

I Remember Winnie

By Ernesto Rodriguez, Jr.

A SUGGESTION was made that because I had been known as Wenceslao Q. Vinzon's No. 1 rival in the youth movement what I would say here might prove interesting. Vinzon was a man among men. There was no need for this excuse really. Vinzon would have been just as great if he had no enemies. It is true he died in the hands of enemies and his martyrdom has become one of the most important highlights in the glorious epic of our resistance and in the labor pains of our eventual redemption. The death of Wenceslao Q. Vinzon was in keeping with the promise: it was the death of a rebel and a hero. Indeed with the passing of the years his greatness will be more pronounced and his selfless sacrifice for our country and our people will be better appreciated.

I first met Winnie, as I was later to call him fondly, in the morning of July 25, 1931. I remember the date distinctly because it was my birthday and it was the foundation day of the College Editors' Guild of the Philippines. I had called for that day a meeting of the editors of the University of the Philippines, the University of Santo Tomas, National University and the Ateneo de Manila. Winnie came with Salvador P. Lopez. He impressed me as a very modest and genial young man. I was younger than he was, but that did not seem to be a barrier to the facility and felicity with which he welcomed me to his circle of friends. I found in him an enthusiastic supporter of my many ideas on college journalism and the youth movement. It was in the CEG where he met Liwayway Gonzales, later to become his wife. Since that day in 1931 until late in 1941, when I met him for the last time, through the space of decade, Wenceslao Q. Vinzon and I seldom agreed on anything. For while he agreed with my ideas and sometimes my convictions, we never agreed on the proper execution of these ideas.

We fought consistently, but I do not remember of any single instance when personalities entered into our polemics. It was probably because I was naturally attracted to him and he was fond of me personally. It was not unusual therefore, that after very exchange of strong words on the platform, on the radio, or in the press, we would break bread together in some downtown restaurant or at his room at the YMCA. We would fight often and hard and passionately for what we thought was right and still remain friends, bosom friends.

He was obsessed, as I was, about organizing the youth as a militant group to fight for reforms in the government. During the first days, nay the first years, we dedicated our efforts to the unification of the students. When we elected our first set of officers in the College Editors' Guild, I, who as founder should have had the first crack at the presidency, withdrew and asked for the honor of nominating him to the presidency of the College Editors' Guild. He won naturally and he was grateful for my support. To this day I am keeping a letter he had sent me thanking me for my gesture of withdrawing in his favor. As editor of the *Philippine Collegian*, he fought always for the things he believed in and was resentful of any attempt to muzzle him or influence him one way or the

other.

When the country was torn in two in 1933-1934 over the issue of the Hare-Hawes-Cutting law, we found ourselves fighting each other. I think the whole thing started earlier. It seems that during that historic demonstration he organized to protest against the Festin rider in the House appropriations measure, I did not give him the full support that he had asked of me. It seems I had a different conception of how the protest could have been made more effective. As it was that demonstration put him in the limelight and from then on, Vinzon had become a young man's hero. Well, late in 1933, I organized the Real Youth Party and became its president. Wenceslao organized the Young Philippines and became its president. He supported the leadership of Osmena and Roxas; I supported the leadership of Quezon. It was really an unequal fight. Quezon won because he was Quezon. Wenceslao favored admitting old people of known liberal tendencies into the folds of his youth organization; I opposed the idea and maintained that a youth movement to be properly a youth movement must not have anything to do with old people. Not that I had any ax to grind against oldsters; I only believed that the old politicians were chiefly responsible for the nation's ills.

On this issue, Mr. Vinzon and I went to the people. On the HHC issue he was with the pros, and in the natural course of events I was linked with the antis. Wenceslao was ably supported by enthusiastic young men, among them Arturo Tolentino, Diosdado Macapagal, Mariano Laureola, Ben Brillantes, Donato Joaquin, Vicente Correa, Aurelio Alvero and the behind-the-scenes cooperation of Jose P. Laurel, Rafael Palma and Manuel Roxas. Our youth party, which later became the Filipino Youth, had among others the driving force of stalwarts like Teodoro Evangelista, Lorenzo Sulmulong, Felixberto Serrano, Emmanuel Pelaez, Macario Zamuco, Edrundo Cea, Sofronio Quimson and Fred Ruiz Castro.

In the 1935 elections for the presidency of the Commonwealth, Wenceslao supported General Aguinaldo and I supported Manuel Quezon. It was no fight again. But it must be said to the eternal credit of Vinzon, that he made Aguinaldo win in his home province, Camarines Norte. Here was a clear instance of the strength of Vinzon as a political leader.

Wenceslao Q. Vinzon had also been elected a delegate to the Constitutional Convention; as a matter of fact he was the youngest delegate elected to draft the charter of our commonwealth and our republic. Much later he was elected provincial governor and then congressman from Camarines Norte. In all these elections he had wrecked the political machine of old guard politicians in his province, by his speecheloquence and unusual gifts of leadership.

They say Wenceslao Q. Vinzon was a sucker for lost causes. In life he always supported causes that could not have won at the time he fought for them. Here was his most

admirable character: that he could fight even if he knew all the odds were against him. I did not realize then the handicaps he had to surmount. After the occupation, I was to taste from the same bitter cup that he had drunk during the pre-war years. I like to remember Wenceslao Q. Vinzons as the young man who always kept faith with the youth. He was one who would easily and enthusiastically pick up a fight, whenever he knew that there was something worth fighting for. He did not care what the rest of the world thought about his ideas. And a great many did idolize him. He probably thought that the only causes worth fighting for are lost causes. As an oppositionist, I know how it feels to fight. Wenceslao Q. Vinzons was the idol of the youth: he was courageous, because he was young; he was uncompromising because he was young; he was ambitious because he was young. He died young, because he was to remain always the model for the young. But he would have always remained young, because he was of the stuff that patriots and heroes are made of. It is a tragedy that we do not have a Vinzons now — in the face of the current situation. Sometimes I wonder if Vinzons had not died in vain.