

A THERAPEUTIC COMMUNITY APPROACH TO THE TREATMENT OF SUBSTANCE ABUSE

# THE SELF Journal

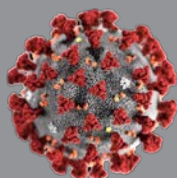
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## TAAAL VOLCANO ERUPTS



**NATURE'S FURY** — A huge pillar of steam and ashes erupts from Taal Volcano in the afternoon of January 12. This began a six-week evacuation of SELF from its Taal View House compound.

*Stories and photos on pages 2-7.*



**The SELF Way** **PAGES 10-11**

**Compassion, creativity and resolve: How SELF coped with the COVID-19 coronavirus pandemic**

# SELF evacuates Taal View House



**THE AFTERMATH** — Daybreak on January 13 reveals the devastation brought about by the ash fall from the Taal Volcano eruption and the heroic effort of the community to revive their beloved home. Clockwise from top left: The grim state of the Lower House facility with broken trees and ash-laden rooftops; Reentry resident Nikki hauls a fallen branch in the futile attempt to clean up the quadrangle; Residents wait in line to board the rescue vehicles during the evacuation process.

**T**AAL VOLCANO erupted on January 12, spewing ashes from its main crater across a wide area of Luzon Island resulting in the suspension of school classes, work schedules, and flights in the area.

The Philippine Institute of Volcanology and Seismology (Phivolcs) subsequently issued an Alert Level 4, indicating that a hazardous explosive eruption could occur at any time.

SELF had no recourse but to evacuate from its Taal View House (TVH) compound, which is located on the hills overlooking Taal Volcano just a few kilometers from the main crater.

Thus began the harrowing ordeal of the SELF community's exodus and ensuing seven-week sojourn till it was safe to come back home

## THE ERUPTION

Around 1:30 PM on January 12 the TVH compound was rocked by

numerous earth quakes. Following the tremors, white smoke began billowing from Taal Volcano.

By 4:00 PM that afternoon, a plume of smoke erupted from the volcano spewing ash all over the compound. Minutes later, it rained and the falling ash turned into muddy droplets.

The slimy muck felled numerous trees and covered the barangay road, rendering it impassable. At this point evacuation by motor vehicle was impossible.

As it was a Sunday, only a few staff were on board at the facility. They were effectively on their own as there was nothing their colleagues returning from days off could do to help them.

During those desperate moments, the only thing management could do was to stay in touch with the staff on board via mobile phones. Immediately, everyone was told to wear face masks and spend the night in air-conditioned rooms. Families of staff who lived in the

surrounding area were also given refuge in SELF's guest cottages.

By this time, electricity in the entire town of Talisay had been cut off. Fortunately, SELF's generators ran smoothly and ensured uninterrupted power and water supply.

Throughout the night, the Director on Board monitored the volcano vigilantly and gave hourly reports to both SELF President Martin Infante and the Chief Operations Officer Sockie Averilla.

## THE RESPONSE

Come daybreak, the SELF Family rose from their sleep only to witness the heartrending sight of the devastation in their home. Tree branches were ripped from trunks. Gutters dangled from the roof edges due to the weight of the volcanic ash. The entire grounds were literally covered with inches of mud.

After breakfast, the entire community convened in the Multi-Purpose Hall for

an emergency meeting. The residents were assured that management was exhausting all efforts to address the emergency.

On their part, the staff challenged everyone to do what could be done under the circumstances. In response, the community started clearing fallen debris and shoveling mud off the pavement.

Meanwhile, the staff who were scheduled to return to the facility that morning gathered at the SELF head office in Alabang instead. They set up a command center and with the use of mobile phones did their best to convey hope to the staff in the facility who knew that rescue was still not possible.

There were some who insisted on driving to Talisay and reach the facility on foot. But their plan was spoiled by news that traffic on the main road had ground to a standstill due to poor visibility from the ash fall.

Another plan to reach SELF from



**Counting Our Blessings** — Just a few days into their evacuation, the SELF Family successfully set up its TC program in the Xiana and Xandra Resort. Photos above (CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT): Martin solicits votes from the residents for the approval of an important protocol during a General House Meeting; Senior Program Director Lyn Simbulan and the kitchen staff cook a special sauce for the family; Travis and his mother Frances after their family dialogue; Martin presents an overview of the 12th Facilitator Training Course; Program officers assess a resident's learnings during a panel interview.

LEFT PHOTO: Male residents take a dip in the pool of the male quarters.

Tagaytay through Sungay Road was also avoided due to the slippery condition of the zigzag road.

In spite of these, Facility Admin Director Aldo Infante decided to brave his way to Talisay in his 4-wheel drive SUV followed by Physical Plant Director Jimmy Nalilin in his pickup.

### THE EVACUATION

Around 12:30 PM, police officers arrived in the facility. They had managed to clear a few fallen trees blocking the barangay road with the help of local volunteers. They warned the staff that the danger level had been raised to Alert Level 4 and insisted that everyone be evacuated. They offered an open truck but the staff unsure that it could safely transport the residents declined.

Shortly after, Aldo and Jimmy arrived in the facility and began coordinating the evacuation. Residents were put on board three SELF vehicles that brought them down to the main road where two tourist buses awaited. When the vehicles attempted to make it back to the facility

to pick up the rest, they could not make it up the hill because the road had become too slippery.

At this point, Aldo and FAM member Ernesto Magbanua decided to use their 4-wheel SUVs to shuttle the rest of the evacuees to the buses. The entire process took a couple of hours.

Meanwhile, Martin accompanied by senior staff drove to Pansol, Laguna to look for a temporary shelter. Through the kindness of Graduate Ryan Flores and his family, they rented four houses at the Xiana and Xandra Resort.

The houses each with a swimming pool could squeeze in a total of 110 residents and staff. At sundown, however, when the convoy of buses and SELF vehicles arrived, more than 140 people disembarked from the vehicles as some women and children evacuees from the neighborhood had tagged along.

The group was greeted warmly by Martin, Ryan and the staff. During the welcome process, the residents shared one thing in common. They feared they would wind up in a basketball court like

the evacuees they see on TV. They were thankful that SELF had found them a shelter complete with amenities.

After the welcome activity, everyone enjoyed a packed-meal dinner, compliments of a FAM member. Then it was off to the showers and straight to bed.

