

# *'Sang Pinoy*

**tatak ordinaryo  
1945-2031**

*j'aime la vie*

## Introduction

*"I am one, unique, unrepeatably gift of life into human history; there has never been one like me before, and there will never be another one like me ever again,"* I thundered to the captured audience at Shenyang Aerospace University, in what might be considered an outburst of self-confidence, if not, exuberant arrogance. Then I dropped the gem: *"Just like the rest of you in this room. You, too, are, and can be gloriously that unrepeatably gift of life to humanity."*

The above was my self-story, the birthing given more details on Part I of this telling. The story allowed me to encounter anyone, in or outside class who were unique human beings, with a few having a better sense of it than others. But there were many I encountered saddled with self-debilitating sense of selfhood. They were susceptible to the punch of my story!

OK. But first, I will encode the words on the title of this reflection. *"Sang"* was a slangish contraction of the Filipino word *"Isang"*, one, and though it usually meant one "among a number of", in a comparative sense, or as a possessive pronoun, as one that "belonged to a particular kind," I took it in my context as meaning *"one, unique, unrepeatably..."*

*Pinoy* was the street-smart, world-wise *Pilipino* (the people rather than the language, which is called *Filipino*) who hustled the streets by the power of his (the male gender will be used for pronouns until the series gets to *Pinoy ze* where *ze* is used as the third person pronoun) wit, or one who was world-wise to the dispensation of

a diaspora of Pilipinos, keeping ethnicity alive though living under numerous nationalities and sovereigns. *Tatak ordinaryo* counters special notions that being unique means being set aside. No. I'm ordinary, woof, wart, and woes.

The French phrase, *j'aime la vie*, means, "I love life." Though not commonly used, the first person singular of the verb "to love," *j'aime* resembles my first name, Jaime, aka, Santiago, St. James in English, patron saint of Spain. It is heard more in the northern parts of *La España* among the Basques where Vergara town sits on the Spanish side of the Pyrenees, so I adopted the French phrase.

Here's how I characterized the vision/mission of my conscious and awake hours: my life is spent on contextual education rather than the practice of slotting a person into a commercial niche based on greed before need; is directed towards social reformulation knowing that we constantly swim upstream in the social milieu where we exercise our personal expenditure; is enabled by the endless quest for spirit transformation rooted in the immeasurable mysteries and surprises at the core of human existence.

That's not our best statement of the cognitive overview around our personal existence but it demonstrates how high-falutin' verbose I am!

The most immediate characters accompanying this journey includes:

*Jaime Empleo Vergara*, father  
*Lucrecia Allado Ravelo*, mother  
*Fe Rosario*, two-year older sister

*Alejandro*, two-year younger brother  
*Eduardo*, four-year younger brother  
*Jailu*, nine-year younger sister.

Relatives and frenemies are identified as they are mentioned. I write from hindsight; honoring someone by mention takes a back seat to factual narration of specifics of an event remembered. Friends are numerous and failure to have one mentioned is simply a memory gap rather than a low significance in my life.

Notable for their continuing relationship to my journey are members of INHS60, my High School batch from Laoag, Ilocos Norte.

A globally dispersed historical spirit movement under the Ecumenical Institute (EI) and the Institute of Cultural Affairs (ICA), maintains connection through the Internet, though at one time, we were legally constituted as the Order Ecumenical (O:E). Our collegiality lives off spirit methods and the sense of "consciousness of consciousness" indelibly marked in our soul to the core. Realistic Living Institute in Texas was an offshoot of these endeavors.

In my formative years was the connection with Methodists, from my birth to UMC in Dallas' General Conference of '68 when I went to SMU's Perkins to prepare for clergy ordination in the communion. I was once asked why I left the United Methodist Church. My response was unequivocal: "I grew up!"

INHS60, EI/ICA/O:E, and the UMC played critical roles in my career and life journey. The reader will discover how in this unfolding.

## The Contents

The top of each page lists holding categories. The Year number marked my existence in the Gregorian calendar, e.g., *Year 1* Cuyapo '45. That's my age August to July, but I was not hard on precision in the memory bank.

Contents of each telling were not limited to the chronological time of the calendar year at the end of the title. Year 1 Cuyapo '45-'46, covered August 1945 to July 46. But the story wandered into other times in the chronos of 86 years that this telling covered. In between my age and the calendar year was a title for the period, a place, a person-role, or a process, e.g. Year 1 *Cuyapo* '45, in geography, indicating that the subject was mentioned in the course of the telling.

The identified divisions as *Parts* were arbitrary, designed more for symmetry than anything else. It did not mean that when I reached Year 16, I became fully an adult! In fact, I was treated like one earlier. Check out Year 11!

On the other hand, it was not really until I was 19 when I encountered the liberating notion of the household of God, *oikoumene*, or in our title of Part I, the household of Awe. I grew into self-support, self-reliance, and self-confidence early, rather than be dependent on external force(s), "god", other worldly and supernatural, a pet description widely used by my peers and circle.

The grandpa in the sky image of God died early in my mind. In its stead was the wonder and awe of being itself. To be sure, the word GOD

was a mainstay in the vocab of my upbringing. I was raised in a Methodist parsonage where the images of the Christian universe wove into every fabric of my life, from the symbol system that evolved in the telling of the story of the life of a barefoot boy turned carpenter in the hills of Nazareth.

My metaphors of mystery and birth, being born again and covenant, commitment and creation, and the celebration of finitude were all over the Christian alley. I used them, but as was clear in the telling, I imbued on them meaning closer to recognizable ordinary experiences more than philosophical clarity, ordinary human lucidity rather than metaphysical profundity.

**FORe** sections were from invited "frenemies", the neutral term for friends and foes. At 68, I started a Seven Year Itch of writing. My titles from Years 69 were whispers in the wind, yet to be felt in the gust and the breeze, to be lived and written up. I wrote from the perspective of the grave after my Year 86.

As an English teacher, I was more particular in making students understand the phonetic nature of the language, and thereby, trained their ears to listen to sounds rather than their eyes to read words. Thus, I was not too hung up on syntax and the choice of accurate words. Same attitude applied in this writing.

What was defined was that my "one moment in time" was 86 years worth, a piece of a global mosaic hewed in the earthrise image of my wanderings, and the earthbound commitment of my resolve. It was a hurdle telling a life story

from memory. It took me two hours to recall the name of the last place I was domiciled in VA so the brain cell connections by 2014 had already grown weary with the years.

I held a memorial service when I turned into my 76th year. Memorial services I attended before were occasions when kin, friends, and enemies gathered to make up lies about the departed since ze can no longer hear what was said. I injected the element of truth into the ritual by holding it ahead of time, when I was still alive, and all were given permission to call me by the name they used behind my back, an S.O.B. of imperial proportions. That was one way we checked the glint of truth in our eyes before it closed for the night of eternal oblivion.

The breath was still warm on the decade before the appointed hour (December 15, 2031), and the bones survived the cold harshness of Dong Bei. I added to this story as often as the fingers could do the walking across the keyboard.

I had hoped that my grandchildren remember to gift their *lao ye ye* a voice recognition PDA so I no longer had to hack my memoirs but dictated it on a voice recognition WP app. I knew it was already in the market, but I was too proud to accept that I was already at the stage when I was looking in that direction.

Personal cameras, particularly the digital ones, would have been useful had one at the start of this journey been available. I wrote hearing the shout in the lanes of memory: "*One day your life will flash before your eyes; make sure it's worth watching.*"

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**Part I Mystery of origin: being born  
to the household of Awe**

- Year 1 Cuyapo '45-'46  
*Seat of grarian unrest.*  
Year 2 Pilipino '46-'47  
*Bayan Ko*  
Year 3 Sanchez Mira '47-'48  
*The smell of copra*  
Year 4 Patapat '48-'49  
*Lola Mining's bidet*  
Year 5 First Grade '49-'50  
*Tag along to school*  
Year 6 Floating rice paddies '50-'51  
*Crocodile and wet pants*  
Year 7 Aparri '51-'52  
*Delta lumber town*  
Year 8 Jolens and rubber bands '52-'53  
*Berbanos and Americhild George*  
Year 9 Jailu '53-'54  
*Mamang Lucring's daring choice*  
Year 10 Mrs. Gorospe's class '54-'55  
*Lightness of being*  
Year 11 Papa @ CLAC '55-'56  
*Central Luzon and Goodbyes*  
Year 12 Manong Bidoy '56-'57  
*"Laoag" light*  
Year 13 Roquito Ablan '57-'58  
*A man named Ferdinand*  
Year 14 Corona Smith '58-'59  
*Summer at the Y*  
Year 15 INHS '59-'60  
*Josie ignores, Gladys steals*

**Part II Adventure in responsiveness:  
adulthood and being born again**

- Year 16 Manila '60-'61  
*UP and Silliman, non; PCC, qui!*  
Year 17 Sanity of the Mind '61-'62  
*Father returns*  
Year 18 Cagayan Teachers College '62-'63  
*Dulce and DZCV*  
Year 19 Rizal in Retiro '63-'64  
*On being Pinoyze*  
Year 20 ACYA '64-'65  
*Freedom to play*  
Year 21 Market Research Analysis '65-'66  
*Bay Area and L.A.'s Luau*  
Year 22 Chicago '66-'67  
*Red head from Puerto Rico*  
Year 23 MLK, Jr. '67-'68  
*The Covenant*  
Year 24 Arlington '68-'69  
*The earthrise*  
Year 25 Faith & Life Community '69-'70  
*Mr. Smith and Mr. Jones*  
Year 26 Dallas '70-'71  
*Graduation watch*  
Year 27 Pea Eye '71-'72  
*MLV and IS*  
Year 28 ITI Seoul '72-'73  
*Sarang Hae's Martial Law*  
Year 29 Maria Kristina '73-'74  
*Starry Starry Night*  
Year 30 Binggie '74-'75  
*I'm dirty, too!*

**Part III Covenant of location: homenest  
earthbound in the space age**

- Year 31 ITI Caracas '75-'76  
*The Order*  
Year 32 Maria Teresa '76-'77  
*O, Canada*  
Year 33 Community Forum '77-'78  
*Just do it*  
Year 34 La Liga Ecumenika '78-'79  
*Mactan 24 AK 47*  
Year 35 En Sud America '79-'80  
*The anatomy of despair*  
Year 36 Lagos Lagoon '80-'81  
*Malaria and unbelief*  
Year 37 TASC '81-'82  
*Closing out sale*  
Year 38 Hagatña '82-'83  
*Pisi Cori*  
Year 39 PCVs '83-'84  
*I shall return*  
Year 40 The Denouement '84-'85  
*Da lao po to Honolulu*  
Year 41 Peoples Power 85-'86  
*M16 in Sudtonggan*  
Year 42 SWCF '86-'87  
*The watershed as a planning unit*  
Year 43 On the Washington Mall '87-'88  
*Return to Arlington*  
Year 44 The Trips '88-'89  
*Bogor, Singapore, Kuala Lumpur*  
Year 45 Tian An Man '89-'90  
*A man confronts tank*

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**Part IV Commitment to creation: *vocation***  
***in creating the new***

Year 46 Bioregionalism '90-'91  
*The Realistic Living Institute*  
Year 47 Down Under '91-'92  
*Kiwi*  
Year 48 Ballston '92-'93  
*Maria Andrea*  
Year 49 Falls Church '93-'94  
*Jefferson Park*  
Year 50 Microcenter '94-'95  
*Apple of my eye*  
Year 51 Goodbye, Columbus '95-'96  
*J Daniel*  
Year 52 Hawaii '96-'97  
*Ewa Beach*  
Year 53 Lei'd but not Maui'd '97-'98  
*The Consul-General*  
Year 54 Work Hawaii '98-'99  
*Abelina Madrid Shaw*  
Year 55 Immanuel UMC '99-2000  
*The Ripples*  
Year 56 Oleai/San Jose 2000-'01  
*The Marianas Resource Center*  
Year 57 Yuan Yinghua '01-'02  
*The Shanghai Girls*  
Year 58 One Heart '02-'03  
*Shanghai Girls*  
Year 59 Defrocked '03-'04  
*CalPAC*  
Year 60 STaRPO '04-'05  
*CK*

**Part V Celebration of finitude: *death***  
***as a sunset rider***

Year 61 SVES ToY '05-'06  
*The Awards*  
Year 62 Tatang Iming '06-'07  
*On surgery*  
Year 63 The Shanghai Goodbye '07-'08  
*Green Card Xiexie*  
Year 64 Spondylosis '08-'09  
*The House of Horus*  
Year 65 Dong Bei '09-'10  
*Fly me to New York*  
Year 66 Falling in lust '10-'11  
*Kim*  
Year 67 SAU '11-'12  
*Macroeconomics*  
Year 68 Nei Menggu '12-'13  
*The grasslands*  
Year 69 Liuliude '13-'14  
*A Taste of Szechuan*  
Year 70 Calgary Stampede '14-'15  
*To Dee I sing once more*  
Year 71 The Publishing House '15-'16  
*The Seven-Year Itch*  
Year 72 Garden Apartment '16-'17  
*Plant and grow*  
Year 73 'Sang Pinoy series '17-'18  
*The Ten Chicken Scratches*  
Year 74 Journal Writing '18-'19  
*365 Quotes, Reflections, and Days*  
Year 75 The Winter of our disconnect '19-'20  
*Of bends, knuckles, elbows, and knees*

**Beyond Forgetting**  
***All mine to give***

Year 76 The memorial service '20-21  
Year 77-86 The Icing on the cake '21-'31

The Memorial Quote:

Nothing that is worth doing  
can be achieved in our lifetime,  
therefore, we must be saved by hope

Nothing that is true and beautiful or good  
makes complete sense  
in any immediate context of history;  
therefore, we must be saved by faith.

Nothing we do, however virtuous,  
can be accomplished alone;  
therefore, we are saved by love.

No virtuous act is as virtuous from the  
standpoint of our friend or foe  
as it is from our standpoint  
therefore, we must be saved  
by the final form of love  
which is forgiveness.

H. Richard Neibuhr

## A page on the '*Sang Pinoy* Series

My firstborn's eldest Van called me *Lao Ye Ye* (literally, "old man", used endearingly in China for Grandpa). He regularly watched a children's Chinese program called *Kai Lan* where he picked up the term. Van's younger brother was Liam, and his Healy cousins were older Dillon and brother Sean.

(Eldest daughter Maria Kristina married to Troy Campbell of Illinois, and sister Maria Teresa wedded to Niall Healy of Ireland, had two boys each, under 10 when I first started this writing.)

I wrote this unsystematic account of a life for the four boys (though in adult language) just in case they'd be interested later to know who their other grandpa was, but mostly, because I got to an age when the brain had unkind Alz knocking at the door. So the writing was as much for my sake, if only to keep the brain active and still "playing" attention, as it was for the boys.

I found myself retired at 68 after a contract as a foreign teacher at China's Shenyang Aerospace University ended in 2014. A characterization of the state of retirement I adopted as my credo; it went something like this: "*Monday to Saturday, I do nothing, but on Sunday, I rest.*"

I began this tale halfway into my 68<sup>th</sup> birthday doing so in the familiar (to me) solar calendar, though China used the lunisolar one when a child was already a year old by the time he was born. In the Gregorian count, August 1, 1945 *anno domini* was my birthday. I used both but stuck mostly on the birth certificate.

As was customary in historical thinking, one researched the circumstances surrounding one's birth since conscious memory draped in socially recognizable language and numbers had yet to kick in. Thus, I recalled my beginnings from the memories of others.

What I did know after living in the Northern Mariana Islands from 1999 to 2009 was that I was born at about the same time the first A-bomb was put together in Tinian, NMI. Named the "little boy", it snuffed 60,000 breaths over Hiroshima's sky 6 days later, though the initial schedule for its dreadful journey was August 1.

I am twin brother to the nuclear instrument of mass destruction first used on people. I say this to underscore the fact that this writing was done in hindsight from Year 68, reflecting judgment more on held values of the moment of writing rather than on academic judgments of the past, and mostly on the balanced though irreverent style of column writing I used for the *Saipan Tribune*.

The format chosen allowed length to dictate how I dealt with content. It was convenient in my Oral English classes to use the format of one sheet brevity for printed reading lessons.

I held the wisdom that the second page of short written materials, like a resume or curriculum vitae, did not get a readers glance. With this three-column format, I showed my students how to organize a piece of writing on one page. Classroom handouts served as examples, and anything submitted that required a second page was routinely ignored.

This paper size and the size of letters served as the standard format throughout these series (except the preceding contents rendered in two pages) so that readers will only glance at a page as a unit at any given time and can adjust the pace of their reading accordingly.

I use "playing" in lieu of "paying" attention on a previous paragraph for the same reason I played on both terms in my classroom pedagogy, not only to counter the subservience of modern minds to commercial values, but also to state that the mind can wander into wide fields of imaginings. It is not limited to rote memory of terms practiced in contemporary education just so students can pass standard tests to be well certificated to qualify for jobs. Paying attention teaches folks to follow orders and be adequately remunerated, while playing attention educates minds to create their own paths as they travel with glee and fulfillment.

The telling was divided into five parts of life's phasing, though obviously, the moments did not easily fit into equal years of categorization. The phasing was for ease of narrating a person's story, a cognitive overview at a personal level.

Each page title reflected my age, a metaphorical holding category, and the year reflected, *mas o menos*. I asked readers to suspend the usual pattern of chronology, logic's strictures, and the verifiability of facts through copious footnotes. This was a stream-of-consciousness exercise in tale telling. We did not surrender the claim to truth; an event's veracity in space and time was not the sole measure for truth. Here's my story with the hope that you will tell yours as well.

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How does one drag forward the luggage of the past trying a feeble inventory into the stream-of-consciousness of the present that may give impetus to a tow into the murky and barely discernable waters of the future?

This is not your normal *Forward* to a literary piece, but Jaime and I go a long way more than a decade when he started writing columns in the Opinion page and I began my stint as a writer in the news room of the *Saipan Tribune*. So I write this *Forward* for him.

Ah, but quibbles on logistics and history is not my task; moving forward is.

It should be obvious that this *'Sang Pinoy, tatak ordinaryo: j'aime la vie*, is at once, a serious attempt at getting those who wish to know the author at face value, woof, wart, woes and all, can do so. It is also, however, an occasion to introduce a form that anyone can use to write their brainstorm of their own reflection on life's journey in the course of time. It is really simple (though, perhaps, not in the writing) since it is only one page for every year of one's life.

In a past world when royals were sovereign, or the elite, whether by education, merit, or caste, presided over the affairs of many, we held on to luminary examples or exemplary role models. We sought those at the apex of the social strata. Ambition was measured on how far one scaled the ladder, and since there were only a limited number of spots on the top, we elbowed anyone

on the way in the sporting practice of fair and just competition. Achievements were awarded on the basis of how well we performed against the efforts of others.

We now live not so much on getting up to the top of the social pyramid but on plumbing the depths of our souls in the net of relationships that define our humanity. Though we could not shrink from individual accountability, we are foolish not to be aware of our collective power, the synergy of collaborative efforts, and the wonderful fellowship of awe-filled collegiality.

Reflections, however, get stymied quickly. We keep daily diaries and journals that often get a furious start, only to be shelved quietly on the downside of other priorities. But we reflect on closing out a year on our birthdays, or make resolutions at the turn of a year, so, why not a yearly one-page write-up of either an event, a summary, or *maski paps* ("whatever", in Pinoy) like those reflected in the following pages? We keep CVs and resumés handy and up-to-date. For reflection and meditation, why not a page for every year to give form to the patterns of our consciousness?

As a fellow wordsmith, and also, a practicing editor, I shall be forgiven for being pedantic in my word usage and definition. I shall stick with the definition I provided as to my task in this section. My task is to move forward.

"Is" constitutes neither a measure of eternity or of the temporal mistiness of now. It just "is", forever and now. If stuck in usual substantive thinking, we would not be able to transcend

moments, nor ground hopes and dreams, but in the realm of process, "is" moves on the on-going-ness of life.

This leads us to "Move" - the thrust onward, toward the front rather than a retreat to the back. Past accounts in this reading reveal the present state of the writer's consciousness rather than the facticity of past occurrences.

"Forward" is our direction, that bold, brazen, barefaced, brash, shameless, immodest, daring, audacious, presumptuous, familiar, informal, pert, fresh move (yup, I have a Thesaurus).

Some will say that there is a lot of "ego" in these pages. That goes with the territory. The writer definitely promotes selfhood. It is that without which there is no network of people, thus, no society nor civilization.

There is nothing wrong with ego. If one recalls, in the Freudian categories, the hierarchy was the superego idealized, and the id despised, while normal in the middle was good old ego. The question is not whether Jaime has an ego. Of course, he does. And he does not hesitate to parade it while he is airing it out on Micro Beach's sand. The real question is, how are you handling yours, and how do you tell your story. Maybe it is worth the while to get paper and pencil, or bring out the old laptop, and start doing the same recollecting, one year at a time.

So, let me see. I am now (?) years old. That means (?) pages. That's doable. I will start hackig my own recollections. So, how are you coming along yours?

## Part I Mystery of origin: being born to the household of Awe

My inherited metaphor on birth comes from the Christian *Ecumene* in the name of one Jesus of Nazareth. Until I was 13, a story was rehearsed in Church pageants of a babe in a manger one Palestinian morn wrapped in swaddling clothes, visited by Magi from the East, looked over by shepherds in the field, while heavenly angels sang to a star on a stop-and-go course!

A friend imagined lying on a cot staring at the stars and reported his musings as an experience of AWE, of the AWESOME, by one among the AWED ONES! Not a bad triune formula! My dead father would have added that he heard the *ouch* of the awe, the *whoa* of the awesome and the *umph* of the awed ones. His focus was not so much on the experience of the infinite but on the finite, on the one on the cot, when it was that s/he (also his/her, henceforth to be "ze") took hold of the responsibility for the 90-years of existence ze had on hand, and how.

In High School, Biology and zoology delivered the sperm and the egg on their way to being an ovum. Mendel and meiosis, zygote and mitosis, genes and origins entered my vocabulary.

Its latest incarnation, to introduce the "I am one, unique ..." sentence at the start of this narrative, in the classrooms, goes like this:

*One night, my Dad gifted my mother a couple of hundred million tailed sperms to race through her fallopian tube towards a mature egg. About 200 of them got to the hulk but the first one did*

*not automatically get the pass card to enter. When one did, it dropped its tail, released a squirt of enzymes as it glided on. Ze was the undisputed winner of the biggest race in life."*

At this point, I drew on the board a picture of a round orange surrounded by swarming tadpole-like creatures.

*One sperm made it. This was more than just winning the city marathon, not even the five-digit lottery. About 250 million were at the gate and that's just one out of the three days each 28 days that Ma had a mature egg in a one-year period that she and my Pa tried for a second child. Figure out the odds.*

Depending on the audience, I sometimes hung back on the details of fertilization especially if the class was starry-eyed, quiet but titillated, embarrassed but curious of genital words in English (the bad words in any language are the first ones often learned and are invariably 'sexual'), otherwise, I hammered down hard on the image of the "winner".

*That's the view from the sperm. Look at it from the egg's window. The welcome mat was not waiting for the first-comer. The egg exercises choice. It chooses. Even before fertilization, the egg exercises a free act.*

Winner and free, that's just at the gate of union. This was when it got mind blowing to Chinese students. They grew up with the image of *Taiji* (yin-yang) as a cultural symbol but never saw it as an icon of the life dynamic it represented. It was here that I drew the tailless tadpole and the

egg in a circle with an "S" keeping them apart and together, swirled in motion into replicating themselves. Walla, the yin-yang! And the slit eyes in the audience opened wider.

*Winsome and free, the zygote went to a process of reproducing genetically similar cells. In nine months, it created one of life's most complex and sophisticated organisms, with muscles on skeletal frames, facilitating a respiratory system to avail of oxygen, and a digestive system to process nutrients, sensory and neural systems that are more complicated in their connectivity than anything Sony, Apple, Samsung, Nokia and any of the technologies on artificial intelligence can come close to putting together.*

This part of the telling can really get very involved. I invited students to ground in their physiological systems the processes, getting them into the existential stream of creativity that two cells undertake in just a 9-mo. period.

*So, on the day I was born, I was already a proven and tested winner, free to make choices, and creative as hell. This was even before I exhibited a thing that resembled awareness and consciousness. With this exemplary gift of life, how dare I decide to ignore its value as if it was just a piece of fungus to be discarded away?*

Physiology continued to study beginnings. The awe and wonder that accompanied religious rites and cultural rituals throbbed my heart, and heated up the dark corners of my souls. *I am one, unique, unrepeatable gift of life in history.* That was at the core of my story. What was true of me is similarly true of the reader.



## Year 1 Cuyapo '45-'46 *Seat of agrarian unrest*

"Cuyapo" was rabid agrarian unrest. I really do not remember anything about the town until I visited it sometime in 1989. I consulted with a few NGOs and found myself in Bulacan, Nueva Ecija, Pampanga, Tarlac, and Zambales. I went into my birthplace for a couple of hours of look-see and look-around.

I parked near the United Methodist Church. I surmised it was not too far from the parsonage where I wailed my first. All told, I was a good month behind schedule. A neighboring town nurse resided in the parsonage for month ready to assist my mother deliver but I was no sound within hearing. So she decided to go home for a visit and since this was still on the tail end of the Japanese occupation, she had to walk home if no water buffalo was on rein to haul. She had an early start. Four hours after she left, I came out. Mom said it was at nine in the morning. I just slithered out without much ceremony.

I will find out later through exhibits from the CNMI historian Dan Farrell that "little boy" of Tinian, the A-bomb that snuffed 60,000 breaths in a flash above Hiroshima six days later, was assembled at the same time I was clearing my throat, making me a twin brother. In fact, the weapon, but for inclement weather, was due for its ignominious pop on August 1, 1945.

A week to the day, 20 years later, I stood before the lights of Ginza in Tokyo, on a stopover in Yokohama from a voyage across the Pacific on one of the last inexpensive passages of Uncle

Sam's President Lines. It began a journey in both outer and inner spaces. I was in a journey of a lifetime.

Japanese "atrocities" was an image I grew up with, mostly from a society that suffered the brunt of Nippon militancy, including those of recruits from Korea and Okinawa. The imperial forces were considered disciplined and were primarily the officers of the occupying forces, but their wards were recruits to be pacified with such things as "sex slaves", and often dismissed and excused for their gore in their relationship with occupied natives. Nice try, Japan!

One of my father's elder brothers was a school teacher in La Union engaged by the Japanese as a translator. When the GI guerrillas and their native forces got hold of him, they strung him to four water buffaloes in the middle of town and drove the *carabaos* scampering to the four winds. Ironically, his life was snuffed by his own kind, and by forces he supported.

My father was pastoring in barrio Palestina, San Jose, Nueva Ecija, and his church mimeograph machine produced propaganda flyers against the *Kempetai* of the occupying forces. One of the Japanese officers assigned to monitor my Dad's movements was a Christian. When my Dad's name showed up on the wanted list, he was immediately warned to skip town.

He did. That's how he got to Cuyapo 54 km away, by the Tarlac and Pangasinan borders where a nearby hump of a hill now known as Mount Cuyapo was home to insurgent forces that the Japanese contained but never overcame.

My mother related that on some evenings, my father disappeared into the night and came home stinking of dog meat they consumed the night before. In the early morn, he stumbled and struggled into bed.

Cuyapo was where I showed up for my first breath of fresh air. I will discover later that it was also a center of agrarian unrest, of tenant farmers who took exception to their treatment by the *hacenderos* that lorded their existence.

The phrase would enter my vocabulary early, and such names as Luis Taruc of the *Hukbo ng Bayan Laban sa Hapon (Hukbalahap)*, People's Army Against the Japanese, and Ninoy Aquino, father of the 2014 President, husband to Cory of the yellow shirt Peoples Power, played in my imagination later in adult life.

But in 1945, the country was just shaking off the shackles of Japanese militancy as General Yamashita's forces retreated to the Cagayan Valley for exit into the defense of homeland Japan. Nippongos settled in the Philippines as early as the 12th century BC, but they were quick to assimilate and had not yet worshipped country and emperor as exhibited later.

At the time, I was just a bundle of tender muscles and skeletons, the sole imbiber of my mother's milk as my older sister was already weaned. My mother liked the abundant fruits of surrounding guava trees on which I was reportedly conceived. I grew up by osmosis liking the fruit as well. The memes influenced my habits as much as the genes, not to mention my hometown's agrarian unrest.

## Year 2 Pilipino '46-'47 *Bayan Ko*

Not quite fully one-year-old in the Gregorian calendar, already almost two in the lunar, the sovereignty of the land of my birth shifted from being a U.S. Commonwealth to an independent nation among post-WWII new nations.

Fourth of July of 1946 turned over control of government from American tutelage to Filipino independence. This was problematic from a political affiliation perspective. Some of those born before 1946 claimed U.S. citizenship in the Courts of San Diego CA but were thwarted by the view that the granting of Independence was to fulfill a promise enshrined in the 1935 Commonwealth Constitution and that being a Filipino national of a territory of the U.S. did not grant automatic rights to citizenship.

The country was then reeling from the ravages of war so nationalists claimed that the granting of independence was more a shedding off by the U.S. of a post-World War II liability than a fulfillment of a promise.

What I do know was that I grew up claiming to be a native English speaker. That seemed like a gross misrepresentation but at my little *bahay kubo* house where the King James version of the Bible was read, and my father spoke English more than the dialect of the region - Cuyapo straddled the line between Iloko, my parent's tongue, and Tagalog, the region's dialect - my ears were tuned early to the sounds of English, more than the sing-song sway and chant-like patterns of the Malay tongues of the locations

where my family grew. The Kings English took me far in my journey.

