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Bill Sorro with wife "Huli" at home. Bob Hsiang Photography ©2007.

Bill Sorro, Presente!

(Posted on Wed, 29 Aug 2007 22:33:14 -0400)

Labor and community activist Bill Sorro, a leader in the struggle to save San Francisco's International Hotel and one of the most revered members of city's Filipino community, died August 27.

Sorro was a founding member of the I-Hotel Tenants Union, which fought for years against the evictions of the mostly senior Filipino and Chinese tenants, who finally lost their homes in 1977. Since then a successful struggle has been waged to save the historic Manilatown community and to secure the former hotel site for low-income housing.

Through the years Sorro continued his tireless work as housing advocate and community leader on behalf of civil rights for Filipinos and others. He worked as an ironworker, was an active trade unionist and communist. Following his retirement he served on the boards of a variety of political and social organizations, including the Manilatown Heritage Foundation, which now manages a cultural center in the rebuilt International Hotel.

A native of the city, Sorro grew up in the predominately African American and Asian Fillmore District. Early on, his father was arrested and jailed for miscegenation for marrying his Scottish/Spanish mother. Because of his decades of civic work and political activity he received a Local Hero Award in 2005 from San Francisco public television station KQED. In 2001, the San Francisco Board of Supervisors officially hailed Sorro his years of tireless service as a tenant and community advocate and rank-and file trade union activist

Sorro is survived by his wife Giuliana Milanese, former healthcare union staffer and community activist and his children - Desu, Daphne, Django, Danae, Giulio and Joaquin - and 10 grandchildren.

A Serving of Love: The Passion of Bill Sorro, a gallery exhibition featuring the interviews, photographs and other historical material from his life opened earlier this month and will run through Oct. 6.; this multi- media project features selected photographs from the Sorro family archives, personal artifacts, an audio oral history installation, and video interviews documenting Sorro's life.

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