

THE SELF STORY

The saga of SELF is a chronicle of the events that transpired when Martin R. Infante decided to put up his own rehabilitation center. The initial challenge he faced was to find a permanent home for the SELF TC. When this was accomplished, the next and continuing task was to preserve the integrity of the TC program while developing SELF's own approach to it.

THE SELF SAGA

HAVING just graduated from a TC program in May 1991, Martin found himself needing to nurture and protect his own sobriety by helping others in recovery. Learning that the TC he belonged to was closing down, he took this as a challenge to set up his own center and help others even as he continued to help himself.

The Birth of SELF

Martin needed money to get the project off the ground but he was broke from his 20 year ordeal with drugs. His life story epitomized that of the typical addict who lost it all. He sought the support of his brothers and sisters, but they were mostly reluctant about handing him any money. However, against the advice of their elder siblings, his sister Flossie entrusted him with a check of P250,000 to the dismay of the rest of his family.

But Martin had a clear mission in mind and an unstoppable passion to get it done. He sought the guidance of Atty. Reginald Bergado whom he had met by chance while he was still a resident. Together they worked to make his dream a reality and on September 14, 1992 the Self Enhancement for Life Foundation, Inc. was registered with the SEC and SELF was born. Martin chose the acronym SELF because for him it captured the essence of recovery – the newfound excitement that comes with rediscovering oneself.

Getting Started

With the organization formally established, Martin immediately negotiated the lease of a small house in Crespo Street, BF Resort Village, Las Piñas. It was filthy and unkempt and had apparently been used as a den for drinking and doing drugs. Bottles of alcohol were scattered all over the place and careful inspection revealed





strips of aluminum foil used for taking “shabu” stashed in strange places.

Martin and his team went to work with a will and gave the house a thorough cleaning. They also built steel bed bunks using the tools from his car repair shop. For furniture, they had to be content with donations from friends. It was a signal accomplishment when SELF was able to buy a brand new refrigerator after a few months. SELF started with six residents, but the Family soon grew to 14 residents and 6 staff members. It wasn't long before the Crespo facility was full.

Growing Pains

The formation and development of SELF did not come without a price. At the time of its inception, Martin was apprehensive about taking the helm of the Foundation and asked his counselor to be the president while he served as a business associate. But this arrangement did not work out too well. Just a few months into its operation, Martin found himself in an illicit relationship with the president that almost led to the collapse of SELF even before it could take off. Happily, the crisis was resolved and Martin came clean and made amends with the situation with the entire TC Family. This experience brought him the learning that sobriety meant fidelity as well.

In December 1992, the SELF Board was reorganized and Martin assumed the presidency. Since then, he took pride in trodding the life of the straight and narrow, and from that point on SELF continued to grow. On August 14, 1994 graduated its first six residents.

The Eviction

It was, however, not the end of SELF's trials and tribulations. In 1995 members of the BF Resort Village Association expressed concern about having addicts within the village. Martin earnestly explained to them that SELF posed no danger because it was essentially a value formation program and the TC method of treatment, above all, promoted discipline. He even went out of his way to invite officers of the association to the facility to observe the program – to no avail. Those who came were instantly converted but those who didn't remained obstinate and pursued an all-out campaign to get SELF out of the subdivision. In the end, there was no recourse but to leave.

From The Ashes

SELF began to search in nearby locations for a place where its facility could be transferred, but they soon discovered that no one wanted them around. Society in general seemed to be saying, “It’s great that you’re doing something about the problem of drug addiction, but please do it somewhere else.” Martin found the entire situation frustrating. No one wanted to rent them a place, and SELF didn’t have the money to buy property. All he could do was pray for God’s intervention. Well, as the saying goes, be careful what you ask for, you might just get it!

On June 14, 1996, a fire gutted the Crespo facility and burned it to the ground. Luckily, everyone was evacuated to safety and no one was hurt. The SELF Family was in shock and Martin was fresh out of insights. He got mad and said, “God, what are you trying to do? Why on top of all this rejection a fire?” Ironically, what all those officers of the village association could not do, in a strange twist of fate, God accomplished in one bold stroke. It took a while before Martin could figure out the meaning of the experience. But he later understood that what seemed like a punishment from heaven was actually God’s way of asking them to trust and follow Him.