My family had a picture taken of my sister and I with mother and father all decked out, my father in his sharkskin suit and mother in her *kimona*, my sister in a perky girl's dress, and I, the little dude in short pants, capped on leather shoes. It was not too long after the culmination of World War II when most in the whole country, except those favored by America's reparation funds, were dirty poor. Though my family might not have had the means, my father as the spoiled runt of his family, and orphaned mother raised by *Doñas*, they definitely had the quiet flair.

Mother's pictures before she was married were of a fair bedimpled lass used to privilege and economic sufficiency as well as social status. She lived as the orphaned niece of Governor Roque Ablan's wife, Lola Mining (Manuela), in Ilocos Norte before WWII. She wanted to go to school so she moved with the Iloilo Jalandoni family in their Ermita, Manila compound, next to Central Church where I served with Grandma Marylou later. My mother was niece to the lady of the Jalandoni house, Lola Mining's sister.

But Japan had co-prosperity plans it was forcing on Asia, and my mother, a devout Catholic who would not cast an eye on anyone who did not make the sign of the cross descending stairs, or passing a church, avoided the leering stares of Japanese officers who frequented the Jalandoni household. Less than a year into the War, she married the guy next door who was earnest in his courtship, though he was a weird Protestant Seminary student.

She was eight years his junior, this bookish effete intellectual. She grew emaciated taking care of the handsome parson whose exemplary brain was not accompanied by the ability to accumulate wealth to pay for basic necessities, let alone, comfort. Raising two children, two years apart within three years of marriage, added to her burdensome obligations.

Father was born in San Esteban, Ilocos Sur, and went to High School in the Provincial center of Vigan. He was with an elitist batch magnetized to the work either as a lawyer for the emerging national government, or, be a Protestant cleric like the missionaries who educated them. At the time, being adept in English was a goal of ambitious students. That's how father ended up at Ermita's English-speaking Central Church when Nippon took the city, and where his eyes caught the smile of the girl next door.

It did not seem like father and mother had any objections to being independent Filipinos after I was born though the sentiments of *Bayan Ko* (my country) was not yet as fully developed in their time as it was in mine.

The Methodist Church and the other Protestant denominations, over zealous anti-papist, agreed to divide the country for their evangelical (read: anti-Catholic) work. The Episcopal Methodists of Ilocos Sur united with Protestant Methodists in the Cagayan Valley in '39. They added more territories, as long as they did not step on each other's toes. The field was open to new ways.

My folks headed after Cuyapo to the lush but frontier territory of the Cagayan Valley.

**Year 3 Sanchez Mira '47-'48**  
*The smell of copra*

It was the coconuts that determined my toddler hood in Sanchez Mira. My playmates and I scrambled atop heaped dried copra to the great consternation of workers because we frequently vanished under the heap without being noticed and we could die of asphyxiation.

Copra was the main industry of the town as 25 percent of land areas in the Philippines grew coconuts. There were plantations that produced copra commercially, and the country's output lead the world's tally on exports, the industry remained as it was when I was growing up, a small landholder's industry.

We did not have the dwarf variety yet that later was cultivated in Taiwan. The native variety grew tall, which was fine in Sanchez Mira. It regulated the wind currents that blew the ocean breeze in and the warm land air out, making the town's temperature pleasant all year round.

I was fascinated with the pointed steel attached to wood for support and firmly inserted into the ground where the harvested mature coconuts were husked. The inexperienced could easily gush their palms if they were not careful.

The art of splitting the coconut also involved skill. I carried as a child against my mother's wishes an aluminum pail to our neighborhood copra sheds and workers were always ready to oblige the children's request for coconut water. This was not the coconut milk. That's the fluid from inside the seed before it is boiled to make

the coconut oil. It's the fluid that watered the seed as it matured.

Harvest of trees occurred three or four times a year. The drying of coconut covered every square inch of the town in spite of the dryers built to accelerate the aeration process. Thus, the fragrant aroma of the copra permeated the air almost all the time.

My father, in addition to pastoring the local Methodist Church, was also the acting Principal at the church-related school, Thoburn Memorial High School, named after a former missionary who served as an early Bishop in the country.

Missionaries crossed my path though not much in my house's dining table during the visitation of the annual dental and medical missions. The parson's culinary offering was awfully limited by budget, though it was an occasion for the in-kind contribution to the table to occur.

The regular appearance of the mobile clinic on wheels left supplies of dried and canned dairy products that my mother valued. She noticed that other recipients only added it to their hog feed. That was the first time I saw my mother trade cash or clothes for the nutritious products so our pantry was stocked with dairy.

I must have been baptized during one of those clinics' visits, based on the names of the people listed as my godparents. One was a prominent nurse who administered the mobile clinics, and the other was the town's famous medical doctor. It might have influenced my aim later to be a physician when I started to climb education's

ladder of social mobility and began to polish social standing.

Sanchez Mira proffered National Geographic (NG) photos of the folks up the Cordilleras. One missionary scampered with his camera as the mountain folks appeared with babies on their chests with goods to sell in the Saturday market. There were topless girls and young mothers not too concerned about showing a nipple or two.

This actually struck me as hilarious years later in San Francisco '66 as North Beach bars had topless female bartenders and waitresses. We were charged a \$5 entrance fee. I turned 21 in the summer of '66 and my buddies took me to one of these spots to initiate my entry to adult entertainment. And to think I hardly noticed the topless ones in the free ambience of the public market of my childhood! In San Francisco, the entrance fee was three hours worth of labor in being a bus boy at a restaurant.

But Sanchez Mira in '47 was just another place for the missionaries to report of the challenges of fertile mission fields delighting handlers in New York. But something about the evening movies conducted by the mobile clinics for the community did not seat well with me. It was a film about factory union organizers who were dubbed communists and the hero was one of the workers who foiled and exposed the destructive aims of the union; ran off with factory owner's daughter, too. It was a well-crafted yarn, a little long on propaganda. Even at the young age of three, I already had the nose to smell a rat.

## Year 4 Patapat '48-'49 *Lola Mining's bidet*

Mother took us to her Aunt's house in Laoag going through a dreaded part of the highway called *Patapat*. That's not the viaduct now connecting Cagayan to Ilocos Norte on the Maharlika highway. It was the one-way road carved out of the rockface on the side of a cliff overlooking the Babuyan Sea that was always treacherous during the rainy season, for either part of the mountain above fell on to the road blocking it, or the road itself fell into the ocean, which then required Public Works to device temporary wooden structures to make the daily traffic flow.

In any case, when we travelled to Laoag from Sanchez Mira, we went through this part of the journey that I later called Highway 666, the dangerous and devil's route, though Pinoy's penchant for community and fiesta transformed the place into a cheerful culinary location.

There were restaurants on both ends of the trail where the waiting vehicles took turns to cross the passageway, controlled by traffic managers waving flags on both ends on a clear day. On foggy days, the gridlock occurred as everyone exercised the first-come, first-serve prerogative.

Those of us who really did not yet appreciate the danger at the time, reveled on the culinary offerings, which often included such dishes not normally served at my home, like goat and dog meats, exotic birds and various reptiles. Not that I knew the difference then but I did not care as long as the ambience looked and sounded

like the town carnivals I grew to love. The eateries before the dangerous highway were full of merriment and music.

Stories abounded of drivers distracted by giggly passengers who exclaimed loudly when they saw a sailing ship below causing the diverting the driver's attention, making him miscalculate his lane position and nose dive the vehicle to the pounding waves.

Children were thus told to hang on to their seats or their parents grasp (vehicles were always full so children sat on someone's lap), and the girls were advised strongly to keep laughter down, or mouth shut!

The trip was to Laoag, which meant "light" in the local dialect, the provincial capital of Ilocos Norte. I saw the "light" there that shaped one of my eccentric habits into my years.

My sister and I shared my great aunt's bathroom that was equipped with a bidet. Older, she took the washbasin first, making me wait my turn or looked for another outlet. I found one. I spotted the bidet, separate from the toilet, spouted the water when turning the side knob, so I brushed my teeth leisurely on the abundant water flow.

My mother would later explain to me the use of the bidet, in a manner that did not make fun of my awkward brushing of teeth, or critical over my ignorance, a pedagogical tool I learned and treasured in teaching. It made me rely solely on soap and water when using restrooms from then on, often difficult where there was only toilet paper on hand.

I was delighted to find out later that kindred devotees, Muslims, Sub and Southeast Asian friends, were devoted water users in the toilet, too.

By four, I already broadened my horizons for traveling a distance more than those of peers who tended to be stationary. I found out later that my mother traveled to Ilocos Norte to bring locally available goods that commanded a price in the Laoag market. In return, she bought good quality and fashionable items from Laoag to the hinterland of Sanchez Mira, earning a profit each way. It paid for travel.

I remember *gamet*, the kelp harvested in Fuga Island and the Babuyan channel, the wrapper in Japanese *sushi*, treasured by traders to Abra and the mountain provinces for their high iodine content to counter prevalent inland goiter.

My mother raised a Roman Catholic, converted into my father's Protestant practicality. Instead of beading her rosary for divine assistance on my father's inadequate level of pay, she earned the additional *pesetas* so that she could procure what she thought her family needed.

My Dad was always well groomed, I think, as a matter of habit being the runt in his family; the eldest child of his eldest sibling was only two years younger than he was, so he had nephews his age who deferred to him, spoiling the brat!

My mother twice or three times a year procured new sets of attire. We lived the lifestyle of the middle class on salary of a pauper, decidedly a living miracle.

## Year 5 First Grade '49-'50

### *Tag along to school*

"Manang" is the honorific title we attached to older women's names when we called them. I was not always deferring to my older sister though she was two years my senior.

I slashed marks on her legs with a sharp knife when we were young. I was shredding banana stalks with a sharp kitchen knife to mix with the hog feed. Manang Fe decided to needle me and I swung a couple of slashes on her calf and shin. With the scars, she never let me forget my mean and dastardly behavior.

But the terror of the event on recollection was not the act itself, as it was absence of emotions in the doing; I rued not the deed, its consequent effects. I was neither hateful nor mad when I made the stabs, nor regretful or proud after the fact. That might have been the reason why I thought in College that I would make a good surgeon, cold and calculating, and much later, was flabbergasted to realize I was an unfeeling cold blooded stoic at such a tender age.

I went to elementary school by dogging behind my sister. Unhappy with the tugging puppy, she enrolled me to first grade. Two years apart by age, we became only a year apart in school, so when we reached college, we ended up in some classes together.

At the time, education in my class of 60 eager puppies was rote memory with a picture book of a boy named "Pepe" and a girl named "Pilar", an adaptation of America's Jack and Jill series.

We were taught to read but my knack was to mimic the teacher's sounds first, then mentally attached the phonemes to the pictures in the book before I recognized words spelled below with letters.

I did not learn how to read but I was good at repeating what I heard. That experience proved critical later when I taught non-native speakers and Chinese students English.

Age-wise, I was not yet five when I registered into grade school. Attire was costly when I was growing up so it was not uncommon for many of us to wear nothing waist down at play. I wore short pants going to school, but as soon as I came home, I took off my belt, or suspenders, and played *au naturel!*

It was about this time that the daughter of the National Catholic (Aglipayan) Church padre, my neighbor, and I, in show-and-tell, compared the difference in what was between our legs, right under the parsonage's dining table.

My mother was amused at our examination of body parts but she decided it was time I had my pants on in public all the time. She took our clinical curiosity at face value, and she did not chastise us for our inquisitiveness nor made us feel guilty about our curiosity.

The incident taught me to ignore the anxiety that preoccupied my peers about the state of our body parts. Most deny how they were built and changed or hid their shape and natural looks with tons of cosmetics, or, when we got older, tucked in the wrinkles on the chin, and held the

protruding belly at parade dress when meeting the ladies. I lived my being in my body before my heart and head added input.

Sanchez Mira was a haven for NG photos like those in the magazines that parents hid so their children were not exposed to the wickedness of the naked wild!

My cavalier attitude towards bared body parts was not lost in my adulthood but did not sit well with western colleagues who regarded "naked" as a sign of depravity, and the lack of morals!

Anyhow, at five, I was pigeon-holed into the nation's public education, and though the notion of nationhood was not yet etched in my psyche, the presence of foreigners in my neighborhood, as well as the strangely attired folks from the hilly hinterlands, provided consciousness of what and who I was alongside the exotic and the other "others."

In school, a grade of 75 was passing. I made 76 on my first foray into regimented learning. I also learned how to play a game underneath the elevated floor of the main school building. It was a hand-to-eye coordination skill. Players placed a piece of 3-inch wood on a dug groove on the ground to sit like a lever in a diagonal position and hit the tip of the wood to loop it upwards, then hit it as hard as one could to as far a distance as it could traveled. The stick measured the distance that scored the game.

Some of us spent more time playing that game even when the bell already rang after recess. That explained the attained grade of 76.

## Year 6 Floating rice paddies '50-'51 *Crocodile and wet pants*

There were two bodies of water in Sanchez that invariably got me in trouble. I was in second grade when I noticed the little creek along the schoolyard. Its current usually muddy from the rain upstream, it was notorious to us because of its reputation as being visited by crocodiles.

I was attracted to the creek because of the birds of paradise, camias, and other ginger plants that abounded. My attraction was not of the botanist but of the flower arranger, on aesthetics rather than science. I waded into the water to get what I wanted, notwithstanding the crocs.

Of course, had I known then what I knew later about crocs, I would not have stepped within a hundred meters on the riverbank. On reaching home with wet pants, even holding flowers, I would get tongue-lashed, that is, if my mother was in a good mood, or a taste of the rice ladle, if she wasn't.

The other body of water that was *verboten* to me was the seashore. Barrio *Masisit* was a couple of kilometers walk from where I lived but it was the scientist's curiosity that got me there. We had what were called "floating rice paddies". These were soil deposits from the hills harvested for their hardwood without regard of the ecological state of the watershed. The soil from the exposed hills ran down the slopes, was deposited on the shore, challenging mother nature's absorptive capacity. It was home to interesting marine animals and other sea creatures.

The soil, planted with rice one or two meters high, rose and fell with the tide. At low tide, they were not a problem. I gathered the green snails I wanted in the flooded holes where the water buffaloes laid from the heat.

At high tide, the place was deceptive. The soil was thick enough that it generally felt solid but the water buffalo holes acted like quicksand, as the rims rose with the soil but the hole were two meters deep. I was too young to understand this phenomenon to care. All I wanted was gather a bag full of green snails to bring home.

These were times when I got a taste of the rice ladle, and that's when I was lucky. If mother was too preoccupied to bother, she sent me to my father's study, and the bother would earn me a welt behind the upper leg.

Both places were hazards of growing up since neither the communal warnings nor the ladle kept me away from the river and the tidal rice fields. I did noticed that neither of my parents enjoyed doling out the penalty, so I learned early not to give them any reason to be upset, attaining my goals without getting the pants wet. I waded *au naturel*.

It was the challenge in my playmates' biases that was more formidable because it was carried in the regions of the mind and the dark corners of the heart. Save for the "pagans", Burmese in origin, like the NG folks who came down from the mountains of Apayao, Sanchez Mira was a bastion of Spanish Roman Catholicism, a town named in honor of a Spanish Brigadier General assigned in the Cagayan Valley.

Nestled between the municipalities named after Pamplona and Claveria of Spain, Sanchez Mira could not get more Spanish than that.

Thus, Sanchez had a hard time acknowledging the national Catholic (Aglipayan) Church as part of its body, a result of the schism started by native priest Gregorio Aglipay when he parted with the Pope and Spanish Bishops.

Nor were the followers of the Thomasites who brought American education at the turn of the century welcomed. Along with them was U.S. Protestantism, established when public schools were started. Aglipayans and Methodists were derisively called *buris tak-ki, protestanti*. The first two words referred to diarrheal excrement. With *da kine* always trying to "save" the misled papist Catholics, I was poo-poo and dog's doo-doo in the playground, and a croc in the field.

Matters turned to worst when father would not leave partisan politics alone. One of the church members ran for Mayor and my father could not keep his preference secret. He showed-up at a public meeting and gave a lyrical endorsement of his candidate and a devastating parody of the opponent.

When his candidate prevailed, the aides stopped by the house to suggest that my father would do well not to go out at night, nor walk alone from then on. That was like asking the water buffalo to avoid the mud pools!

It was not long after that my father received a new assignment in another town quite distant from the tranquil breeze of Sanchez Mira.

**Year 7 Aparri '51-'52**  
***Delta lumber town***

Aparri had harsh lights compared to the genial kerosene lamps of Sanchez Mira. The same was equally true of the rampant killings over natural resources, actually and financially.

I remember the news of a fiscal who was shot behind the head after he was told to kneel down when stopped from surveying the proposed site of a contentious license application. He was known to be a very honest official who refused the grease proffered to oil skids by persons who needed to fast track papers with the law.

The other was a gruesome sight for a 7-yr old. Collantes was our famous local bandit who was viewed by kids as Robin Hood, unsettling to the powers that be, but a celebrated protector of tenants. There was a prize on his head, and one day, his decapitated head was displayed on a pole by the gate of the Constabulary barracks.

Aparri was a delta lumber town where the logs harvested elsewhere were floated to the mouth of the Cagayan River for export to Taiwan and Japan. Some people raked the dough.

There were lots of *dineros* in concessions to harvest forest products, and the commercially minded new immigrants from Fujian with their moneyed Kuomintang cohorts, were seasoned at bringing the rice cakes home. Booted out of mainland China in '49, the new addition to the Sinobloods in the Pea Eye (that's P.I., an abbr. of the Philippine Islands, a designation no more in vogue), were either from Fujian (who joined

Chiang Kai Shek in Taipei), Guangdong of the old Canton, and the Hakka folks of Xianggang (HK), Singapura, and overseas Chinatowns.

They were a raucous crowd in Aparri with their Nationalist school. Their children attended both the Chinese and the Catholic schools.

The Kuomintang introduced me to the prodigy of the Hans. My Chinese neighbors lived on the second house after the courthouse next to the Methodist's tin-roofed *bahay-kubo*. Their unit, a brand new bungalow with an elevated semi-second floor had two cars in the garage.

The sons played with the local boys, mainly to teach us to gamble with gum cards. The cards were collectibles, printed with Marvel comic cartoons, sold with sugar-coated gums. Cards were numbered and the last digit was used to play lucky 9: two cards at first draw, with the option to quit after checking one's hand, or raise a bet or ask for a third card. The sum of the last digits closest to 9 won.

My playmates were intense gamblers. Playing with cards deteriorated into gambling with cash. They had plenty of it. I was a steady player. I usually won but I was a shaking sweaty nervous wreck at the end of each game because the kids kept pulling out wads of cash to double their last bet if they were losing, hoping to recoup the last bet. Undeterred, poker-face kept winning.

Though I tried to play it cool, I did not know how to handle the heap of overflowing cash usually held under a foot's rubber thong. I breathed a loud sigh of relief when the maids

called in the boys for lunch or dinner, or told to wash up for guests.

Later, when I moved further south to the capital town of Tuguegarao, and I attended a private *hoi polloi* secular College, my playmates were students at the prestigious and exclusive Ateneo de Tuguegarao for the boys, and their sisters at the St. Paul's for girls. I was a tad bit jealous.

China in the Aparri of my childhood soon crept inside of me. My mother opened an account at the Postal Savings Bank. She doubled anything I deposited. Two pesos at the time equaled a U.S. dollar. Once I made a peso from *centimos* saved, my mother headed me out to the Post Office with her counterpart. Asked what I will do with my savings, my response was clear: "I will travel to China."

At the time, the trade and commerce of lumber was lucrative and popular. Later, as a trainer for the Department of Local Government and Community Development (DLGCD) in their resource management program, I discovered that for every foot of timber reported to have left Aparri port since the 50s, ten were recorded in the destination books to have arrived in Japan or Taiwan. Many had their fingers on corrupt practices, by today's standards, but at the time, harvesting timber with a wink on bookkeeping was the means for distributive justice. Why let Manila eat the pie when it can be divided fairly at source?

At seven, I was getting an accurate picture of the world I lived in. Who said life was fair? Justice was a relative term.

## Year 8 Jolens and rubber bands '52-'53 *Berbanos and Americhild George*

The Berbanos were a large clan that occupied almost an eighth of an Aparri town block with a quad that had the shell of a pre-WWII leftover building, converted into a basketball court but served more in our minds as the castle and the moat where bamboo sword-wielding warriors mimicked Stewart Granger's *Scaramouche*, the popular roguish character clown of commedia dell'arte of Italia.

There was also lots of sand in the lot. Tamped ones damp under the guava trees, solid after a rain drench, made excellent ground for marble (*jolens*) games where each player contributed a marble into a circle. Determining who went first by casting a marble to a hole 4-to-6 feet away, we took turns in hitting the marbles in the circle enough to drive them out. A player kept hitting as long as he (the girls did not play this game) drove a marble out of the circle without leaving the master marble in the circle. I often went home with pockets heavy of marbles from the winnings of the day.

The other popular game was called *tin-nu-dok*, where a group of boys hunched around a mound of sand took turns to play *house* or *bank*. They kept the group's contributed rubbers twisted on the tip of their short pointed sticks and drove it into the ground under cover of hand, hiding it under the sand. The other players alternated to stick their bamboo sticks into the sand and get the rubber to lasso their stick. When successful, they drove their stick to reveal the rest of the rubber bands, win as many rubbers as comes

out of cover. Obviously, the *house* knew where the rubbers were located and if players failed to locate it, the house delivers the *coup d'grace* to rake in the take.

There was a cultural universe with its own rules of behavior and social strata in the playground. The older male Berbano of the yard served as our *ipso facto* role model. I was in the circle of leadership because two Berbano girls were in my school class, and their membership at my father's church gained me family status, often invited to lunch when I was lazy to head home.

Still innocent, but not yet with malice towards the opposite sex, I showed features of the much maligned but tolerated effeminate boys. Female classmates delighted in using me as their make-up doll in their dress-up games. Mother winced each time she noticed traces of mascara on my face, blush on my normally rosy cheeks, and paint on my lips. I was indifferent for I enjoyed the ministrations of the female of the specie.

Later, some close friends derisively called me a *palikero*, one who indiscriminately kept too many girl friends. A College Dean interviewed me once with a female associate in attendance, and interrupted the interview by saying, "She's already married, Jaime," nodding to his aide. I was sending unconscious inappropriate signals.

My younger brother was built like a bully and did not enroll in school until he was close to 7 as recommended by the Education department. He did well in school, a pressured valedictorian. However, he called me *bakla*, pejorative title for the effeminate. That tinge of inane bigotry

developed in me a defensive affinity and a protective stance towards the gentler members of my gender, often snickered at for the way they swayed. I became paternalistic to those of the third kind until I was told to desist as the ugly head of patriarchy proved worst.

In the Berbano playground, Americhild George was left behind by liberating forces of WWII, from a Victory Joe who might have wandered beyond barracks to George mama's arms. He was bigger in stature than any of us, and though he was usually jolly and amiable, he showed a streak of bad temper when irritated. He was also a tease of considerable persistence.

One playful day, he decided to pick on me as I was losing badly in the rubber band game. He needled my effeminacy, laughing and joking derisively when my thrust into the sand missed the rubbers. Exasperated after warning him to stop, (and perhaps, acting on the same impulse that led me to slash my sister's calf when we were young) I grabbed George's arm, executed a fast twist, strung his arm on my shoulders, lifted his body up on my back and dumped him soundly with a thud on the ground like a sack full of rice.

An ambulance had to be called to bring him to ER as he could not get up on his own from my outburst. That was my last day in the Berbano yard. Full of remorse and shame, I avoided George like the plague from then on, though on those rare occasions when we met in the street, I noticed a grudging admiration out of his smile to the little effeminate runt that dared to break his arm in the playground!



## Year 9 Jailu '53-'54 *Mamang Lucring's daring choice*

If "Manang" was the honorific title for an older female, "Mamang" was the endearing term for one's mother.

Four years after my brother Edward was born, Jailu, the runt of the family was conceived. The first born up to the fourth came on schedule every two years with birthdays on November, August, September, and October. The spacing was orderly, and once we started birthdays, they came monthly one after the other.

Jailu came as a "gift of God" middle of August. On Mamang's pregnancy, a tumor was found in her womb that interfered with a full term, and if not surgically removed, it complicated delivery. If the tumor was excised at pregnancy, the baby could be lost. Mother opted for the guarantee of the baby in lieu of the assured safety of her health.

Of the first four siblings, none were named with out-of-the-ordinary names, nor of particularly evocative and meaningful words, like my dear cousin *Liwayway*, meaning "dawn".

I was the firstborn boy so I got to be "Junior" of my father by default. Eldest became Fe Rosario (faith in the rosary, so Pinoy), younger brothers Alejandro and Eduardo were run of the copra mills names. Later, Anglo Alejandro became the Hellenic Alexander the Great, and Eduardo became England's King Edward (also honored a beloved former missionary simply called Ms. Edwards).

Jailu was a sheer gift of love from God through parents Jaime and Lucrecia, so she was named from the first syllables of our parent's names, *Jai* and *Lu*. However, the gift came with a huge responsibility. As youngest, she was charged to take full responsibility of our parents' welfare in their old age, a role she might have wondered why she had to play since she had able older siblings who would do just as well.

Tradition. It did not play well in her favor. For instance, Jailu wanted to be a medical doctor, but she was a girl. She was drilled to aspire only as a nurse! That's a tragic refrain that still echoes in many places around the world. The boy can go to medical school but the girl gets to wear a silly white cap! That's tradition.

An old Chinese saying goes: *nu ren neng ding ban bian tian*, "women hold half of the sky." This was extensively used by Mao Zedong to further the female status in China's traditionally male-centered and patriarchal hierarchy. I had borrowed the same saying for one women's day in the CNMI at the Oleai MRC. I noticed that a commercial ad picked it up in one of its broad sheets on women's day a year later.

I turned out to be Jailu's infant care-sitter when my mother was otherwise preoccupied. My older sister and I took turns and diaper changing at the tender age of nine came in handy when I had children of my own.

She was three or four when I tried showing off dexterity on a borrowed bicycle in Laoag. She sat sidesaddle at the back when I decided to go fast and a bare foot heel got caught into the

turning spokes, scrapping her skin, oozing the flow of considerable blood. I was horrified on what I caused on my sister's tender skin.

Like the scars I lashed on my elder sisters lower legs earlier, I carried the guilt of this accident on my youngest sister's feet for a long time, too. I was not much help in the medical doctor issue as well, but I suspected I could have been more forceful in enabling her real choice.

In the Ablan household when we lived next to the Farmacia Vallejos and Sunga's bakery, my uncle's visiting children were on the 2nd floor playing with new toys and I spied sister Jailu watching from the top of the stairs, pining for toys of her own. I vowed then that she was not going to be overwhelmed by wants, nor was she to be considered less human just because she did not have things.

I remember returning home to the Philippines in 1969 to visit the family who still lived in the archipelago. I lived in North Carolina after I dropped out of school and got married, but I mellowed enough to return to SMU to finish the course I left behind *sans* a diploma. Jailu was the only one living with the folks, still in High School. She asked if I could send her a big doll to keep her company after I was back in the US. Big brother sent her books, instead!

Jailu never got all the breaks she wanted, and definitely not the toys she desired, but life came to her as a gift, existentially clear as mother put her child's being ahead of her safety. Jailu said so in one of her reflections. In her case, one could not wish for a more daring choice.

**Year 10 Mrs. Gorospe's class '54-'55**  
*Lightness of being*

Until I was in grade 4 at the Central Elementary School of Aparri, schooling was what one did as a matter of course, hardly equivalent to the onerous task of learning, but one of my teachers was a WWII no-nonsense old vet who used his military discipline to insure proper behavior in the classroom. He taught arithmetic and meant for us to learn.

The cognitive portion of the brain used words to describe sense noticing from the stem, emotive expressions from the cerebellum, topical themes and understandings from the cerebrum. Number accompanied word to show patterns as well as proportions and ratios of parts against wholes. With numbers and words were how we dressed thoughts and ideas.

Obviously, I am articulating what I learned later about the brain, and our soldier teacher may not have explained it the same way I did above if he were asked, but he sure understood that brains were innately able to discern part and whole in the processes of addition, subtraction, division, and multiplication, in geometric and algebraic representations.

Somehow my brain recognized mathematical language and understood numerical symbol's function. Each time the teacher gave the class a problem to solve, I returned acceptable answers. Consequently, he asked the class to all stand up, and being the shortest runt in the group, sat me on an elevated chair on top of the teacher's table and had my fellow students execute crisp hand

salutes in honor of demonstrated prowess on so tender mental agility.

Embarrassed that I hardly knew how to read or write, I paid attention to my learning. I asked my intellectual father questions on how to do things as well as matters I did not understand. He was only too glad to oblige. I finally turned into a student who found himself a real teacher. I also discovered a way to encounter my father in fruitful dialogue.

My fifth and sixth grade classes had the same homeroom adviser and main teacher for both years. Ms. Gorospe had a laidback pedagogical style. She brought her classes home and held sleepovers at her house.

From an arithmetic teacher who put up a mirror so I can discover my innate capacity to learn, to the encounter of a father who was a dialogical partner, Mrs. Gorospe provided the key to the process: awareness of one's learning processes and self-management of one's own knowledge. Self-consciousness rose in the horizon.

All the above was not the language of a 10-yr old but my narrative was from hindsight rather than a chronological reenactment of times past. Still, clarity of events gives credence to some of the high falutin' language of this narrative.

Clarity at Mrs. Gorospe's homeroom included my acknowledgement that I was two years younger chronologically than anyone in the class. I was most playful and was not remiss to moments of being solitary. Alone was not a lonely number, and a crowd can be a lonely gig.

Mrs. Gorospe either understood this, or she was just too burdened by the size of the class to care what individuals did. I went with the first. One charge that I was fully guilty of was a return to wet pants. No, I did not start wetting my pants, but I started getting them wet again.

