

CONDOLENCE MOTION

Moved by: Councillor Kristyn Wong-Tam

Seconded by: Councillor Pam McConnell

The Mayor and Members of Toronto City Council are deeply saddened to learn of the passing of Gene Lara on April 1, 2013, at Mount Sinai Hospital in Toronto.

Predeceased by her husband Benjamin Tolentino Lara and also predeceased by her daughter Genoveva Lara. In many ways, Gene was a pioneer. After earning a university business degree, she studied with the United Nations and then led a program promoting self-help projects for women in the Philippine countryside.

During the 1960s and 1970s, Gene was a delegate to key international gatherings, including the 2nd and 3rd World Women's Conferences. She also received a prestigious scholarship from the International Labour Organization to study co-ops in Europe and the Middle East.

After stepping off a plane on a cold winter day in Regina, Saskatchewan, in 1981, Gene's life would change forever. Both she and her husband encountered numerous obstacles in their quest to forge a brighter future. At first, Gene endured backbreaking work as a hospital clerk while her husband tried to put his gifted writing skills to use.

Gene's fierce determination and community activism eventually led her to becoming Executive Director of the Immigrant Women of Saskatchewan, where she earned accolades for assisting immigrant and refugee women gain access to support services. Displaying her eclectic and diverse talents, Gene even hosted an international cooking show on Regina's community cable channel.

After her husband's death, Gene moved to Toronto to become executive coordinator of INTERCEDE, a social service agency fighting for the workplace rights of domestic caregivers. Upon retiring from INTERCEDE, Gene revived the Silayan Community Centre, a local drop-in serving newcomers to St. James Town, Regent Park and Cabbagetown. Working with diverse volunteers, Gene initiated job placement, settlement, seniors and youth mentoring programs. As a result, the community centre is now a thriving beehive of activity.

In addition, Gene has served our community in a number of volunteer capacities. As a founding board member of the St. James Town Tenants Network, she mobilized tenants and organized a campaign to bring back rent control. Gene also worked tirelessly as an outreach counsellor at Our Lady of Lourdes Parish to help some of our community's neediest and most vulnerable residents.

She will be missed by her children; Rita McEachern (Fred McEachern), Ramon Lara (Michael Montague), John Lara, Chiara Lara, Paul Lara (Abbey Lara). She was the grandmother to Dominica Noelle Lara, Mateo Santo Lara, Aria Angeli Lara, Ethan Joshua Lara, Katia Isabelle Lara and Tristan Lara.

The City Clerk is requested to convey, on behalf of the Members of Toronto City Council, our sincere sympathy to Gene Lara's family.

April 4, 2013