

# The Life and Loves of SAMMY LORENZANA JR.

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## 'My best is yet to come!'

**B**ehind most of the Philippine products you see in stores today is an amazing story. The story of Sammy Lorenzana Jr., the pioneer importer of products from the Philippines, not only to the US, but to many other parts of the world.

"I started it all, around forty years ago. I first imported Lorenzana bagoong, patis, and other spices. Then, I expanded the line to include around 500 products - including seafood, vegetables, sweets, juices, snack foods etc.," said Solomon Udarbe Lorenzana Jr, better known to family and friends as Sammy.

The story began in 1908 when Sammy's grandfather, Don Felipe Lorenzana, from Tagudin, Ilocos Sur started the business. Sammy recalls, "Don Felipe was a Protestant bishop in our town. He was also a trader and bought in goods from China and sold it in the Philippines. He learned how to make bagoong from his travels in China. One of his 16 children, my father, Solomon Lardizabal Lorenzana, decided to continue the business. He and his wife, Anita Udarbe, made bagoong and other Filipino sauces in their backyard in Ilocos."

"I saw the hardships of my parents as they did all the work by themselves. Even at an early age, I was very interested in the family business," Sammy said.

The second of six children, Sammy went to San Francisco when he was 18, where he took up Business Administration at the University of San Francisco. After graduation, he was drafted into the US army and was sent to Germany. He served the US Army for two years and then went back home to the Philippines.

"When I came back to the Philippines, Marcos was in power. Life was hard. I didn't like it there. I left in disgust," Sammy recalled. He went back to Europe and decided to further his studies in Germany where he took up his doctorate in Economics at the University of Heidelberg, the same university where Jose Rizal took up his second doctorate. While in Germany, Sammy married a German nurse with whom he has two children, Diana and Eva Kircher.

Speaking of his first wife, Sammy said, "We were happy but our cultures clashed. So, the marriage ended, although we have remained good friends."

Then came a challenge from his father that changed Sammy's life. "My father talked to me and convinced me to sell the Lorenzana products in the US. He said that at that time, almost forty years ago, he was selling some Lorenzana products in the US and was making around \$1,000 a month. He challenged me, 'maybe you can make it \$10,000 a month'. We had no money then. My dad just said, 'Ikaw na ang bahala.' With a handshake, my father made me exclusive distributor worldwide. But, he didn't give me any capital to run the business," remembered Sammy.

So Sammy went to LA in the early 70s. "I stayed with friends. I cleaned apartments. I worked hard. I went into selling insurance and other jobs. My friends used to ask me, 'You're the son of a rich man, why are you working petty jobs here in LA?' But I answered, 'My father is not really rich; he only looks rich.' You know, it's very hard to enrich yourself in the Philippines if you are an honest man," Sam stated.

Sammy started to work on exporting the Lorenzana products in the US and established the Lorenzana Food Corporation, USA. He developed the market and soon expanded their product line from the original Lorenzana bagoong. "I was able to develop around 500 products --from frozen veggies, to coconut milk and juices, to sweet desserts and seafood," he said.

As demand for his products grew, so did his business. He set up franchises for his products, not only in the US but in many other countries in the world, like the Middle East, Canada, and Europe. Sammy Lorenzana, Jr. worked hard and became one of the biggest importers of Filipino products in the US. "By 1975, I was up there. I was on top of the world, buying new cars, houses, and buildings," he recalled.

In the late 70's, Sammy met his second wife, Josephine "Joy" Orduna, a beauty queen and a valedictorian in high school, who he describes as "the most beautiful woman in LA" at that time. They have three children, Ariana, Karina and Sammyboy. "I'm so proud of the achievements of these children. Ariana has a BA in Psychology from Barnard College and Columbia University and is now pursuing her Ph.D. in Neuroscience at UCSD. Karina took up BA in International Relations at Tufts University '05 and will soon finish her Masters in Public Administration from Princeton University. Solomon III or Sammyboy has a BS Double Major in Decision Sciences and Policy and Management, Minor in Engineering Studies

from Carnegie Mellon University," Sammy proudly stated. "With the marriage, I got distracted from business. Plus, I made a lot of mistakes and encountered many trials," he added.