On the side of the school was a newly installed artesian pump. That was a misnomer since we had no aquifers in the sandbar to hold fresh H<sub>2</sub>O able to push itself up on its own pressure and feed artesian wells. But we called it "artesian" hand pumps in the same way that we referred to taking a photo as "kodak-ing"!

It was by the artesian pump that my imagination opened up and my pants got wet. Not a monk's solitary exercise yet, I created whole universes unto themselves. I pumped water into a created waterway on the sand. Given the super-porous nature of our sandbar soil, I pumped lots of H<sub>2</sub>O to keep the canal running.

In the canal, I made paper boats representatives the voyages of Columbus to the New World, Magellan through the Pacific, Vasco de Gama around the Cape of Good Hope, and Herman Cortes' conquest of Mexico, that we learned in our social studies class.

I transformed mental database into existential reality. Life was not a problem to be solved with right answers; it was an experienced feast to be celebrated. All of human knowledge, I decided, was mine for the taking if I so desired. Mrs. Gorospe made it exciting to desire it so.

I earned honorable mention in her class.

## Year 11 Papa @ CLAC '55-'56 *Central Luzon and Goodbyes*

CLAC was Central Luzon Agricultural College previously called Central Luzon Agricultural School (CLAS) the year before from its 1907 opening, then Central Luzon State University located in the Science City of Muñoz of Nueva Ecija. Science City refers to an urban place as an educational center. Muñoz was one of those cities, about 400-kms from Aparri.

I did not know why my father attended summer school there. He pulled me out of school to go with him in 1955. I found out painfully later when he bid us 'goodbye' the next year. He was a B. A. degree short to pursue higher education so he spent sessions at CLAC to that end. In 1956, he sailed for graduate studies back to the halls of academy in the US.

The school in Muñoz south of San Jose is 42-km away from where I was born in Cuyapo, and had been a hotbed of agrarian reformists. That's the conservative wing. Rabid radicals did not bother with civil discourses, or exchanges of ideas. They dealt in the lingo of incendiaries. Some of my relations sympathized with their ideology that pitted the marginalized *have-nots* against the filthy rich *haves*.

The whole summer of 1955 was spent with kin in San Jose, Nueva Ecija, and in Balaon of La Union. My father was the runt of his family so I was uncle to many relatives way older than I, and was a great Uncle to some of my age. I was almost ten years old. I was independent from father by default while he pursued his degree.

Mother had a toddler and there were four other children in the family to look after. Stressed housewife left behind in Aparri meant that one of the children had to go along with father. I must have drawn the lot!

This was the summer I learned the state of self-reliance getting to Barrio Palestina by myself. Father served there as church pastor in WWII. I bothered one of his sisters who farmed parcels of land bought from hard earned soil tilling.

The family had a fruity orchard that cuddled the cockles of my delta sandbar arid heart! It had fruits I had not seen before, so I climbed trees to my heart's delight all day.

I was guest to relatives and their families for a week, presumably so that I was not too much of a moocher on limited food resources. I stayed with cousins in Balaon, La Union, a mere 175-kms away. It was there that I learned of my uncle's ignominious execution I mentioned in Year 1. It was the first time I watched my Dad down fermented coconut socializing with peers.

Up to this point, I only wore short pants. The summer introduced me to "briefs". Nephews and I dropped our pants before jumping into the irrigation canal and I noticed that I was lacking a piece of clothing that they had. At first, I found the brief tight and cumbersome but the corn was beyond knee high on the fourth of July. It was time. I turned 11 that August.

Mrs. Gorospe's sixth grade class was uneventful but I was a self-reliant busy bee, shined shoes, delivered papers, and sold snacks. My father

had a green thumb and two ponds in the yard. One pond had *tilapia*; the other grew algae for feed. The second was also where the chickens and the ducks wetted their bills and left their droppings to fertilize the algae.

I gathered laid eggs under our house built on stilts. The ponds caught rain half of the year; we watered the veggie garden from it. Other than poultry doo-doo thrown into the soil, the greens were spared chemicals and night soil.

The yard had lettuce and greens that I delivered to clientele who understood fresh salads; also bagged (*bayong*) veggies in the morning and dropped it off on my way to school to mother's friend who had a fresh produce public market stall. She sold it for us, retained 20% of sale, and I picked up our share on the way home. I learned ecology and business that year.

There were countryside students who lived with us in exchange for labor; we did not subscribe to paid housemaids. I went with one of our boarders home one summer to her barrio 4-hrs upstream of the Abulog River by bamboo raft. It was an experience of a lifetime. I weeded grass off the rice paddies, watched an old tree burned down to catch and kill a boa constrictor that devoured a water buffalo. I might have even grown a hair on my chest that year.

It was a time for "goodbyes" - to Aparri and its arid delta, the ponds, the greens and childhood.

Papa in April had packed for a long boat ride to another institution of learning in the headlands of the United States of America.

**Year 12 Manong Badoy '56-'57**  
**"Laoag" light**

When father left for America, I became a 10-yr old adult. I was the oldest boy in the family and moving on to the town of "light", the meaning of the Iloko *Laoag*, I became Manong Bidoy. (Manang Biday is the equivalent of Marushka in Russia, Auntie Mame in New York, or Aunt Jemima south of the Mason-Dixon line).

At that age, and with the considerable cultural influence of the United States to the Protestant community, I was an Americophile. I was proud that my father went to the United States, and though I expected his return after his schooling, my internal clarity was of the opportunity for my siblings and I to travel. It was opened wide, so I doubled my savings for my "trip to China".

Mother compounded that travel sense when she booked us on promotional flights at Philippine Airlines in Laoag. Passengers experienced a flight over the city for fifteen minutes. It was clear that my traveling in the future was not a question of whether or not, but when.

Compared to Sanchez Mira and Aparri, Laoag was the big city. The first host to the family was Lola Andang Allado married to a school supervisor who fancied himself as a ladies' man. He only had daughters, devastating a machismo ego. He bore a son with a teacher he supervised out of town. I met him in my High School class but I did not call him "uncle".

Lola (great aunt) Andang's house was adjacent to the Shamrock elementary school and with the

Irish luck one was a winner attending the place. My two younger brothers did.

We occupied half of the first floor of a house that had a roof garden frequented by out-of-town boarders. We lasted a year. The aging beau (great uncle-in-law) of my Lola Andang turned on his charms on mother. We moved.

In the next block lived a lady whose husband supported her from the US. She built a spanking dwelling so she invited us to stay with her. We were not blood kin and the real ones were not pleased. It did not help that the five kids, me in particular, did not behave well, so we moved again, this time to the home of another great aunt popularly known as Lola Mining.

My sister and I attended High School at the spanking multi-story building of Northern Christian College a few blocks away. I was a bit on the chubby side and two years younger than anyone in the class, so I ended up being the class baby. I marched the crown of the school's queen during one of the festivities. But a lowly 78 was the grade to my academic performance.

My vocational training was unimpressive. I was strictly left-handed on both arms. The hanger I made at woodworking took a year to finish. My mother promptly shelved it after I gave it to her.

I might have shown some promise in the art of public speaking. I played roles in staged plays particularly the Christmas pageant at the local congregation of the United Church of Christ, (UCCP), a union of the Congregational and Presbyterian ministries of Protestantism. (The

Methodists and Baptists skipped the union.) The imposing downtown church was close to movie theatres. I looked forward to Sundays for it meant a trip into the town center.

Two gatherings served my literary craft and social networking acumen. Both happened out of town in December and summer.

The first was the Christmas Institute of the Methodist Church held in Ilocos Sur where my father was from. It gathered young people who learned not only of their biblical and church history, but were also counseled on human sociology and psychology. I was not yet in my teens when I attended but the group welcomed my presence and I basked on the intellectual challenges it provided.

The other was a summer gathering at a family camp by the shores of sandy-beached Currimao of Ilocos Norte for the UCCP folks. At the time, it was more than an-hour-bus-ride far. At the camp, we sang under tents, strummed the guitar around bonfires, swam in the sea by the protruding pier, generally had a good time for a whole week. I was *bon vivant extraordinaire!*

Manuela Ravelo Ablan was first lady of the Province when husband and charismatic Roque Ablan was Governor. She was also Manang Biday, the legendary Ilocana lady. Lola Mining in '56 headed the local Red Cross chapter. She cooped us next into her filial nest.

There was no Manong Bidoy, but *Badoy* was the night-walker who hung out under nocturnal street lights. I was a Manong Badoy at heart.

## Year 13 Roquito Ablan '57-'58

### *A man named Ferdinand*

Roquito (diminutive for Roque) was my hero. He led fabulous roadshows and performances in the 70s and 80s around the world promoting the Philippines as a destination for Middle Eastern, European and Russian tours.

His travels earned him the media appellation of "alibaba", a dust that will not settle down! I bumped into him later one night in a wharf in Zamboanga City (he came from Jolo, he said) and Dadiangas, in Cotabato, in India's Bombay (where he asked: "what are you doing here?"), and at HK's (Xianggang) international airport ("so what are you up to this time?") I remember a gift I gave him in the 70s a Christian Dior case I shoplifted from Honolulu, which he gave to one of the more fashion conscious performers in his entourage.

Roquito came to the image of "spoiled brat" naturally. The only child of Lola Mining and her legendary Ilocos Norte Governor elected to the office at 31, the younger Roque was left a famous act to follow. The Governor, selected to sit in Pres. Quezon's cabinet but interrupted by Japan's invasion, fought the Japanese until '43 when *Dai Nippon Teikoku* forces overrun his guerrilla camp, captured his wife and son and two American soldiers.

In his last encounter, he was MIA. His remains were never found. Roque Sr. had a well-told rags-to-politics story that defined the spirit of his government service. His proletarian bent continued with the son's politics.

Roquito's inherited facilitative stance exuded the image of a lively Godfather. He had people hanging out of his office and served at his house until the young Ablan delivered promised travel assistance, usually with official documents after Pres. Ferdinand Marcos declared Martial Law in '72 that restricted out-of-country travel.

He was also a labor recruiter. Many in Hawaii and the West Coast USA consider their status a consequence of Roquito's sometimes not kosher maneuvers. But they were always colorful.

Once, while fund raising for P.I. development projects, I took two ex-clergy US colleagues to pay Roquito a visit with intent of soliciting help in accessing Philippine frozen assets in HK. We entered his office while a lovely sweetheart massaged his back, another manicured nails, and a third, pedicured toes while slumped on the floor. Knowing my uncle, I was amused at his wicked parody of the Godfather but my colleagues were not pleased, judging him to be arrogant. Nor did the visit produce anything save the advice that he will facilitate the process of extraction if we pointed out where the assets were. Duh.

On the other hand, when I raised funds for the Mindanao projects, I paid Alcantara and Sons of Davao a visit. Roquito's intro of me to the President had the "R" in his stationary circled with a pointed arrow to the "R" in my name. A check was ready before my appointment, so we just chatted about the weather as the lumberman was too preoccupied with other things. That the President's secretary was a very good friend helped. Years later, Marcos in a financial fix

raided Alsons' coffers, sending unpretentious Alcantara almost to penury. In '57, Roquito was aide to Ferdinand Marcos, then a luminary in the Northern Ilocano constellation.

I remember going to one of the political rallies in a neighboring town where Roquito headed logistics. I sat in a jeepney with a *bayong* full of veggies. I thought the fresh produce was to feed some of the help after the event. It turned out that underneath the vegetables were small arms and hand grenades. It was my last rally.

After Roquito finally sought elected office, he brought me along to the downtown area as he went from one store to another pointing to things he wanted and telling the proprietor to put it in his tab. I thought it was generous of him to patronize local merchants until I was told that store owners, all Chinese, did not collect. They just passed on the cost to price. My hero toppled like Stalin after Khrushchev.

Roquito was a fraternity brother to Ferdinand, who thought Ninoy Aquino, his' nemesis and another spoiled brat, should follow him to the Presidency. (You still with me?) Martial Law detained Roquito and Ninoy to quarters. Both had their fingerprints on the Karagatan attempt to smuggle arms into the country. Ninoy was dubbed a communist, not popular with the US military, but Roquito air-suited in the Vietnam war deftly tri-crossing the USA-PI-USSR triad.

I visited Roquito at Camp Crame shortly after he was confined. He told me to look out of the door to the parked Benz, winked and smiled. I did not worry about him any further.

**Year 14 Corona Smith '58-'59**  
*Summer at the Y*

Riding a bicycle was one of the skills I had to learn. I got to school on one when my mother decided to procure me a bike ride after I did good on my goal to join the fast learning crowd of Class A in my third year of High School.

I transferred to the provincial High School on my second year from the church-related one and I discovered a love for historical thinking. My homeroom adviser, Mr. Francisco Duque, was my social studies teacher. Like the vet teacher in grade school who discovered math aptitude, "Sir" Duque (I really had a hard time getting used to the address of the "Sir" while being mistaken for a UP PhD in my natural resource work in the Visayas later) bumped me up to Class A on my third year, akin to being sent to the talented and gifted class in today's schools.

Without a steady girlfriend yet, the bicycle my mother bought was one I tenderly caressed and chamois'd every morning, and rinsed with a bucket of water every weekend. Bike riding skill, however, came with a hefty price on my sister Jailu's heels, as related in Year 9!

The other thing I got was from my father who at the time was attending Seminary in Kentucky. He sent home a used Smith Corona typewriter. Though the hacking stunted the quality of my pen craft, I think the skill I learned to finger the keys was probably the most important tool I had depended on in my adult life. As today's young people cannot exist without their smartphones, I could not have survived the years without a

laptop, with the ease on the keyboard inspired by Ms. Corona Smith.

The local YMCA (YW was but a grudging nod in those days) in Laoag was only a couple of blocks away from where I lived. Known for its bowling alleys where teenagers eagerly set up pins after each pin ball rolled (they used smaller balls compared to the ones used now), it also had pool tables, which taught useful geometry but attracted the hustlers for the quick *peseta* bets from the unwary. Table tennis schooled us in trajectories and orbits with spin-chop-cut on the sandpaper-covered paddle.

The Y conducted summer sessions on self-help courses including typing on a keyboard. I spent 8-weeks honing my dexterity on the QWERTY one summer.

It was the Smith Corona that I received as my very own after the summer session that made my fingers do the walking to many paths of the imagination, to this day. And boy, it sure had taken a long trek from the fragrant yard smells of ripe mango fruits in the not-too-humid air by the Laoag river, to decades of travel through the world's continents save Eurasia, and finally, to that "trip to China" intended by my savings bank account that began when I was but a child. The China intent commenced later in '65.

The ease of writing a column in a newspaper for more than a decade and typing this memoir with a computer, a word processing program and a built-in dictionary, can be traced to familiarity and friendship I developed with Corona Smith and the Y.

There were loops and hoops on the journey. In College, we looped easy on typewritten term papers. I appreciated a lot about penmanship but as a teacher, I saw how favorably teachers received a research paper with clean Courier font than one with the squiggly but disciplined and artful wrist twist with a pen tip, however elaborate that may be!

I graduated to the electric typewriter by the time I watched the first Apollo Astronauts head out to outer space. Then the interchangeable and rotating IBM balls hugged the limelight but by the 80s, Atari offered a console, and not too long after, in a village in Mactan Island, Cebu, I caressed the ergonomic design of Apple II.

Soon, word processing evolved from a luxury to a necessity, and not very long after, WP came bundled with XL and db. From the desktop to the laptop, I settled on the iBook but decided to quit with the iPad in China when it served me more as a paperweight than as a communicating tool. I do not know about apps, am not wired to an iPod, and have yet to chat on an iPhone. I no longer belonged to their time.

In 1997, the cellphone came into the market. A generation later stared at restaurant signs that said: "we do not have a Wi-Fi; talk to each other." Young people no longer talked, they texted each other, even across a yard long table. The cellphone mediated voice and literacy. We became slaves to a machine. George Orwell's *1984* was on target.

In '58, I had Smith Corona, and I treated it as Ms. Corona Smith! We've had quite an affair!

**Year 15 INHS '59-'60**  
***Josie ignores, Gladys steals***

Puppy love came sans a manual of instructions. When I told my father studying in America of my heart throb, he deftly passed the bucket back to me with: "if you are to be an extension of my personality, and that of your mother, then your choice will be our choice." There is no way out of self-inflicted heartaches.

Josie called Puddie was my puppy love in my INHS class. She received a bottle of Chanel 5 for Christmas. She did not acknowledge it, nor did she squint an eye my way afterwards, not that it mattered in retrospect, but it had tectonic effects on my bike trailing psyche behind her *calesa*. Years later, she did not remember the gift but I might have give it to her incognito, also! I was a tender foot.

If Josie ignored my heart, Gladys stole it.

From a distance in Lingayen was the daughter of one of my father's clergy colleague. Gladys was popular with many of the Methodist boys who gathered after district Christmas Institutes to be trained as youth leaders to the churches in Luzon's Northwest. That included districts of Nueva Ecija, half of Tarlac, Pangasinan, and Ilocos Sur. Though a resident of Ilocos Norte, I faithfully spent my Christmases and summers with the Methodist Church in Ilocos Sur, and being more loquacious than others, I got elected to leadership positions without trying.

I liked Gladys and we could have been an item in College (my mother and her mother greeted

each other as in-laws when they met at church gatherings) but in '59, in the classic tradition of Asian indirection, I wrote a short story with Gladys as the mango of my eye but let her die at the end of the tale. That was easily a Freudian slip on what I thought of Josie, I mused later.

Classmate Virginia Peralta awakened a writer in me. She encouraged me to write the short story for the class paper. My classmates may have wished she had not, with the obtuse verbosity my writings turned out to be, but in '59, I started an affair with Corona Smith on authentic living and I was evidently not too good at it.

Alumni of class INHS60 still meet and greet each other more than 50 years later, the last I attended in Honolulu in October 2013 coming from China. It coincided with a hurried visit to ailing 93-yr old mother at a Honolulu hospital. Still endearingly called *Puddie* by close friends, Josie and I sat on the same table at the reunion; we were sport to other friends' good intentions of making a pair out of us. We kept promising to perform an Argentine tango, complete with a red rose on clenched teeth!

I ran into Gladys and Mike on an overnight boat ride from Dumaguete to Cebu 19forgotten, and an exchange of emails two years ago revealed that they now live in eastern Canada.

Gladys and Josie are evidently important in my journey but in '59-'60, puppy love was what got me awake in the middle of the night.

The physiology was not difficult to explain. The body by then went to an autopilot testosterone

drive and drooling at beautiful bodes then came as naturally as breathing fresh air. Hair grew in other parts of the body as well.

My physical initiation to adulthood waited for what was in the Jewish childhood ritual a rite on the 8th day. Circumcision in the summer of '58 when already 13 was performed by a Manong, a medical intern at a leading University hospital in Manila. I was a seasoned solo bus rider in the northwest of Luzon but this time, I went to Manila on my own for the first time.

I was a bit self-conscious as I laid on the OR surgical table watched by two neatly starched student nurses recruited to assist this freebee procedure. They giggled a lot on the side. I noticed them doing *jak n'poy* to decide who was to shave the hair around the pruning area. I was shy but after the local anesthesia, I did not have any shred of modesty left. The recuperation in a house atop one of Binondo's squatter towns constituted my rites of passage. I had become a man!

My mother, however, still considered me her little boy. I wanted to attend the University of the Philippines after INHS60, like many of the students in my graduating class, but my mother did not think I was strong enough to survive the fraternity hazing that was razing the UP terrain. Second choice was Silliman down Dumaguete way but my mother had not traveled south of Manila, so Negros in the Visayas was foreign country in her geography. Philippine Christian College scholarship came with enrollment. It is near Union High where she wanted to attend earlier. Guess where I headed?

**FORe@WARN.net**  
**Ed Stephens**

Not exactly X-rated but sections of this writing might get some folks to squirm. Yo, there is nothing wrong with a squirm once in a while!  
So, just in case, I.D.s, please.

Jaime was a beer bottle holder one night in a joint newly opened I recommended at As Lito. Though San Miguel comes with a pricey tag, especially in Saipan's local dives, the place just opened then, and I went to check it out. Jaime lived not too far, and showed up as well.

My role in this litany of sanctimonious wailing is to warn, like, inform folks of possible danger. That's like making a point to flip-flap wearers among snorkel goggle users in Saipan's coral reefs to watch out for the sea urchin needles. They were painful when stepped on while the creatures rolled out and crawled outside their protective coves and crannies.

My warnings are generally not psychological or sociological in nature. I leave the psyche to the couch guardian and the sociology to the decent politician (not too many on island). I just focus on the mechanics of a used car, the viscosity of the oil we pour on engines but those unfamiliar with Jaime's style might turn wary for he does not hesitate to occasionally lob a psychological grenade when readers are not paying attention.

His is a disparate terrain. At once, he can be tinkering with the nooks of your cranium only to catapult consciousness into the black holes of the known universe. He has not ventured into

the far reaches of my telescope yet, but give him time! His philosophical musings tend to be in the long and obtuse side. His take on social issues defies conventional classification. He intends sometimes to get serious with the three dynamics of the social process - the economic, political, and cultural. But he can also get lost easily in the haze of the forest fires of Sumatra's forests.

We come to this forewarning by assignation. We were chosen. My, I could use Abraham's robe on this one. Or, better yet, Joseph's coat of many colors!

But, to our task. How can one forewarn those on the bull's eye of a target. Clearly, Jaime is not just idly doodling (he hacks, he says) with a pencil to tease our minds. He is into something too wild that we can easily mistake it as devious and sinister. He means to let us meet ourselves when we just got up in the morning without cover of our favored mascara, or the numbing caffeine of our morning beverages.

Oh, yes, we think he is just telling us of his own experience(s). When he is legible, and we are reading along, he can get us to be curious on the import of his journey, and before we know it, we got the ballgame to our self.

This is actually an old trick. The Greeks had us commiserating with Atlas with the weight of the world on his shoulders, or Prometheus who can't ever get the boulder up the hump before it comes crashing down all over again. Jaime might have read too many Olympic denizens, for he is playing the same tune. Wily, this one.

But he aims to get us coming or going, and the ambush often catches us unprepared.

It is not about brothers Atlas and Prometheus folks. It is about us. From Homer to Jaime, the props are just like mirrors. Unless we do not wish to see monsters that have our looks, we dare not look at them.

Jaime have this obsession, to meet our self. Say, what? That's what I said, but the image in the mirror he leads us to see is the same one we run away from and cover with all kinds of enhancements, real or cosmetic, we dare look into the mirror. He really wants us to meet the real us wiping our Heine in the morning before we turn into Mr. or Ms. so-an-so in the office and in the marketplace, carefully attending to the accouterment of our guarded titles.

In our time, *"If you meet the Buddha on the Road, Kill him,"* has become a contemporary mantra. Jaime is an ardent practitioner, deathly fanatical to the core. But he sugarcoats the slash of his scalpel.

Ah, we are getting to the deeper end. I thought I would just slowly drink my San Miguel as I watch the sun sets on the horizon from my stool and tell you to watch your step if you chance on Jaime's free document. He won't let us off the hook easy, at no extra charge. He wants us to read a page at a time, just one page, and let it sit a while before hitting the next one another day. He is a sadist to want me to do this, and I am a masochist for acquiescing. But he promised to pay for the beer, so what the hell. Will that be 70 bottles, Jaime?



## **Part II Adventure in responsiveness: *adulthood and being born again***

Response-ability was our equivalent term for adulthood. It was the ability to respond to a) external stimuli and b) internal prodding. The social garb by which we standardized external behavior, we dub as ethics; the internal gauge we use to regulate internally motivated deeds was our morals. All the same, the value and virtue of responsibility was in the individual. To be responsible then was not joining a corps called "adults" as it was too pass the hoops of to sense of self-hood, and owning up to it.

One of the obvious consequences of my father leaving his family to pursue a graduate degree "abroad" was the eldest son's catapulted into the head of the family. This was expressed more in ritual than in practical terms, but the image was birthed nonetheless.

We titled the period between Years 16 to 30 as our adventure in responsiveness. The events and incidences occurring during this period solidly established my sense of identity that bore my first name more than the family name.

My times included two years in Manila at a newly developed campus of the Philippine Christian College while still relating to friends and relations in the northwest section of Luzon.

Next came two and a half years in the crook of the river bend town of Tuguegarao where the edges of my expansiveness was explored. It witnessed journeys into far Mindanao and the bewildering throbs of the heart at home and

along the way. A sojourn of half a year in Manila in my first full time job solidified my standing in the arena of self-support and self-sustenance.

Peripatetic itch got us hitched to the rails of a US President Line ship that sailed our soul to San Francisco's shore.

That began my conquest of the United States of America. A year and a half in Kentucky got us filled with horse manure from the stables of the Derby. I spent my first summer working tables in California from Sacramento to the Bay Area and the suburbs of L. A. on the not-yet-famous Rodeo Drive in Beverly Hills.

The next year's summer was spent at a Camera factory doing quality control of inexpensive and disposable clickers on the strength of my being Asian who automatically knew something about cameras to my Jewish employer. A Seminarian from Japan led our team of Taiwanese, Filipino, and Singaporean lads.

The oppressive air of evangelical hurrahs in KY moved me to the deceptively tranquil lawns of Hillcrest and Highland Park of Dallas, Texas. I spent my first semester in front of a Washeteria protesting a bold sign of "for whites only".

In addition to holding a vigil by the flagpole at the University quad in protest against the War in Vietnam, I was also on an all night/day drive from Dallas to D.C. to join MLK Jr. march to Arlington Cemetery in protest of the Vietnam War draining resources needed for the War on Poverty mouthed by LBJ.

That summer saw us in church youth camps in Minnesota, N.C., NY, and Maine weathering the assassination of RFK in L.A. and finding solace in a trek up Mt. Katahdin in Maine.

The increasingly violent civil rights movement and the protests against the war in Vietnam, and the snuffing of another Kennedy's breath, felled me into deep despair, retreating to the illusions of marriage and the safe canopy/confines of career tokenism in the Piedmont area; was also rudely awakened to reality's accountability that Mars-born grokker Valentine Smith in Robert Heinlein's *Stranger in a strange land* was not an acceptable model for self-awareness and a life style of freedom.

Ironically, this came after being literally "born again" when we figured in a Dallas car accident on the day MLK Jr. caught a bullet standing in front of a motel in Memphis TN.

I went back to Dallas to finish a Master's degree and to plan a return to country of origin that fueled the impetus of my foray into theological school in the first place.

My internal response to Marcos' declaration of Martial did not catch us by surprise. We had then become used to Uncle Sam's machinations around the world, and our suspicions then of the Pentagon's fingerprints on our new dispensation would later be confirmed with the news that the martial constrictions in the Philippines stewed on burners at a US military base in Seoul. We just happened in both places the same year.

My world and welcome to it.

**Year 16 Manila '60-'61**  
***UP & SU, non; PCC, qui!***

Philippine Christian College introduced me to the blatant act of plagiarism. A Princeton PhD grad of Sino extraction taught philosophy on a purely lecture format. I located one of father's anthologies, so I was a whiz kid in class. Prof. Ting had the nice habit of telling us of the final exam essay question(s) so I went into the test fully prepared.

We used standard test notepads and I prepared essay(s) using father's book for my narrative, simplifying the text so it read like it was a poor freshman's write-up. I brought the notepad to the test, wrote in another pad, and submitted the prepared pad to the front of the room. Effective but neither ethical nor moral!

The Dr. considered me the best student he ever had in philosophy. Well, I was not exactly a slacker in the class. I did not understand his required readings but I read them anyway, was never absent and was a pleasant sunshine in a class that included my elder sister and a lot of older students who were there to meet degree requirement.

I got clear that year about passing tests to earn grades and to learning to understand the content of a course. I learned as well as cheated.

One of the AA courses was psychology, which I took to be an understanding of the sanity of my mind. A teaching assistant, after administering a personality test, suggested that, perhaps, I was overachieving in my class performances.

Tested to be of average I.Q., I excelled too well in the grade tally. Afraid to be lumped with the kooks and crazies, I diverted my attention away from the books to social and communal net. I seemed to have a knack in making girls giggly, edgy, and jittery.

I joined the volleyball team; I served the ball in the final game while we were only two points behind. I had images of turning the tide to our favor and winning the intramural championship. Instead, I hit the ball out of bounds. So much for being carried on the shoulders of admiring fans while Vangelis played *Chariots of Fire!*

Neither did I fare well in the sweetheart score. The eldest daughter of a rising politician from Palawan was a pre-nursing student in Tondo's Mary Johnston School of Nursing tied to the College. We sat together in science courses that I aced; we were very close friends. I visited her regularly and faithfully in her dorm, walked her to and from school, and we became sweethearts, albeit, in lots of love looks but barely crossing the line beyond holding hands. We were kids.

Meeting her mother was not a very smart move especially since it was on an interisland ship revving up from Manila's crowded and unruly north pier ready to leave the Bay for beyond.

My girlfriend was told to dispose of the morose Ilocano's friendship. I was dropped like a hot chili on the Bicol Express. By then, after her portrait was displayed in a boutique photo shop on Taft Avenue across PWU, she found herself with a lot of admirers, especially from the UP school of medicine. I was heartbroken.

Unceremoniously dumped on my first serious relationship? Mildred of far Palawan versus Gladys of known Pangasinan were my initial choices. I chose the unknown heartthrob over the known one! That became the pattern of my choice making later, where the road less taken, let alone traveled, trumped the ease and security of rational and well-trod paths.

One of my teachers was Professor Quitoriano who we endearingly called Quito/Kito! He was patient with me, answering my questions with not much concern with brevity as he was clearly one of those Jack-of-all-trades, master of none. Not unlike what I was turning out to be! And just as loquacious.

Lackluster in athletics and sports, I was close friend to many, but boyfriend to none, so I gravitated to student activism that protested the imposition of required Spanish language credits to a bachelor's degree. My intuition did not sit well with that stance, and I kicked my *Heine* later in Sud America when the familiarity with *Caxilla* would have served me well.