### SETTING UP SHOP

The following day, the staff and residents held a General Meeting to organize function units for the new environment starting with the Kitchen and House-keeping units.

Next, a Daily Schedule of Activities was established so that everyone had a task to fulfill. Not long after, prescribed therapeutic sessions were conducted so that residents could continue their recovery process.

Unhindered by the state of SELF under these exigent conditions, Martin resumed his work of giving seminars and training residents to become facilitators.

Days off were eventually restored so that Aftercare and Reentry residents as well as staff could get much needed

respite from work.

By the end of the first week, there was a semblance of TC life in the new environment and the refuge began to feel like home.

Over the two-week period SELF stayed at the Xiana and Xandra Resort, families visited and some even had dialogues with their loved ones. Graduates, former staff, and friends also came to give moral support to the evacuees.

SELF owes a great debt of gratitude to the Flores family for accommodating the entire community in their resort houses on such short notice.

Special thanks to FAM members Resty and Menchu Santos for providing the buses that evacuated the residents and staff, and to all the other families for their unwavering support and generosity.

Indeed, SELF faced an unprecedented challenge in the aftermath of the Taal Volcano eruption. Happily, the spirit and power of the Therapeutic Community prevailed and the SELF Family remained strong and united through the trying times.



A MOVABLE TC — Residents disembark from one of several vans used to bring them simultaneously to the Blusyl Resort on January 28.

# SELF transfers to bigger quarters

**W**HILE the Xiana and Xandra resort had enough amenities to set up a temporary TC, management was unsettled by the fact that many residents had to share beds. The cost of rent also exceeded the allowable budget so SELF went in search of another venue that could accommodate the whole community at a more affordable price.

Fortunately, on January 23, Graduate Denise Dangilan came for a visit and suggested the nearby Blusyl Resort that belonged to her friend. The complex had three connected vacation modules that together could accommodate 120 people without anyone having to share a bed space. A welcome bonus were three large swimming pools. In the coming weekend SELF inspected the site and closed a deal to rent the place for one month.

## THE TRANSFER

On the morning of January 26, the SELF Family woke up to the good news that the danger level had been lowered to Alert Level 3 and the hazard radius reduced to 7 kilometers. Management, however, decided to stick to the original plan and stay in Blusyl Resort for a month. After all there was a need to conduct a massive cleanup of the

facility.

To effect this, an additional workforce was sent to the facility to augment the team that had stayed on site to secure it. Together they undertook the formidable task of removing volcanic ash and mud from the rooftops and trees, clearing the compound of fallen trees and branches, and tidying up all the living quarters. With no residents around, it was also the opportune time to replace all the floor tiles in the Lower House basement.

On January 28, SELF made the transfer to the Blusyl Resort in one massive move. This was completed by mid morning and, after a brief welcome ceremony, everyone began setting up the function units. By then, the community had become quite savvy at setting up the TC so it didn't take long before everything was in place. Program operations were up and running by dinner.

## BEYOND SURVIVAL

With travel restrictions lifted, numerous trips were made to Taal View House by various committees. They took charge of getting kitchen equipment like refrigerators, freezers, and stainless steel dishwashing sinks and other essential equipment such as computers, printers, public address

equipment, and white boards. They also brought more clothes for residents and staff.

With these, the entire complement of function units were set up in strategic stations throughout the complex. The Kitchen and Pantry were stationed in Module A right beside the main dining hall. The Resident Development Office was established in Module B behind the multi-purpose hall.

Support departments were likewise set up, including the Evaluation and Motivation Unit where the following day a prospect was admitted.

The Clinical Department was provided with an ample area in Module C. With it came a small gazebo where family interventions could be held. The food bar served as the makeshift medicine dispensary for the Infirmary.

The Admin Department took its place in Module C where its staff continued the daily routine of procurement, accounting, and general oversight. Adjacent to it, the Media Department set up operations and attended to publishing the next issue of the monthly TVH Review and SELF Activities Video for the coming FAM meeting.

Not to be outdone, the COOP Store reopened and did a brisk trade with a wide variety of drinks and food snacks

at reasonable prices.

## TC LIFE GOES ON

Apart from the normal grind of TC activities, swimming became a new feature in the weekly schedule. Salsa, Zumba and Pilates classes also resumed.

Over the four-week stay, Martin continued to conduct training sessions for the 10 participants of the 12th Facilitator Training Course.

On the morning of January 30, Board Member Jess Hofileña paid the community a surprise visit. After a quick tour of the makeshift TC, Jess met with the SELF family in an informal gathering. He congratulated everyone for their resiliency in coping with the emergency and promised that everyone would soon be able to go back to the facility.

In the morning of February 14, Phivolcs further lowered the Taal Volcano advisory to Alert Level 2. For the SELF Family still in refuge, it was the best Valentine's Day gift ever. Knowing that it was surely just a matter of two weeks before they would return home, everyone focused on the here and now with renewed vigor.

All told, the stay in Blusyl Resort showcased the admirable strength and resilience of the SELF TC in the midst of a major crisis.



**FULL COMPLEMENT** — While the facility underwent clean up and repair operations, SELF set up Blusyl Resort so that the full complement of services could be delivered to residents and their families. Photos (CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT): Martin shows a cardboard file box that will serve as each resident’s footlocker; A regular therapy group session, one of many conducted with the program up and running; COOP Head Kim sets up his store; Martin shows the disposition of the dormitories and function units in the new location; Female residents engage in Pilates exercises during the regular wellness schedule; Board Member Jess Hofileña (RIGHTMOST) visited the SELF family and brought treats for staff and residents; The residents pose before a “boodle fight” meal prepared for the Valentine’s Day celebration; The 10 trainees of the 12th Facilitator Training Course undergo a group process.

**EXTRA THRILL** — Swimming became part of the “new normal” during the four-week stay in Blusyl Resort. Right photo shows the residents enjoying a game of water volleyball.



**PARADISE REGAINED** — Residents and staff strike a jubilant pose by the SELF logo at the Lower House Quadrangle to mark their rerutn to Taal View House.

# It's good to be back home again!

**O**N February 24, an advance party of residents and staff headed to the facility to prepare for the arrival of SELF Family.

The following morning, the rest of the community boarded 16 vehicles and headed home. Upon arrival, the convoy proceeded straight to the Sacred Heart Auditorium where the advance party cheerfully greeted them.

