

Inocencia Agonoy (Magaoay) Facunla—Our Mother

By Rosita Magaoay Camero

(Summarized and edited by Juan Antonio "Tony" Magaoay, Joan Camero Parris, Michele Magaoay Weinhouse, and Patricia Camero)

"Inocencia's Life Story" is a never-ending story. Her journey paved the way for a better future for generations to come. Through her life of adversity and achievement, she became a model of strength and hope to her family, teaching them never to give up on life, often making difficult choices, and pressing on to the goal of a better life tomorrow.

PART 1: Inocencia Agonoy

Long ago in a faraway barrio in the country of the Philippines, there lived a rich landowner named Juan Agonoy. He lived with his beautiful wife, Juana, and they were blessed with a wonderful son and two lovely daughters.

Born in the Philippines on January 6, 1911, Inocencia grew up in a modest-style home. Even her name, "Inocencia," fit this young Filipina so properly. She was simple and full of innocence. Growing up, Inocencia had somewhat of an unsophisticated demeanor, but many witnessed her coming of age as she blossomed into a beautiful maiden.

Inocencia did not have an opportunity to get to know her mother, Juana. Juana died and left her husband to tend to his three young children. For the sake of his beloved children and not wanting them to be motherless, Juan Agonoy remarried a widow who had a daughter the same age as his youngest daughter, Inocencia. As the tale goes, the stepmother favored her own child and often treated her stepchildren unfairly.

This is a poignant account about the life of a beautiful maiden, strong-willed wife, strict mother, and loving grandmother and great-grandmother of the twentieth century. This is *Inocencia's Life Story*...

PART 2: Basilio Magaoay

In a nearby village, there lived a young man named Basilio Magaoay. He was handsome with dark, curly hair. Basilio had a hard life, compared to the life of Inocencia's family. His family was extremely poor, and just as Inocencia had lost her mother at a young age, Basilio had lost his father at a very tender age, as well. There are conflicting stories about his father's death. Some say Basilio's father died in a tragic accident. He was on top of a large moving truck going to work one day when a strong wind came along and blew his hat off. As Basilio's father tried to retrieve his hat, he lost his balance and fell to his death. Many believed, however, a darker version: that Basilio's father jumped off from atop a large moving truck and committed suicide. Either way, the sudden death of his father hit young Basilio very hard. He believed and was haunted by the thought that his father had taken his own life. Even more painful was his mother's decision to sell Basilio as an indentured servant to make money and make ends meet. Basilio was only seven years old.

PART 3: Inocencia & Basilio

Juan's lush golden rice fields lured many Filipinos from near and far provinces to help with the crop. It was during one of the harvest seasons that the handsome young Basilio caught the eyes of the beautiful thirteen-year-old Inocencia. Basilio's strong stature, good looks, and compelling and enduring love convinced the young girl that he was the man she would be with forever.

The impetuous and naïve couple decided to elope. Since Inocencia was too young to marry, she falsified her age and rationalized to herself that she had "borrowed" a couple of years from Basilio so they could marry. On the civil certificate, Basilio was listed as being twenty years of age, and Inocencia as seventeen.

When Juan learned of his daughter's elopement, he was furious. He mocked his daughter by telling her that she could have at least chosen a man who knew the difference between "black and white." For Basilio's family was so poor they could not afford him a proper education. Although he could not read or write, he proved to be exceptionally good with numbers. Basilio was a math wizard, and this trait has been passed on to his children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren, who work in the engineering, medical, and educational fields today.

Eventually and over time, Juan's love for his daughter, and the obvious affection he saw between Basilio and Inocencia, overcame all of his disappointments and anger. He gave the happy couple his blessings and presented them with a *carabao*, which is considered a noble wedding gift in the provinces of the Philippines. The newlyweds settled in their *nipa* hut, and Basilio tended the rice fields with their wedding gift—the *carabao*.

Within a couple of years, their first child was born—a precious little girl with beautiful, dark, almond-shaped eyes. One look at her and Inocencia somehow knew in her heart that her baby was a special gift sent from heaven only to be enjoyed by her earthly parents for a short time. They named her, Theresa.

PART 4: Basilio's & Theresa's Departure

Basilio felt like a restless spirit. He wanted a better life for his wife and new daughter. So, when he learned about an opportunity to work in the sugar plantation fields in Hawai'i, he decided to leave his family and ventured across the vast Pacific Ocean to work in the "Promised Land." Basilio and Inocencia planned to reunite after a year. He would make some money, find a home, and send for his wife and child so that they could live as a family once again.