Radar Roger's Hall was the name of our dorm next to the Taft Ave. offices of Union Seminary cor. Tennessee by PWU where father attended, a leftover from the days when rural young men came to the city wearing well-pressed linen and shark skin suits. The Seminary was moving to its wide-open out-of-town campus in Cavite. But PWU students still looked down for laughs on boys who paraded in their undies for vanity.

It was the worst of times; it was the best of time

## Year 17 Sanity of Mind '61-'62

### *Father returns*

I moved to a boarding house in Malate's San Marcelino St. after a few of us broke into the Radar Roger's Hall pantry. I went with a group to the Rizal stadium on Taft Ave. to watch a basketball game and returned without getting what we requested to be left for us on the tables. was normal practice when requested. It sent me reeling to this side of roguish insanity.

Our request was entertained by the food staff but was vetoed by the dorm head honcho since we were not seminarians returning from Church assignments. It would not have hurt if we just walked down to a restaurant a block away. But it was late in the night and we chose to make a fine rebellious point of it, a costly one.

Parents of the six guys involved were called from outside Manila to deliberate with officials on our deemed serious offence and consequent punishment. The parents were actually amused by the prankish nature of the offense; Seminary officials that owned the dorm were not.

Since the Seminary just become an institutional part of the Philippine Christian University, then in the drawing board, it flexed its administrative muscles. We were the sacrificial lambs banned from returning to the dorm in the next term.

Sanity of mind and fair judgment became my preoccupation in '61. With his imminent return, I began to miss my father. I was conflicted over my desire that he come back. I secretly wished for him to call us to join him in America, but I

knew he promised to return to serve his home of origin. He was definitely a man of honor, and clearly, he was coming back.

I knew that when he returned, we would join him at his next professional assignment, not so much because we could no longer afford to study in the city with his expected inadequate remuneration (my mother knew ways of turning stones into gold) but because it was desirable to get to know each other again.

That year, I grew a couple of inches, discovered the pleasures of what my Chinese flyboys said they did when bored in their dorms. I asked and in a language they thought I did not understand, one student replied, *da fei jie*, a handy erotic job *con muy alegre!* I was, like most transitioning kids at that age, guilt-ridden with the bedtime habit, and it was a relief to discover one of my father's books he brought home: Albert Ellis' *Sex Without Guilt*. I did not read the book but for a Methodist cleric, father was definitely ahead of the curve!

The kind of counseling I received from eminent psychologists who came to church gatherings emphasized the preeminence of love as a prior condition to sex, so the title of my father's book authored by a rather controversial figure was liberating by itself. His bringing home a copy made me proud. This also gave me permission to take the road of adventure rather than the crippling confines of fear and trepidation.

I thought since leaving the dorm that I was no longer in the tight company of fellow PKs (pastor's kids). I was wrong. My new boarding

house swarmed with PKs. Three of Gladys' brothers were there, too. It helped that my host mother was also my English teacher in my sophomore College class.

Guys barely 17 normally do not worry about their sanity but being the odd ball who went to school about two years earlier than his peers, the judgment of the psychologist in school that I might be overachieving, and being obviously a misfit in my age group in school and elsewhere, grabbed me in intense wonder. The assurance of normalcy came with the close association and acceptance of the Garduque-Castillo family who took me into their circle as a friend of their son Rey. We were not out of the ordinary.

It also helped personally to be with the PWU ever vivacious presence of Lita, a very touchy-feely girlfriend from Palo, Leyte. My feelings once dashed to the ground after being trashed by my Palawan lassie, warmed up with Lita's mending ministrations. But it was short-lived as I did not do her the favor of returning her loving care and attention when my father came ashore. She cried when we said our goodbyes.

With my father back, I knew I was headed back to the Cagayan Valley of my childhood. I went to Laoag to clear out physically and mentally. I must have been deeply conflicted because in one of those occasions when Lola Mining and I showed up at the same party, and the host plied me with food without question, I devoured a whole roasted duck and downed a whole bottle of whiskey into stupor. I recall my great aunt giving me the cold shoulder I deserved before I passed out into oblivion.

**Year 18 Cagayan Teachers College '62-'63**  
***Dulce and DZCV***

Ten years after leaving College, Dulce Ventura invited me to join CTC's 25th anniversary of in '72 as one of its 10 outstanding alumni. She had not change from her enabling, and I did not shy away from walking into the doors she opened.

In 1962, she was my CTC English teacher who taught her lessons not always in the classroom but even sitting on the floor leaning on the wall. I was a shy lad, arriving to a new environment from a protected life in the city but she did not hesitate to fling the challenge of achievement into my face as soon as we met. She gave me permission to overachieve!

She was a radio announcer in DZCV, one of the town's two commercial radio stations. She was also the station's main personnel recruiter. She wanted me to improve my English and what better way to do it than use it on a regular basis. That regularity was a daily bout on the airwave, an hour of disc jockeying to a dedication show for those who requested certain songs to air and be played for the listening pleasure of another.

I thought the job was going to be easy. Playing songs could not possibly require effort more than any thing one did on a repetitious manner. And reading people's dedication notes can only be a breeze. I was mistaken.

Not only did I have to overcome stage fright, though no one but the technician on the other booth was listening at the unholy hour of 8-9 in the evening (we were a provincial town; the

sidewalks folded at sundown) but I also had to correct the sentences of letter writers, and when there were not any that showed up in the mail, I was told to make them up!

I must have done well for Dulce got me to host a morning talk show entitled *Ti Ayat ken Biagni Tang Jaime* (the love and life of old Jaime), where I could either invite guests if I wanted to but mostly, to offer commentary in Iloko, the dialect of the region, a sad result of the natives being overwhelmed by the Ilocano interlopers brought by the Spanish Friars early on.

In any case, I was delighted. I had my night and morning shows recorded so I can listen to them when there was an available tape player (in 1962, tapes were still on the 16 mm format). To my horror, I sounded like an old man. I was not hired for my radio announcing broadcast voice; I was evidently in for the adult glib and gab of an irreverent kind that I made.

The morning show made me sound like a sage sharing wisdom on the current local political scene, and commenting on the state of the world that seemed familiar to my understanding. The evening dedication show came out like a genial uncle reminiscing of the passing of the years and nursing the relevance of music and lyrics on the love lives of the times.

Dulce had a market for my performance and she added a *coup d'grace* in an afternoon 30-minute segment. I read Iloko and English forlorn love letters from listeners, and proffered advice to their revealed predicaments, heartaches and pains. Patterned after a famous syndicated city

night show called *Dear Kuya Eddie*, I was *Kuya Jimmy* transformed. I was barely 18.

One day, the noon newscaster could not make it so I was called to sub. Broadcast news was quite different since we modulated the voice as solid and clear as possible. Mine cracked like the aged sound of wisdom, so I after the first incident, and knowing that there might be other occasions to follow, I started tuning in to VOA and practiced turning my Vienna Boys Choir voice into the baritone and base voices of the US State Departments' radio propagandists.

In one year, Dulce turned the shy boy into a public personality, albeit, heard rather than seen. In a couple of invitations to neighboring town fiestas, I was a dismal disappointment as folks expected an older gentleman rather than the emaciated looking teenager; their yard's bananas were dressed better than I did.

Where Dulce found a brain she could use in her radio station, I found a mind that was not afraid to go boldly where I had not gone before.

I made a trip to Apayao when a neighbor 's GF who happened to be a city Mayor's daughter wanted meet in a town fiesta. He needed one to handle the chaperone. I volunteered.

A pleasant 33-yr old chaperone taught me what was a joke I learned later: *What do virgins eat for breakfast?* The answer: *I don't know.* The retort: *I didn't think so.* One pitched dark early morning at a gazebo where she was staying, she introduced me to my first lesson on the art of forgetting what virgins ate for breakfast.

## Year 19 Rizal in *Mi Retiro* '63-'64 *On being ze Pinoy*

If radio broadcast made me take responsibility for my voice, Rizal made me take responsibility for my cultural identity.

A motley crew on makeshift coconut-fronds-walled and tarp-covered cabins in Zamboanga del Norte's *Mi Retiro* Park, home to honor its illustrious one time resident Jose Rizal in the northern town of Dapitan, gathered for a two-month residential leadership program led by the YMCA-YWCA of Manila known as RYLTI, the Rizal Youth Leadership Training Institute. Fifty-some student leaders from different parts of the country gathered to be the first group to try a curriculum formulated by the Y with US funding, on honesty in service. The US at the time was losing to Mao on the revolutionizing of the world. Developed from the centennial celebration of Jose Rizal's birth in 1961, the RYLTI's focus was on leadership training, the first demo in '62. We were first regular batch.

Though still an Americophile at this time, I was not a knee-jerk fan to the US Embassy, as many of its actions, particularly the anti-union film propaganda in Sanchez Mira that I saw growing up, the maligning of anything anti-American from Methodist missionaries during attendance of church Institutes and Conferences, and the growing military belligerency in Asia with the Korean war, I was not impressed by what USIS had to offer, however, I noted the quality of the RYLTI leadership, participation of members, training preparation, and leaders selection, so I was decided to be a happy camper.

In '63, prominent schools from different parts of the country designate reps to the Institute. A classmate and I represented the Cagayan Valley while leaders from Baguio to Cabanatuan, Naga to Legaspi, Dumaguete to Davao, Manilad to Sugbu, Cagayan de Oro to Cotobato, Tacloban to Butuan, to name a few, were in attendance.

Rizal was known to all of us by reputation and his writings, required subjects in school in any of its translations, though more popularly, the original versions. His two novels, the *Noli Me Tangere*, (Latin translation of Jesus' oft-quoted words to Mary Magdalene on Easter morn, "do not touch me"), and *El Filibusterismo*, (Rebel, or Subversive), got Rizal into exile without a court martial when he returned from Europe to join his family in Luzon. Dapitan was distant "foreign" country then, though it was part of Spain's administered archipelago in the East.

Though we were in Dapitan to "feel" the hero's presence, it was clearly also a time for some 50 young people to confront and encounter their heritage. We plumb the depth of our choices in identity, vocation, and mission. Or, at least, I did. Overwhelmed to be together with *mucho talento*, we also managed to have fun, and that was enough.

In camp, a few came to recruit others to their movements, or were just out to express their familiarity with the political tradition of *liberté, égalité, fraternité*. A roommate later became the country's solicitor general. I also competed against three on extemporaneous speaking at the national PRISAA held in Davao the year after. We were a motley crew of talents.

The most lasting influence on me was personal. Davao's Brokenshire School of Nursing was called "broken desire" for romances dashed against life's realities. I fell head over heels to Faridah from Tacurong, Cotabato. She was not Muslim, as her name suggested, but being the runt of her family of Spanish, Chinese, and Malay descent, she was appropriately named. The "unique" lady was three years my senior, a heartbreaker. Her family rejected my suit.

After four years, serendipitously we ran into each other again in Chicago, and conducted a sizzling summer love affair in New Jersey. I took her to the Dallas airport at her mother's request to have her family attend the wedding in Pea Eye after I followed. I failed her family's selection criteria before. I failed it again. We never saw nor hear from each other again after.

But in '63, leadership was the issue and some of us were in RYLTI because we held positions that influenced others thinking and behavior in the places where we came from. The discovery of a soul mate was secondary. We came to train and teach the brain, sharpen the mind's view of contemporary issues confronting the nation, and how to broadly and effectively participate in handling an appropriate response.

Response-ability made it clear that identity, not ethnicity, religion, or race, was the basis of the national democratic consensus that needed to spread across the land. My Pilipino-ness took on a wider archipelagic meaning and coverage. To be ever world-wise and to be street-smart, neither male nor female, choosing and chosen, ze Pinoy was born.

**Year 20 ACYA '64-'65**  
*Freedom to play*

I played editor-in-chief to my College paper. I was not good at it, declared the College, after I shifted tabloid format to magazine. I presided over the Student Council, turned the traditional students' annual cash donation to the school, generally going into the building fund, into a book fund to purchase textbooks for the library to rent out to students. Textbooks were rare and renting them with investment recouped within four turnovers was possible. School officials declared my scheme undoable. I turned over all funds I was holding and resigned. I already completed my academic degree requirements.

I was a ROTC officer and in our last Ball, the Corps' sweetheart and I struck a concupiscent nerve. Caught in a compromising position, she turned heavy petting to rape, and said so to a close friend who then brought it to her uncle's attention at the Constabulary camp. On a face-to-face confrontation, the girl broke down with the truth. I skipped town for Manila but left behind a jaded reputation.

What happened to the desire to be a medical doctor? Well, one of our missionaries took me aside one day and told me that the cost of going to medical school would drain all the family's resource to the disadvantage of the four other siblings. "And you like that to happen, *ading?*" he asked in his lilting missionary tone.

Later, when I facilitated others to make choices, I asked them how they would go about doing a choice. Was there anything I could do to assist

in the process? I asked last. The missionary was practical but he was one loser of a man! The choice of how to win did not cross his mind.

My father promised a year in Law school. I checked out possibilities. As Methodist Youth's president, I represented the church at the Asian Christian Youth Assembly (ACYA) in Silliman by Dumaguete's sea.

Having forsaken Protestant parochialism, I was still unprepared at the ecumenical nature of the gathering. Pope John XXIII launched Vatican II two years before and issued *Pacem in Terris* addressed to "all men of peace." Thus, when the Eucharist was concelebrated in the middle of the night by Episcopal and Catholic priests, and various Pastors, I was mesmerized.

At ACYA, a little book called *Honest to God* by Anglican Bishop John A. T. Robinson asked the faithful to examine the "God up there" and the "God out there" metaphors. I was introduced to the thoughts of Bultmann, Tillich, and martyred Bonheoffer. The trio stirred the waters of my discomfort in the "idea" of G-O-D.

It was the trip home that moved tectonic plates beyond the cognitive. I brought two delegates, one Chinese Singaporean, and a Japanese from Tokyo. On our first night home, a hail of stones rained on the roof of the parsonage. It appeared that almost 20 years later, there were those who thought that citizens of Nippon need not cast their shadows on the streets of Tuguegarao. I was unprepared for the prejudice and bigotry. After ACYA and the incident, I checked on the program of Union Seminary. The attraction of

Canon law suddenly became more exciting than the practice of common law.

The son of my former Manila boarding house owner who sponsored my entry into the Jose Abad Santos chapter of the fraternal Order of DeMolay was heading out off country, and his job as the church secretary of the cathedral of Methodism by Luneta opened up. I talked him into a recommendation.

Meanwhile, I discovered that Union Seminary could only provide scholarship for a candidate from each Annual Conference of the Methodist Church, and Dick Turingan from home was at the head of the list. The Seminary President told me not to worry about school cost since he could also grant scholarships under his name.

I was, however, too cozy and playful with the President's secretary. She was my senior by a few years, but she had the sprite of a young girl and the voice range of a contralto to soprano. She wanted to marry before the start of school, in a hurry to birth a brood. She had a dress and sponsors already picked out.

I applied to four Seminaries in the U.S. Three of them didn't bother to reply. My father's alma mater in Kentucky did, with scholarship to boot. Stoic me decided that the President's secretary was be better off with a settling man.

I got my girlfriend to refrain from buying the dress. On the third day after we celebrated my 20th birthday, with promises to walk the aisles soon, I skipped town aboard a UPL ship, tail between legs, a coward and a deceitful rogue.

## Year 21 Market Research Analysis '65-'66 *Bay Area and L.A.'s Luau*

My mother traveled from Cagayan to see me board a US President Lines vessel at Manila's south harbor, along with buddy Winston who was at U.P. law school. The ship was the least expensive mode of travel across the Pacific, and my bed berth was cheapest, next to the boiler.

I made my trip to China. Well, not exactly, for Xianggang was still called by its Cantonese name Hong Kong, and the Union Jack flew its skies, but looking at the crowded streets of Kowloon, I knew I was in China.

I returned to Hong Kong many times after but in '64, Kowloon was all rickshaw, and sidewalk tables hosted the evening serving of *mein chow*. Yokohama's Chinatown, our next stop, looked cleaner; Ginza's lights gave me my first glimpse of a modern city and showed me the world's first rotating restaurant.

Honolulu's Chinatown was sedate but relatives just wanted me to see the Punchbowl where war casualties were interred. Waikiki beach showed me where the surfers surfed. Twenty days from Manila, I got up very early in time to go under the Golden Gate Bridge for my first view of the mainland of the US of A.

My first year in Kentucky was eventful only to the degree that I almost withdrew upon arriving at the Seminary site. The town voted against a freeway that rendered it too close to inroads of modernity into town. The town railroad tracts divided skin colors. Movies were banned and

the only outpouring of emotions seen were on the race to the communion rails at the local Methodist Church to wail convictions and silent confessions on vespers and mid-week services!

An HK friend attending Indiana U gifted me a year's subscription of Playboy. Hefner wrote his philosophy in several issues. A few of the students borrowed my brown wrapped copies at night claiming to want to read the devil's own reflections. I refrained from letting them know I really just enjoyed the pictures.

The breaks from Kentucky in winter and spring made the confining ultra-conservatism of my school bearable. Warmhearted Methodists who chipped in to my travel hosted my visits to the Great Lakes. But I picked up (again) the nasty habit of smoking cigarettes, a crop in KY that supported churches who were too horse shit to acknowledge the product's cancerous effects. I refused church invites because I did not know how to conduct worship in old time religion.

On my first summer vacation, I headed west to the city by the Bay. Friends I met on the ship joined me there. Two of us worked for a firm that targeted English speaking foreign students. With briefcases, we conducted market research analysis in neighborhoods picking families with young kids, a tactic developed to sell books and encyclopedias, and still remain on the good side of the Better Business Bureau.

The pitch was developed out of the University of Chicago that used all kinds of psychological manipulations like "for the cost of one pack of cigarette a day" (25 cents at the time) to pay for

the cost of ten yearbooks if they qualify for a library placement in their homes. "Qualify" is the operative word.

We were not selling. We were placing libraries into "qualified" homes willing to pay for ten yearbooks! We were dropped off to knock on doors to chose at least three marks per day and close at least one sale a night.

My teams take was half of what a mark wrote in a check, divided between the office head at half, all the way to the salesman. That was me @ \$75 from a \$300 sale. One can imagine the pyramid structure of the scheme. I had mental difficulty closing a sale thinking I was engaged in a con. I think my leader did that for me *sans* the credit. I saw much of the lights around the Bay Area and the redwoods of Eureka. But I didn't earn much mullah while I struggled with integrity. Selling did not meet my standards.

My friends did not do any better so we decided to invest in a used car and drove down to Los Angeles staying at Watts a year after the riots.

The *Luau* in Beverly Hills was where I landed, one classy restaurant and watering hole. I sang "Happy Birthday" to Andy Williams, served lunch to Rex Harrison (he was bald) and a bevy of ladies who feted him, and to Marlon Brando and Tahitian wife Tarita. Jill St. John was too sauced when she gave me a wet smack-e-roo on my last day at an open bar for me. A thrilling blind date at Disneyland on my last day in L.A. ended the summer. I was worth \$64 in cash on my return to KY. Like the roller coaster, it was one wild summer ride.

**Year 22 Chicago '66-'67**  
***Red head from Puerto Rico***

St. Clair Shores, Michigan was where I spent Christmas in '66. The trip to Detroit was not yet a test of the depth of one's depression, and the drive to pig island did not involve getting life insurance for heir's benefit should anything happened to me. Grosse Point, with its gated communities, and guardhouses looking like palaces, were not yet too imposing to avoid.

During that winter, my host family took me up to a lake near Saginaw where I iceskated. The children held my hand to the middle of the lake, and left me on my own to find my way back to shore. We then went to Cheboygan and peeked at Mackinaw where a Pinoy friend in Dallas later spent a summer.

In the winter of 2004, I took my young Chinese bride to Detroit to deal with her questions about coming to live in America. We were living in Saipan and winter in Detroit in 2004-05 looked like a war zone.

But on February '67, my social ethics class went to Chicago. The Police Commish was a former student of my Sociology professor so we were authorized to ride police cars on a Friday night.

A classmate and I rode on a cruiser around the Uptown theatre near where I lived less than a decade later at Lawrence and Sheridan. Though Uptown had its rowdy crowds, we were given a relatively safe and sedate Friday evening tour. We did hear of sirens and the cracking cruiser radio, but it was a cool February night.

We were also directed to visit a 5th City project on the Westside. On the Saturday a.m. trip to the project, I saw serious honkies (white folks) living with black folks in a predominantly black urban ghetto. I took the whiteys to be utopian dreamers. In '67, they were a bunch of crazy do-gooders. In '72, I found them in a slum in Manila and become my colleagues. I counted myself that year among their number.

It snowed hard that Saturday night in Chicago and on Sunday, I visited a cousin's former host family in Glen Ellyn, Illinois when she was a Philippine exchange student in a middle class suburb. My cousin's host family sister dropped out of Illinois U when she found out that her heart was with the civil rights cause. She was then living in D.C. eking a living to forge on self-support. That February, I left my number with her parents to relay to her in case she wanted to get in touch with her "sister's" cousin.

She did call but I missed it so I called her back. I had the temerity to say that I did not think LBJ was in town so I was not sure who was calling. She found my sense of humor strange.

I spent summer in Chicago at a Camera factory doing quality control of inexpensive clickers on the strength of my being Asian who knew about cameras, the Jewish employer assumed, and our Japanese team leader implied. The factory at Addison Ave. was made up mostly of foreign workers who assembled the cameras. Asians were there to test and repair them as they come out of the factory line. One of the ladies in the factory line was a redhead about 24-26 years old from Puerto Rico who spoke English more

confidently, and pronounced her words more clearly than the others who spoke like they just got off the boat. She had a 6-yr old daughter who came to work with her when there was no baby sitter at her house. That meant her friend who is not the father of the child, was at work, employed off and on. The mother-daughter became my friends.

One Saturday, the factory had an order to fill and we did not have enough cameras that had gone through quality control, so my team was allowed to take a box home on Friday to fix.

I lived not too far from Wrigley field, a direct bus ride from Rita, in a cheap hotel. She helped bring the box to my place Friday. She returned Saturday to tell me that I worked too hard. "I came to show you how to play," she said as she cleared cameras off my bed.

Other than the red hair, everything about Rita was real. She saved me the embarrassment of figuring out if there was money involved. "My daughter and a friend are outside," she said. "Walk me out and bring \$20. My friend needs it," she added.

She came one more time before the end of the summer. Afterwards, I gingerly asked if her friend was outside waiting and needing what at the time was hard-earned Andrew Jackson. She combed her red hair, scratched her head and gave me a knowing look and a forgiving smile. "No, but when she does, I will let you know," she said as she buttoned her blouse.

Chicago. Chicago. My kind of town.



**Year 23 MLK, Jr. '67-'68**  
***The Covenant***

Kentucky Blue Grass music was not enough to keep me in the State, cute and peppy the banjo and the foot stomping might be, but I became clear that my school orientation and mine were too wide apart to ever find a common ground. I bid it adieu. I discovered that JB Holt, a former Pea Eye missionary at Knox UMC, was student dean at Perkins School of Theology. I arranged a transfer. My Kentucky school was equally pleased to see me leave, as I was eager to go.

Scholarships did not include pocket money, so I scraped leavings off plates at the school canteen and worked the front desk of the School library.

Over Christmas, I headed for Cleveland to meet with fellow students and saw the dissolution of the University Christian Movement as a church-related organization; it was wary of infiltration by the Students for Democratic Society (SDS).

Ironically, the SDS member they were afraid of were reared in the social ethos of the Methodist Church, like Bill Ayers, class and church mate to Mary Lou Brunkow of Glen Ellyn, sister to my exchange-student cousin, who I joined in a Cleveland conference where we learned that Eugene McCarthy declared to run against LBJ as a peace candidate. I liked him more than RFK, killed in L. A. later in the year.

Came February, a carload of seminarians drove to DC to march with Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. to protest the War in Vietnam and promote the War on Poverty. I supported subversive

causes against US military incursions in foreign territories, so I was nervous about attracting the attention of Immigration officers. They were not particularly friendly to in-country foreigners who seemed unfriendly to the friendly host's unfriendly policies! Got that?

So I stopped SMU's student papers office and secured a Press card that I strung around my neck as an I.D. and be able to move round and about during the march without worrying being nabbed as an interloping foreign student.

A nurse classmate Puring earlier invited me to drop in on her were I ever in her neighborhood, and since I had not been to Philadelphia, city of brotherly love, and had not seen her since I left High School, I took up the offer. It was a nice respite of philo-loving before boarding a train the following day for a day trip to DC.

I was among the audience rapt at attention when MLK Jr. took the pulpit at the 13th St. NY Ave. Presbyterian Church to give a context for the day. I was not into listening to his words as I stared more at the man, shorter in stature than I imagined and looking so ordinary, but full of wisdom, power, and energy.

The march itself was uneventful other than the obvious jockeying for position of secondary participants in the line. The pictures I took did not come out to be of good quality. Thank God I was not picked up for questioning lest I had to show someone the pictures I took. Automatic focus on digital camera was a few years down the market, yet. I also questioned the efficacy of mass protests as a sole tactic.

The best picture of the lot was taken in front of the White House on Pennsylvania Ave., of me sitting with doves at Jefferson Park, a dove on one shoulder and another atop my head, a literal sense that the journey into DC was for the birds. I did not feel we accomplished anything for the effort, though I was richer in experience.

Mary Lou moved from DC to Greensboro to resume her schooling at a former all-white all-girls College. I swung over the Piedmont on my way back to Texas to visit her. The bud of romance took a chance at blooming.

I resumed being just another purveyor of the evening news, wondering if liberals in school had anything to say about the national situation. A professor used Aquinas' *Summa Theologica* to justify US incursion in Vietnam. I was livid, but was unable to offer similar academic insight to a counter claim.

Two Filipino sailors in a nearby NAS dropped in on me at the dorm April 4, with a bottle of PX whiskey. I played designated driver while the two drowned their sorrows through the spirited libation. Outskirt of the city, one of the guys decided to take the wheel. It took me 30 minutes to come to after the crash.

Martin was not as lucky. He was in Memphis leading a sanitary worker's march for better wages. A lethal bullet bit into him on a motel veranda that day! He did not recover. I got a Greensboro call. The city was up in flames. Mary Lou was in tears. My nurse expressed a widespread whitey sentiment: "Well, well," she said, "they finally got the Niger!"

## Year 24 Arlington '68-'69

### *The earthrise*

The year ended in a trip to Arlington. It began when Mary Lou decided to entertain parental objections to our budding romance, or go her own way. She deferred.

Meanwhile, I bumped into Faridah at Vespers in the downtown Chicago by the Daley center. We revived old sentiments. She was friendlier this time. I found out later that she ran out of visa time and will have to go back to Pea Eye. Exploring the prospects of hanging out with me was probably worth the consideration.

The summer of '68 was my third in the U.S., the first spent in the west coast, the second in the windy city of Chicago, and the third in the east coast. I signed up to be church camp counselor in MN, NC, NY, MA, and ME. Other than a trek to Maine's Mt. Katahdin's top where wild blueberries on Thoreau's solemn grounds were there for the picking, the summer was one big happy hour tour. That included a torrid love affair with Faridah in New Jersey and NYC.

Mary Lou stayed incommunicado all these time so I assumed she made up her mind. Faridah came down to Dallas and revealed she needed to go home unless we married. I did not have anything else to do and I was fond of the lady. We bought a ring at a jewelry store.

Her family had been through this terrain before. I was vetoed out of contention in Pea Eye after Faridah passed her nursing board exam and I was deemed a liability to her future. The runt in

the family, her mother this time requested that she proceeded back home first, let me finish my degree and follow at the start of the new year; be blessed in the presence of the whole family. It was an idyllic picture. Being of Asian stock, I deferred to the wishes of my elder.

I updated Mary Lou on development. She said, she was sorry. All summer, she thought of her future and decided it was going to be with me. But I had made up my mind, so would I host a visit if she came before I returned to the Pea Eye? "Of course," I replied.

Mary Lou went to her bank to borrow travel expense but she had no credit standing. The banker followed the lead of ML's adviser who was the only one among the faculty members to consent on her request for a week's leave. In a similar fashion, the banker took one look ML and said, "If you were my daughter, I would give you the money." He approved the loan.

She came to Dallas Thanksgiving. I was a working student planning to have extra bucks on my pocket when I returned to Pea Eye. I worked nights at the University Motel so my roommate played lead host. ML attended my classes and we walked around campus on my free time. We were civil and behaved. She left as inauspiciously as she came a week later.

Meanwhile, Faridah was frantic. She had gone to meet my parents, and my younger brother's family who shared similar linguistic orientation, Ilonggo. They planned the big event with her but her side of the family was lukewarm. She suspected that her older sisters, uppity and well

off financially, planned to derail the show. She made a frantic phone call one day that might have tipped the scale away from her favor.

I was steadfast and since Mary Lou made the trip to Dallas to say "goodbye", would she let me do the same if I went to Greensboro? This was a bit tricky since, at this point, the mind wanted to follow the rational expected course while the heart wanted to upend the "money changers tables in the portals of Jerusalem."

I called Mary Lou and I asked if I could come at Christmas time. Her response turned the world around: "I know exactly the place, the pastor is available and willing." I was stunned. I told her I would call back. She said, "OK."

I called Faridah. I was brief. "I am getting out. We're off." She quietly said, "OK."

I had been between the rock and a hard place. There is no resolution to the dilemma. Either way, someone was going to be hurt. Warm winds in America dropped the temperature in Manila, and vice-versa.

Faridah and I were known quantity, with a future already scripted if I was willing to play my part without question. The path could be lined with my glitter and her gold.

With Mary Lou, we faced unknown territory, starting with her parents who did not approve of our union. Interracial proximity in the Union was legal but laced with hidden unexploded bombs along the way. Literally feverish, I chose the path to an Arlington wedding in VA.