As everyone settled in the cushioned seats of the air conditioned auditorium, Chief Operations Officer Sockie Averilla kicked off a brief welcoming program. She began by congratulating everyone

for executing a well-organized and uneventful transfer.

She said it was so gratifying to note that, while SELF was on evacuation, it did not cease to be a "Strict Yet Caring" community. There had been no need to become tough on residents as everyone abided by the rules. There had also been no need to remind anyone about looking after one another because empathy abounded.

At this point, Martin no longer able to hold his excitement, got the microphone and exclaimed, "Welcome home, Family!" Everyone responded with

cheers and a thunderous applause. Then in a calmer voice he lauded the community for remaining at their best during the entire six-week emergency. "We left home as one and we returned as one! This evacuation and survival story will go down in the annals of TC history," he declared.

When the floor was opened for relates, many residents said they were grateful for the care SELF gave in ensuring their well-being and safety. In the main, however, everyone was simply glad to be back home.

After the heartwarming session the

residents proceeded to the quadrangle in systematic TC fashion.

Everyone was dying to see their dormitories, but first the the family was treated to a catered buffet lunch at the Multi-Purpose Hall to honor the momentous occasion, compliments of the Santos family.

After lunch, the residents set out to clean their dorms, reorganize their belongings, and set up their beds. Then, they inspected their respective function units and began cleaning and returning things to Normal Set.

That afternoon, Martin himself got



Photos (L-R): EMU Head Greg washes a dining table; Antonio and John air hampers and mattresses; Residents arrive at the Sacred Heart Auditorium; Pauline relates during the welcome program.



**RED LETTER DAY** — On February 26, the day after the SELF Family resettled in Taal View House, SELF held a thanksgiving program for its safe return. Serendipitously it was Ash Wednesday and started fittingly with a healing mass celebrated by Fr. Justine Torres (LEFT PHOTO). In the program that followed Founder & President Martin Infante gave due recognition to the officers and staff on board when Taal Volcano erupted and those who chose to stay to secure the facility. Photo below shows Martin and Chief Operations Officer Sockie Averilla honoring the staff who kept the community calm and safe till they could be evacuated — (L to R) Primary Program Director Jen Arbis, Media Head Toffee Torres, Facility Admin Manager Jason Cordova, Upper House Head Marichu Villegas, Clinical Staff Joy Nalilin and Nika de los Santos, and Infirmary Head Alan Mendez — as well as (FAR RIGHT) Facility Admin Director Aldo Infante and Physical Plant Director Jimmy Nalilin who braved the night impassable roads to evacuate them. Martin declared that henceforth February 26 would be a Red Letter Day of Thanksgiving in the calendar of SELF.



down and dirty and helped set up the Supplies Room in the Lower House basement that had received a facelift while everyone was away. He also assisted the staff in establishing a Normal Set in the kitchen so that it could start serving the community immediately.

The following day, SELF held a formal thanksgiving program in the Sacred Heart Auditorium to celebrate the safe return of the SELF Family. Board Members Jess Hofileña and Peter Stevens joined the community along with a few FAM members.

As it was also Ash Wednesday, it

began fittingly with healing mass celebrated by Fr. Justine Torres. It was followed by the recognition of the entire SELF family for a job well done during the crisis caused by the eruption of Taal Volcano.

Martin commended all those who walked the extra mile to support the community throughout its ordeal. In particular, he thanked the staff who were on duty when the volcano erupted and kept the community calm and safe.

These were Facility Admin Director Aldo Infante, Primary Program Director Jen Arbis, Upper House Head Marichu

Villegas, Facility Admin Manager Jason Cordova, Media Head Toffee Torres, Infirmary Head Alan Mendez, and Clinical Staff Joy Nalilin and Nika de los Santos.

He also recognized the courage and dedication of a group of technical staff who remained in the facility to safeguard the compound together with the kitchen staff who chose to cook for them throughout the evacuation period, namely: Physical Plant Supervisor Jimmy Nalilin, Technical Head Winnie Sulit, Technical Assistant Boy Ambion; Head Mechanic Levi Almosara, and Kitchen Staff Michelle and Mylen.

Martin also took the opportunity to hail the Family Association and all the friends of SELF for their outpouring of support. Then the board members in attendance spoke. Peter Stevens expressed how proud he felt to be part of the SELF community. On his part, Jess Hofileña enjoined everyone to join him in thanking the Lord for delivering the family back to the facility safe and sound.

To close the thanksgiving program, Martin declared that February 26 would henceforth be a Red Letter Day of Thanksgiving in the calendar of SELF.



**FACILITY UPGRADE** — While the TC was taking refuge in the Blusyl Resort, SELF forged ahead with the project to refurbish the entire basement of the Multi-Purpose Hall that had been put on hold by the evacuation. With no residents around it was the opportune time to tear down nonessential rooms and retile the entire floor. Funds for this project had been earmarked from the proceeds of the 2019 Yuletide Show that raises funds to improve the facilities. In the photo, residents begin setting up the kitchen and the pantry in the handsomely renovated basement. More facility improvements are in scheduled in the coming weeks.



**By Pauline**  
UPPER HOUSE RESIDENT

**T**o be 66 years alive, 29 of them in recovered sobriety, is no mean achievement. To celebrate it meaningfully in the time of the COVID-19 pandemic is no walk in the park either. June 20, 2020 will be a day to remember as SELF marked Founder and President Martin Infante's remarkable milestones with a salubrious celebration in the still essentially locked down facility.

What made it special is that family and close friends left the safety of their homes to honor Martin. For Board Vice President Peter Stevens, his wife SELF Family Association Chair Margie, and Board Member Jess Hofileña, it was their first time since the community quarantine began in March. Schoolmate Ricky Rivilla came too as well as Martin's wife Joy and daughter Inez.

Close associates who could not come in person took the time to send video greetings that were shown during the program. Samaritan Daytop Director of Peer Service and International Training Aloysius "AJ" Joseph checked in from New York, USA; European

## Nothing but the best

Federation of Therapeutic Communities President Phaedon Kaloterakis, handsome in a Barong Tagalog, called from Thessaloniki, Greece.

The celebration began with a lunch treat for the whole community featuring Martin's favorite dishes made from his mom's recipes – Bacalao and Lamb Adobo – prepared by his home cook.

