

## Obituary

### Tribute to Prof. Victor S. Soliman

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#### The Achiever

Victor Salcedo Soliman (1962-2020) served in the faculty of Bicol University Tabaco Campus for over 30 years, initially as an Instructor shortly after earning his BS Inland Fisheries degree in 1983, and eventually as Full Professor in his last years. He obtained his MS degree from the CLSU in 1989 and his PhD from Kochi University in 2010. His contributions to science gained recognition with his seminal work on the population dynamics of *Mystichthys luzonensis* in 1989. Locally known as *Sinarapan*, this goby species is the world's smallest commercially-exploited fish and is endemic to lakes in the Bicol region of the country. Since then, his work expanded with the same keen sense of science to the biology, stock assessment and culture of scallops in Masbate, the country's largest scallop fishing ground, and the early life history of siganids. Throughout his career, he successfully translated his research findings to societal benefits through the enactment of 14 municipal and city ordinances aimed at establishing lake sanctuaries and marine protected areas for biodiversity conservation and sustainable fisheries. For his lifetime work, he has received 40 national and regional awards in recognition of his contributions to science and conservation efforts. These include a *Ford Conservation and Environmental Grant* by Ford Motors Company, Philippines in 2001 for his team's repopulation efforts of *Sinarapan* in lakes in Camarines Sur, the *Philippine Wetlands Awards* from the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) in 2004 for his team's successful stock revival efforts in lakes of Mt. Asog and for the protection and management of sanctuaries for the same species in Lake Buhi, and the DOST *Elvia O. Tan Award for Best Published Research Paper* for inland fisheries in 2004 and for marine fisheries in 2010. In 2018, he was awarded the *Freshwater Conservation Award* by the Philippine Symposium on Freshwater Biodiversity and Ecosystems. Aside from motivating and mentoring numerous students and young researchers, and publishing over 70 scientific papers, Prof. Soliman also served as the Dean of the Graduate School (2015-17) and Vice President for Research, Development and Extension (2017-18) of Bicol University.

Aside from his many achievements in the academe, his



Dr. Victor S. Soliman

profession and to the public he served, Victor was a treasure who touched the lives of many.

#### The Mentor

*Antonio B. Mendoza Jr., Professor, Bicol University Tabaco Campus*

My more than 25 years of experience with Dr. Victor S. Soliman as mentor have been extremely productive. "Sir Vic", as we usually call him, guided and advised us in our professional endeavors, especially in our research undertakings. He understood well the external and internal pressures in an academic community – anxieties, difficulties, happiness and accomplishments. His advises were always sincere; his inquiries and feedback were unfailingly constructive, and measured with compassion and care. My entire experience under his tutelage opened up valuable opportunities, especially when I was recruited as a faculty member of Bicol University. His mentoring definitely made me feel more comfortable and I knew I had a person to talk with and find answers. With this situation, I was able to move quickly and clearly in navigating my work and my career.

I am extremely lucky to have worked with Sir Vic in more than 10 R&D projects implemented by the University. His ability to bring out the best in me was truly remarkable. He

encouraged taking risks and constantly asked questions that would make our neurons work and our brains think. I can still remember what he said to us as Research Assistants, “if you have questions, don't ask me, read and read again”. This approach ignited our curiosity to do more in R&D.

### **The Institution-Builder**

*Plutomeo M. Nieves, Professor (ret.) and former Dean of Bicol University Tabaco Campus*

In 2005, a team of Japanese scientists from Kochi University (KU) headed by Dr. Yoshinori Morooka arrived at Pili Airport, Camarines Sur and was welcomed by Partido State University (PSU) which had previous research engagements with a member of the KU team in the Visayas. During their visit to PSU they discussed their interest for institutional cooperation with academic institutions in Bicol to develop and foster joint research engagements and information exchange about the Kuroshio sphere of influence in Japan and the Philippines.

Driven by the need to explore potential partners, Prof. Morooka requested Prof. Raul Bradecina for a visit to other SUCs in Bicol and ended at the gates of Bicol University Tabaco Campus on the same day. During that time the BUTC Research Team headed by Prof. Victor S. Soliman was preparing for a presentation of research outputs for a province-wide Lagonoy Gulf – Resource and Social Assessment. Hence, coming to BUTC that day was a blessing in as much as the KU Team was given the opportunity to attend the meeting the next day. This was the start of the collaboration which was formalized by a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between KU and BU signed in 2006, covering five years of collaborative activities which included among others scholarships for faculty, student exchange, cross-visits by KU and BU scientists and exchange of scientific information between the universities. Prof. Soliman was at the forefront of these collaborations. This agreement was renewed for the period 2011 to 2016, and additional ones were forged with several other institutions from Taiwan, Indonesia and Malaysia between 2011 and 2017.