## Year 25 Faith & Life Community '69-'70 *Mr. Smith and Mr. Jones*

In early '67, I visited the Fifth City project on Chicago's Westside. The fifth city was a slice across sociology's four layers of 1) inner city, 2) city proper, 3) suburbia, and 4) exurbia. The project initiated by the Ecumenical Institute and globally replicated by the Institute of Cultural Affairs had cutting edge methodologies and innovative technologies in a bold experiment in human development cooperatively undertaken at delineated locations later around the world.

The corporate structures that undergirded the project came from the Faith & Life Community House experiment in intentional spirit life at the University of Texas in the 50s. Methodists who were part of the experiment went on to design their Wesley Foundation work along the lines of the Faith & Life Community House concept. We had an old house at the UNC-G campus where I ended up being the volunteer resident minister, and inexperienced coal shovel man.

After Mary Lou and I were married late '68, I had to deal with the issue of family self-support that did not come easy since I refused to write the two remaining papers I needed to graduate, and really did not care much if I ever stepped into a UMC again. I had no academic titles.

Greensboro was a double challenge since I was one of only two in the city of Philippine-descent without any social connection whatsoever, and though I wanted to work the copy desk of the local newspaper, the entry level pay was only \$480/mo. Across town at Muir's Chapel UMC,

they needed a director of education doubling as associate minister for \$600 per month. On the copy desk, I was a neophyte with nothing but passion; in the pulpit, I brought credentials.

This was reversed economic tyranny in my book, as often a visionary gives up a religious vocation for a secular career because of the pay differential. I wanted the secular job but took the religious one; it paid higher. Go figure.

Muir's Chapel was an all-white church. Darker skin color were found in the nursery where uniformed nannies baby-sat infants while parents worshipped. I was the other who came into church with an untucked shirt (*Barong*) in the summer, of more than off white in skin color who took to the pulpit on occasion. One member refused to learn my name so he called me Mr. Smith. In turn, I called him Mr. Jones.

I had a poster of the slain MLK Jr. on my wall that raised eyebrows of members who wandered into my office. My senior pastor, alumnus to the KY school, explained to the Board that I worked with students, and had appropriate tools in my repertoire. As the minister-in-residence at UNC's Faith and Life Community House of the Wesley Foundation, the church needed to know a connection to the styles and symbols of the University. At Muir's Chapel, I was the circus' odd animal on display.

I was being faithful to my calling, "to preach good news to the ... (and one can list everyone) ... financial poor and mental misguides, psychic misfits and physically challenged, the socially inept and the marginally displaced,..." etc.

Massaging the delicate church psyche was not my forte. I had a Socratic approach to truth that did not sit well with those who did not wish to be reminded of it, or of anyone who rocked the boat, or rattled nerves. I naturally showed up as unavoidable structure of accountability.

The Faith & Life Community House at UNC-G came as a canopy that covered a multitude of "sins", including having the resident minister serve the youth and education at Muir's UMC.

Another sin proved to be a flaw of character. In '61, Robert Heinlein released his *Stranger in a Strange Land* book. I was not a prude, nor was I strong on societal morals, but the language of *grokking* entered my vocabulary. One of the four F&L residents and I *grokked* our selves into the connubial sheets one day, and ended my institutional role in the House.

Of course, I immediately resigned my role at Muir's Chapel as well. After four years out of the Land of the Morning, I took guilt-filled polar route trip up north from NYC to Tokyo to the soil that once nurtured my soul.

Before departing, my fellow grokker and I did not miss a beat. We continued to grok in the sly. I played hard *sans* repentance, stayed unforgiven, devastated yet I continued to violate marital vows I had duly sworn to keep making Haight-Ashbury proud but it was not my choice of residence, nor the site of my professional endeavors.

The "love child" of the 60s performed his role as casually as the decade slid into new times.

## Year 26 Dallas '70-'71

### *Graduation watch*

The intercontinental flight from New York to Tokyo was my first. I had been strictly a land and sea traveller, though the PAL promo flights of my youth and domestic flights in recent years in Pea Eye and the US, left me familiar to air travel. But my wayward behavior showed a disturbing insensitivity to ML's deep sense of violation of her trust, cold-bloodedness beyond just mere stoicism. It was malignant, and I was conscious of it.

I left my travel papers on the airline desk in Alaska on a Saturday, which meant that the office would not be able to forward it until the following Monday to Tokyo. Japan was kind enough to let me leave the airport *sans* tickets heading down to Osaka to pick up my brother's Asahi Pentax SLR that he ordered from a trader and tourist he met in the Philippines.

Their mutual religious affiliation established trust because my traveler's checks were with the airlines in Alaska. I left his store with a brand new camera on verbal credit. I rode a rapid rail (crowded with folks bound for and returning from the Osaka Expo 70) past famed Mt. Fuji.

My absent-mindedness was a consequence of the internal turmoil I kept to myself. Even my lawyer boyhood friend and his wife, and Gloria, a childhood sweetheart, who joined us at the movies, did not get to see the welt of remorse of what might be described as depravity. Remorse was there but not of any help for I refused to see that behavior change was called for.

This was also the year my sister wanted a baby doll with all the trimmings but I thought she was beyond that in age. Besides, I was at core a dictator over other people's view of what was good for them. So, she got books, instead.

Not only was I a real letdown to dear ones, I was also growing to be arrogantly defiant of customs and mores. Whence did it come from? I did not know. What I knew was that the responsibility for the behavior was solely mine without recourse to some reflexive behavior considered conditioned by cultural and genetic influences.

Mary Lou and I packed our stuff into our VW square back sedan we procured in Greensboro and headed for Texas after she completed the last day of her Head Start class. I decided to return to school to finish my Master's degree, lacking two subjects to fulfill, but took the year to audit overview courses to put subjects in a manageably neat package.

Mary Lou lined up consumer goods at a low-cost store for income while at night, I MICR'd (magnetic ink character recognition) charges for the Southwest Credit Card Association's punch cards fed into three buildings of computers that may now just be equal to a desktop processor.

Albert Outler taught a yearlong course that was a cognitive overview of western theology and it was a pleasure to receive his vast knowledge, witness a genuine ecumenical stance of equal measure towards the scholastics, charismatics, and eclectics, delightfully sit through the twang of his elocution and enunciations in southern

accent, and watched a grey haired gentleman smile his innate hospitality.

I finished Seminary before summer '71 and I had the chance to march in gown and cap with the rest of the grads. Indicative of my casual relationship to rites, rather unusual for a degree holder in religious studies, I declined. Since grade school, High School, and College, I never attended a graduation rite, not by design but for travel reasons. I was always away someplace. This time, it was intentional. I just watched the proceedings from the rafters like the rest of the spectators, \$100 richer for skipping the rentals.

ML and I were counselors at a UMC-sponsored summer camp. One of 9 pastors in the church asked what I planned to do since I graduated. I wanted to head home as soon as I could get the travel funds together, I replied. The following week, he announced that economy plane tickets were purchased and we could leave for home as soon as we were ready. I am for participatory democracy but that does not mean a committee. I am sure Pastor Bell checked with someone before authorizing purchase, but bless his soul, he just went and did it! I liked that!

I do not remember how it was that we fully settled the cost of the VW. We might have done that when we moved out of Greensboro. I already left for Pea Eye when ML disposed of it in Illinois. For all my rants and bluster against corporate bodies, the logistics of our move (a San Miguel contractor shipped my books) was facilitated by decisions from what I previously considered were centers of greed and avarice. Alas, even perceived opponents had hearts!

**Year 27 Pea Eye '71-'72**  
***MLV and IS***

I left for Manila earlier than my bride asking her to join me three months later for Christmas. I was told by a Pilipino Bishop attending the '68 General Conference in Dallas that there were positions I could fill back home. I was under the impression that my return was welcomed.

I did not have to go home. I was not a scholar obligated to do anything other than study and in five years, I had conquered in my mind the US grid of the west and the east coast, the Midwest and the South. But I never really thought about doing church work in the States, especially after the debacle of my short-lived church-related stint in the Piedmont.

Besides, I had an evangelical passion to bring good news to the young that "shattered illusions and compelled attention to the authentic and the real." The Student center started by my brother near a hotbed of student activism at Central Church needed a director that I could assume.

Before officially taking over the Student Center as director, I disk jockey'd in one of the city's tri-media radio, TV, and print stations. The cast format caught my interest, and a cousin edited an afternoon daily, so I got my entry into one of the nation's top muckrakers!

It was while working in as booth monitor while remote field microphones to feed live coverage failed that I began to broadcast as if I was inside the Congress to listen to Marcos' SOTU, the year he declared Martial. I had ethical qualms

pretending to be in the field, but what the hell, I said at the time, it needed to be done and I did not shrink from the challenge.

Tech set up a TV monitor in the booth and for three hours, I covered SOTU live, identifying guests whose names were in the program, from the diplomatic corps, the Cabinet members, and the Judiciary, while three layers of the military and police secured Congress' parameters and a riotous protest aired the dysfunctional affairs of State. It was Parliament in the street by Disney!

The station owner sent congratulatory bottles of wine to the staff for a commendable job! I was awakened to the common practice of managing news! Like placing libraries in qualified homes on my first US summer job, I had professional integrity problems. I quit.

The big surprise was when I attended church Annual Conference a few months later. One of UMC's young Turks blurted out: "Your return means that those of us who lined up for the chance to be appointed to Central Church will have to wait another bloody turn because you are American-educated with an American wife ensuring first seed on the choice position."

He was right. Though my wife and I welcomed a posting in mission areas like Palanan, Isabela, or among the Aetas in Mindoro where the social gospel was more relevant than the saving souls, I was appointed associate pastor at the Central United Methodist Church. One of the Church lay leaders worked at the International School in Manila ensuring contact should my spouse decided to teach there.

Mary Lou arrived for Christmas. My sister's family lived in an apartment bulging in the seams with their five-member household (helper not included) and when my wife came, we joined resources and rented an apartment in Makati that was no improvement on my sister's space requirements but accommodated that of ours. Worst, it flooded the ground floor when it rained, inconveniencing my sister's family that lived there while we equally shared the rent.

Before summer, while attending to the youth at the Center, a black girl came. I asked for her name and she told me. Chatty, I volunteered that I heard of the name once in Chicago. She said, "That's where I am from." He was a white staff member of the Ecumenical Institute, I added with his name. "He's my father."

Serendipitously, my wife at the International School talked to the assistant principal who said she was an Ecumenical Institute pedagogue. My wife recalled that she attended a weekend course in College taught by EI staff.

A reconnection made, my wife was invited to *Ecclesiola*, a dinner fellowship on Thursdays. I got a phone call from a lady about my meeting with the black girl and how her father would like me to join their Thursday dinner.

My wife and I surprised each other with saying "yes" to an invitation without consulting the other. This was one happy coincidence. We accepted the invitation of the same group of people. It turned out later that we said *Yes* to more than just dinner. We ended redesigning the direction of our marital life!

**Year 28 ITI Seoul '72-73**  
***Sarang Hae's Martial Law***

My first act with the Official Board of Central UMC was to ask for a leave of absence with pay. Auspicious, yes. Modest, no. Necessary, yes. I discovered where power came from.

Having returned on my own volition to the country and about to be appointed to a choice position, with a wife advantageously (though cheap local hire) positioned at the prestigious International School, intentionality was power, and being able to articulate a vision, formidable. I exhibited both traits.

During the Annual Conference, a contemporary of my father orated before the body to suggest that I as the pip-squeak in clerical garb had been preaching since serving as youth leader so I can be granted the License to Preach; I served a US local church so was qualified to be Deacon, and had completed a Master's level academic work, so I can be admitted as Elder qualified to vote. The normal course of joining the professional clergy rank of the institution had three layers of Preacher, Deacon, and Elder followed on a path two years apart. The senior Elder suggested that I get all three at once since I was already qualified, albeit, I did not follow the standard procedure.

The young Turks were up in arms; they wanted to pare me down to size. Like the rest of them, they wanted me to take my position at the end of the line and do the dishes first, mop the floor and tidy the kitchen, polish the pots and pans before even thinking of having a seat at the

dining table. Fair enough, I thought. After all, initiation rites are part of life and why should I be spared the process.

I was humble enough to concur with the young turks that I got the grudging support of elders while gaining the respect of the young Turks. I had two years before becoming a Deacon and another two before joining the Elders. I was in no hurry, I was in a good mood and I was in my elements to chart the course of my new career.

Meanwhile, the church ladies took Mary Lou aside and told her what foods she should serve me to insure vigor and vitality, and how she needed to position herself in bed to be most receptive to the possible strength of my seed. We had been married for three years and it embarrassed my members that we were still without a child. My wife was too polite to let them know that she had been on the pill.

Intentionality and a clear vision was what the EI folks stood for. Charles Lingo was the guy who oriented us in Chicago's Fifth City. He had me out for dinner in what I thought was going to be a pitch for funds for EI events. In fact, he said, we have enough money to send 10 people to an event but we only have 9 available to go. Will you go? Very direct and to the point.

Central Church said, yes; my wife said, yes. I said, yes! In the summer of '72, I left for the International Training Institute in Korea, aka, Seoul ITI '72. We lived for eight weeks at a training facility in Suwon when the countryside was still planted with peaches and pears rather than today's sprawl of Seoul's suburban homes.

It was a serious no-nonsense high-powered, tightly packaged, superbly orchestrated 2-month encounter with the personal and social issues of identity, vocation, and lifestyle.

The intensity of the gathering addressed my playful nature deeply, but the message was clear: there's a global revolution in progress to transform individual and planetary life to a new level of spirituality, and we think you might be one of us. If you are, join us. If not, it's been a pleasure knowing you, nonetheless!

One of the exercises in an odyssey had writing of current thoughts. I remember creating a literary scenario while talking to a meditative council, an invisible college of invincible souls: "You do not want just my connection to the Methodist Church; you want my body and soul into the barbwire of human history." The one who read the piece looked at me and smiled.

The ITI was not an easy bottle of sauce to ladle to my Church Council's plate, though my wife had an easier time as she recalled RS1, a 44-hr EI weekend course she took dwarfed any course Esalen Institute of Big Sur could offer to reach to the bottomless pit of one's abyss.

Are you going to join us? I was asked when I returned on my first Ecclesiola. *Sarang Haeyo*, "I love you," was my response, the Hanggul I brought home from Seoul, later learned by my sister Jailu when she went as a nurse volunteer to the project in Jeju Do in '75.

We moved in on September 20, 1972, the day before Marcos declared Philippine Martial Law.

**Year 29 Maria Kristina '73-'74**  
***Starry Starry Night***

I was in Korea at the same time the Martial Law books for the Philippines were being cooked in one of the military sections of Seoul's Walker Hill. Ms. Lee of the Suwon Training Center staff actually took me to the hill at what was then a U.S. military R&R place. Korea in '72 was already a GI occupied territory sniveling while Kim Il Sung of *Cháoxián* belligerently rattled the sabre.

Ferdinand touched a conservative cord that was receptive to his call for national discipline. The raucous behavior of the disillusioned and the riotous manner the discontented expressed their displeasure did not do well with U.S. decorum so we got the discipline of West Point into our homes. It was not foreign to me since my uncle Roquito was a seasoned practitioner of the art but a nation under the illusion of participatory democracy through easily manipulated elections was ready for the tightening of belts, morals, and freedoms.

My family's move to the house of intentionality was not to the slums of Sta. Ana where we first went to encounter again the pedagogy of EI but to a nice house in Malate where an executive of an American company who joined the program in Tokyo lived. He company assigned him to Manila and the company house doubled up as the EI's Manila Religious House.

Not unlike my realization that some personae in offices normally perceived to be the centers of greed and avarice were actually enablers, I saw

the subversive in the whole enterprise of social reformulation that the Ecumenical Institute was attempting to do. In fact, being "ecumenical" in the WCC sense was no longer sufficient. The whole world's spirit struggle became a mainstay in our institutional menu. The conviction that if transformation were to occur, it was going to happen in the structures of local communities and the behavior of individual lives, then EI's pedagogy had to adjust to the call of the times.

The Institute of Cultural Affairs was born. EI's own research assembly, highly participatory in nature, revealed that in the cognitive processes of the economic as self-sustenance, political as self-reliance, and cultural as self-confidence, the cultural poll was key. Enabling persons and communities to meet their own requirements, important enough to be worth giving one's life and death to, became the credo of the ICA.

Central Church, progressive as it was compared to its kindred institutions, was, nevertheless, a creature of US Midwest Protestantism, still in the language of Luther and the Wesleys, Asbury and Cook, and the early American missionaries who were attached to US occupying forces in Pea Eye, metaphors that were not relevant to the requirements of the time.

My senior pastor was tolerant but I was not too patient with the inutile call for facile leadership in the church. A prospective Bishop among my group smoked cigarettes, drank beer, and joined a dive with girls dancing on table tops, against his own will, just so he could garner the votes to elect him to the episcopal office. It was not a style of compromise I was buying into since I

was not in the game of forwarding my career in the steps of a pyramidal structure.

ITI Baguio '73 was held while I was pastor to a Vespers congregation of young people that saw regularly behind the last pews uniformed and civilian officers of the Philippine Constabulary allegedly attending to participate in a worship service but in my view, monitored the tone and content of my pulpit pronouncements.

Six months before we joined the house, my wife got off the pill. On the money, our first-born arrived mid-August. She was born while I was in the mountain city of Baguio learning the EI style of pedagogy with others who were with me the year before in Seoul. I was still in the staff of Central Church, the UMC episcopacy pleased that we were packing a crowd on the Sunday evening vespers of folks limited in their mobility under strictures of military command. The Student Center also attracted an audience that was a bit serious in the program of student activism.

The priests, nuns, pastors, and deaconesses who attended the Baguio ITI were folks I visited in their sites, some becoming friendly with the resurgent members of the New Peoples Army, and others forsaking their religious vows to join other subversive elements and movements.

The ITI curriculum held a longer view of the transformational challenge of the times beyond the juvenile urge for revolt. Corruption in the Marcos regime decayed in its own rotten core; awakened ITI alumni held their breaths on the *Starry Starry Night's* pull to Charisma's galore.

## Year 30 Binggie '74-'75

### *I'm dirty, too!*

Maria Kristina Brunkow Vergara was written in her birth certificate. In Tillich's sense that "our ultimate concern is our god," Kristina was mine in '73. I was protective as hell of her and when her mother early got to work but attended the house collegium at breakfast first, I stayed to soothe her to the morn.

My absence at collegium did not go unnoticed. House members gave cosmic permission to hold the other accountable for acts of omission and commission. A colleague with the manners of a bulldozer came and hammered my door regularly to ask if I had ceded the directions of my day to a baby girl! Being clear that he was on target did not guarantee emotional tolerance. I rebelled as a consequence.

But I took my rebellion against the Methodist Church, instead. A genial Bishop, a mentor to my father, attended one of the morning services I led (by the second year, I had the third week of the month as my morning pulpit time as the senior pastor took the evening pulpit in turn), and took me aside to let me know that if I did not desist from running around with the foul mouthed EI folks, I would not make Bishop in ten years as "everyone" hoped.

Running around with EI at that time involved drinking and smoking in public to shock the "old ladies" in the clergy profession, and those in the pews. The mother of the black girl who came to the Student Center, once led a session with "proper" folks, using the "f" word in her

urban repertoire. I imagined how that worked on Chicago's Westside, but the tender ears of missionary-schooled churchgoers were not prepared for the assault on their sensibilities, more so because the solemn title of the course was Religious Studies One (RS1). But then, hers was quite to the point. Religion was about real life, not rites and rituals, and definitely, not good manners and right conduct.

Central Church sat by Luneta of Manila, not too far from where the US Embassy sat by the Bay. South of the Luneta was Ermita, the fun-and-games area for tourists of the city.

A female friend who was in school in Cagayan with me was a tour guide, influential in matters relating to Customs and Immigration. I enjoyed her company. She took me out many times for lunch, or lent me her car when I needed wheels at work, or drove out of town.

She had a cubicle of an apartment in the Walled City of Intramuros where sometimes lunch was served. It did not take long before she became part of the menu. It also became clear that my cavalier attitude towards concupiscence was my Achilles heel and her pleasure.

The pain I caused was beyond forgiving. There was the young church deaconess who was as equally attracted to me as I was to her but we recognized the boundaries. She left the service to earn a Master's degree in the Visayas.

Meanwhile, my relationship to my senior pastor in church was tested when members pitted us against each other. Ilocano ethnicity reared its

ugly head. The senior pastor was Pampango. He had a distinct accent carried into his English pronunciation. My clan the Ilocanos were more in number than other groups so they ganged up on the pastor. It was out of this animosity that I got assigned to preach at the morning English service once a month. Members pushed for a second turn. I was only into my second year.

I resigned to avoid a fray. At the EI Religious House were three Pilipino members. One family was readying to immigrate to the US. The other managed Methodist mission work. I traveled for his offices in places where there were no Methodist presence but where I recruited for EI training. It was during one of those trips when I was at my young Master's degree friend's city, away from prying eyes, that she let her guard down and I was forcefully playful. She never forgave me for that indiscretion.

In the Manila ITI '74, a Hong Kong delegate who was pretty enough to be in a HK magazine cover, previously studied in Regina, Canada. I asked how old she was, and she said, "thirty." My retort: "I'm dirty, too." After the ITI, she came back from HK looking for investment possibilities in the Philippines. I was her guide. One thing led to another, and I spent two weeks in HK later figuring out what was good for both of us with a fertilized fetus in her womb.

She was all business, cool and calculating, in choosing to abort. I drowned in the abyss of my bottomless pit. ML was forgiving. I really did not think the joke, no longer funny, was going to be on me. But I was definitely, and despicably, dirty, too!



**FORe@GO.net**  
**Tina Sablan**

Jaime was a teacher at SVES when I run for the legislature, first, as a representative, and later, for the Senate. I failed to make the last one. Jaime endorsed me in his newspaper column, later deciding that his endorsement was the kiss of death. Probably.

I was an alumnus of SVES; we were on home turf. The place always welcomed me, and I was easily forthright and honest there, as I tried to be in other places.

There was presence in the way Jaime carried himself as a teacher, which may have been read as lots of ego by some but it was an assertive, indicative, and declarative kind, a selfhood not to be quickly damned.

My assigned FORe@Go to this writing would be construed as straight out of the word “forgo”. By our last check in my computer dictionary, it also meant, “do without, go without, give up, waive, renounce, surrender, disavow, part with, relinquish, drop, sacrifice, forswear, abandon, swear off, steer clear of, cede, yield, eschew, cut out; refuse, repudiate, spurn and decline.” Yes, JayVee, my WP also has a thesaurus!

Jaime wrote columns for one of the newspapers, not always in easily understandable English but I trusted his aims so I endured his unorthodox syntax and style. He was probably off my left ideologically but it doesn't matter since my politics was more on compassion, of empathy rather than ideology; though we might be on the

same wavelength, he pushed the envelope as far left as he was able to allow himself equilibrium without dropping off the edge.

“Forego,” is another spelling for “forgo” with the same set of meanings, but Jaime put a space in between two words, changing the meaning all together. To “fore go” was to move forward, the opposite of renouncing something in favor of going for something.

Of my experience in politics, I discovered that some constituents were more excited about the things one was against as they were with what one was for. To be sure, when I was with those enacting laws in the Legislature, it seemed I spent more occasions to say “no” to bills since we seemed to spend a lot of times serving our interest rather than looking after the long term welfare of the people who elected us into office, but I might have been seen to be *Ms. No* more than I was *Ms. Yes!*

No matter now. I was tasked to play with *forgo* and *fore go*, and the operative word there is “to play”, as Jaime's narrative of his living appears very playful in more ways than one.

So, *forgoing* is doing without, which is a great stance if deciding from foresight, before acting rather than after. Forgoing after is a waste of effort since what has happened can't be undone save in the region of the mind, and of imagined stories from guilt-ridden souls of those seeking atonement for grievous mistakes.

We saw this at play in the frenzy that followed the mysterious disappearance of MH370 of the

Malaysian Airlines as the mystery of the plane's disappearance was not as evoking as guessing on who is responsible for it. In a world where we can locate with technology my residence's front yard in Honolulu, we would not use the same to locate a huge Boeing 777 that vanished from the surface of the earth!

Again, in the sudden disaster of the ferry boat Sewol that sailed from Incheon to Je Ju, the search for survivors in the upturned boat, with all the sea and air assistance that gathered around the tragic incidence, could not harness quick and efficient means to save those who might be trapped inside. Instead, the news was more focused on the culpability of the vessel's officers than rapidly turning the boat back to its top, known to be technologically feasible.

*Fore going* from the perspective of planning, of intentionality was right down our alley. We are not spending our effort in urban planning just so we can leave the arrangement of tangible geography to the devices of chance. It can be planned. We can decide.

What is true of space is equally true with time, the preoccupation of the European mode of thought that differentiates between “before”, “after”, and “during”. Or, in its classic mode, the “genesis” and the “apocalypse”, with life's journey lived in between.

Not able to fore go come as a regular practice among us girls who thinks aging is an offense. Cosmetics that we patronize stumble on each other to promote products to keep us looking young! Jaime's journey is one, all fore play!

### **Part III Covenant of location: homenest *earthbound in the space age***

It was the Apollo 8 mission picture of the blue orb in the sky now titled "earthrise" that gave me a single world view, the *weltanschauung* of the Germans (the word also means, philosophy of life), and most recently, cognitive overview in human discourse.

The overview effect was described as a shift in awareness that happened during spaceflights or viewing the earth from orbit or from the lunar surface. While these had been limited to the astronauts and cosmonauts, the visualization that occurred through TV and the movies had left audiences share the experience of seeing firsthand the Earth in space, in virtual reality immediately understood to be tiny, fragile ball of life, "hanging in the void", shielded and nourished by a paper-thin atmosphere, where national boundaries vanished, the conflicts that divided people in it became less important, and the need to create a planetary society with the united will to protect this "pale blue dot" was obvious and imperative.

The Apollo missions, for all its tragedies and victories, enriched us creating an image of who we are by transporting our imagination to the visuals from outer space.

The earthrise came to me in Greensboro NC at the Faith & Life Community House while we watched Neil Armstrong set foot on the moon. The fragile sphere in space rising from one side of the lunarscape into the other made me aware of the common destiny of the specie. In it were

no favored races in this planet, and the political division we operated out of was purely mental. It was not part of the physical make-up of the landscape.

The experience had been vicarious and as the earthrise photo joined the iconic images of the 20th century, our resolve to be not only the caretakers of it, but to restore it into sustainable health, became stronger. The earthrise photo was the first image I got that allowed me to transcend the sentimental bondage I had with my ethnic and national identity.

It had since become axiomatic to emphasize the importance of a holistic perspective on almost anything. The perspective of "compare and contrast", so dear to our mode of definitive and substantive thinking was a thing of the past. It rose with the theory of evolution, mishandled by the Nazis of Germany who took the science and merged it with the belief of the superiority of the Aryan race.

We learned that human DNA was 97% similar among members of the human race descending from creatures originally from tropical West Africa. Science became the source of our new belief systems, and though yesterday's beliefs were less credible than the ones that replaced them, science was in the area of imagination.

Process was the new metaphor of wisdom and understanding as substantive physics was used to describe appearances of surface things while underneath them were nebulous fields of light and energy, what had since come to be known as quantum physics.

The resolve to be an earth caretaker created for me the ethical stance of being earthbound. It was not a prescription to avoid traveling into outer space, nor belittle the effort. It was the recognition that the transcendent perspective was meaningless without grounding the same on the reality of flesh and blood for humans, and the carbon (C), oxygen (O) and nitrogen (N), et al, contents of earthbound space.

In the era of the earthrise, I became in my body and soul, intentionally earthbound. If the years of the previous narrative dealt with experience of awareness of the response-ability to the yarns of existence, this part focuses on the decision to expend one's self to the requirements of place and the people in them.

I ended with the dismal tone of depravity, and though that sense reflects more the morality of the ocean I swam about, the grokking involved continued as a matter of course rather than as a willful negation of the way life is.

A colleague saw a t-shirt with the sign: *pikaru Guam*. He asked what it meant. Though a resident of the Marianas, I did not pick up *Chamorro*. My audience learned better English by my speaking it rather than my translating words into their language. He related the word to "picaresque", an episodic style of fiction on the adventures of a dishonest and rough but appealing hero. I quietly nodded my head. I will need to look for that t-shirt.

(Those reading this who raised their eyebrows and blinked on sudden revelation were asked to leave the room and were graciously excused!)

## Year 31 ITI Caracas '75-'76 *The Order*

The spirit warrior was one who squeezed juice out of any given situation. After the Binggie event, known to EI/ICA symbolic leadership circles, the assignment commission sent me to the faculty of the Caracas ITI '75 (Venezuela in South America) where I ran into various Order priests, and a buxomly nun bursting out of her bra. The dear sister came to my room to bid me goodbye the day after we concluded, expressing appreciation for my presence in the event in a rather non-religious yet moving way.

Though curious about religious rites, I had no idea where her gestures came from, but she took my hand, looked me in the eye, turned around to lean her back on my front, and let me fondle her breast with hardened nipples under an unhitched bra covered by a tight habit. Now, one might think I've read too many porno lit, but my narrative was sedate compared to the steam she generated in the room.

After leaning her head on my shoulders, she turned and tip-toed to kiss (not peck) forehead, eyes, lips (dry, not wet), neck, chest, tummy, the bulge between my legs, knees and feet. She then gave me a lingering tight hug, looked me intensely in the eye, hooked her bra back, and left. With no awareness ever of what she did, I received life's absolution on the heavy guilt that hung over my head after the fateful Binggie affair.

The Caracas of my recollection was a city that went siesta from noon to three, an eerie town

heavy in Iberian moorings, seething underneath in Afro-European beat and rhythm, sound and song, with nary a worry on unbridled sensuality.