After this everyone convened at the Sacred Heart Auditorium (SHA) for a program that had been lovingly prepared by the residents and staff. Their sentiment was captured by the beginning announcement: "As we celebrate the 29th Sober Anniversary of SELF Founder Martin Infante we also celebrate our own sobriety. For it was in his beginning victory over substance abuse that our own took root and grew."

The show was composed of a delightful mash-up of old and new dance numbers interspersed with greetings.

It began with an AV presentation of the Hillsong "Lord, I Offer My Life To You" dedicated to all those who had been afflicted by COVID-19, especially those who had passed away.

Then hosts Infirmary Head Alan Mendez and Program Head Angeli Garcia came onstage to welcome everyone and preside over the next hour and a half of rollicking fun and heartfelt greetings.

For the first number they called out the SELF Salsa Society for a Salsa Mix number that Martin had choreographed and directed. He would have loved to participate but had to be content with proudly watching his charges perform

the intricate passages with elan.

After this Upper House Resident Marky led his gang of residents in a reprise of Carol Burnett's "Shy" that they performed in last year's Yuletide play that is one of the celebrant's all time favorites.

Next came the videotaped greetings. AJ praised Martin as The Captain whose dedication is such that he cared for everyone and would be the last to abandon ship. Phaedon likewise extolled him stressing that he was honored to be part of Martin's successful endeavors.

Then it was the turn of those who had come in person. In his usual brief style, Peter simply said he was proud to be part of SELF these many years, commended the Family for sticking together through the crisis of the Taal Volcano eruption and the COVID-19 quarantine, and wished Martin long life and continued health.

Jess was at his eloquent best, regaling the crowd with how he had joined SELF after getting to meet Martin again 25 years after high school and was all the better for having done so. He gave an outstanding tribute. He said nothing that I have done so far even in my successful career in the corporate world can compare with what Martin has built. More than the handsome building and facilities, he has built a community.

Martin then went on stage to blow the candles on his birthday cake presented by the present batch of Facilitators that he had mentored. Two of them, Riza Lutero and Regina Deleste, shared their growing up moments with

him in laughter and tears.

Martin was visibly affected but gathered himself enough to thank everyone. He was especially heartened by how the SHA had come alive again compared to its dingy and rundown condition when the Family returned from evacuation. He was extremely proud at how the family put together such a wonderful program in such a short time. He gushed that it no longer seemed so farfetched that there may be a Yuletide show this year after all.

After this the rest of the presentations rolled out. Marky, billed as SELF's Andrea Bocelli, stilled the audience with a masterful rendition of "Amazing Grace". Then, a remake of "I Will Follow Him" from Sister Act with the female staff dressed as nuns and Media Head Toffee Torres channeling Stevie Wonder brought the house down.

Afterwards, Chief Operations Officer Sockie Averilla acknowledged the growth she attained working with Martin for close to 20 years in the closing remarks.

For the Finale SELF's master choreographer Jason Cordova led a troop of residents in a rousing frenetic hip hop and k-popping dance number.

Overall it was a fun-filled afternoon with moving moments of caring and grace for a community determined to honor its founder. True to SELF's culture of excellence, resident's and staff had given their all and presented nothing but the best to celebrate Martin and their shared commitment to a life of sobriety.



**HIS FAVORITE THINGS** — Above, Martin blows the candle of his birthday cake presented by the facilitators he had just trained; At right, his students do the Casino Rueda in a salsa dance he choreographed.





**WELL WISHERS** — (L-R) Hosts Angeli and Alan; Sockie gives the closing remarks; Toffee fakes the piano in "I Will Follow Him"; Riza shares her growing up moments with Martin; Regina brings out a short list describing how Martin mentored her in the Media Department; Jess extols Martin's achievements; Peter salutes the resiliency of Martin and the community.



**THE PRESENTATIONS** — *Spiraling from upper left:* The SELF Salsa Society in the opening performance of the program strut to Salsa Mix 2020; The female staff perform "I Will Follow Him" from Sister Act, an all time favorite from past shows; Marky (leftmost) and the residents in their reprisal of the song "Shy" which was one of Martin's favorite acts in SELF's Yuletide show in 2019; Facility Manager and homegrown choreographer Jason Cordova (center) and the residents at the end of their K-Pop finale.





By **Martin Infante**  
FOUNDER AND PRESIDENT

# Compassion, creativity and resolve

It has been a fraught year thus far. 2020 had barely started when Taal Volcano erupted on January 12, spewing ashes from its main crater across a wide area of Luzon Island including Metro Manila resulting in the suspension of school classes, work schedules, and flights in the area. The Philippine Institute of Volcanology and Seismology (PHIVOLCS) subsequently issued an Alert Level 4, indicating that a hazardous explosive eruption could occur at any time.

SELF had no recourse but to evacuate from its Taal View House (TVH) compound, which is located on the hills overlooking Taal Volcano just a few kilometers from the main crater.

It was a harrowing experience. Luckily, the entire community found refuge in a private resort owned by a SELF

graduate. Accommodations, however, were enough for an emergency situation but a bit cramped for long term operations so a search for more conducive quarters was soon started.

After two weeks, a suitable place nearby was found. A large resort that had been shuttered was made available by its owners through the intervention of another SELF graduate. Indeed, what goes around comes around.

Upon the second transfer the Alert Level had been lowered but SELF took one more month to return to Taal View House. The time was used to clean the ash and debris left by the volcanic explosion. It also provided an opportune window to retille and repaint the basement of the Multi-purpose Hall that houses the kitchen, pantry and house-keeping units.

On February 25, SELF moved back to Taal View House. The next day a thanksgiving program was held. The staff on board who had watched over the community during the explosion were duly recognized together with

those who had volunteered to stay behind to safeguard the facility.

It felt so good to be back home again, but the contentment did not last long. Barely two weeks after returning to the facility along came the peril posed by the novel COVID 19 coronavirus pandemic.

Immediately a planning session was held to come up with protocols and guidelines to secure the facility against the grave threat. On March 11 a General Assembly was held and the entire community was updated on the global spread of the deadly virus and informed about the protocols that would be followed to safeguard the community from infection. SELF had effectively anticipated the “Enhanced Community Quarantine” imposed by the government on the entire Luzon Island five days later.