Meanwhile, back in the Philippines, Inocencia became a nursing mother not only to her daughter, Theresa, but also to orphaned twins. The twins' mother, her sister-in-law, died when the twins were very young. One night, the unexpected happened—the twins both died. Their cause of death was unknown. Being very superstitious, Inocencia swore that their mother's ghostly spirit came in the middle of the night and took them away, longing to be with them in heaven. Soon after, Inocencia's daughter succumbed to influenza and died. Inocencia blamed herself for the death of her dearly loved daughter. She also remembered her premonition about Theresa the day she was born, and she felt that her nursing the twins and Theresa together ultimately may have contributed to an unhealthy situation for her own baby.

Saddened by these events, Basilio quickly sent for Inocencia to come to him in Hawai'i. It would be a new beginning for the young Filipino couple.

PART 5: The Promised Land

In 1930, Inocencia left the familiar surroundings of her homeland, Bacarra, Ilocos Norte. Although she was sad to leave her family, close relatives, and friends, Inocencia was anxious to be with Basilio. She had been away from her beloved far too long.

Once reunited, Basilio and Inocencia settled in Na'alehu, Hawai'i. In 1932, their second child, Arcinnia, was born. Life was good, and the family was happy; but feeling restless once again, Basilio decided to move his family closer to his relatives, also from the Philippines, who were now living in Kahuku. They moved closer to Uncle Lakai and Aunty Baket Tomacder. It was wonderful to have the Tomacders so close. A year later, their third child was born, Rosita.

PART 6: Hardships in the Promise Land

Again, Basilio couldn't stay in one place, and he eventually moved his family to Spreckelsville, Maui. "Camps" were like small villages, comprised of simple homes, built on stilts, with carpeted bedrooms and a kitchen with dirt floors under the stilted home. Basilio, Inocencia, and their two young daughters, Arcinnia and Rosita, moved from camp to camp. With two young children to care for, it didn't take long before Inocencia became exhausted as they moved again and again.

Even with Arcinnia and infant Rosita to care for, Inocencia still found time to brew her own liquor. Although it was a prohibition year, and the manufacture, sale, and transportation of intoxicating liquors was outlawed, Inocencia secretly brewed her own liquor and stored it in a large earthen jar, in an enormous hole, hidden away under the house. Inocencia took pleasure in the suspense of making the *basi* or sweet wine, and was even more satisfied watching her husband enjoying the fruits of her labor. She was also an excellent masseuse. She was especially popular with young married couples that desperately wanted to have children but for some reason couldn't conceive. Her reputation grew, as she possessed a unique massage technique allowing the once barren wives to become pregnant.

One day, while Inocencia was washing clothes, a neighbor in the camp came running, frantically shouting for Inocencia to come with her. She told her that something horrible had just happened at *Compadre's* house. *Compadre* was a close family friend whom Basilio and Inocencia had decided would assume the role of parent to their daughter, Rosita, if something happened to them. Inocencia ran as fast as she could to Rosita's *ninong's* house. Arcinnia, their eldest daughter, followed her frantic mother and did her best to keep up with her.

When they arrived, they found two-year-old Rosita on *Ninong's* porch trembling with fear, crying with her hands covering her little face. Right in front of Rosita, sprawled face down on the muddy ground, was a sugar plantation worker, lying in a pool of blood. *Ninong*, they came to discover, had viciously killed him with an axe. The dead man was *Ninong's* roommate.

News traveled fast in the camp. Soon, a tall *haole* man, wearing long black boots and riding on a horse, came looking for *Ninong*. It was the camp's boss. He took *Ninong* to the local authorities. After that, *Ninong* was never again seen or spoken of.

Ultimately, the fourth child, Calixto, was born in 1934. Then, the fifth child, Pasito, in 1935. After the horrific incident with *Compadre*, Basilio decided to move his family to another camp, yet again. He took his family to Camp 11 and joined Inocencia's cousin, Matias Agonoy. Just after their move, Juan was born. Juan was a very sickly infant. Being superstitious, his mother believed there was an evil spirit in her precious baby. To confuse the spirit, she nicknamed her baby Tony. Eventually Tony's health improved.

With yet another mouth to feed, Inocencia felt compelled to supplement the family income, because Basilio's wages alone were not sufficient to support five hungry children. Inocencia started to wash clothes for the sugarcane workers, particularly the single men. Neighbors and relatives helped the often-weary Inocencia by lending a hand to watch her children. Inocencia missed her family in the Philippines and wanted to go back home. She was always exhausted and felt mentally drained. It was then she realized that she was pregnant yet again.

