

Manuel Gotiaunuy

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Written by Atty. Dennis B. Funa



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INSURANCE FORUM

Manuel Gotianuy, together with Jose Leyson and Lim Bonfing, founded Union Surety and Insurance Corp. on July 14, 1931. A month later, it would be renamed Visayan Surety & Insurance Corp. It is, as of 2016, an 85-year-old nonlife-insurance company. Leyson was later executed by the Japanese Imperial Army; his remains were never found.

Manuel was born in 1888. His father was the equally renowned business leader Pedro Lee Singson Gotiaoco, who founded Gotiaoco Hermanos Inc. together with his brother Go Quiao Co. Gotiaoco Hermanos engaged in the trade of abaca, rice and copra. Manuel married Alicia Wong in 1911. In 1918 Manuel founded the Cebu Shipyard and Engineering Works. When his father Pedro passed away in 1921, Manuel found himself taking over the helm of the family business. In 1931 Manuel founded the Visayan Surety & Insurance as an affiliate of a Shanghai-based marine insurance company. He was the president of the Cebu Chinese Chamber of Commerce and was the richest businessman in the Visayas.

Perhaps more colorful was the life story of his father. Pedro Gotiaoco, or Go Bun Tiao, was born in Fujian, China, on June 30, 1856. A story goes that he was also the illegitimate father of Sergio Osmeña Sr., who was born on September 9, 1878, when Pedro was 22 years old. The mother was Juana Suico Osmeña. This story has remained unconfirmed. He was also the father of Doña Modesta Singson Gaisano from a third wife. Modesta would become the matriarch of the Sy-Gaisano family.

Pedro married Go Disy and produced three sons: Go Chiong Wei, Manuel Gotianuy and Kong-Uy Go. Go Chiong Wei would be John Gokongwei Sr.'s father. When Gokongwei Sr. died, Gokongwei Jr. was sent to Manuel Gotianuy who took charge of John Jr.'s education. According to John Jr.: "Then my dad died, and I lost all these [small businesses]. My family had become poor—poor enough to split my family. My mother and five siblings moved to China where the cost of living was lower. I was placed under the care of my granduncle Manuel Gotianuy, who put me through school. But just two years later, the war broke out, and even my Uncle Manuel could no longer see me through."

Pedro allegedly traveled to the Philippines after accidentally shooting a cousin. He would become Cebu's greatest philanthropist and largest taxpayer. Among his descendants would include the Gokongwei family. John Gokongwei Jr. is

Pedro's patrilineal great-grandson. On June 26, 2010, the remains of Pedro were dug up from Fujian Province and re-buried at the Gokongwei family Mausoleum at Manila Memorial Park. John L. Gokongwei Jr. remarked during the occasion to writer Wilson Lee Flores: "I hope our entire clan and my children will remember Gotiaoco and his legacy, his life struggle and traditional Confucian values, that we shall always honor his memory and give our respects to him." His other descendants would include the Gotianuy clan, the Sy-Gaisano clan and the Gotianun clan. John Gokongwei and Andrew Gotianun (founder of the Filinvest Group of Companies) are distant cousins.

Pedro Gotiaoco was baptized into the Christian faith under the sponsorship of Don Mariano Singson, he later incorporated his sponsor's name into his own. In 1914 Don Pedro would build the Gotiaoco building, now one of Cebu's heralded landmarks. It was the first building in Cebu that had an elevator and an air-conditioning unit. It stands along M.C. Briones Avenue behind Cebu City Hall. He would pass away in 1921 in Quanzhou, Fujian, China, at the age of 64.

Going back to Manuel, one of Don Manuel's son was Jose Go, also known as Jose "Joseph" W. Gotianuy, who was born on December 5, 1914, in Cebu City. Joseph finished his intermediate course at De La Salle College in Manila. He later worked as an insurance agent for Visayan Surety & Insurance. In 1949 he would be finally granted Filipino citizenship by naturalization before the Supreme Court after being opposed by the Anti-Chinese League of the Philippines (GR L-1563, August 30, 1949). He later became chairman of the Visayan Surety & Insurance.

He has recently passed away. Another son, lawyer Augusto W. Go, is the founder and president of University of Cebu and chairman of Toyota Cebu City. He served as an appointed vice mayor of Cebu City in 1987. His only daughter Candice G. Gotianuy is currently a chancellor at the University of Cebu. A street in Cebu City near the Redemptorist Church is named after Don Manuel.