Our safety protocols were simple and practical. The primary strategy was to limit and control access. Thus, family visits, dialogues, and interventions were suspended and residents and staff

could not go out for their days off. All deliveries were received at the gate and brought to a holding area for disinfection before being allowed into the facility proper. Inside the facility everyone was required to wash their hands regularly (at least five times a day) and to ensure compliance the community was reminded over the PA system at designated intervals. Twelve weeks later, as the country relaxes its containment policies, SELF has managed to keep the virus at bay.

Residents in rehab are of course no strangers to confinement. Still, to progress they have to reach milestones that involve taking days off. Staff, of course, were now in the same boat with their treasured days off to decompress on hold. What to do?

The program had to go on. With no clear indication as to when the quarantine would be lifted, SELF found ways to cope by getting creative with what was available.

The Msgr. William O’Brien and Fr. Lambertus Somar Building which



President & Founder Martin R. Infante presents the COVID-19 prevention protocols to the community in a General Meeting on March 11.



Above, residents fall in line to wash their hands following the reminder announced over the PA system. At right, Martin leads staff and residents through a homemade bike trail traversing the Taal View House compound.



houses the International Institute of Therapeutic Communities (IITC) in the adjacent property was designated as the “Days Off Hotel” — the go-to place to unwind and recharge.

Upper House residents on their regular days off are billeted in the basement dormitories; the staff occupy the private rooms in the second floor. The Dining Pavilion now serves also as a makeshift recreational room for playing table tennis, board games or simply lounging around. The Therapy Room has become a movie house in the meantime with a 40” flat-screen TV and a lineup of three screenings a day.

All prescribed days off were made to happen: the Escorted 12-hour Day Off for Lower House residents and the Escorted 36-hour Day Off and Unescorted 36-hour Day Off for Pre-reentry

residents.

To simulate the conditions of going home, residents boarded facility vehicles and were driven out from the facility to traverse the Barangay Miranda road before returning and being let off at the Days Off Hotel. There they undertook the approved activities lined up in their mandatory Day Off Itinerary.

With regard to program interventions requiring interaction with families and significant others like counseling, encounters and dialogues SELF has resorted to video calls. The newly installed fiber optic internet connection in the facility has made this more practicable.

With this upgrade, an Aftercare Continuing Care Meeting via the Zoom app was successfully pioneered.

Following this, SELF held “FAM on Zoom” on June 6, the first ever online

monthly Family Association Meeting. It was a huge success as some 50 families participated and interacted with the SELF community on quarantine, including officers, staff and residents.

It featured a complete program with a two-hour plenary session in the morning followed after a lunch break by two therapy groups that also lasted for two hours.

It looks like FAM on Zoom will become part of the “new normal” while the threat of COVID-19 remains.

With the installation of successful measures to safeguard the facility, provision of off-the-floor amenities for staff and residents, and migration of family interventions to online venues, SELF went on to turn crisis into opportunity.

Having chosen to shelter in place, Founder & President Martin Infante

zeroed in on the TC program and put together a continuing series of seminars, beginning with how SELF was formed and became a model TC to a presentation and discussion of Dr. George De Leon’s “Essential Elements of the TC” and “Community as Method”. Following this he attended to a review and improvement of selected Tools of the House.

All told, 2020 has been fraught thus far with tension and uncertainty, even with existential threats. But building on the compassion, creativity and resolve that make up the fabric of TC culture, SELF is ready for the long haul, to not only survive but even thrive until the world makes it through to whatever the new normal will be.

Till then, we wish one and all safe passage.



GROUP DYADS — Nigel speaks as Robin (seated) in the “Peter and Paul” group dynamics exercise as Martin and the others listen.



By Rafael Torres

MEDIA HEAD

**W**HEN the SELF management announced the lockdown of the Taal View House compound on March 16, it meant there would be no more days off for the staff or residents. Everyone had to remain on site for the 30-day quarantine period ordered by the government as a response to the grave threat of the COVID-19 pandemic. Aftercare and Reentry residents as well as staff would have to be content with going off the floor within the confines of the SELF compound.

With its usual creativity management eased the situation by using the Training Center in the adjacent property as a get-

# The Amazing resilience and fortitude of the staff

away place for those who were off the floor, a virtual Days Off Hotel.

As it was my first time to experience the cancellation of my treasured day off, I was really confused and terribly upset. I wanted to go home and stay with my wife and son during this time of crisis.

But when President & Founder Martin Infante came up to me and reminded me that we had an obligation to publish the **TVH Review**, our monthly newsletter that informs families about their residents progress, I agreed to fulfill my duty.

As the days wore on, I was inspired by the resolve of my colleagues who seemed to have accepted the challenge and continued to faithfully and diligently do their work.

When I asked one of the clinical staff how she was coping with the situation, she replied that there was nothing we could do but surrender to God's will and trust that He will take care of our loved ones outside. This instantly lessened my worries and helped me focus on my responsibilities.

Then that first dreaded weekend came. I was anxious to see what the staff would do when they went off the floor. Apart from lounging around, reading, watching movies, and catching up on much needed sleep, many turned to physical exercises like basketball, jogging, and table tennis. Biking, a sport in which only a dedicated few indulged, gained a new following. Many who had never shown interest were enticed to mount a bike that first Sunday. They happily joined our President Martin, an avid biker, as he made loops around the training building and facility compound.

This inspired Martin and fellow bike enthusiast Admin Facility Manager Aldo Infante to build a mini bike trail in the undeveloped portion of the compound. The following weekend the bikers did their best to conquer the trails. This time I too was enticed to go on two wheels. It was such a fun-filled diversion that my anxieties were placated.

Of course we also attended to the need to be in touch with our families

and we had cell phone conversations with our loved ones in private corners of the Days Off Hotel.

When it was time to get back on the floor, everyone was eager to get on with their duties. Their enthusiasm was amazing and extremely contagious.

As Managing Editor, I was motivated to keep the our newsletter progressing. Even when I needed to attend to other matters, I made sure the newsletter did not lag behind.

My commitment to our publishing work inspired me to be resilient and keep on going every day. I even found myself working when I was off duty. As long as there was something new to type on my computer, I was on it.

The progress of the struggle to contain the pandemic continues to rage. It may be a while before we regain a semblance of normalcy. With God's grace, however, and the amazing resilience and fortitude of the staff, I am confident the SELF therapeutic community will surpass this unprecedented trial.



**WELCOME RESPITE** — Staff on day off enjoy the relaxing ambiance of the IITC Dining Pavilion terrace playing board games, jamming on the guitar, and even catching up with online studies.