Sammy expounded on his business struggles. "Being the pioneer importer, I was the one who encountered all the difficulties. I was always fighting the customs and FDA. You know at that time, our Filipino products were not acceptable to them - especially the bagoong. They were throwing it into the garbage, containers worth thousands of dollars. There was so much discrimination at that time and I lost all my cases in spite of so many appeals and petitions. It was just too hard to win. You either wanted to just give up or shoot everybody who were giving you such a hard time in customs and FDA," Sammy said.

For two decades, Sammy did good in making money, at one time having a net worth of \$30 Million. "But I wasn't good in keeping the money," said Sam.

One weakness, Sammy admitted, is that he is too trusting. "I opened my heart and home to people who were in need. So many people came to me for loans, for financial help and I gave as much as I could. I helped thousands, here in the US, in other countries and in the Philippines. Once, I was in an airport abroad- a stranger, isang kababayan went up to me saying he had no money, no job. Naawa ako. I gave him what I had -- even my coat, kasi nilalamig siya eh. I wished him well. But sadly, many people also took advantage of my generosity and trust. Nagsamantala. I became a target of many sinister people. Some took my businesses; others ran off with my money. I can say that I am the most swindled person in history. But I believe God's promise that there will be a Day of Reckoning and Retribution."

Financial difficulties, family squabbles and health problems forced Sammy to lie low in the 90s. "The bad economy in the Philippines affected our company back home. My siblings in the Philippines were fighting over the corporation. I resigned. I was so downhearted. I've done all those things for the family but I felt that they didn't appreciate my sacrifice. I stopped importing products from the Philippines. My building and homes were foreclosed. I got divorced. I developed high blood pressure and had depression. I lost so much weight, from 140 to 120 lbs. The struggles were just too hard to fathom."

"I cast all my cares on the Lord and like He promised in the Bible, He gave me rest. I realized that I've made so many mistakes in my life but I've learned from them all. I got wisdom and I got back my energy and strength. Two words that I can say helped me after all those struggles are resourcefulness and serendipity," Sammy shared.

But it's hard to put a good man down. By the early 2000, Sammy was back on his feet. He started to develop his own products - along with the other products that he has been importing in the past. He has been busy traveling all over the world, expanding his network.

In 2003, Sammy found a new inspiration, Janelle Baulite, who became the mother of his youngest children, Lady Janella and Jacob Job. "I love beautiful women. That is my weakness. I have loved five women and I'm credited with 9 children - Diana, Eva, Ariana, Karina, Sammy



Boy, Cecile, Arthur, Lady Janella and Jacob Job. They have all made me happy in many ways. My children are my precious treasures," Sammy said.

The president of S Lorenzana Foods is now busy rebuilding his business with his son, Sammyboy. "I am currently looking for people of integrity -who are honest and hardworking - to be brokers and distributors of my products. I will not ask for any fee as I share my wisdom, trade secrets and business contacts and expertise. All they need to do is to help me promote and sell my products anywhere in the world. We will build something great together," said Sammy.

"I am on my second wind. As I've said, I have committed so many mistakes from which I have learned so much. There are very little mistakes I have not committed yet so I know the business will be better this time," said Sammy, who claims to move so fast and work so hard that he tires people around him. Amazing feat for a man of 72. But then, Sammy Lorenzana, Jr. has never ceased to amaze people. So those who know him believe him when he says, "As far as I am concerned, the best is yet to come."



THE LORENZANAS. (L-R) Karina, Sam, Sammyboy, Joy and Ariana

Photo courtesy of Joy Lorenzana

Publisher's Note

### The Spice of Life

According to William Gilmore Simms, "Genius is the very eye of intellect and the wing of thought; it is always in advance of its time, and is the pioneer for the generation which it precedes." And indeed, Sammy Lorenzana, Jr. is among the few who, despite the odds, courageously did great things ahead of their time. The Pioneer Importer of Philippine Products, Sammy Lorenzana, Jr. adds spice to life by becoming an inspiration to his kababayans here in the United States. The Asian Journal MDWK Magazine brings you his savory story -- one that will leave you with a mouthful of valuable lessons in life and love.