After his dad’s interview at their home, Joe continues to work on the FANHS Hampton Roads oral history project, *In Our Uncles’ Words: We Fought for Freedom*. Photos: FANHS HR, 2006



Even after college, Joe still returned to FANHS HR's youth programs as well as to Filipino Intercollegiate Networking Dialogue (FIND) conferences - year after year for decades. He'd be there as a speaker or to support speakers while mentoring young student organizers throughout the East Coast. At one FANHS HR high school conference, he asked a student: "What's the most important idea you learned this weekend?" Joe would listen intently, asking questions to push thinking further. Later, he'd join their dorm party – breakdancing (in his mid-30s!) to drums in the hallway. He'd often be with Ray Obispo (FANHS National Trustee) who teaches at Salem High School and advises the Filipino American Cultural Society (FACS). Ray recalls:



*"I first met Joe Montano in 1996 at the FANHS New York National Conference. He became one of my closest friends who dedicated his life to his friends and the community. Upon graduation, many of my high school students became leaders in FANHS, college organizations and political advocacy groups. Joe was instrumental in their development. I recall a time at the 2002 FANHS LA National Conference: Joe gathered my students in our hotel room and*

*conducted an impromptu workshop as he educated and challenged them about their identity and their role in community. That's how I'll always remember Joe- selfless, giving and always working towards a better world for all of us."* – Ray Obispo



**TOP: Mentoring at FIND:** More than a decade after graduating from GW, Joe and Marlan Maralit continued to mentor students gathered at FIND's national conference at the College of William & Mary. Photo: FANHS New England, 2005.

**LEFT: Joe greets FANHS Trustees in Philadelphia:** Joe meets up with Dawn Mabalon (CA), Ate' Emily Lawsin (MI), Ray Obispo (VA), Ate' Joanie - Joan May Cordova (PA) Photo: FANHS PA, 2007

The growing number of students - mentored by Joe, Ray and more BFFs - would take what they learned at FANHS and FIND into local civil rights activism and national organizations or careers in Washington, DC. The energy of their networks made a huge impact in making the Resolution for October as Filipino American History Month pass U.S. Congress and Senate. They would later organize White House briefings on Filipino American issues and invite FANHS friends. Joe's ongoing mentoring would spiral into new arenas and causes that politicians laud today.



**The last time** FANHS national leaders saw Joe was during the historic first “White House Celebration for Filipino American History Month” in October 2015. Folks had flown from all over the USA to celebrate the holiday that Uncle Fred first declared some 30 years ago.

At a reception before the event, Joe introduced me to one of his colleagues by telling her about the very first FANHS HR event he’d attended in 1993 – role playing a struggle for justice and land rights.

Later, he connected with old friends from GW and reached out to a 2016 GW graduate who was not yet born when Joe’s crew experienced their first FANHS workshop. Joe asked about her involvement in The Philippine Culture Society and her plans after graduation.



**LEFT: Joe Greets GW Alumni** Bettina Tamesis (Class of 2016) and his old friends Jojo Maralit and RJ Dionko. All spent years active in GW’s Philippine Cultural Society. Bettina says: “My friends spoke with Joe at PCS’s 30<sup>th</sup> Annual Gala and gained a lot of wisdom.” Photo: @ForCommunities for FANHS, 2015.

**RIGHT: “I’ll always remember Joe’s smile,”** says Auntie Dorothy Cordova at a reception following the first “White House Celebration of Filipino American History Month” in October 2015. Photo: @ForCommunities for FANHS, 2015

Before he left to meet another FANHS group having dinner nearby, Joe stopped to greet Auntie Dorothy with an expression that conveyed genuine respect, gratitude, love.



**Joe meets old and new FANHS leaders** at Capitale, Washington, DC in October 2015. Pictured are FANHS Hampton Roads Founders Edwina and Allan Bergano, FANHS President Judy Patacsil and FANHS President Emeritus Mel Orpilla (both of California); FANHS President Emerita Joan May Cordova (Pennsylvania); FANHS Treasurer Christine Marasigan (Alaska); FANHS Trustee Pio DeCano, Jr. (Washington State) and friends. Photo: FANHS Alaska, 2015

There were so many VIP events Joe could have attended in Washington, DC on that historic night. But Joe chose to close out the evening with his FANHS family – standing between his Hampton Roads home community mentors, the Berganos - and beside Seattle’s Pio DeCano, Jr. whose father, Pio DeCano, Sr. had won the historic legal case for land rights in Yakima Valley after years of activist organizing.

**Earlier that day**, I’d taken photos of Joe that reminded me of his visit to the John F. Kennedy Museum in Boston years ago. In front of a life-sized iconic photo of the Kennedy brothers silhouetted against the light, Joe struck the same dramatic pose, holding still before laughing. The image recalled how many of us hoped that one day Joe would be working at the White House. And this week we learned that, yes, his spirit *will* be in the White House. Beyond his legacy of hard work to get many elected, we’ll remember Joe for: love and respect for parents and family, passion for history and justice, paying forward by building with youth, and giving back to the communities we nurture with love. Mahalo for all, Joe. You’ll inspire us forever.

*Sharing love @ForCommunities, Ate’ Joanie*



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