

I first met Fr. Jorge in 1953 when he was Brother Jorge, teaching Latin at Serra High School in Gardena, California. He was still walking throughout my Freshman year, but we all noticed him slowing down during the second semester. Jorge waited for the end of the school year and then during the summer of 1954 he underwent surgery to remove a fatty tumor that was attached to his spinal column. We later found out that that he was slowing down slowly because this tumor had worked its way between the vertebrae and was pinching the nerves to his legs.

Jorge's first operation was not completely successful; he began to teach and counsel from a wheelchair. A second operation was performed the following year but because of complications Jorge lost the use of his legs permanently. From his wheelchair, he continued to teach us, counsel us and help us to publish our school's newspaper and yearbook. We always looked up to him even though we had to look down when we were standing around him. Before and after class, after school, evenings, weekends --- Jorge always made time for us, but he kept his Marianist community as his first priority. The Marianist residence adjoined Serra's main office building and Jorge always made sure that we rolled him back to the house in time for prayers and meals with his Brothers.

In those mid-to-late '50s mobility was not much of an issue for Jorge. He could make his "leap of faith" from his wheelchair into the front passenger seat of our cars all by himself -- even into my VW "bug." All we had to do was fold his chair and toss it in the back seat or into the trunk. One of his favorite jaunts was to the Palos Verdes Peninsula. The twisting road on top of the high cliffs provided some spectacular views of the Pacific Ocean churning below. It was decades later, when I was able to accompany Jorge back to Japan that I realized why he was so attracted to that ocean drive. Below Yokohama, where he was born and grew up, there is the small village of Oiso. Jorge and his family lived there during the war. The ocean, cliffs and views from the winding road along the Oiso coastline were just like Palos Verdes!

Jorge loved to the ocean and the warmth of the sun. Whenever he visited me on Maui, he couldn't wait to get into the water. We fixed him up with a water ski belt and carried him into the surf. In the ocean he was no longer handicapped --- he was free! He became the strong swimmer he was as a child, the boy who was at home in the ocean. Hours later we would have to plead with him to let us take him out. Jorge was tanned and tired, but beaming with delight. That smile is the one I will always remember.

Me ke aloha pumehana, Jorge. Oremus invicem! Jim Orsini