**By Regina Deleste**  
AFTERCARE RESIDENT

**I**N SELF I never thought much about getting promoted to positions of great responsibility. Before rehab I lacked self-confidence and feared figures of authority. Thus my silence and lack of participation. This carried over to my program: I felt I was only built to follow orders and agree with higher-ups.

Nonetheless, after 24 months I made it to Aftercare where I chose to go back to school. I wasn't ready and wound up back in the facility in November 2019 for acting out my negative thoughts. After serving Piyesa I rejoined the family as a Pre-reentry and two months later I was promoted to Resident Development Office Coordinator.

I must have been doing a good job because in the midst of SELF's evacuation from the facility because of the

Taal Volcano Eruption I was selected to participate in the 12th Facilitator Training Course.

I was taken aback and at first I was hesitant. I never thought I would be invited to join after having been looked over three times. But I swallowed my pride and mustered up the courage to join.

I was not about to pass up the possibility of becoming more actively involved in the management aspects of the program and simultaneously boost my self-confidence and people skills. I plunged into the training in earnest and involved myself fully in the course.

In early March, some two weeks after SELF returned to the facility, I became a badged facilitator and became a member of a select group of trustees.

As such, I got to attend numerous meetings and got exposed to the full spectrum of facility issues and even became privy to sensitive information. I actually had a say in what was being decided even though I was only a resident.

At first, it felt scary to be amongst

those empowered to bear great responsibilities. But this is how I learned that any processes residents are asked to go through are not decided at the snap of a finger.

With this, I developed more trust in the program. My thinking errors were quickly straightened when I experienced firsthand the long, hard but always compassionate discussions it took to arrive at what was best for the person and the entire community.

It got tiring, yes, but at the same time being entrusted with bigger responsibilities further increased my motivation to complete the course.

I am glad to be chosen as one of the people the program could depend on. And I feel very blessed to work with people who motivate me to advance my recovery.

Over the last weeks, a few of my fellow FACIs had lapses in their attitude and were processed. However, save for one, we managed to reunite our band of brothers and sisters. Now, we "good-fellas" are back to discharge our duties and give back to the community.

We have assumed stations in critical areas of the program. In the Lower House, Thereze is Program Facilitator; Roman is Head Coordinator, and Jason is Liaison Officer. Riza is the Resident Development Office Facilitator in the Upper House.

Elsewhere, Michael supports the Head Nurse in implementing the COVID-19 safety protocols in the IITC building, Gaby works in the office as Admin Coordinator, Joel serves as a Safety Officer, Lani supports the Purchasing Unit, and Janrebb runs the Upper House Kitchen.

As for me, I have found a home in the Media Unit. Apart from my work assignment, what excites me is when I get called to help facilitate group sessions, resident processes and family interventions.

In our daily work, my fellow trustees and I are constantly on the lookout for viable program improvements. We work hard to model good behavior and look forward to pass on what we learn to other residents who will dare walk the paths we blazed.

# The good fellas



**OFF TO WORK** — The new set of trustees who completed the 12th Facilitator Training Course set off to work. This band of brothers and sisters are (L-R) Regina Deleste, Michael Noble, Janrebb Santos, Lani Deleste, Joel Nanlabes, Riza Lutero, Jason De Guzman, Gaby Vasquez, Thereze Rivera, and Roman Aquino.

# Letting go, letting God

By Lani Deleste

PURCHASING FACILITATOR

**B**EFORE I came to SELF, I had a gambling problem that caused me to neglect my children. Sadly, my daughter Regina was so affected that she developed a behavioral disorder. This compelled my mother to send her to SELF in 2016.

Two years later, my mother sent me to SELF as well because my gambling addiction had gotten out of control.

A few months into my process in the Lower House, I had a dialogue with Regina who was already in the Upper House. It wasn't as great as I wished it to be but it was a good start.

Eleven months later, I too made it to the Upper House. I was assigned in the Kitchen Unit as Crew. I was excited because it was the unit I wanted to be in. There I felt important and accepted by my peers. I did not have to worry about what other people thought of me. The work was physically challenging but I enjoyed preparing the food, doing the dishes, and cleaning the area.

Being depended upon by the program gave me a sense of confidence that I never felt for most of my adult years. So, as my Aftercare phase was coming up, I considered working under the Supervised Practicum and Internship Program (SPIP) where I would commit to working six months for the Foundation and earn myself a reasonable pay.

I also joined the 12th Facilitator Training Course and passed it. When I got "badged" as a FACI,

I was promoted as Kitchen Facilitator. The thing is I joined the training because I knew Regina was part of the group and I wanted to prove to her that I had become a better person. But I felt anxious because I knew that the training would require both of us to be open and honest. Unfortunately, this plot backfired on me.

During an exercise Regina and I were paired and made to relate our stories to each other. When she brought up her issues and told me she was still angry with me, I was shocked. All the while, I thought we had settled those matters during our prior dialogue.

I was hurt but chose to suppress my feelings instead of sharing them with the group. I feared they would think I was being immature.

One day, there was a job change and I was moved to the Housekeeping Unit as its facilitator. For some reason I did not take the transfer well. I was angry to leave my comfort zone and rationalized that my new superior was hard to get along with. I also convinced myself that the program was rejecting me and that I was being demoted.

Blinded by all these negative emotions, I remained obstinate. Even as they clarified that there was a need for me to serve in the Housekeeping Unit, I refused to see the real picture.

It was only a matter of time before my emotions got the better of me. I dumped my feelings on my subordinates and acted out my frustrations in front of younger residents. Consequently, I was confronted, had my FACI badge taken away, and placed under Reflection.



While sitting, I realized that I was having an emotional relapse. Here I was rejecting myself again. Perhaps I had not really forgiven myself for what I had done in the past. I also realized that joining the FACI training to impress my daughter was the wrong motivation. Now she was even more disappointed.

On my second day in Reflection, senior staff talked with me to assess what I had learned. I told them I realized I was basing my self-worth on my daughter rather than on my growth and achievements. They said I was on the right track and encouraged me to invest in my Higher Power. Their remark hit home.

It was time for me to let go of my anger towards myself and the expectations I had set to gain my daughter's respect. It was time for me to let God have His way with my life. My job is to heal my own wounds while my daughter heals her own.