Survival and Harassment

Martin had no choice but to go in search of another house. After combing every town outside Metro Manila, he chanced upon an old abandoned house in Rodeo Hills, Tagaytay. It was up for sale, but its owners wanted the exorbitant amount of P20 million for it. Martin managed to persuade them to rent it out instead, but for a steep price.



The transfer to Rodeo Hills proved to be another drama as SELF had to undertake it in the midst of a strong typhoon. The SELF Family braved the wind and rain in two large trucks only to discover that their new home was virtually a wreck. Rain was pouring into the second floor and there was no water and electricity in many parts of the house. However, their will to prevail could not be blunted. Everyone changed into swimming suits and cleaned out some areas where they could spend the night.

The SELF Family displayed remarkable resiliency as they began repairing the roofing, lights and plumbing. Water supply was also scarce so they got hold of a water trailer and made 10 trips each day to fill the overhead tank. Within one week, the house was made fully operational.



Yet, even as SELF continued to grow the pressures never abated. After six months, the owners of the house asked Martin to rehabilitate the property (in lieu of deposits) or be prepared to be evicted. Again, without much choice, Martin reluctantly agreed. Within the next six months, SELF fixed the roof and changed all its gutters. They also overhauled the electrical system and painted the entire house, including the roof. Then they built four more rooms and three more baths. In the end, the house was given a complete face-lift.

Martin was understandably nonplussed when in 1998 the owners doubled the rent. Their argument was simple: since the house was much improved, it was definitely worth more. Martin had no choice and agreed once again. But when they did this again the following year, he finally decided that enough was enough, and began actively searching for a place SELF could finally call home.

The Promised Land

Finally, a stroke of luck! Atty. Reginald Bergado, who had stayed on and served as SELF's corporate secretary, put Martin in contact with a judge who was offering a one-hectare hillside property in Talisay, Batangas. At first, Martin could not imagine how the land could suit SELF's needs for it was situated on a steep ravine. However, the judge was very convincing and, most of all, accommodating. Anyway, since the property already contained an unfinished three-story building, all that was needed were dormitories and a multi-purpose hall.

Martin found the cost of the project prohibitive but after several months of negotiations, he made a final offer that, much to his surprise, the judge accepted. Banking on his mechanical abilities plus eight years of sobriety, fidelity and spiritual surrender, Martin set aside his trepidation, gave the judge all the Foundation's savings, and put his trust in God. Thus did SELF build its first permanent home.



On June 17, 2000, SELF inaugurated the Taal View House (TVH) compound. By 2005 the project was fully paid. In the years to come, he even added a new structure which served as the Reentry House and Pre-admission Unit.