PART 7: Hardships Continue

While in Camp 11, Inocencia and Basilio had two more children, both girls. Unfortunately, one was stillborn, and the other lived just for a day. Each precious daughter was laid to rest. Inocencia grieved each death while Basilio kept on working. He could not bear to see this once vivacious maiden stricken by grief. Although he tried relentlessly to comfort her, he did not know how to console his grieving wife.

One hot, windy day, Calixto and Pasito were playing with matches in the sugarcane fields. The mischievous brothers found the thrill of striking the matchbox and lighting the dried-up sugarcane field irresistible. Without warning, a sudden gust of wind started to spread the fire quickly through the fields. The playful boys became nervous and feared the worse. They knew they were in trouble and in danger. Wives of the sugar plantation workers came running toward the fields with heavy buckets of water, trying desperately to contain the fire. The evacuation of their camp homes appeared inevitable. Luckily, homes were spared, and no one was hurt. That evening, Inocencia punished her boys by giving them an old-fashioned spanking to their bottoms, using, of course, Basilio's thick leather belt.

After the fire incident, the family was forced to move again. They returned to Camp 3, located a distance away from the sugarcane fields. As one can imagine, other families were apprehensive about Inocencia and her family moving into their peaceful camp. Inocencia was ashamed, and disappointment filled her fragile heart. Fortunately, a distant relative reluctantly took the Magaoays into his very small home. Granduncle's place had one small bedroom, a living room, and a tiny kitchen. He also had a *banyo*, which is somewhat of an overcrowded outhouse. That same year, Inocencia gave birth to her youngest child, Lucena Carmen.

PART 8: The War

December 7, 1941, started as a usual Sunday, Inocencia catching up with her household work and Basilio enjoying a day of rest. The children changed out of their Sunday school clothing into play clothes so that they could play outside in the dusty fields. The children were enjoying a game of "Pee Wee," a popular game among the young involving two sticks, typically broomsticks. Inocencia and Basilio were relaxing in their shared plantation house listening to the radio. Suddenly, the music stopped and was replaced by static. They heard loud sirens and the sounds of swooping, diving airplanes over the radio. Hawai'i was being attacked, and the Japanese were bombing Pearl Harbor. It was the beginning of World War II.

Inocencia calmed her children, as they did not know what the implications of war meant. They were innocent, and the mother of six tried her very best to keep the children's lives as normal as possible. Still, the family knew that their lives were in danger. Neighbor helped neighbor, digging and building air raid shelters alongside each plantation home. Miles of trenches were dug behind the children's school, and gas masks were given to everyone. Inocencia made sure that her children had their gas masks before they left for school and that her dear Basilio packed it daily in his workbag.

The schoolchildren practiced drill upon drill, quickly marching and hiding in the ditches. They were trained to clench pencils with their front teeth to keep them quiet as possible. Windows in homes were covered with black cardboard so that bright lights did not illuminate the dark, still nights. Times were tough, and the economy was faltering. No work, no pay. To make ends meet, Basilio took his four eldest children, Arcinnia, Rosita, Calixto, and Pasito, to the deep *kiawe* forest. There, they gathered *kiawe* beans off the trees and ground so that they could sell the beans to farmers to feed their cattle and hogs.

The children's hard labor produced a dollar for the day's work; however, the most gratifying reward was their mom's crunchy homemade rice krispies, a rare and delicious treat at the end of their workday. Inocencia would lay these treats on top of the home's iron roof to bake in the hot sun.

On the outside, the family seemed as if it was one strong unit. Nothing, not even war, could divide this strong family. However, something was terribly wrong in their relationship. The more time Inocencia spent to keep her family happy, the less she felt that Basilio was giving her the attention she needed. She became increasingly agitated and more vocal. Tough words were exchanged, and arguments ensued. Basilio escaped hard times and marital problems by turning to alcohol. He knew that Inocencia was very unhappy, which made him unhappy as well.

It was a time of war, both outside and inside the home of the Magaoay family.

PART 9: A Family Torn Apart

The year 1944 was not a good year for the family. Frustrated and unhappy with the constant arguing, lack of income, and Basilio's increasing dependence on alcohol, Inocencia decided to leave her family, taking only her two youngest children. She felt she had to escape. She was gone and left behind her four eldest children with her husband. The family felt torn and broken. The four children were devastated, confused, and hurt. Their youthful minds posed unsettling questions: "Why did Mama have to run away?" "Why didn't Mama take me with her, too?" For Basilio, it was a heart-wrenching time. He never stopped loving Inocencia and desperately wanted her back.

News about Inocencia leaving behind four young children reached the local child-care agency. A child-care worker arrived, unannounced, at Basilio's home. There she found nine-year-old Arcinnia and eight-year-old Rosita doing laundry. They were barefoot, working on the cold and wet cement in the *banyo*.