The next day I was accepted back in the family and assigned

to the Kitchen Unit, but as a Crew once more. There, I continued rebuilding my self-esteem by affirming myself daily and did my best to be open to the concerns given to me by my peers.

Weeks later I earned back my FACI badge and was transferred to the Purchasing Unit as its facilitator. This time I proudly embraced the change.

It's been a month since my promotion and now I can truly say that I've gained a lot of confidence in myself. I communicate properly to my superior and have earned the trust of the program once again. I also make sure to take concerns objectively.

In time, I hope to turn this personal achievement into something instinctive and pray that my newfound way of thinking becomes second nature to me.

As for my daughter, I do hope to see the day when she and I will be fully at peace with each other. Until then, I will entrust everything in the hands of God and let my life unfold according to His will.

# Leaving no stone unturned

By Antonio Minagawa  
RDO COORDINATOR

I WAS admitted to SELF in 2014 for substance abuse and graduated in 2017. At that point, I felt equipped to get through life's challenges and got myself heavily involved in advanced cycling.

I earned well working in my brother's company and was enjoying a functional relationship with my father and siblings.

Two years later, I had a bothersome dream about a past personal incident involving my younger brother Yuri. But with all the great feats I was accomplishing in biking, I managed to brush it aside.

A week after an epic bike race, I relapsed. I began using shabu and it became a major struggle again for me and my family. I did not know why I relapsed. What I knew is that I was undergoing a lot of emotional pain.

So as not to prolong the drug using cycle, I reported my drug use to my brother and he brought me back to SELF in late October 2019.

It was not till early January 2020 that I took accountability for my relapse and began serving my Piyesa status in the Lower House to begin my healing process in earnest.

However, the SELF community was suddenly forced to evacuate the facility due to the Taal Volcano eruption.

So it was at the temporary shelter in Laguna that I was welcomed back to the family as Pre-reentry and entrusted with the responsibility of serving as Security Support Crew. This role heightened my awareness and strengthened my



RDO Coordinator Antonio explains the EMO Bank Account table to some of the new residents.

sense of responsibility.

I took the opportunity to join numerous group therapy sessions where I talked about my relapse. I even joined the 12th Facilitator Training Course to further my recovery process. Still, there was something bothering me.

One day, I had a surprise dialogue with my elder brother Jun. Immediately, I asked for his forgiveness even as I had not yet figured out why I relapsed.

When SELF returned to the facility and program operations were back to normal, I was assigned another role as Water Station Crew.

Shortly after, I quit the facilitator training claiming I needed to focus on my personal process. However, in reality, I was deeply irritated about something. This prompted my peers and staff members to

our allowance. I remember how my father favored Yuri and I was envious. Then it all came back to me.

In my desire to find inner peace, I searched unrelentingly until I was able to recall a faded memory of a dark moment in my past.

A long time ago, I wanted to gain a sense of dominance over Yuri so I abused him badly, something an elder brother should never do.

Now that the incident was clear in my mind, I sought the strength to embrace it as an inevitable truth of my past. I needed to reach out to my family and make things right.

Thankfully, I had a coming video dialogue on Zoom with my brothers and sister. When the day came, I felt scared about being rejected but was determined to be open and honest.

The dialogue turned out to be a blessing. When I brought out the story and apologized to Yuri in front of my siblings, they showed compassion. My fears and anxiety were appeased by their forgiveness, most especially Yuri's, and I felt liberated.

A week later, I made the same confession to my father over a video call. He was teary-eyed but grateful to see that his children were finally mending old wounds.

I was also able to express my gratitude for the sacrifices he and my mother have constantly made for our family till this day. I am grateful to have found the courage to deal with this process.

Now, as the Lower House Resident Development Office (RDO) Coordinator, I have made it my mission to share the story of my relapse to my brothers and sisters in SELF who, like me, are struggling to attain serenity in their recovery.



# IN MEMORIAM

## Alfredo R. Infante Jr.

October 26 1942 - April 17, 2020

**M**Y brother Freddie has passed away at the age of 77. His demise was totally unexpected. I last saw him two months ago, when he visited in Blusyl Resort where SELF was taking shelter in the wake of the Taal Volcano eruption.

He complained about stomach pains but looked quite well. Little did we know that he already had Stage 4 Cancer. From the time that he got diagnosed, Freddie's health deteriorated rapidly. Sadly, because of the Enhanced Community Quarantine, I never got to see him.

On Friday, April 17, 2020 he passed away at 1:40 PM. He was cremated the next day and his ashes are in the keeping of his wife Janet. Hopefully, when we regain a semblance of normalcy, our family can give him a formal interment.

Many of the present FAM members may not have gotten to know him, but my brother Freddie has made a difference in the lives of many residents here in SELF especially over the last seven years.

In 2014, after following our Caroling Roadshow for 22 years, he suggested a new approach to our Yuletide tradition. Thus, Broadway came to the SELF Theater as he facilitated the engagement of his friend and colleague, the famed Director Fritz Ynfante, in SELF's Performing Arts Program.

Week after week, Freddie brought Fritz to SELF for rehearsals going into the Yuletide Season. They brought out the hidden talents of many residents, helped them realize their potentials, and transformed them into stage actors and singers in their own right.

Together, they produced a lineup of stunning musical productions including "The Magic of Christmas", "Seasons of Love", "A World of Pure Imagination", and "SELF@25: The Extraordinary Experience" for SELF's 25th Anniversary in 2017.

During those years, Freddie and I renewed our friendship. In my young adult life, my growing up moments with Freddie were centered on our love for automobiles. We also shared a passion for golf as he taught me how to play the sport in the 70s.

After that, Freddie and I parted ways as I began my downward spiral into substance abuse. In 1991, it was Freddie who led a team of doctors, orderlies, and family members in snatching me from my car repair shop and throwing me into a hospital for detoxification. From there I went straight into rehab.