Realizing the need for a regular annual scientific meeting, the series of annual Kuroshio Science Symposia began first at KU in 2007 then at BU the following year. In the ensuing years, the symposia were hosted by other educational and research institutions from other countries which sought formal participation in the Kuroshio group of institutions. The collaborations within the group continue to benefit students, researchers and faculty from the various institutions up to the present, and these have helped develop Bicol University into a major player in marine and fisheries research in the Kuroshio sphere of influence.

### **The Colleague in the Profession and Friend**

*Wilfredo L. Campos, Professor, University of the Philippines Visayas*

I first met Vic in a meeting on shellfish culture in 1989, over 30 years ago, while I was still with the Philippine Council of Aquatic and Marine Research and Development (PCAMRD) in Los Banos, Laguna. Our paths had crossed many times since then, developing a work-related relationship as well as a valued friendship. My wife Annabelle del Norte-Campos, who is also a Professor at the University of the Philippines Visayas (UPV), is also a colleague and friend of Vic's.

Vic was a true “student” of nature, always open to new ideas, always willing to learn, always asking questions and trying to find solutions to them, in spite of his long list of scientific achievements. He developed expertise in many fields, from aquaculture and aquatic ecology to fisheries biology and stock assessment, and fisheries management.

I remember meeting him and Plutz Nieves in Tabaco in 1990, as part of PCAMRD on-site evaluations, to visit their clam culture set-up in Tabaco Bay. We talked a little bit about their pet clam, *Paphia undulata*, and a lot more on other fisheries concerns in the area.

Several years later, his other work on fisheries management gained national recognition when their efforts in San Miguel Island won the Reef of the Year Award in 1997. This was only the 2<sup>nd</sup> year of awarding this honor, showing that during the early phase of MPA efforts in the country, Vic and his team had already been achieving what most had only been aiming for at the time.

He lent his expertise in fisheries biology and management in drafting part of the *Training Manual on Sustainable Fisheries Management*, published by PCAMRD in 2005, and used in national and international training workshops. He raised the need for enhancing local expertise in stock assessment and together with PCAMRD, organized a training workshop for young practitioners from all over the country in 2013.

These are just some of his many achievements.

While we worked in different parts of the country, Vic and I met on many occasions to present papers, work on related projects, discuss science and its use and relevance to fishers, share our knowledge with the public and with younger researchers, or just to sit down after work to drink, enjoy good food and talk about life.

I constantly admired his dedication for putting science to practical use and to benefit ordinary people. His many public service achievements, awards and recognition are testaments to this. I also always looked forward to exchanging thoughts with him each time we met, to discuss old and new ideas, and

to draw up projects in our minds. My wife and I eventually translated a number of these ideas to thesis studies of our students, where he also served as a committee member. In fact, there are still a few graduate students in UPV whose committees we both serve in and I am certain that we would have had even more.

Vic willingly shared with us his know-how and expertise in many areas, including scallop biology and the use of otolith microstructure, which the OceanBio and Marine Bio labs in UPV have since been working on for a few years now and will continue to do so in the future, thanks to Vic's sharing. Many of the young researchers in these labs know him, and have learned from him and from his work.

As much as I respected Vic as a scientist with all his professional achievements, I valued his simplicity, perhaps over-simplicity, and humility even more. I know that this is why he is esteemed and loved by many outside of his family,

including myself. I last saw Vic in early February 2020 in Tabaco City, where we held a project inception meeting with his colleagues Plutz Nieves and Antox Mendoza and their staff. This project in many ways was also influenced by exchanges of ideas with Vic. On the last day of our visit, we had dinner and talked over a few beers. I excused myself briefly and when I returned he had already sneaked to the cashier and paid for the bill. That was typical of Vic – warm and caring in his special way.

One of our graduate students was scheduled to defend her thesis in December 2020, with Vic as the external thesis committee member. I asked Prof. Vincent Hilomen of UP Los Banos and the Biodiversity Management Bureau of DENR if he would take the place of Vic in the committee and his reply summed it up very nicely for many of Vic's friends and colleagues: "*In Vic's memory, I will be happy to do so*".