The contrast was stark to Redlands, California, at least at the surface, when EI conducted its North American ITI. In a deserted College over the summer, I lectured on Freedom, grounding "lucidity" to the audience. I looked at one of my female colleagues who had an abrasive way of out-guying the guys. I said: "I am very clear, Cynthia is a bitch, she will always be a bitch but my freedom is not to change her bitchiness but to live with the lucidity of the bitch that she is." I received a standing ovation! Cynthia's lash back came 10 years later in the telling.

I kept an eye on the ladies by natural reflex, and was not lacking of charm to get their responses in kind. One was married to a cleric belonging to the group that refused to accompany Brigham Young to Utah in Kansas. She was very prim and proper. She sat upright by the collegium table next to daughter reluctantly in the ITI.

My senior by 12 years, Mary and I were lovers that summer. She later divorced her husband, not on my account but because the marriage had long been on the rocks. She occasionally held me in her arms when we found ourselves in the same place at the same time. I am writing at 68. She's now 80. There is no shortage of *double entendre* in our notes when we exchange them, and we write often 14 time zones away.

I did not hesitate to keep her daughter close to my chest when she and I crossed the line on whether or not we were to heed the glint in each

other's lust. She attended a 2-month EI session where I lived, and when she was free, we retired to a black dude's cubicle on appointed hours, and disturbed the bejesus out of the neighbor's serenity with moans of pleasure. Incestuous in a particular kind, we were not shy.

I had the temerity to lunch with *mi dos mamas de dos Marias*, with full knowledge of who they were in my life. The Religious Order my family joined was not intent on polygamous orgies of sensuality. In fact, the opposite was true. Elders kept to monogamous marriages, or promoted its goals and frowned on those who didn't. In turn, I grokked my drawers down without inhibition. I appreciated its sensual expressions.

An old Denver physician and I drove from a trip to Pasco and back to Spokane one week and we hit black top. On the skid down the slope, the picture of a friend from Cebu flashed across my vision. She was a student at Claremont CA. I decided to go see her. Having not seen each other a while, though up to that point we only flirted rather than touched, it did not take much for us to forget what virgins ate for breakfast.

Still, Mary Lou and I vowed a lifestyle of poverty, chastity, and obedience and there was no shortage of the declared fealty on filial aims and responsibilities in the Order. In the periods Mary Lou and I joined daily offices, canonical hours, and retreats, I was lucid that I had not been, nor will be, a faithful bed partner in the conjugal life of monogamous marital bliss.

An incorrigible sensual playmate, I was either secretly praised or publicly condemned.

**Year 32 Maria Teresa '76-'77**  
**O, Canada**

I saw myself being sent understandably into exile. By past behavior, I nonchalantly received what was doled my way. My *dagan* (butt) froze as soon as the family got off in Saskatoon early January '76. It did not help that the wind chill factor was low; it pushed us to dart from the terminal to the car. I wore a three-piece suit under my overcoat so I was a easy candidate for frostbite if I stayed outside longer than five minutes. Literally and figuratively, I would not keep still. I kept moving from that day on.

In my rather picaresque journey, my colleagues in the assignment commission saw promise in my confronting the winds of Saskatchewan. The house there was an abandoned hotel in the seedy part of town where the mixed wino *Metis* (progenitor of the European fur trappers and natives sworn of legal Native Reserve rights) and their daughters walked the streets, the wino with his bottle, and the daughter, with a warm body to make her night.

In April, I joined a colleague in Dillingham, AK to conduct a Town Meeting (TM '76), an ICA program widely endorsed by the bicentennial celebration and Jimmy Carter's White House.

We flew on a cargo plane with a few passenger seats. There were six of us on board, with three looking like Inuits. One I thought to be a local *Inuk* turned up to be an Ilocano priest from next to my province, Isabela. I was jarred back to my Pilipino awareness of *Pinoy* in diaspora. That must be why I felt strongly to be present at

the Consult of the Sudtonggan HDP (Human Development Project) in the Philippines. I was not assigned to go, so I asked an ICA guardian to foot a ticket.

There were already assigned roles so I was a participant observer, curious about the method utilized to net the local vision, its hopes and dreams, with the expertise of the voluntary and public sectors. ICA facilitated the identifying of contradictions and the making of practical proposals, but more importantly, worked out the details of implementation in a timeframe with schedules, budgets, and assigned personnel. It was an engaging week as consultants parceled out to homes to interview the residents daily. I came out both excited and disturbed.

The "local" was socially stratified so the vision of what was supposed to be from the many was the articulation of the few. The network of volunteers were a compassionate cadre of care, but the public sector focused on their piece of the action understood in their own terms as the supplier of venture capital, financial, material, and human. The professional skill of the ICA facilitators departed to their offices leaving behind an overwhelmed resident staff to fend for themselves, not only to continue the process established by the Consult of planning and implementation, but also on self-support of which they did not excel.

The corps of volunteers was benignly thought of as well-meaning interlopers and well-off aliens who poured good will and altruism into the morass of an underdeveloped village. On day one, the staff left behind was *dejado*, the

term for severely at a distinct disadvantage in competition like the fronton and horseracing.

There were promises after the HDP, but also landmines on the side. I brought this sense as I assisted a colleague staff the ICA booth at the '76 UN Habitat conference in Vancouver. There the UN came out with the first official policy on human settlements and the environment. We had a lot to say about that but the limited dais of a slide show on HDPs was drowned by other NGO voices in the lot.

I soldiered on. The Mazurs of the Hudson Bay *Post Review* in Saskatchewan put their weekly paper behind the Community Forum Canada program patterned after the Town Meeting format of gathering town folks around a lively deliberative process. Doing a weekly circuit into towns promoting the program made me know prairie Canada well.

My exile had the feel of penance, more so as my Claremont Cebu colleague showed up on a bus trip to Canada's east coast via Saskatoon.

My dour Scot-Ozzie circuit partner, whose Oz boyfriend left her at the altar, and I, began to lean on each other's shoulders to lighten the loneliness of the road and the deafening sounds of silence in the convents of Ukrainian nuns.

Second daughter Maria Teresa came October right on the money when ML and I bunkered on the second and last child. Like Kristina, born while I was at an ITI, Teresa came while I was conducting a Community Forum Canada. Their father was an M-section (missing) at their birth.

## Year 33 Community Forum '77-'78

### *Just do it*

I did not produce the numbers. While CFCs were held in Hudson Bay, Moose Jaw, and Yorktown, my efforts at movement building was nil. EI/ICA was seen as just another American do-good NGO. We had difficulty getting Canucks into the houses.

One colleague who sought my pastoral advice became mother to our child, instead. Initially, as we mapped out our work in Saskatchewan, Manitoba and Alberta, she attended meetings in Saskatoon and met my bubbly 2-yr old Kristina. She casually said: "*I want one like that!*" In my sporting self, I said, "*Do you have 15 minutes?*"

I enabled her attending the Academy that was our main program bearing the accumulated wisdom of the Order from the Judaic Torah to the Social Gospel, in dialogue with the best learning of contemporary science and the arts.

She got defensive in the Academy as the assault on her religious background shattered her self-image, so she clamped up and I retrieved her from the course. On the way back, she assisted in completing a Community Forum, and in the heat after the celebration I exploited her willing vulnerability but forgot the prophylactic. She had her 15 minutes!

We held hands under the Calgary air later, but she did not bother to inform me when the baby was born. When she did, and I offered to adopt the child, she hit the ceiling, going into a tirade of how I abused and violated her trust. She was

right. We did not hear from each other again. Until three decades later.

I had the TM/CFC format pat and I was deeply addressed by what my colleagues were doing with HDP replication in Maharashtra, around Maliwada, near the city of Aurangabad (means, "built by the throne").

Education colleagues earlier converted the basic Bachelor of Arts degree to a 13-week course for rural villagers. Human Development Training School (HDTS) in India girded HDP replication and applied the Univ13 learning in an 8-week design. I was returning to Pea Eye to initiate the Mactan replication project. I went through India to have a firsthand look-see at HDTS.

Maliwada had *haridjans*, Gandhi's children of God, the "untouchables" of the caste system, in the village since time immemorial. The staff, local and international, injected themselves into the situation, and with their best shots, just did it. (Nike shoes later adopted *Just Do It* as its slogan, and I've been wearing Nike ever since.)

In my rational self, I expected a 1-2-3 manual on how to conduct a revolution. India's HDTS was not a regimented force doing battle with ignorance, imbuing neat aims and purposes of charted vision of an imagined future. It was unbridled emotions on raw energy fueling a Maharashtra movement, driving many of my rational but seasoned battle planning colleagues to hit the bottle!

One week into the school, I was clear that the HDP and the replication process were nothing

but inspired intrusions of the unknown to the malleable nature of human existence. I came to look for a textbook; I left convinced that I had to build the road as I traveled. "Go home, and just do it!" I heard the arid wind whisper.

The trip to India allowed me stopovers in Paris where I woke up in futuristic Charles de Gaulle airport. It was summer when the whole city took off for the coast, leaving money grabbers to conduct business at the portals. My budget for the week went *poof*. Dinner by the Seine's Left Bank and an overnight stay at a Lebanese dive in Montmartre sent me back to the Metro for the Airport and Rome.

A Religious Order colleague offered a bunk and passed the hat among the Order nuns. Three days of driving around Piazzas, including the Vatican, el Padre handed me an envelope with green paper and drove me to the airport. Pope Paul VI died just after I saw the Sistine chapel. His successor Pope John I had a short reign on Peters throne - 33 days.

Bombay (Mumbai) was a contrast of the very wealthy against humanity's mass of poverty. I had one Amex check remaining after Maliwada. At the office, a lady exchanged a plastic bag full of currencies, leftover from a European trip. I took my Rupee, ordered a hamburger at the Taj Mahal Hotel restaurant next door, reminded myself that in both its absence and abundance, I was not a victim of money.

Tun Lee Kwan Yew lived up to the promise of a *Singapura*. The island city's Hakka trailblazer demonstrated a *Just do it* lifestyle.

**Year 34 La Liga Ecumenika '78-79**  
*Mactan 24, AK 47*

A lingering image in the Order's selfhood was that of the League in Hermann Hesse's *Journey to the East*. I called mine La Liga Ecumenika. This became critical for EI/ICA when its chief guru Joseph Wesley Matthews died Oct. '77.

Living Effectively in the New Society was the title of the LENS seminar the ICA launched in the 70s. When Marcos decided to use New Society as the title of his dictatorship, LENS became Leadership Effectiveness and New Strategies. Less prosaic, it became a business management seminar more than the radical tool it was designed to be to redesign the economic, political, and cultural dynamics of the social process.

However, one of the early course graduates was the Department of Local Government Secretary in Marcos' administration and on his stationary, we launched Community Forum Philippines in every Province of the country. A team of ICA's two "blue shirts" was assigned to four provinces a week in each to facilitate a Forum organized by the local DLG office. Provincial Governors were also alerted in the top-down order of the Cabinet member.

One of mine was Lanao del Sur. The Governor chose a barangay (village) captain to organize. The *capitan* happily had been to University for his technical degree that was never used after he turned into politics. He was curious enough to entertain our approach. I asked for assistance to get school teachers and he said they were ready

to cook, serve the food, and clean up the place. The ladies were only meant to be helpers.

When I showed my bewilderment, he explained that village leadership was all male following the dictates of the Koran. The non-Muslims in the community did not participate nor join in the deliberative political process. Nor were the female voices included. In fact, he preferred that I solely conducted the Forum without my female partner's upfront role. All participants were going to be male.

He asked what kind of food we needed and I blithely said *Lechon* (whole roasted pork) was fine. He stared hard at me and I realized my monumental *faux pax*. Pork to Islam was the ultimate culinary No-No. I apologized.

The CFPs did not budge us a nation, not even a wink from the press. There were not enough top-down maneuvers we could accomplish to gain what we were after, a revolution in human consciousness at the local community level. I was impatient with incremental change but I realized we were to create La Liga Ecumenika.

We plotted how to utilize the demonstration value of the Sudtonggan Project so we built a training center. Colleagues from Australia, the US, Malaysia, Indonesia, and India came to join the faculty. We chose four villages in Mactan to be in a cluster of four, including Sudtonggan. We named the maneuver Mactan 24.

Soon the Island's preschoolers were singing to Imelda Marcos at the airport: "*Hello, Madam Imelda, are you standing tall this day!*" to an

Indonesian tune. I was no fan of the Marcos regime, but the HDPs were getting attention and written up. Mary Lou made her picture in an interview with a Caltex in-house magazine. Unfortunately, the notice the HDPs received were from the private corporate donors whose motivation was, at best, suspect.

Langub project was Mindanao replication site after Mactan. We held an HDTS in Sudtonggan from villagers around Langub HDP for the effort. In the Consult, two police officers who organized illegal gambling flaunted powers to make them their own violators.

While at the Consult was on and gambling was rampant, AK47-equipped members of the New Peoples Army (NPA) visited, took the police officers out but left the Consult to continue its business without any further interruption. That gained the NPA an extra point on my chart.

When the symbolic head honcho died, Order stability became a preoccupation. Movemental passion took a back seat. I attended a memorial in Chicago. The trip got me through HK where Binggie took me merrily to lunch at the Hilton, then went her merry way. We parted as friends and promised not to see each other again.

Despair began when bean counters took over operations. Performance ratings rather than the word of absolution became accountability. That was fine in Wall Street, but as the NPA showed, efficiency in gambling even with a patina of legality was no match to passion showed on the ground, the fuel of our whole operation. The resurgence of the local was our calling card.

## Year 35 En Sud America '79-80 *The anatomy of despair*

The news from Langub was that the volunteers in the HDTS who knew more of Ukraine than Spain, were being systematically decimated. I was not suprised. I was, however, deeply sad, and awakened once more to the reality that in global politics, the red of the oppressed labored under the blue of the oppressor.

Up the hills of Cebu City was a site where low land farmers forced to go to upland agriculture learned to contour terrain from a former PCV. Soil and water conservation was his specific gig but his soft technology on village participation was hazy. We joined efforts, got some villagers from his site to our Training center, and began planning local Consults and a broad replication schemes in his project sites.

Our volunteers identified with the ICA's use of navy blue in its attire, so they were known as the "blue shirts." We were all over the foothills behind the classy new housing development and I seethed with the knowledge that whatever we did, the benefit will redound to the real estate developers who already had designs on the area. My ICA colleagues did not quite appreciate the subtle subterfuge underneath the support we got from the private sector.

ICA operated with troika families in all sites, and one in ours had a hubby playing court with one of our volunteers. The wife was faithfully expending efforts in her social work vocation, but my antennae picked up the quiet discord in the other front. My response to commiserate

and empathize in her sorrow, for I genuinely liked the lady as a person, drew us close to each other for comfort. Too damn close, I was told.

My South American colleagues received a grant for economic acceleration in their HDPs and the Order Assignment Commission sent me to lead a team of two trainers to join the effort. It was a long haul from the western Pacific to Jamaica, my first stop, but I was a Methodist circuit rider so I packed a suitcase with a briefcase, left a sweet budding collegial friendship, and my ever faithful Mary Lou with the girls behind.

As expected of the outside colleague, ze brings new perspective in an existing situation to spark creativity and innovation. My towering partner was a willing but wide-eyed young neophyte who thought I would be the kind-hearted lead. She came with a lot of prepared constructs and designs that we could not obviously use.

She was severely disappointed. Our Jamaican project staff smoked the wildly grown *ganja* in the Blue Mountains as they plodded through the struggle of a socialist government friendly to Fidel next door vs. a Miami-friendly Chamber of Commerce attuned to us.

Guatemala showed the reverse as the new pipe irrigation in the farm was a boost in the nation's land reform efforts, but the government head was more intent in furthering his evangelical agenda wedded to Pentagon's military designs against neighboring Contras, than reforming this bastion of Iberian conservatism. One of our local staff members was shot while on vacation, suspected of being a leftist.

In Brazil, our staff played roulette with their bedmates, with the House in Rio and the HDP in Bonito two hours away. The rough Afro-European version of Portuguese did not sound understandable. However, there was sufficient goodwill locally on the ground to continue the participatory implementation process in place. Meanwhile, my partner and I quit talking.

Chile had Pinochet return with a red face after Marcos cancelled his stopover in Manila from Fiji on his way to China. I showed up with the first Philippine passport at Santiago's airport shortly after he arrived. Our village project adored Allende, so I became a celebrity fending off invitations to party for being a Pilipino. Wildly celebrative, my training task was left on the wayside.

In Peru, the coco tea settled the nerves but our primary troika guy sliced his finger on a slicer, and he was in deep despair. His lovely wife and a French volunteer carried the ICA component of our project effort. I could write a book on the visit but the lessons from the French girl were best left off from memoirs.

I went back to Caracas with some effort since a Philippine passport required a visa to enter. The Afro-European vitality of the *Cano Negro* HDP took care of its own, nevertheless.

I played Troika in the Research Assembly of '80, but during the Order pow-wow, I was assigned kitchen duty. *No hay problema*. I wore my best tan sharkskin suit, plastered a smile, and stir-fried veggies. I nurtured a Sud American despair deeply tattooed on my soul.

## Year 36 Lagos Lagoon '80-'81 *Malaria and unbelief*

While I was in South America, ML was in the US South working on HDP-related training. After the summer, we drew faculty roles in the Global Academy. The Dean was an introverted living image of Van Gogh's self-portrait, who later wrote a scholarly dissertation of Simone Weil's life and work. Articulate, disciplined, literate, an intense genius, I enjoyed working with him though he might have found me to be less than committed to the task. I was. The Order was losing its relevance to my vocation, and Mary Lou and I had drifted apart.

A family assignment to Africa was an insulin shot to the soul. We headed for Nigeria and transited in London. A US green card holder, I did not think I needed a visa. I did. That cut three hours off our time. Layover was nine hours, but we had enough to get out of the tube to Piccadilly Circus and be served chicken by *Filipina* (the word had then entered the OED to mean, nanny) workers at KFC. We managed Westminster before catching our flight.

Inside Air Nigeria, the luggage bin in the cabin for carry-ons looked like my Cagayan Valley bus spilling with irregular sizes of plastic bags. I knew we were headed to a third world country in spite of the country's oil boom.

Lagos on the west coast was humid without the driving sea breeze that made Cebu tolerable, though both were almost in the same latitude north of the Equator. Nigeria grounded to me the sensuality of the human psyche.

Jamaica showed me folks who danced rather than walked. Of West African heritage, there was a rhythm built inside expressed gracefully in the expression of muscles and joints. In Lagos, while hanging on in a crowded city bus, I sidled up to a colleague, and asked: "Charles, with Nigeria's new wealth, how come deodorant is not used?" He was a sport. "Jaime," he said, "If you can't smell your neighbor, how will you know who your friends are?" There was such a thing as a tribal smell. It didn't answer the bus question directly but I got the drift.

By Lagos lagoon in Ijede, we had a group of community development workers in attendance at the HDTs. One of the standard lectures I gave was an overview of primordial images that humans invented in the course of its journey. Cultural anthropologists call this "Ur images" from Abraham and Sarah's origins in Ur.

One of the cynical PCVs from Burkina Faso interrupted with a question about how I would fit the Eskimos and the Lapps into my scheme. Fair enough, but from his manner, it was more than just a question of clarity. He resented the top-down assignment to attend the training by his office. He was not a happy camper.

Top-down methods of operation have long ate into my revolutionary menu, tolerated when we needed the timeframes and bottom lines of bean counters to protect financial flanks, but never at the expense of programs. I encountered the thick cynicism of Peace Corps volunteers in the Philippines that was standard *modus vivendi* to few burnt out idealist unable to transcend their search for significance in the accomplishments

of their efforts. It permeated their discourse. Their overview was self-defeating but I had no patience to babysit juvenile revolt against one's own hierarchy expressed in their relationship to the training they were told to attend.

I grew up in mosquito country and while I was adamant about the participants downing their prophylaxis, I neglected my own. Soon, I was climbing the walls with malaria fever.

I was no longer of use to the training so Mary Lou took over while a tropical disease specialist brought my fever down in Abeokuta. We were to lead another HDTs in Zambia but a Kenya colleague at Nairobi airport took one look at me and decided I was not getting past by him.

I took Air Iberia to Madrid. They lost my bag but my Philippine passport merited an 45-day visa automatically, so I did not complain. The Madrid Religious House kept me at bay. My Malaria included hepatitis. I saw Calle Manila and Hotel Mindanao, along with the Prado. On antibiotics, I kept distance from the Porto wine in five-gallon bottles that flowed smoothly like water in the dining room.

I was back in Chicago in a week. Immediately, I double-checked on the hepatitis since I was in a communal living situation, but I was fine. But despair, the sickness unto death that I got from S.A, permeated my soul. I thought that my non-violent revolution was coming to an end. I was not, however, prepared to abandon a sinking ship. So I looked at myself in the spirit mirror, and put on my armor once more. I went to my workstation to mold a new day.



## Year 37 TASC '81-'82

### *Closing out sale*

Though we encouraged everyone to a point of "just doing it," we also developed the methods so that one consulted another as an individual or as a group before putting one's body on the line.

The symbolic leadership of the Order consisted of five people patterned after India's *Panjayat*. They did not vote, they arrived at a consensus; they did not rule the Order, they advised four centrums of operations, management, research, and development. Each Religious House had a troika of families, globally connected, locally self-reliant. Interdependence was the rule of the new day; we were out to show how it worked.

While recuperating from my African bug, I wandered about our 8-storey building to limber the bones and tone the muscles. In one of those walks, I overheard an ongoing conversation in which my name was mentioned along with a third world colleague. "*Jaime is revolutionary alright, but which revolution?*" They were choosing the next set of Panjayat members.

In 1981, the World Methodist Conference was held in Honolulu and the Order sent my wife and I, and one of our older colleagues. Like any conference of that magnitude, nothing of any significance happens at the bleachers, and we had back seats. I think JWM's brother who was a Methodist Bishop encouraged the Order to attend. My brother who took care of Kristina once, and my parents, lived in Hawaii, so we were delighted to fulfill the assignment. An ITI backer from the Y, Leticia Shahani, was in the

conference so meeting her again was worth the trip. We discovered that our colleague with us, like our departed head guru JWM, was addicted to both tobacco and spirit water. He handled them both well, but he definitely had other spirit struggles that I could not even begin to fathom.

Mary Lou must have responded well to the trip for we found ourselves assigned to Majuro in the Marshalls, site of one of the 24 on-the-hour-every-hour HDPs around the globe.

Part of the UN Trust Territory in the Pacific entrusted to the US, we tested missile accuracy and trajectory to the Kwajalein atoll. JWM was chaplain to military forces in nearby Tarawa in WWII, so choosing Majuro as one of our early HDPs was a no-brainer. We did, however, bite into something bigger than we could chew.

I thought we were headed to Majuro to toughen our presence since it laid between Honolulu and Guam, both strongholds of Methodist presence. Before being assigned to the place, I visited as a corporate management trainer to the vehicle the project created to voyage its programs.

TASC is the *Trans Atoll Service Corporation*. The Marshall Islands hosted the Pentagon and introduced the world "Bikini" to the world, was also a welfare state of Washington. Economic self-sufficiency was understood as raking in US\$ from Congress as much as possible, and natives chanted to the waves. TASC was organized to show an alternative method. It organized small shop owners in the populated islands and atolls into a corporation, who purchased directly from California sources, warehoused goods, lowered

prices at the retail end and have profit redound to consumers and the corporation owners. The attrition rate was too high in the economic lanes at the time that we thought we could streamline it and pass on the profit to the local folks.

We were ready to write the textbook on small island's economic survival and development but Mother Nature (typhoons and tsunamis) would not sit still, and the politics between the US and the local government, of rent to the island's *Iroij* and the *Nitijela*, were not areas of our expertise. The entrenched business interests welcomed our interloping like a drought; Washington was too far to worry and the atoll's shenanigans were inexpensive to easily ignore.

By '81, after a disastrous rice purchase through Nauru, we were saddled with a drain on capital from credit lines of retiree's savings. We were sent a bean counter that saw his job as closing down operation of a bloated giant. I thought we could capitalize on our gains and cut losses *sans* skipping town dragging our tails between our lower extremities.

I did not disagree with the mission. I wanted to clarify my role in it. I flew to Chicago, at the same time coincidentally that the guardians (the ones who put their retirement savings on the line) were set to meet.

Powers-that-be met me at O'Hare for breakfast, and counseled that I visit family for a week, relax and take my time as I was evidently under duress. I was clearly cut off at the pass. But I pronounced absolution, and came in to Centrum later knowing that my days were numbered.

**Year 38 Hagatña '82-'83**  
***Pisi Cori***

The Order's treasurer and his wife took us out to lunch, but we did not get a symbolic send-out. The year in Majuro was not exactly easy on the moralists among us since I still found time to relate to the PCV nurse at the local hospital in Majuro. Besides, ML and I were not actually leaving. We were taking a sabbatical.

The Methodist Church in Guam needed a pastor and though my last pastorate was a good decade before, I did not hesitate to take it. Most of the members came from the Philippines though the church related to the California-Pacific Annual Conference of UMC, under the Hawaii District.

Not unlike my first act in Manila when I asked for a 2-month leave of absence to attend Seoul ITI '72, I asked Guam to let me go to Davao to facilitate the community development part of a PCV orientation program. The director was a former PCV who frequented our Cebu project and remembered not just our training skill but our perspective on community development. She wanted some of that to rub off the trainers and the volunteers.

BTW, *Pisi Kori* in the title referred to PCV. I ran into it in Nuku'alofa in Tonga, and Apia in Western Samoa. It was actually a pejorative term, my Majuro PCV explained, pointing to PCV girls who neglected themselves because they wanted to discourage the male population from getting attracted to them. It appeared that not only did they find it difficult to fend for themselves against the man, they also faced

formidable antagonism from the native ladies who were stuck in the traditional image of the plump Mama ready to plunk down a dozen kids.

I returned to Guam to work in a congregation that prided itself as community based. It hosted various community activities from groups who were members of the Church as well as groups who were just in the community. The Church did not need to lock the doors. The Scouts met in our yard.

I biked from the parsonage to the Church. ML taught at a local elementary school and drove the used car (probably 5th hand by the time we had it) we got. We had been mendicants, so we did not have deep pockets. But when one of Kristina's playmates wondered if her father she referred to as a worker on "development", was rich, she replied: "Oh, no. But he makes other people rich!" Children say the darndest thing!

Teresa followed a more vivacious sister, and like any second child in a family, she tended to be a bit timid. She wanted to learn to swim when we went to the public swimming pool. I grabbed her by her upper arm and dropped her to the middle of the pool. She did not panic; she just kicked a leg and paddled; did not have any difficulty floating from then on.

The above is a crude but accurate description of my teaching approach. In the current touchy-feely orientation of early childhood education, we have a tendency to avoid confrontations that may result in permanent psychological damage. "No gain, no pain" was best left to the Marines, but for the young, they are encourage to have

fun while learning. No pain please. We do not have any disagreement with such approach but I needed to show that reality was not a walk in the park. As physics claimed, reality was at the core, chaos. Order was a matter of choice.

Kristina and Teresa grew up in unconventional environments. At Sudtonggan, the staff house burnt while they were in bed. Papa and Mama were on the other side of the island conducting a community consultation.

Together with other children of staff members, they shared time bathing *au naturel* in an open pump in the training school. Later, when Mama and Papa went to Africa, they lived under the care of an Order couple. Other than the not-so-common make-up of their growing up, they also missed out on a Papa's usually warm embrace.

In Cebu City, while they were growing up, I ran into a beggar by the cathedral that looked like one of my daughters. From then on, I became existentially the father of every child shorn of love and attention. Kristina and Teresa were raised to be self-sufficient, self-reliant, and self-confident. Exclusive proprietary claim to Dad's care was not theirs to claim. But they survived the travail of that path with distinction.

After a year, the United Methodist Church of Guam through Hawaii District and its District Superintendent decided that Vergara was too ahead of his time in Guam's congregation and would be better suited training pastors at a Seminary.

Gently, but I was summarily fired, nonetheless.

## Year 39 PCVs '83-'84

### *I shall return*

The decision not to be rehired by the church was unexpected. The family actually thought that we were doing fine. The girls were also at home in Guam where they neither have to be white Caucasians or pure Malay. They were of mix blood like everyone else. Much later, Kristina unfurled her University banner with: "Mongrels of the world, unite!" We scrambled to hassle in 1983.

Mary Lou, as a resident of Guam, could attend the University of Hawaii as a local so she took advantage of that. She brought the girls with her. However, Kristina was too well in advance of her age group in school; was recommended to be moved two grades up. Recalling how I was always the runt in my class, I took serious exception to that and asked that she joined me in Manila as I began a quarterly contract to orient PCVs to their two-year stints.

*I shall return* was a famous Douglas MacArthur phrase in country after Dugout Doug's promised to return when he left Corregidor after Nippon invaded in '41. I used the phrase when I left the PCV orientation in '82; in '83, I did good on my promise and joined the Training Staff, this time, as a US citizen.

In '82, there was the issue at PCV of local hire rates since I carried a Pea Eye passport though I had a US green card. In '83, a member of my Church who was a teacher and a Guam senator facilitated my citizenship and passport release. In a record three weeks period, I got sworn in

and got properly documented to join Manila in their orientation of PCVs. Many locations in the world were closing out their welcome of PCVs as America's errant youth had been using the program as a rite of passage rather than a venue for serious service.

I was the Darth Vader of Pea Eye's *Pisi Cori* in '83. Not perhaps as colorful as the character in the movie *Star Wars*, the Anakin Skywalker who surrendered to the dark side of the Force. I was more like a quiet opportunist, a boy with a sweet tooth in a chocolate glass counter when nobody was looking, and decided to taste the display. I did not go on a rampage, abused anyone, and raped anybody. I might, however, by 2014 standards, have taken advantage of a position of authority.