After his successful foray time marketing in television with ABS-CBN and RPN-9, he went on to establish a career in the sports industry. He became the founding president of Metro Sports in 2003 and poured his passion in pioneering the development and promotion of women's volleyball. He was

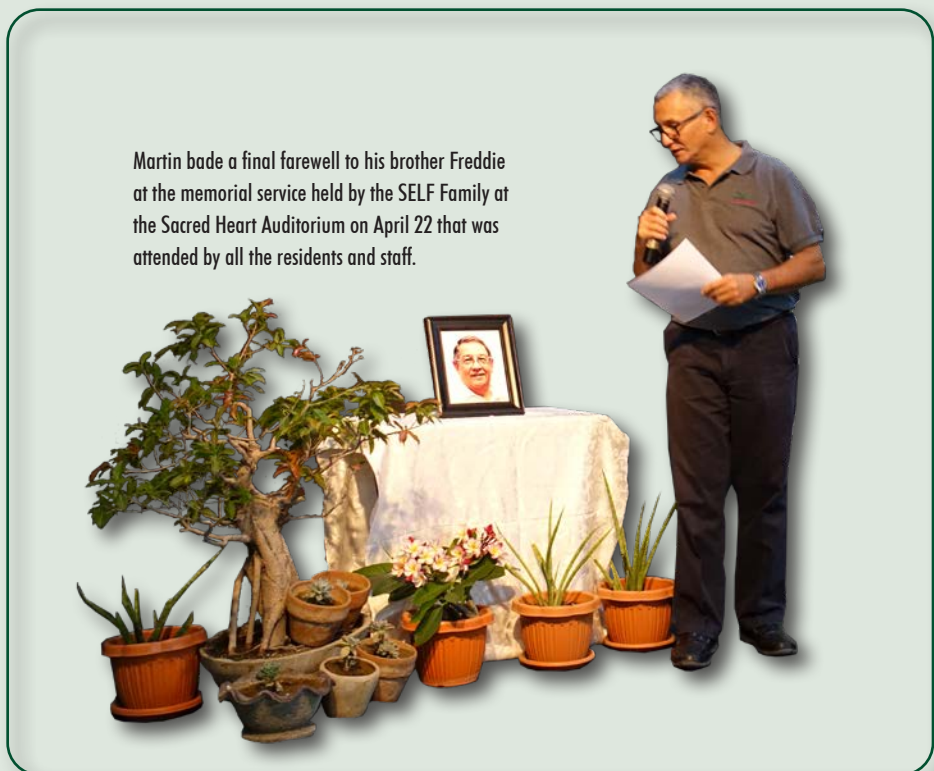
behind the organization of such leagues as "Toby's Sports Junior Volleyball League" and "Shakey's Girls Volleyball League".

In the past seven years, Freddie developed a keen love for SELF and grew very fond of our staff and residents. Through SELF, he found a more profound connection with himself. Indeed, "What goes around, comes around!"

Part of his healing must have come from the grace that flowed from his daughter Vicky's service as a counselor in SELF for seven years till she passed away also from cancer in 2012.

I will miss Freddie dearly, as a brother and as a friend. Thank you for this chance to pay tribute to his memory and please remember him in your prayers.

May he rest in peace with our Lord!



Martin bade a final farewell to his brother Freddie at the memorial service held by the SELF Family at the Sacred Heart Auditorium on April 22 that was attended by all the residents and staff.





**RESOUNDING SUCCESS** — For the first time ever, SELF's monthly Family Association Meeting (FAM) was held online via the Zoom app on June 6. Photo shows a few of the more than 50 families who joined from their homes in the Philippines as well as from abroad.

# Courage, strength, resilience

In these trying times of the novel coronavirus pandemic where the world is having to adapt to the "New Normal" of working from home, social distancing, and wearing of masks, treatment centers have their own share of challenges.

To safeguard their communities from infection, many therapeutic community (TC) programs had to implement a complete lockdown of their facilities resulting in the cancellation of family visits and days off of staff and residents.

Residents in the Primary Program or treatment phase were largely unaffected as they were going to be undergoing months of confinement anyway. However, cancellation of days off would surely take its toll on those in Reentry and Aftercare who need to go home regularly as part of their reintegration to society.

SELF got creative and repurposed some facilities in the Taal View House compound to provide residents and staff a way of getting away from the work environment. Our recently inaugurated training center in the adjacent lot became an excellent refuge for their days off the floor.

SELF also sought to continue its monthly Family Association Meeting (FAM), a vital adjunct of its recovery program. Happily, just before it had to shelter in place a fiber optic internet service was installed with the help of a FAM member. With this, SELF held its first ever FAM on Zoom — the 329th edition — on its regular schedule on the first Saturday of June.

The event brought a much welcome sense of normalcy. Even the program hewed to the traditional format: a two-hour Plenary Session from 10:00 to 12:00 in the morning and two hours of Therapy Groups after a lunch break, from 1:00 to 3:00. But there were a few surprises to spice up the proceedings.

The Plenary Session consisted of the requisite greetings and reports on program developments. A welcome addition were the accounts of resident facilitators that rounded up the reports and gave the families a closeup and personal feel of what their loved ones were undergoing.

A special treat was the singing of the TC Philosophy at the beginning that was led by two residents blessed with outstanding singing talents. The

families were so enthused that they asked for another song. Thus, the duet capped the plenary fittingly with the the song popularized by Celine Dione and Andrea Bocelli, The Prayer.

In the afternoon two separate Family Therapy Groups were held simultaneously on Zoom. The format in both was the same. After opening introductions, each participant was given time to share feelings and concerns. An open discussion ensued and the sessions ended with a round of insights and learnings. All told, the therapy groups helped assuage the anxieties of the families, especially the new ones, as the elders shared their wealth of experiences and insights.

Thus, the first FAM on Zoom was a resounding success. The more than 50 families who participated from their homes in the Philippines and abroad became one-minded with the program and SELF was inspired to set sail and continue its voyage of recovery.

Looking back, the semester has been rough sailing. It started with the eruption of the Taal Volcano in mid-January that forced the SELF Family to flee from its home and seek refuge for a total of 75 days. Then, barely a week after it returned to the facility, came the COVID-19 pandemic which seems to show no sign of ending soon.

There has been no respite. However, banking on the courage, strength and resilience engendered by the TC, SELF is confident that it will continue to not only survive but even thrive.

In the coming semester, SELF is set to deal with the more complex challenge of opening the facility to family visits as well as how to make residents take days off outside the facility. It is also looking at holding the traditional graduation ceremony for its successful residents online.

The review of this storied chapter in the annals of SELF will be incomplete without acknowledging the great debt of gratitude it owes to those who came to its succor in a time of dire need. FAM members Resty and Menchu Santos for providing buses for the evacuation. The Flores family for accommodating the entire SELF community in their resort on such short notice. And all the other FAM members for their unwavering material and moral support.

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