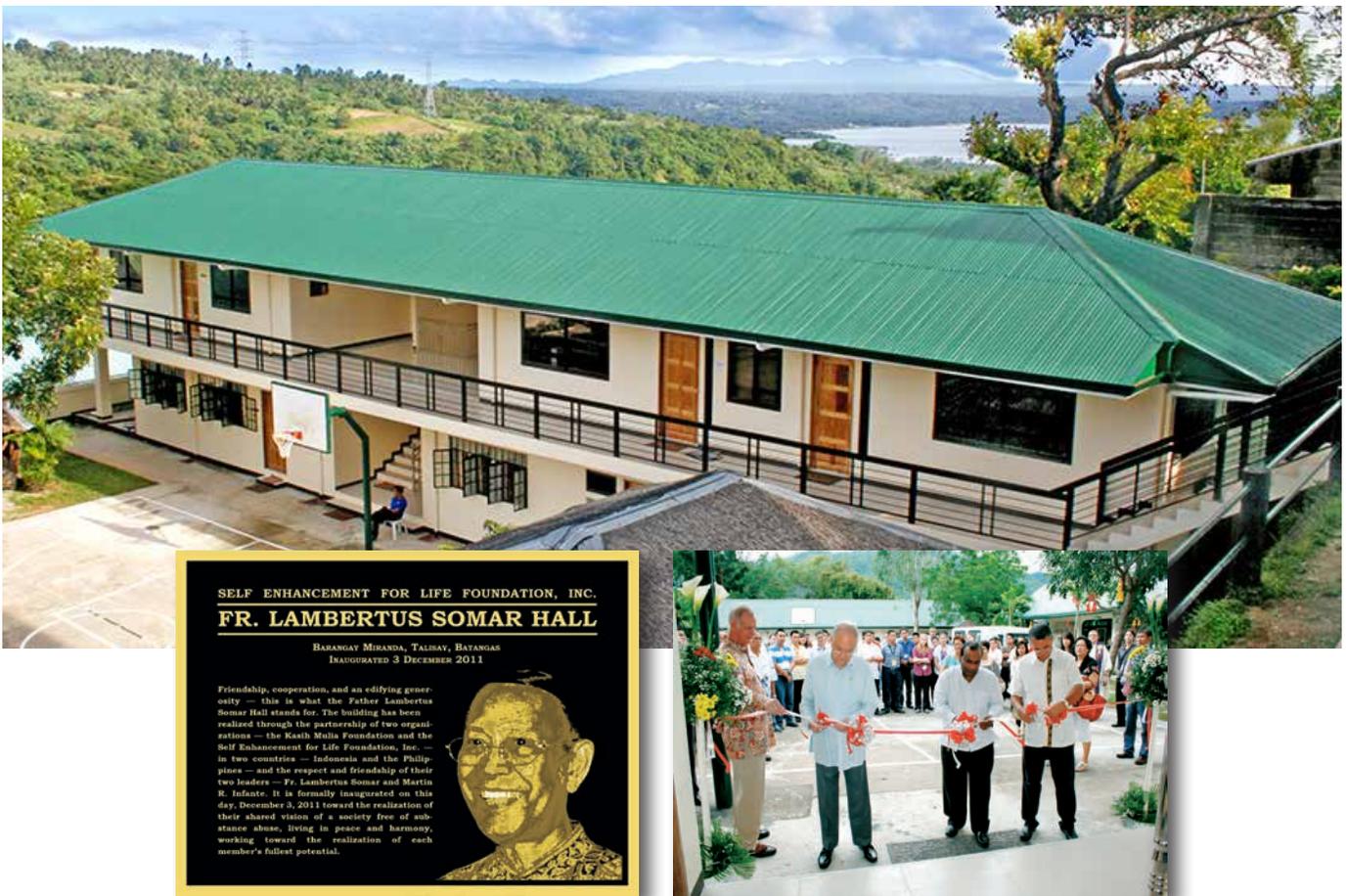
Through the years, the development of the TVH's physical plant and equipment has kept pace with the growth and development of the SELF TC. In September 2009, Martin took a risk and built the Sacred Heart Auditorium (SHA). The SHA was conceived in a dream. Martin began talking about building a seminar hall for SELF's monthly Family Association Meeting in June 2008.

By August 2008, ground breaking started with SELF's usual flair as staff and residents lent a hand to the Technical Department in digging the foundations. In addition Martin undertook most of the design and drawing requirements and most of the work was done by the in-house technical staff thereby realizing substantial savings in costs. The project was completed with the full support of the SELF Family Association (FAM), and in October 24, 2009 the handsome, 250 sqm hall was inaugurated. Fittingly, it became the venue of SELF's first graduate homecoming in 17 years. Today, the SELF Family enjoys the use of the SHA for all its various annual celebrations and events.



A year later, Martin embarked on yet another massive project of tearing down an old dormitory to make way for a two-storey edifice that would house the Clinical Department, a conference room, several offices and better dormitories. But costs were prohibitive and he had to set those plans aside.

One day, Martin was invited to give a seminar at the Kasih Mulia Foundation rehab facility in Jakarta. After the seminar, he was called to the office of its President Fr. Lambertus Somar where they talked shop. In the conversation, Martin expressed SELF's need for additional facilities to meet the demands of its rapidly growing resident population. Without hesitation, Fr. Somar offered financial assistance. Elated by his response, Martin wasted no time in drawing up the architectural plans of his dream building. In the summer of 2011, construction was underway, and by December 3, 2011, the newest addition to the facility was inaugurated as the Fr. Lambertus Somar Hall.



Back in 1992, not in his wildest dreams could Martin imagine what SELF would grow into in 20 years. What with the unthinking rejection imposed by society, the utter devastation wrought by fire, and the oppressive tenure foisted by opportunistic landlords. It took a while but Martin finally figured out the meaning of all the trials and tribulations. What seemed like punishment from heaven was simply God's way of putting SELF to the test. And when Martin surrendered to God's will, he was led to the promised land.