First, there was the charming PCV who visited the Sudtonggan project as a volunteer and got romantically entwined with the training person she sought. When she became training officer of the main office, other PCVs perceived us to be an item.

Then, a rather professional woman assigned to Bohol invited me up to her hotel in Cebu and shared one of her joints making me understand why Bill Clinton might have inhaled.

Another was a girl from California who said she was scarred badly by a previous sex encounter before enlisting, and might actually have joined the PCV to run away from the past. One week together and she found herself feeling better again. I was not remotely trying to be in any way therapeutic but she chalked up the meeting

as a healing event. Nor did I use the outcome to justify Lothario's behavior.

Finally, there was the Afro-American woman who complained that she did not have anyone to date, even in her own batch. I winked towards a black dude from Boston and she crooked her elbow above her hips, declaring emphatically: "He ain't no Nigger!" We tumbled into bed in the solace of each other's thoughts a day or so after Ninoy Aquino was shot in the tarmac.

ML went for her Master's degree in social work majoring in gerontology in Hawaii. Her parents were already of age when she was born; she got interested in the field of aging. She had not been too happy with my bed habits, and with the Kristina back to her care, giving an accurate report of her Manila time, she realized she also needed her husband. She drew the line and wanted me to quit playing around, or else. I ignored the wife's cry and saw the "or else".

Darth Vader found himself an emotional loop hole though I was not yet self-consciously schizophrenic, nor seeking for a way out of a marital commitment. But in defiance of what was expected that seems to have characterized my growing up, a contrariness that appeared at many levels of relationships, the shadows of Darth and Anakin indistinguishably merged.

Return I did, with a vengeance. Our country director cautioned me about a counterpart in Africa held accountable for allegedly preying on volunteers. When the new female country director replacement arrived, it was clear my days were numbered.

## Year 40 The Denouement '84-'85 *Da lao po in Honolulu*

In my prolific roustabout playing the numerous faces of Dr. Lao, I got the serious consideration of three persons who, at one time or another (not simultaneously), inhabited a deep corner in my heart. One was a health specialist in Davao who was in the Toril PCV batch I helped orient in '82. The Claremont girl whose image flashed before my eyes in '75 as I skidded off the road outside Spokane was second. Beth was third, an extrovert par excellence.

Elizabeth and I were professional colleagues who became bedmates. We did not plan to create a child. Margaret came as a love child.

The Claremont girl became bedmate since that trip to CA but she was stuck in her profession to be a colleague. In my conjugal wanderings, collegueship was the card that finessed bedside manners. After her Canada visit post-MBA and Chicago swing in '77, she returned to Pea Eye to become aide to the Ag Department's Minister and acted as his representative to an ASEAN working group. I laid my head when I was in town on PCV business in '83 at her QC dive.

Claremont girl was Binggie's batchmate in ITI '74; she hailed from Mandaue of aristocratic pedigree (a description, not a judgment). She trained workers for the Industrial park in Isabel, Leyte where a copper smelter was located. She showed up at my office in Lapu-Lapu City one February day '87 uncharacteristically amorous. Emmanuel Maximus showed up nine months later. She delivered the boy in California. For

more than 20 years, I thought I was the boy's father from the February incident! I learned otherwise.

Pat of Davao was in the batch of PCVs I joined in Toril when I just started the Guam Methodist assignment. We discovered pleasure in each other's company in Mindanao, exchanged notes by post while I was in Guam. When I joined the PCV staff, we resumed our liaison. After her two-year hitch was completed, she joined me at the Sudtonggan HDP in Mactan.

With Pat decisive enough to join me in a rural village situation, she led the three in contention, should I segue on Mary Lou's "or else". My *da lao po* (primal spouse in old China) Mary Lou was in Hawaii being a faithful wife and mother while working in a Methodist service center. Her unfortunate "or else" message was met *sans* resistance. I had a tract record of going AWOL. I distanced myself from the emotional safety of my established family, buckshot myself in the foot aiming at no one in particular.

Elizabeth came to Chicago that summer, met my mother who visited from Hawaii. Beth's family let me bunk in their basement in PA while she and I raised funds to cover her trip to Chicago. After Chicago, she invited me to visit her site in the provincial office and introduced me to Plan International. They were interested in getting field workers trained in participatory planning methods. The Australian director had us over her house for dinner. She had a young husband and a baby. The evening uncorked several bottles of wine; we ended the night in each other's arms. Like the macho that I was, I

left condoms as my Beth's concern. She thought I already had vasectomy. Meg was born nine months later.

Before the babies, ML and I decided bravely (reluctantly on her part) to return to the ICA sinking ship. Cynthia the "bitch" of an earlier time, sent an unsigned letter on behalf of the Order Life Commission stating that my family needed to stay out of the Order, deal with a disintegrating family life, and return as interns, if we so still desired. It was a good way to say: "don't bother coming back."

I was not angry but I was sad. We had become impersonal in our treatment of each other. The gauge on my behavior was not equally applied to other members of the body including two in the symbolic leaderships whose spousal ways were less than kosher. I reproduced the letter and distributed it to the Assembly. My brother in the audience was livid, not so much that the letter was sent, but because I would rather cry in public rather than put up a fight.

That happened at the time my Prior family who took Mary Lou and I to lunch before we went on sabbatical, was sacked. My response was seen as a divisive retaliation from a supporter.

The Order extended its meeting by another week to untie a Gordian knot. A member of the Troika fed me accurate data on what was really happening but did so outside ICA for ease of deniability. Political intrigue was thick in its partisanship. The denouement was death knell to the Order, as it became with my marriage as well. In four years, the Order dissipated.

## Year 41 Peoples Power '85-'86 *M16 in Sudtonggan*

The Order meeting in '84 shook the foundations of EI/ICA/O:E. By that time, the Ecumenical Institute had become just a legal shell since our demonstrated ecumenism was no longer simply holding hands with Monsignors in Manila and Patriarchs of the Eastern communion.

From 1982 to 1985, we assisted UNESCO to promote sharing approaches that worked in a UN consultative relationship with ICAI, the international arm of the EI/ICA/O:E net, in the International Exposition of Rural Development (IERD) utilizing the learning of on-the-hour every-hour HDPs stretched in every time zone. That relationship continues to this day.

Two of our members went on to distinguish themselves in the UN net, one in the UNESCO office in New York, and the other, at the WHO headquarters in Manila.

In '84, at the Summer Order Assembly, half of the staff were said to have left. The center did not hold. Third World staff used the connection to make their way to the United States. This had basis as some left shortly after putting in time and then charting a separate course.

I was accused of using third world members as a political force within the corporate body. We met frequently as a group in conversation that summer when I asked to be welcomed back to the fold. I was obviously suspect. That might have added to the response of the Order Life Commission I got.

My family (brother and sister) experienced the reverse in visa acquisition because they were qualified to immigrate but applied for visitors' visa. INS considered them as circumventing standard procedure.

With the disintegration of trust on each other in the Order, my brother who did a lot of fund-raising for the organization brought out his kept meticulous record of correspondence and put together an unfavorable picture of the record and history with fund sources in both Taiwan and the Philippines.

Edward attended EI's Sydney Academy in '72 before Marshall Law became harsh on student activists. My brother had his own axe to grind and he hummed the East was Red in his time, knew the Pilipino lyrics of the *Internationale*, but he was perceived by the red insurgents as a lackey of USIS on Roxas Blvd.

He returned from Sydney on the year Binggie and I discovered a mutual fondness at being "dirty, too"; joined the Manila House after I was sent to the Caracas ITI '75. My sister, a newly minted nurse traveled to Korea for the HDP in Jeju Do. *Sarang Hae Hanggul* moved to my sister who took a liking to *bulgoggi* (beef) and *kim chee* (salted cabbage) to provide vegetable nutrients in the winter.

I located a 35-mm film projector and started showing commercially produced films in the training center (HDTs) in Sudtonggan, to the youth who ironically left school in order to engage in the then flourishing Mactan stone industry, one of the successful HDP money

making activities. Six students lived in the facility as High School scholars.

In one of those evenings, the local big shot in the village came brandishing a Beretta M9 to disrupt the showing. He was inebriated but we calmed him down. On the village fiesta, after I left the festivities, a shot ended his bullying. It was rumored that I master minded the kill and harbored NPAs in the training school.

Not too long after, a squad of the Philippine Constabulary armed with their armalites (M16) assaulted the training center looking for NPA insurgents that they were informed I kept in the facility. They did not find any but that was one time I almost wet my pants looking at numerous gun barrels pointed on my chest.

My brother refused his ICA assignment in '85; my nurse sister and dentist husband in Kenya decided to return to Manila. All three joined me in Sudtonggan.

The village was asked to choose between the ICA international staff and the Vergaras. They went with the Vs. Sudtonggan sent ICA folks packing. Two weeks later, the EDZA Peoples Power erupted, driving Marcos to exile.

It was a time to move matters and people fast. Jailu and Edward needed to go to Hawaii. Jesse and his Kenya-born son Jonah were to await a Hawaii move in Bicol. Mary Lou and the girls did not find a welcoming Chicago and moved out. Pat moved in with me at SHDP becoming my facilitator partner. An old era faded fast, and the new one arrived stillborn.

**Year 42 SWCF '86-'87**  
***The watershed as a planning unit***

It was in late February that Ferdie and Meldy found Hawaii's Ariyoshi waiting in Honolulu's tarmac. The joke was that the ailing President was told they were flying to Paoay (pronounced *Pah Wai*, when in fact, he was being flown to Hawaii, pronounced *Hah Wai*). Filipinos went on a laughing binge up to the fringe in one big sigh of relief while trigger-happy Fabian Ver, erstwhile, Ferdinand's fanatical *Verdugo*, and his brood sought refuge in Brunei.

The day before the first day of the revolution that surprised the world, EDZA, I was with an Australian colleague, an ex-priest who married a Cebuana and was part of the consultant group that off-and-on engaged my services, in a group of Makati-based workers nursing cheap Beer in Samar del Norte. We had forsaken San Miguel in protest of Ed Cojuangco of Imelda entourage, and his stock portfolio, and started drinking the competing generic one sold simply as 'beer'.

In the group, someone asked how the yellow shirt revolt could possibly prevail to win over Marcos' shenanigans in the recently concluded election that saw Cory Aquino's popularity rise. The widow of the slain Senator Ninoy exceeded Marcos' doctored support. I responded in the same tone as "when hell freezes over", saying: "When Fidel Ramos and Juan Ponce Enrile join the protest!" Both did the following day and the rest is history.

Three weeks later, in Manila where the head of the Australian advisers to the Samar del Norte

provincial government gave a party, one of those in Calbayog screamed when I walked in, "There he is, the one who predicted Ramos and Enrile joining forces with the rebels!" I had forgotten the incident. I made a projection in the form of a big "if", as I was not aware that Enrile was with RAM but the guy would not let me off the hook, so I had my 15-minute of fame for foreknowledge and solid voice of prophecy!

I was not close to being as prophetic with my actuations as I wanted to be. To begin with, after Elizabeth found herself with child, she had to decide what to do since her condition was going to be obvious and PCV had rules about that. I dreaded the prospects of another Binggie not only because the procedure is illegal in the Philippines but also because morally, whatever remaining virtues I have in that department, I was not too firm on my grounding.

She was instrumental in getting the course for Plan International contracted but my design for the pedagogy had her left out, and she was not pleased. Compounding insult, Pat had become my traveling companion and partner, and the health specialist was an integral part of the Plan Bicol Colloquy.

The Latin word *colloquium* means "speaking together", or a discussion and a conversation of colleagues, so if Plan Bicol was to move in the participatory direction between planners and clients, administrators and workers, I knew that the best way to come about the practice was for the participants to discover the process, build the way as they traveled along, and NOT be told about it.

The intent was well meant. The execution was something else. I had hoped that the former colleagues at the Manila ICA and I would mend dysfunctional ties by their facilitating a LENS (Leadership Effectiveness and New Strategies) course. They did, but I reneged on their fee when it went elsewhere to pay for Beth and old Lapu-Lapu obligations. The relationship with ICA turned worst on my account. They could have taken me to court if they wanted to, but given my generosity on having them take half of whatever was at the SHDP training center when the village chose my family against the staff, they might have understood that I was really caught between a rock and a hard place!

The year was not a very convivial one for me, *ipso facto*, for others on the receiving end. Beth went home. Claremont girl skipped town. Pat was not too happy with her hanging out in my neighborhood. She went home to visit family but returned. A strong backbone was behind her decision to be my professional partner.

Mary Lou returned to Chicago to a sinking ship that told her she was being received back as an intern rather than as a returning Order member. This did not mean anything financially. But it was a symbolic slap in the face. She did not bother unpacking. She moved out of Lawrence corner Sheridan in Uptown, officially our home for a decade.

I joined my ex-PCV colleague in the Soil and Water Conservation Foundation (SWCF), to promote the conservation of the contours of the watershed and the communities in them as the locus of planning and development.

## Year 43 On the Washington Mall '87-'88 *Return to Arlington*

Pat earlier took the Foreign Service exam and did well. She applied for a position at USAID, was entertained, would be hired if she finished training at the main office in DC. She went to Rosslyn VA. I stayed behind at the HDTS in Sudtonggan but opened an office in Lapu-Lapu City. It was time to vacate the HDP facility so the local community can make it its own. A furniture shop in Cebu contracted a villager to produce products for him, and the absence of a labor union made the arrangement attractive to him. Dealing with just the issue of survival, I was immune to the influence of ideology and practice. But labor exploitation was not me.

After '86, Lito Abelarde, a local Mactan prawn grower and investor in commercial abalone sea farming, a former student leader, organized a few popular deliberative meetings to ferret out local sentiments and ground views held after the euphoria of the EDZA peoples power revolt. I lent organizing skill and presence in the effort.

The housewife in Malacañang enjoyed her *mah jong* sessions with the girls allegedly more than the Machiavellian moves of politics. Given the US Pentagon's hold on military matters, it did not come as a surprise when the frequency of military putsch against Cory accelerated, and Defense Minister Enrile was sacked when he supported RAM members (Reform the Armed Forces Movement) to "Save the Queen".

I was not really interested in the in-fighting within the archipelago thought one might say

that it was a microcosm of the global situation where corporate power married to the military command determined economic policies and political power through the force of cultural globalization. Media dubbed crony capitalism, became the face of corruption in many parts of the world, particularly power centers, autocratic and democratic.

I suffered the pangs of guilt for participating in that globalizing movement when it became clear to me that my very own organization, by its effort to survive, also sold its soul to the company store. Two Philippine HDPs were near a geothermal plant and an oil exploration site, both supported by self-serving companies.

This was just like Phillip Morris touting the art and discipline of efficient marketing while its business remains the hawking of cancer causing cigarettes.

The Pentagon had only one product: submission to policy, program and project meant to coerce people to behave as prescribed in the global US Empire. The prescribed behavior is determined by the bottom line of stock market profit, so we have the example of some nations paying a fee to produce carbon in the air to a fund on behalf nations who will defer from producing their allotted quotas! For Camelot's glamor and the lucidity of a warrior like Ike, the popularity of a Reagan, never mind the duplicity of a Nixon though the bumbling of a Ford was OK, D.C. constituted the modern version of sophisticated corruption and cronyism in the world. It is not because it is naughty. It is because it bought into the objectification of money, rendering the

symbol of accumulated selfhood an object of idolatry and a gauge of human worth.

In my social process, commerce is the activity to make profit out of exchanging needed goods and services in order for the activity to continue but we made the exchange itself and its icon to symbolize value, in this case, Caesar's coin, the object of desire and effort, regardless of what is being traded. If turning into a robot was idiotic, adoring Caesar's altar was idolatrous and evil!

Pat entered this world, and my Darth Vader was drawn intensely to explore Uncle Sam's power. Meanwhile, Beth and I reconnected as Meg, a robust child, was growing up. Beth worked in the Commerce Department. Pat and I baby sat for Meg when Beth worked on a weekend.

Mary Lou and I stayed cordial in our act of separation. We went to her lawyer in Chicago who drafted the divorce papers, accommodated my foregoing any legal advice. After we signed the papers, Mary Lou and I retired to her place. Justified pent-up anger exploded. I found my wretched sobs on the bathroom floor. I was defenseless and guilty as charged!

Mary Lou was and is my *da lao po*, my primal spouse. I sniffled myself out of the bathroom to a bench where I stretched for the night in the confined one-room apartment she shared with the girls. She signaled me to join under her sheet, and pronounced absolution as sweetly and quietly as she could muster on this old rogue who violated all civilized rules since we said "I do." We held on to each other tightly through the night. I snored loudly as well.

## Year 44 The Trips '88-'89 Bogor, Singapore, Kuala Lumpur

"I do not wish to continue work with USAID. I would rather work with you", Pat wrote after a spat on the direction our marriage was moving. We were trainers in and facilitators of decision-making process of a highly participatory style, and I continued doing that while Pat engaged in the endless conversation to refine government policies and program deliveries.

We made our legal "I do" in Arlington VA '88 before a judge as the tyranny of the economic prevailed. I was not good at providing steady income against Uncle Sam's generous support of its workers. We also had a chance to travel, half at taxpayers cost. From Manila, we did.

A pan-Malay confederation Post-WWII was a regional visions, and when the colonial powers divested themselves of colonies in Southeast Asia, Malaya, the Philippines and Indonesia, flirted with *Maphilindo*, a union of blood kin separated only because the UK, Spain and the Netherlands kept conflicting agendas. The Maphilindo spirit was short-lived as President Sukarno declared *konfrontasi* while the UK created a union out of its dissipated geography to form Malaysia, but letting the oil in Brunei remain with royals in the same way as Kuwait stayed separate from Iraq earlier.

Pat had a seminar in Jakarta, and since the city was just as messy as Manila, we decided to see the outlying area. We went to Bogor less than half a distance to Bandung. I was raised in the Philippines where volcanoes were dime a dozen

but Pat from Ohio had not been to one so to the rim of volcano Salak was our destination.

After Bogor, we flew to Singapore, and Kuala Lumpur. Malaysia voted out Singapore in '64 but Lee Kuan Yew whose Hakka family hailed from Hainan in China, along with colleagues from Fujian and Guangdong, transformed a set of islands into a State, a formidable financial center, transit and transfer portage of goods that *Majulah Singapura* famously became.

The price was high. During the *konfrontasi*, Singapore was attacked. Two perpetrators were caught, tried, and condemned, executed in '68. In '73, Lee Kwan Yew established relations when he scattered flowers on their tombs.

I was in Malaysia in '83, to Kampong Sungai Lui outside of Kuala Lumpur in the State of Selangor. I remember the *rambutan* fruit laden trees in the village and the winding *jalan* of the road into the community.

In '88, ICA ex-colleagues in KL joined us to feast on the *satay* (or *sate*, the skewered grilled meat from India's *ke bab*, sold in street-side tent-restaurant), in celebration of having come out of the challenges we faced in our respective village assignments. We laughed our hearts out under the Malaysian stars as we bathed in the idyllic time. The Jordan-Vergara household was taking form.

Pat and I were facilitators and trainers in the Network Foundation I listed among the NGOs in Cebu before she joined USAID. We worked on a Central Visayas NEDA project funded by

the World Bank, with Australian consultants in place even before the EDZA revolt took over the Marcos' initiated projects in the provinces of Region 7. I mention this to ground Pat's note about wanting to continue doing the fieldwork we used to do together.

After Marcos, the winds of change blew wildly in our faces, to borrow a writer's image, and I battled forces to restore to the villages Tagore's "the power to meet their own requirements" rather than continue with the top-down method of development practiced around.

I saw a movement of local people, where folks, each-one teach-two, adopted new ways of doing things until a critical mass was reached. This included the terracing of barren slopes rather than exposing a hill's topsoil to wind and rain.

I saw a movement of new grads willing to put two years as resident workforce in watershed management projects in Cebu and Negros. We trained and engaged three clusters of them.

The Petronas twin towers in Malaysia were just a gleam in an oilmen's dream when I visited KL. My sweat was on conservation of soil and water in the watershed. The Petronas towers were the tallest twin towers in world.

A staff cluster in an SWCF project site took me to court for breach of contract as the President of the sponsoring agency. In their participatory assessment of operations, they felt cheated by our rates, felt abused by the consultants we sent to them, and their sense of integrity assaulted when I ignored their suit. I lost the case.



## Year 45 Tian An Man '89

### *A man confronts tank*

One of the iconic photos of '89 was a solitary man standing in front of tanks blocking the lead tank as it tried to avoid him in the middle of Tiananmen square.

There are several ways of looking at the filmed incident shown widely around the world on TV. Western media delighted in what it dubbed as common man's defiance of central authority practiced by the Peoples Liberation Army and it's ruling partner, China's Communist Party. Post-Mao had China in turmoil as interests vied for privileged positions in government.

The Tiananmen incident, the real and the press-reported one, both showed political liberalism's influence on students, forcing friends and foes' hands out when the line was drawn on what was proper and what was not. Into this climate, Pat and I, with mostly foreign-service personnel in the Philippines, trooped to China and trod its lanes and parks in the fall of '89.

It was a tour while part of China was trying to put out a friendly and welcoming face to bring acceptance to its chosen style without apology, while others were still smarting from reality's slap on the wrist on those who insisted to be doctrinaire. We were a group that had a punch on global opinion and the host country showed its nice side to the curious audience.

We were in Beijing at a newly built hotel that did not cut corners to provide us the care and comfort we required. At the time, China still

had two-currency system, the Yuan for external use and the renminbi for local exchange. It was recommended that we patronized the exclusive Friendship Stores for foreigners and those with special permits. Crony communism was widely practiced in a system that saw the members of the single ruling party take advantage of their privileged position.

Imperial China of the Forbidden City, of Mao's mausoleum in Tiananmen Square, the Summer capital, the Mandate of Heaven Temple and the Great Wall got to our itinerary. *Wangfujing Da Jie* was not a pedestrian shopping Mall yet, but China opening up to the world also required the opposite response of the world opening its mind to the heretofore veiled and seemingly esoteric slats of the bamboo curtain.

I had saved my coins at an early age to make a trip to China, was fascinated by the rickshaw poverty of Kowloon in my stopover in '65, and was caught in the romantic and sentimental icon of Susie Wong in Wan Chai during the Vietnam era. Add the tsunami on my prim though not so proper clergy innards occasioned by a Binggie heart-wrenching experience, and I was a sucker for anything Chinese. There was a sense that this trip with Pat was a destined culmination of a journey fated to happen.

Xi'an, formerly Chang'an of old, showed me the majesty of the Qin dynasty and the Huangdi's mercurial (pun intended) struggle with finitude through his terracotta army in a period when the life expectancy was but three decades. Other than the introduction into China's long history, I was also exposed to China's Muslims who were

traders in the night market, welcoming our Yuan and returning our change in renminbi. Chinese cuisine had always been dumplings and noodles in the West. Xi'an taught me that dumplings were enjoyed best by the quality of the stuffing and the sauce it is dipped on. Dumplings were not created equal, nor were there rules on taste.

The old buildings at the Bund in Shanghai were in disrepair. Famed Nanjing Road of shops was not yet home to the world's boutiques though the promenade by the Huang Po was a lover's delight. Across the river were golden rice fields interspersed with new buildings and a towering antenna in Pu Dong, site of the International Airport then under construction, from where the experimental Maglev train would run.

If Shanghai glimmered with the future, it also maintained its history in the foreign quarters, and the preserved upper room where Zhou Enlai and others organized the Communist Party and its cadre. The old sign of "dogs and Chinese not allowed", reportedly seen in parks in the 20s, were sold to tourists on the sly.

Suzhou relished its gardens and canals, and Hangzhou, with its West Lake pagoda, and the reclining Buddha in its outlying area, mirrored the desired tranquility in the Zhongwen soul.

It was almost anti-climatic to head back to HK, though the progress of the Kowloon Peoples' Park was impressive. It was the treasures in Taipei that made me understand the resentment of mainlanders to the Kuomintang that carted China's art and archaeological treasures to a museum abut a mountain in Taipei.

**FORe@GIVE.wd**  
**James Rayphand**

Ache was what I sensed when my body was stressed and the strain on stressed bones and muscles persisted. It was life letting the body know of the extent of one's endurance, be conformed to the limits of exercise to expand one's fortitude, and be confirmed on life's process of forgiven-ness.

Forgiveness was not to cover a happening with an excuse. It was to surrender it to the future, to the great unknown, to the unknown Unknown.

Or, to put it more prosaically, to live to *fore give* was to move forward, to get kicked in the butt so that one was reminded to move on.

Gandhi was quoted once as saying, "The weak can never forgive. Forgiveness is the attribute of the strong." This was not true because Gandhi said it. I found it true because my experience confirmed it.

Jaime and I go back to when he first came to our NMPASI door while working with a family who fitted the qualification of who we served. Later, we found common endeavors with the staff and faculty of SVES.

He opined once that the way one dealt with physical and emotional aches was simply to locate them in one part of the body so the rest of it can function without a hitch. I guess that was his way of saying, deal with your aches, never ever let its woes manage you. Saying "I am fine" was not fine, though it was a common platitude uttered by peers and I, even when I

was already dripping in the drench of dreadful anxiety.

Asked to do the FORe@Give section of this bio-narrative, on forgiveness, was to traverse familiar grounds (wd. of Jaime stood for "the world"). Who had not felt badly treated by the violation of one's trust? I have. Worst, who had not harbored guilt over the violation of one's own standards and values by one's shaky attitude? I have.

I would have preferred to be skipped over this assignment but I knew Jaime would not leave my office if I declined. Besides, access to the office backdoor was not always easy even when it was unlocked. So I moved forward, the very essence of forgiveness. To make this point, I took a pit stop on the host.

Jaime was not lewd in the exhibitionist sense when we served the same public together but he did not hesitate to use the Thesaurus' on words to describe his licentious concupiscence. He frolicked with body, mind, and soul, his version of being playful. Normal colleagues considered it lascivious and lecherous, a hidden quality of his avowed depravity. He also conceded that he was dirty, too.

I noted the nature of his narrative. In places, he easily fitted into the bawdy crowd, a bit more than just on the risqué and racy side, wickedly suggestive and intentionally naughty. Getting his "adulthood" in San Francisco abetted his taking what others saw as obscene and vulgar as just raunchy but normal. There was in the edge of his normalcy something displeasing.

He wandered around the world as a fanciful world traveler but to some, he was more like a homeless vagrant. A nomad, itinerant preacher by profession, he had not been a drifter nor a tramp save in the swashbuckling center of his imagination. His root was planetary by choice, and he had been at home with street people, yet at the same, he was at home hobnobbing with the perfumed locks in high places. He was no stranger to both either sides of the tracks.

Had he written what he wrote in these pages before his interview with PSS for employ, not only might some of us refuse to hire him but there would have been a few in my circle who would have recommended that he be put behind bars as a danger to the morals and wellbeing of the impressionable youth of the land.

Unconditional acceptance of the likes of this errant debonair constituted forgiveness of a high caliber! To forgive was not a stroll by the promenade on the side of the lagoon. It was, at best, paradoxical and ambiguous.

I am familiar with those who were condemned with such labels as the handicapped and the disabled, marginalized in the social nets we put in place for normal folks. Differently abled and physically challenged, they "nevertheless" stood up to belonging to a dysfunctional society. The meaning of forgiveness was the "nevertheless" that oozed from them.

My name is James, another one in the *j'aime la vie* crowd, and as life moved slowly on the road to Papago, to forgive was to proclaim loud and clear that to love life left no other alternative.

#### Part IV Commitment to creation: *vocation* in creating the new

The saying went like this: "If young and you are not a communist, you have no sense; if an adult and you are not a socialist, you are without a heart, but if you've grown older and you are not a wise capitalist, you didn't develop a mind." Not to make a big point on the political role of the communist, socialist, and capitalist, I did see the dynamic and wisdom of the saying.

Young, I sensed the things that did not sit well and encouraged sense responses to protest with displeasure. Protests, however, depended on someone else to rectify a wrong. Independent adulthood discovered interdependence as a socially responsible stance. I developed not just empathy towards others but found my identity with the planetary task of caring for the earth and all that was in it. As an established adult, I realized that the function of commerce was not ownership but to ensure production of needed goods and continuation of necessary services, so trade had to be profitable to ensure delivery.

Pedagogy evolved as my stock in trade. Rooted on the phonetic nature of English, spoken prior to being written, I learned to utilize words and metaphors to affect behavior rather than be too attached to cognitive syntax and structure.

From the shyness of youth, I found my voice, learned the power of broadcast, the podium and the pulpit professions, and became a rouser for action in many endeavors. The art and science of the mind came as a capping goal of learning, all in service to a planet, an innocent blue orb in

space, its physiology and the society that makes home in it.

Grounding was key to pedagogical method and understanding, not focused on impressions from one's sense experience but to make sense out of outbursts of emotions, the poly-graphic basis of all cognitive formulations. Thoughts and ideas as a verbal exchange of current metaphors had to be grounded on sense, common sense.

My method evolved into four parts:

*Describe it* - sense

*Express it* - emotions

*Articulate it* - ideas

*Formulate it* - plans

Aware of sorting out these four levels enhanced the way I communicated, conducted meetings, led sessions, charted reading materials, prepared a talk, facilitated group gab fests, and even just in holding one-on-one conversations. I looked down on the practice, particularly in school that expected everyone to be erudite, in the phrase, "I communicated with my parents yesterday," to, "I talked to my father on the phone Monday night."

There's nothing new about this insight. One only had to walk into a western museum and note the categorization of displays. There was *classical* art that focused primarily on accurate dimensions of an image held in clear visual perspective. Then there was *impressionistic* art that focused on the effect of a particular image on the viewer, in this case, the artist. Moving on, there was *abstract* art that gathered and summed the cognitive overview of the artist on ze subject, the cognition being the main intent.

Finally, there was *social* art that compeled the viewer to act in accord or in response.