The child-care agency wanted to remove the already distraught children and place them into separate homes, but Basilio adamantly refused. Inocencia had taken two of his precious children away from him, and he'd be *darned* if a stranger would take away the rest of his family. He knew he wasn't perfect, but no one could ever love his children the way he did. His children were the very ones who kept him alive. Basilio refused to give them up and give up on himself. Many tears were shed as he fought for his family. He did not want to end up with the same fate as his own father. Giving up was not an option for Basilio. He had to do something quick. He had to save his remaining family. They were moving again...

PART 10: A Refuge—The Island of Lana'i

Naia was to be Basilio's and his children's rescue boat. It was headed for the tiny island of Lana'i. Cousin Matias Agonoy was now residing on Lana'i with his wife, Ladia. They had three beautiful daughters, a little younger than Basilio's four children. While Basilio's two daughters were reluctant to move from their familiar surroundings on Maui, Basilio's two sons were excited about their new escapade. It didn't take long, however, for all of them to adapt to their latest home. Matias and Ladia loved the children as if they were their own, and their daughters Marina, Apolonia, and Magdalena welcomed their new cousins with open arms. They got along very well, and for the first time in a long time, the children felt like a family again. Ladia made sure that the house was a home for all of the young kids. It was small and cozy. Mostly, it was a house full of warmth and love. Nine people were under one roof, and the duties were shared equally among all.

Not once did the Magaoay children feel they were outsiders. Though they missed their mother, Inocencia and two siblings, Tony and Carmen, they felt loved by Uncle Matias and Auntie Ladia. Ladia, a woman of small stature, was full of life. Like Inocencia, she was stern but loving. She was talented and dedicated her life to her newfound family. She taught all of the girls to crochet and helped the boys to realize their strength so they could help her husband and their father with any outdoor physical work. She was influential in developing the children's faith in God.

It was a fresh start for Basilio and his four children. He knew that he had made the right choice. Matias and Ladia were a godsend for Basilio and his children! Lana'i became their refuge, their home, and ultimately Basilio's final resting place. Thank God for new beginnings.

PART 11: Inocencia's Return

After living with the Agonoys for some time, Basilio found a home on Block 32. Back then, there were no street names, except for the main road connecting the harbor to the city. The blocks were divided evenly with rows of plantation homes, and the unpaved roads were made of dirt. There were no streetlights and no road signs. Tall, majestic Norfolk pine trees bordered the neighborhoods, keeping the weather about ten degrees cooler than on the rest of the island, and endless rows of pineapple fields surrounded the tiny city.

The year of 1945 proved to be a better year for Basilio and his children. Without Inocencia, the family settled into a quiet routine.

Basilio worked with Dole Company, as a pineapple picker, and eventually received a break when he was promoted to city groundskeeper. After a year of separation from his wife and two youngest children, his dream of having his family back together again became a reality. Stepping out in faith, believing that their life could be different, Inocencia returned to her husband and four older children. The children were overjoyed to see their mother, brother Tony, and sister Carmen. Basilio was elated. This time, tears of joy, not sadness, streaked down his aged face, and Inocencia was content again. Basilio and Inocencia vowed to make their marriage work. Though cautiously optimistic, Inocencia felt "whole" again, and the Magaoays were, once again, reunited as a family.

In 1946 recruits from the Philippines were contracted to labor in the sugarcane and pineapple fields in the Hawaiian Islands. These were young men, the *sakadas*, who left their families to seek their fortune in the land of opportunity and eventually return to their home after their three-year contracts were up. However, many of them chose to remain in their newly adopted homeland and raise their own families.

With the coming of the *sakadas*, the social life changed on Lana'i. Besides birthdays, baptisms, and anniversary events such as Rizal Day, an annual celebration, social "box" dances also became popular. The dances were sponsored by local Filipino organizations to raise funds for other community activities. Later, these dances were named *Monso* dances by the locals. *Monso* was a term cried out by the pineapple pickers who followed the pineapple boom and meant, "go for broke"!

Sadly, these *Monso* dances would empty the pockets of the *sakadas* until the next payday. As one Japanese laundress said, "*Dan-dancing cost money. Wash-wash clothes—no can pay.*"

Inocencia loved the theater and would attend the once-a-week Filipino movie with her girls, Arcinnia and Rosita. Inocencia made sure that her young girls were properly chaperoned. She was seen many times with the girls during these and other similar functions.

PART 12: Her Freedom

To make up for the time she was gone, Inocencia worked harder than ever. She was resolute, stubborn, and determined to succeed as a wife and mother. She became an excellent homemaker and supplemental provider. She was a terrific cook for her children, making their favorites: *pinakbit*, *balatong*, *cancanen*, *adobo*, and *Spam with long rice*. She refined her skills as a seamstress, sewing hundreds of work garments. She acquired more work through laundry duties, cleaning, and washing dirty work clothing. She also prepared *balon*, packed lunches for the *caseras* who worked on the pineapple plantation. Lana'i was considered home of the largest pineapple plantation in the world, and the small town of Lana'i City was booming.

Inocencia remained devoted, dedicated, and a loving mother and wife to her family. However, tirelessly working day after day and night after night took its toll. When things didn't go well, Basilio turned to alcohol to escape. The idea of running away again entered Inocencia's mind. This time, it would be forever. If she walked away from her dear children, she knew that she might never see them ever again. She yearned to break away from her hard and complicated life. She wanted freedom.

PART 13: Her Children

It was Christmastime in 1950. Although there were marital problems at the Magaoay household, excitement filled the air in the tiny city. The holiday sentiment was contagious, and Basilio decided to take Calixto with him to cut down a Christmas tree. Every Christmas, Inocencia would make her famous *para dos dos*, a Filipino dessert made with *mochiko*, sweet rice flour, and coconut. Their home clearly needed the ambiance and décor of the holidays. Maybe this might help alleviate the mounting tension in their marriage. Just days before Christmas, however, Inocencia left her family for the second time and took young Carmen with her. It was a difficult and heart-wrenching decision for her, but she could no longer stay in such an unhappy situation. The once strong woman was now shattered, hurt, fragile, and hopeless. She prayed that one day her children would understand and would forgive her for abandoning them once again.

The second time was harder for the children, especially because it was Christmas, a time for families to be together and find joy in the season. Older and wiser, they knew that their mother would probably never return to them and to their heartbroken father. For Tony, it was particularly difficult. This time, his mother didn't take him with her. He was relentlessly ridiculed and taunted by a mean-spirited boy at school. This boy mocked him daily. He laughed at Tony because he didn't have a mother. He teased Tony because he often wore dirty clothes and shirts with missing buttons. Tony wanted his mother and his family back.

Arcinnia and Rosita worked hard to manage their mother's household duties while trying to keep up with their schoolwork. Calixto, Pasito, and Tony helped their father with any physical work that had to be done. The children were determined to keep the family together. They were as strong and as stubborn as their mother, and they would not let anybody take their honor away, just because their mother no longer lived with them. The children were firsthand witnesses of their parents' disintegrating marriage and of its arguments and fighting. They understood why their mother had left, though knowing didn't erase the hurt. They never held it against her for leaving them, and as difficult as life was without her, there was a certain "peace" that resulted, with no more fighting. It took them a while to realize that even if their mother had left, she was with them at heart.

Ironically, those "lessons" that Inocencia had taught them through her own struggles helped them as they faced their own trials. They never gave up on each other. They strived to do their best and be the best. This idea kept the Magaoay family functioning and strengthened their relationship as brothers and sisters. The bond was unbreakable, and their love for both their parents, Basilio and Inocencia, remained constant.

PART 14: A Modern-Day Filipina

Fast-forward to the present day and Inocencia Agonoy Magaoay is remarried to her second husband, Feliciano Facunla. Inocencia, an elderly mother, is now a grandmother and great-grandmother. Her six children, twenty-three grandchildren, and over forty great-grandchildren are now reaping the fruits of her arduous sacrifices. Inocencia and Basilio were able to put aside their differences and disappointments. Later, at family reunions, when both attended, no one was the wiser about their past marital strife. Inocencia finally attained her greatest desire, as now her family would come together united and happy, as one.

A year before her passing sensing her earthly time might be limited, Inocencia arranged for extended stays with all of her children and grandchildren, who were no longer living on Lana'i. Her untimely death came on April 15, 2000, when she left this earth by way of a massive stroke. Her tombstone reads, "No Worry Me" and "Remember Your *Tatas* and *Nanas*." There, indeed, was no time for anyone to "worry" about her. She left vegetables in the sink, ready for that night's dinner.

Her dedication to her family was steadfast. Inocencia's legacy of strength, hard work, and perseverance remains for her family. She gave her loving heart to all that she did, which is the beginning of all knowledge and the truest of wisdom. That is her gift to all.

My Grandma

*My grandma taught me
how to bait my fishing hook*

*My grandma taught me
how to catch fish*

*My grandma taught me
how to cook para dos dos*

*My grandma taught me
how to eat Spam and long rice*

*My grandma taught me
how to sing and dance Babay Kubo*