The above understanding guided pedagogy. As the art world often commented, impressionistic, abstract, and social arts were to naught without a basis and understanding on the classical. Life was lived on the sense, dude

The creation of the new was at former times the province of external force(s) intruding into the stable substance of the given. The world of the supernatural mandate of heaven proliferated and was still evident in this century with the Marvel comic book characters of my youth, Clark Kent and the rest of the super family. Christo Rei of Constantine made center stage commanding a high position for theology before Jesus Christ Superstar descended the stage and the cinema, and became one of our own.

Vocation was nothing but expenditure, creating the new became a more active category than the passive *que sera sera* of yesteryears. No longer did I wait for things to happen; I was geared to make things happen. The pillars and portals of selfhood were less the automatic, deterministic unfolding of genetics. Nor was it simply the conditioning by the societal context and milieu. It was a matter of individual choice, to take the horn of one's evolution and create a person in one's image. That was the bane and benefit of personhood in my time.

To create and not to create was to be or not to be. The road to perdition was strewn with lives wasted on the feeble and the mild. The intense desire to create married our vocation.

## Year 46 Bioregionalism '90-'91 *The Realistic Living Institute*

The Cebu Soil and Water Foundation (SWCF) became my vehicle of meaningful engagement. I had to be at arms' distance from USAID, Pat being one of their program officers.

In Texas, the Marshalls organized the Realistic Living Institute. I served in the International Advisory Board. RLI was active in bioregional activities in the U.S. Southwest.

Bill Granert, ex-PCV married a Bohol girl, was SWCF's driving force. We become symbiotic working buddies. We joined a group of USAID consultants who operated out of a bioregional context, the islands watersheds, and put in place participatory measures to get all stakeholders involved.

However, most of the projects I was involved in were still of the top-down variety where experts came, usually in the form of consultants from the funding agency who nursed the pay more than the product, paraded their expertise rather than train as facilitators to enable villagers to design and implement plans based on their own requirements.

Doing up front facilitation of group meetings carried with it certain assumptions. My running around with natural resource experts of upland agriculture, nearshore fisheries, inland villages and community human resource workers, had my audience assume that I must have gotten a graduate degree, a PhD at UPLB. The first time I corrected the "Dr." Vergara title, my partners

assured them that I was just being modest, and operating in a pecking structure where status counted, unless it blatantly got on the way, I let the unearned honorific title pass.

The big heartbreak took place when I facilitated a confab for NEDA IV held in Tuguegarao. The heartbreak was not the area conference itself but to what happened to the Cagayan Valley since I left. The place had been manicured like a lawn.

I paid no attention to what we were doing when I was growing up, but the green revolution rice touted as a miracle added fertilizer, insecticide, and pesticide into the field to gain better yield, but killed the *bisokol* (brown edible snails) and the *ikan gurami* (fresh water carp) of my youth. The fields looked OK but the *ludong* (long fresh river fish that annually went upriver to spawn and die) originating full grown from the mouth of the river, was overfished into near extinction.

Forest cover of the Sierra Madre mountains and the Cordilleras was wild, pristine and numerous in my childhood, then, over logged and logged out, all sent to mills in Taiwan and Japan.

A sliver of hope did enter my mind as I noticed when I dashed to Aparri after the conference that the *kufi* Muslim skull cap had been added sight to the market scene, and a *muezzin* called the *adhan* and *iqama* from a Mosque suitably tucked away near a residential corner.

In the home front, I asked one of Sudtonggan's scholars to be bookkeeper/auditor for Abenter, Inc., the prawn grower in Mactan, at its Manila office and enroll in what used to be my college,

Philippine Christian U of Manila. He stayed with us in one of Makati's "villages" and not only did he complete a Master's degree for his CPA, he became the first lawyer of his village.

Pat listened to the ticking of her body clock and started sticking the thermometer to her mouth to indicate that she was checking her fertility. She was past her 35<sup>th</sup> birthday and she was getting antsy. With all the travelling I did to facilitate meetings, with a playful bunch of male friends who delighted in arranging liaisons with ladies of the night to cuddle us to sleep, I came home with a drip and went into medication.

Pat discovered that a zygote might have reached an advanced stage. She was particularly friendly and amorous. I looked for the rubber and she wanted to know why. When I finally had the gumption to tell the truth, she was appreciative that, at least, I wanted to protect her, but was taken back that I had evidently returned to my *bonhomie* habit with the girls on the road.

I was defenseless. In fact, I had been faithful at the emotive level but the pressure of "boys will be boys" was not something I honestly resisted. I could not claim that I did not have a choice. I chose with no shortage of glee to go and to play along with the rest of the guys. It was perhaps out of that dismay that Pat's anxiety was visibly heightened. Within two months, the conceived baby was lost.

Members of the Realistic Living Institute were predominantly strait-laced folks, save one who asked what happened to the vaunted free sex in the Order. Happily, the twain never one'd.

## Year 47 Down Under '91-'92 *Kiwi*

It was an ADB project where consultants from Washington D.C. owned by a French-speaking Haitian, accorded affirmative action preferential treatment as a minority business, had me as a last minute filler for a training facilitator who backed out in the 11th hour.

The consultancy leader and partner was a young Nippon, a violin virtuoso grad of Juilliard by the Lincoln Center Plaza, who was forbidden by parents to speak Nihongo as a result of their incarceration during WWII, but spoke perfect California talk. She assembled representatives from various small credit unions and coops to train on effective planning and efficient office operational skills. They wanted to avail of an Asian Development Bank-backed loan through the Philippine government, and training was a precondition to qualify.

The training session was conducted in Tacloban City (made famous by *Haiyuan* in 2013) in the only decent hotel that catered to western tourists in Imelda Marcos' hometown. We sang songs and conducted highly participatory proceedings, met in a conference room where trainees were treated like individuals rather than as digits in a students' roll call in a classroom.

The collegium arranged participants to a face-to-face experience, with a center decor that invited curiosity with walls adorned by intended messages rather than foyer decor. I had gotten used to running quickie training sessions where participants wondered what transpired, returned

to their sites excited. They were not quite sure why nor how they got that way!

The training, in the absence of set of prepared manuals, followed the regular parameters of consciousness I used in the art and discipline of managing *time*, organizing *space*, defining *roles*, and symbolizing one's *story*. Many later confessed to expecting to hear of the latest in accounting procedures. They encountered instead a *lao shi shen jing ping*, a crazy old teacher, who assaulted their sense of identity, the nature of their vocation, and the choice of lifestyle that mirrored their life's choices.

In '91, Pat and I went Down Under where they had maps printed with North on the lower end - to Sydney when it did not yet hide behind the haze from the blaze of its foothills.

We stayed in the colorful Kings Cross district where the red light of wine, women and song were legally on nightly display. We managed to walk around the Opera House that looked into the Harbor bridge, ferried to the Olympic gardens where, holy of holies, we ran into an EI colleague, a retired Colonel from Delhi's Army now living with his son in Perth.

Canberra was a day trip to local bureaucrats, trying to be neutral about the affairs of state that elicited all kinds of raw outback emotions as the nation of rugged individualists that began as a European penal colony found self-confidence in their voice at the expense of aborigines. Rowdy in their defiance of European morals, even its pretentious royalty, it was a people (former EI colleagues, Jim and Isobel Bishop, asked as to

dinner at their house) to my liking for its natural honesty.

We flew into Kiwi's North and South Islands where the sheep outnumbered humans 10 to 1, when their wool still commanded a fair price, overtaken by the cows that produced its famed dairy and steaks. We drove around the North Island where *Aotearoa* (Maori for "land of the long white cloud") was still evident in tourist flyers and around the rugby field, but also a symbol of the subjugation of a proud people by folks who had access to the musket.

We drove around Coromandal and the Bay of Plenty, sweated Rotoroa's hot springs, then to Wellington where one of Kiwi's inexpensive red wines might have assisted the zygote that came out 9 months later, lovingly nicknamed "Kiwi", for both the fruit and the emu's flightless bird cousin.

We ferried to Picton across Cook Strait to the island nicknamed "mainland", where we drove on the left side of the road. Before our foray in Kiwi land, the Tacloban training defined the challenge of the year, as I played the mate game once more. It was a disaster.

Had Pat chosen to part with me by then, I would have chucked my dishonorable behavior to Saipan's boonies, where I was asked to visit and join a Guam acquaintance to exploit cheap and eager labor. I declined but returned then years later. Pat was with a child, and she was not yet ready to drive my kind away from her embrace. So to the Washington Mall, I went once more to play five years of Mr. Mom.

## Year 48 Ballston '92-'93

### *Maria Andrea*

We lived on a townhouse near the subway stop by Ballston in the Virginia side of DC. It used to be part of the Capital city until the State claimed its real estate back. D.C. was abolitionist in the slavery issue. Alexandria was center of slave trade.

Maria Andrea, *aka*, Kiwi, was born on August of '92, at one of the hospitals in DC's northwest quadrant. Andrea greeted the howl of the wind week after she wailed her first. Andrew battered the Bahamas before it swung to Louisiana and up to Appalachia. OK, we might not have had a drop of the rain in DC, but Andrew was notable in that the name was that of a male rather than the traditional female one.

I kept an eye on Africa. After getting malaria in Lagos, I kept Africa at bay. The whole of Africa in 1992 was in turmoil. The Soviets backed the military coups that changed the landscape, only to turn just as bad as the old crony capitalism of the previous corrupt regimes.

Though I considered myself informed, I did not know much about Africa except Kenya, Zambia and Nigeria where the EI/ICA operated HDPs. It was rumored that Pat's work might head in the direction of southern Africa.

Somalia was at the top of Washington's agenda. A draught resulted in widespread famine. The political situation was tenuous. Haile Selassie, a long time friend of the west especially after he resisted Italy's annexation before Mussolini

joined Hitler in the Axis pact, was previously deposed. Elder President Bush responded to an obvious need, while Dick Cheney itched to arm troops to bolster influence and presence in the region. Oil development had become an option.

Somalia could not get its act together as even Ethiopia held a considerable number of Somali citizens and real estate within its borders.

That's how I got Selassie into the picture. When he was deposed, the whole region from the lower Nubia (Sudan) to Djibouti all the way to the Kenya-Somalia border, the tribal loyalties of Africa reemerged into absolute chaos.

I ran into his influence in Jamaica's Rastafarians who held him in high regard. To some, he was the Messiah on his second coming. Claiming direct lineage from the Davidic throne through King Solomon and Queen Makeda of Aksum, better known in the Abrahamic tradition as the Queen of Sheba, he had great credentials.

Somalia was where the US military employed the first of its humanitarian efforts, Operation Restore Hope, initiated by Bush on his way out of his office, expanded by Bill Clinton with the new rationale of nation building. Soviet trained Mohamed Aideed took exception to US military presence in his territory.

After a botched attempt to capture the renegade General a year later, when Marine corpses were dragged through Mogadishu in front of world TV, 75 Clinton cut loses and brought the forces home. It was not a proud time around DC as the USAID folks quietly applauded the military

failure. We thought of heading to Africa and raise a child in the land of savannahs and deep gorges, rain forests and deserts.

I was homebound in Ballston, babysitter to an infant while Mom took the subway to Rosslyn where her USAID office was located. I drove Andrea in to pick up Pat to suckle a babe at the Iwo Jima memorial, at a distance from gawking tourists who walked by Arlington cemetery to the Netherlands' carillon towering the grunts on the bronze replica of Mount Suribachi of Iwo Jima in Okinawa.

Kristina and Teresa did not have a dotting Papa when they were growing up, though they were hardly without any adult supervision. That may have created an emotional distance that was not bridged even in the course of time. Andrea this time had sole call on Papa's attention and I was not holding back anything to give it fully to her.

The year offered a time to check one's rudder, a stocking and inventory time. No longer victim of rued moral guilt, I had, nevertheless, realized that I had dashed many expectations along the way. Given the avowed intent of my vocation, I was expected to stay on the high road of social behavior. I was too raw and earthy for that.

I knew my hurts were not externally inflicted. They were chosen, or, put similarly but another way, I chose to be hurt. An intuitive defense on shattered self-image often results in a knee jerk response to wall one's self. Like avoiding the ladle of mother and the belt of father, I learned not to provoke their ire. I paid attention to not hurt the one's I loved.

## Year 49 Falls Church '93-'94 *Jefferson Park*

Patricia was a practical woman, protective of her rights and conscious of official privileges. I knew of her before I met her as staff members prepared for Pre-Service Training of her PCV batch. We identified prospective team leaders on the basis of their profiles. She was one that I picked out.

When her batch arrived, her luggage was badly damaged and she would not sit still, nor allow staff to handle her case, until the airline repaired or replaced it before we brought them to Davao. One of the training staff members immediately dubbed her a crybaby.

With Andrea as new addition to the family and Pat the breadwinner, I became Mr. Mom. While a consultant in Manila, there were consultancies (beltway bandits who valued my USAID connection, but Pat explicitly prohibited the marketing of the connection to anyone.

Her practicality extended to the promise of real estate. We bought a house. Areas of prudent investments were in fossil fuel and properties. One could not lose on either as long as one did not go into the speculative side of the business. Rentals were meant to be short term; mortgage was for the long haul. Real estate value do not go down as the commodity was recyclable but not duplicable.

We bought a house, and I became a Mr. House Mom. I had no complaints. I willingly signed the mortgage paper. I was complicit to the

crime, out on the long haul. Pat wanted a family with children (two) and having been reckless on that score with others, I was not one to object.

As Mr. House Mom, I regularly walked Andrea by the Jefferson golf course to pick up balls that strayed into our neighborhood trees. We would pick a lot in an hour. We ended at a 7-11 store for an obligatory dairy product.

Meanwhile, #2 daughter Teresa headed for New Zealand on her fourth year in High School '93, residing in Takaka near Nelson of the mainland. She lived with a back-to-nature family living in a homestead.

Teresa suffered most in our divorce. Young, she blamed herself for the dissolution of the parent's marriage. We were oblivious of her burden. I was too preoccupied with my own struggles at the simultaneous denouement of a two-decade marriage, a Methodist birthright that unraveled, and the EI/ICA/O:E that was our family turned severely dysfunctional.

I reminisced on the Manila sojourn. Kristina left IS with a graduation diploma and a circle of rebel friends from families of the diplomatic corps. She did have a harrowing experience when one of her "rebel" friends from Finland was shot with three others while sitting in their car early morning in one of the gated villages. The Finn survived.

Seafront where Kristina cared for her Finn was also where dependents of US personnel retired during the putsch years of Cory's Presidency. Ironically, I was the dependent, so when the

village homes evacuated, I was the one ordered to drive into the Seafront compound while my Pat stayed behind. I complied once, then gave someone the bird!

All these come rushing back as I did not have much to do other than play with a toddler learning how to locate golf balls in the bush; reminisce in the process. I could have taken the pen, oops, I meant pounded on the keyboard but the bitter taste of the expanding notebook I did for USAID remained. Pat, a damn good editor, edited my magnum opus but as they say in the editing room of films, my story was blood all over the floor.

In writing the notebook, I discovered that I did not write the way manuals of operations and instructions were done. I was more a child of Cervantes, a buddy of Rod McKuen, an admirer of Gabriel Garcia Marquez, and a disciple of the irrepressible Kazantzakis. The prose off my thumbs flew tenderly with a *papillon*, raged with a tropical storm, but it would not march in the disciplined cadence of the English Queen's providence.

What become clear in the meditation and contemplation that transpired being Mr. Mom was that the creation of anything new began with the recreation of the creator himself.

While I did not apologize for who I was, I knew I could take more effort to make decision with more than just a kneejerk reflex for a guide. It was not condemning the past but learning from it that needed to prevail. Andrea found herself a growing up partner.

## Year 50 MicroCenter '94-'95 *Apple of my eye*

Not too far from where we lived, in fact, a drive west on Lee Highway to Fairfax, Route 29, was a computer store that needed associates for the customer service section. I interviewed and was taken in.

This was not a hole in the wall. It was bigger than any Computerland outlets. Most of the items it carried were of low quality, sort of like the WalMart of the digital world. IBM and Apple were the pillars, with the shop hawking its own PC.

We had a diagnostic triage with a competent technician who, however, snorted the white stuff and was either extremely high and full of energy, or, noticeably feeling low and irritable. But from 6 to 11 pm, I was engaged in a field I hardly had any technical competence. I knew how to deal with people and Customer service had use of the likes of me.

It was also the time I got hooked on Apple. Oh, I already knew of Apple before. In fact, of the three times I was offered to buy stocks in my lifetime, the first was Apple in CA, TI in Dallas and AOL in VA. I probably would have no time writing this memoir had I bought any of the three at the time they were offered, but I also rarely had any disposable income, so that is mote and academic.

But at Fairfax in '94, I learned the basic lingo of computers and its accessories. I began hacking on the Mac. I had Apple's first portable that

cost a bundle but it was like my portable Smith Corona in size, and I was a bit nostalgic when using it. I gave up the PC and DOS too soon. I was spoiled by the ease of use of Apple to be bothered with PC's peripherals and accessories.

An Afro-American girl that was the mainstay in our office, with whom I exchanged words rarely unless it was official in nature, stopped me one day as I was clocking in, and asked: "Jaime, why are you here?" I responded simply, "Oh, I am clocking in."

"No," she added. "I mean, you look, act and talk like you should be leading a Third World country, and I wondered what you were doing in a computer store?" The question was jarring. It raised in my mind what it was that made me look like I should be somewhere else.

One of Pat's friends invited us to a party one afternoon in Maryland at the onset of summer and we drove over with Andrea sitting out the party quietly in her stroller while we imbibed in the libation and I made goo-goo eyes at her all evening. Nine months later in April '95, Jaime Daniel was born.

One would think we had the makings of a good family. In fact, we did. A girl and a boy, one for each to spoil, were ours. But we got signals from friends to check a pediatrician. Andrea's delayed speech pattern was noticeable.

Every chance we got, we drove to Columbus OH to commune with the folks. The youngest and only boy in the family was married. He was not shy about lining up as many kids as he

and his wife could line up. Pat's medical doctor eldest sister lived in Cleveland with journalist husband of the *Plain Dealer*. We visited them to show off Andrea. Another sister lived in the woods drove up with her forrester husband. The youngest sister, formerly an officer of the US Navy as a meteorologist, lives in California but also came out to Ohio during family gatherings. We had a lively family where conversations centered on the medication each took.

I was the odd man out, often the butt of jokes from father-in-law who would comment that a visitor was like a fish. After three days, it stunk. Pat was allergic to alcohol so we hardly had anything in store in the house but when we got to my in-laws, I drunk with the boys. Soon the comment was that I came over because of the booze.

These were all received in good spirit, until my father-in-law asked if immigrants and visitors in country should get the same treatment as HS graduate brother-in-law, at a disadvantage for not attending College, working with his father-in-laws' business in construction.

My eldest daughter spent her college junior year abroad, 1994-95, getting her French fluency in old Avignon of Provence.

I looked forward to a posting in the southern part of Africa but by the time J Daniel came around, Andrea was diagnosed with PDD-NOS, a Pervasive Developmental Disorder Not Otherwise Specified, a big wrench on future plans. It clear that we were staring autism on the face. Pat decided to do frontal attack.



## Year 51 Goodbye, Columbus '95-'96 *J Daniel*

I did not see movies very often but three that tugged at my romantic proclivity were *The Graduate* (with Mrs. Robinson), *Goodbye, Columbus* (the football player), and the *Love Story* (preppy and his dying wife).

Anne Bancroft was so attractively mischievous, almost evil, but Dustin Hoffman and Katherine Ross were teenagers in my view. I remembered the lady in a late night Apayao gazebo, 15 years my senior, who made me forget what virgins ate for breakfast. The movie's Mrs. Robinson and Benjamin, though not as romantic as my gazebo night was, nevertheless, very endearing.

Jenny and Oliver, the preppy to Ali McGraw's Ryan O'Neal, was still in the Snow White and seven dwarves level, brought some realism to my own love story.

I imagined myself in the 6<sup>th</sup> grade water pump canals of my mind as Lothario, Casanova, Don Juan, and old Romeo rolled up into one. None ever left anyone wallowing in regret or despair. Or, at least, that was my considered badge of honor. Not so in real life, history following my tail. But what the hell, it was a good tale.

Pat had reasons to be alarmed. The Sino girl in Tacloban sent the postcard with the Mexican hat to Trevino Lane, our village street. That was when Pat remembered as well the letter her office received from M just after she left her post in Manila. It did not help that when M delivered her baby, she began calling him

"Jimbo", a common nickname for Jaime in Pea Eye. Pat was not amused.

Pat had a different take with the birth of Jaime Daniel, for I found myself accused of not really wanting to own my boy. I kept putting Michael into his name in honor of my father and brother-in-laws, rather than the Jaime she vehemently wanted to precede the name "Daniel". In other places, my son might have been called JD. At home, I called him Daniel. Something in Pat's demeanor soured.

With Andrea's diagnosis, Pat got into her high horse of finding a remedy for Andrea's disorder. PDD-NOS was inconclusive but it encouraged false hope and she went in full swing to locate a remedy. I was more for bundling the kids to Africa and not be too anxious about finding the cure, like polio and cerebral palsy, but to take the situation as it was given, and run with it.

A beltway consultant got my name somewhere. He had a document he was reading, and hired me to take 2-hours a week to read an assigned section and rate my response according to a template he prepared. It brought a little income but not much. I wanted to be a more productive partner but I was not doing well.

I was in that mood when I returned home and walked into Pat vacuuming the living room. She had Daniel on a back pouch harnessed to her body asleep. She was not in her best moods so I told her that I already cleaned the floor the day before. She responded tartly with, "You do not know how to clean a house." My ears red pinged.

My kneejerk response unplugged the vacuum cleaner, kicked the vacuum cleaner, and in the process, she was elbowed, waking Daniel up who started to respond to his rude awakening. I stormed out of the room and out of the house. I was never really welcomed back again.

I thought of what triggered the exchange and I remembered the day before when Andrea and I stopped at the 7-11 store after the golf ball walk and I scraped the bottom of the family's debit card. Pat was antsy about our financial state. I was not exactly the productive partner but I was a faithful Mr. Mom to her, the children, and the household.

With two children in the house, Pat engaged the services of an elderly Filipina. I was asked to move out of the house. I joked with the nanny about how I could just take Daniel with me and be consultant in a remote island in Pea Eye. The joke was passed on to Pat, which just fueled her native fears and incipient dread.

I asked the use of the car to clear my mind and while driving through the PA turnpike, a doe suddenly gleamed its eye in front of my fender. There was mist in the air so I was not driving fast, able to avoid the deer. Consequences had I hit it and went off the ravine might have been a third of a million dollars to the children and my wife from insurance.

The year before, a Connecticut couple divorcing had the husband offer the wife 15% of assets for the settlement. Feminists like my wife were in uproar. Then it dawned on me, I was Mr. Mom. Would the same rate apply to me as well?

**Year 52 Hawaii '96-'97**  
***Ewa Beach***

When a wife is pissed at her husband, and takes the children to Mama, we consider that par for the course. I was in one of my devilish moods. I had just gotten the children their passports. I took Daniel's who was under two at the time to Hawaii. I left a note on where we were headed, where we were going to be and how long, and when we were returning.

I hit a live button. Of course, our nanny was the first to get hit with the ambiguity of my move since we were essentially friends, and she knew that I knew that she would be blamed for letting me run away with my son.

The flight from National in Washington stopped in St. Louis before proceeding to Honolulu. I talked to Pat about where we were, how Daniel was having a great time running down the aisle and that we would be back in two weeks.

Pat's mind went another direction. I kidnapped our son. No two ways about it. She was not standing by and let me do it. There was a high profile case in DC at the time of a father who, after an acrimonious divorce, took off with the children to his home country though they were adjudged to the custody of the mother. Pat first called the air Marshalls to have me arrested.

After finding out that I was the legal father, she was told that unless they had a court order, they could not do anything. Being the father without a legal judgment, she could not claim custody of the children. Getting a subpoena would be

impossible. As we were not divorced, I still had rights to my children.

She then talked with my sister at great length, I was told later, claiming that I was using Daniel as a negotiating tool. What I was supposed to be negotiating, I was not clear. What was clear was that I had done the unthinkable as far as she was concerned.

I didn't have a forward ticket beyond Honolulu, nor was I really inclined to have one. Daniel needed his mother as much as I wanted to be clear why I was suddenly shunted from being a member of the family. Or, if there were ways of salvaging an evidently desperate situation, I would have wanted to hear it.

Daniel and I did many things together, wading in the lukewarm ocean, but he was too young to get salt into his eyes so we did not swim. We walked barefoot in the grass at the park. We ran around the mall and were happy J Daniel did not know how to spend money yet, though he did know his way to the ice cream freezer of the 7-11 store.

But Daniel was too young to be separated from his mother. Many times at night, and even after he snoozed on the plane, he grabbed into my chest looking for the comfort of a suckle. I cut our visit time in half. In a week, we were back in Falls Church.

The reunion between mother and son was pithy, like someone died, or something. The old stoic me was just resigned. I did not understand the big deal, but that was probably what was the

matter. I was an insensitive zombie, oblivious of other people's feelings.

Pat had not been short of signals that something was amiss with the marriage. She had gone to a therapist, who then talked with both of us when Pat dragged me along. Pat not only wanted us to keep going to counseling, she also wanted me to see a therapist by myself.

Theologically, I was dismissive of God, not out of unfaith, nor arrogance, but because my faith saw that Jesus died so that I did not have to be dependent on any god. God was the alpha and omega of my life. The point in between was my response-ability to live in its fullness. God was the *sine qua non*, that without which there was no life!

The Jesus of history who became my Christ was one who raised a mirror so I can see authentic me. The Christ was one who killed the Christ; my Christ was the no-Christ. It was as if Jesus said to the Jewish community of its time, and resonated in mine: "You waiting for a Messiah? Well, here's the good news for you. There is no one coming. You may stop looking. I tell you that good news, so I am the Messiah (Christ)."

In a visit that summer, Pat noticed that I related well with the children, and that they cried each time I showed up, which evidently affected me deeply, so why didn't I look for a place nearby, and get myself a real job, too. We could raise the children together, though separately, and we could all live happily thereafter. I am a sucker for romance and had she said goodbye between her bed sheets, I would still be her neighbor.

## Year 53 Lei'd but not Maui'd '97-'98 *The Consul-General*

There's a popular line in the movie, *The Sound of Music*, where the Mother Superior tells the novitiate Maria: "When God closes a door, he opens a window." Colleagues in 2014 say, "*she* opens a window."

She was, however, a very "she" who opened a window in Hawaii. The Consul-General of the Philippine Consulate was a childhood friend and occasional visitor to the vesper services I conducted when I returned from Seminary to Pea Eye. Sister to my lawyer friend who came to see me off when I sailed out of Manila, my parent's family became hers as she and her three children settled to their new posting in Hawaii from a diplomatic stint in Ankara.

The CG filed hardcopies in her office and still wrote her correspondence by hand for someone else to input into a computer, usually one of her children. The eldest boy was born missing a chromosome that made his body age faster than normal. He was a gentle soul. The younger boy was in his late teens, a charmer and lay about. He was mother's sweetheart. Middle child was a girl who out-guyed the guys, was just bursting into her female pulchritude. They were a fine family; in the Philippine tradition of extended family, I was easily Tito Jim.

Mama needed a computer tutor. I volunteered. I let her play with my laptop once a week. She reminded me of Leticia Shahani who helped in our ITI as chairperson of YWCA. I met her at the World Methodist Conference in Honolulu in

'81 that Mary Lou and I attended on behalf of the Ecumenical Instituted. It turned out that she was also the CG's Foreign Service mentor.

It was in this tone of familiarity that I wrote a note to the CG after noticing that she worked a tad bit too hard, turning down invitations to social functions. She was comfortable unless it was her consular functions. It was my choice of metaphor that got me in happy trouble. I said that if there was a feast of Bacchus she wanted to attend but was not sure, in the absence of a reliable escort, she can let me know and I would be glad to be her Dennis Thatcher.

As a good student, the CG hit her dictionary for Bacchus (Dionysius in Greek mythology) and Bacchanalian orgy. Now, this came as shock to her since I was the staid cleric who had always behaved appropriately in her presence and had not indicated prurient interest on her feminine charms.

My note to the CG, however, was intentionally of *double entendre*. The week before, I wrote Pat a consent to file divorce papers, a heady as well as a liberating occasion. Should the CG get off her formal diplomatic personality and be the little girl I once knew, I was not going to be unhappy. We were adult enough to take it from there.

The CG mulled over my note and decided to take me on. She responded that after an Oahu event with the Filipino community, she would fly to the neighboring island of Maui to conduct an ocular survey of the place. If I accompanied her, would I make the reservations for her travel

and her accommodation. I pretended I was in the dark, in case I misunderstood the import of the whole scenario. I was living with my sister in Ewa Beach, so I commandeered one of their vehicles and left it at the terminal parking for transport when we returned. I showed up to pick her up from the afternoon community function and got into one of the interisland flights.

First, there were vacant seats so I sat one seat away from the CG (she took A and I had C), and she gave me one look that clearly said, "Why?" When we got to the hotel, I had to rush to the registration desk so I could cancel a second room I reserved while she giggled not too far away. That's how I discovered the phrase: *Lei'd* but not *Maui'd*.

The CG's house then was by Diamond Head, an upscale neighborhood with the huge Australian residence a block into the entrance of the CG's house was. It was a simply dwelling. After we returned from Maui, the CG showed me the rest of the house and suggested that if I wanted to move in to the guest room next to her bedroom, I was welcome.

Reality check came a week after. She told her brother of the new liaison. As a good friend, he told her I was not the most stable guy, could not keep a steady job, was a mendicant, however, I was a good guy. I stopped by the CG's office a week later when she told me of her brother's comments. I said, "Whatever we've got, I will give it a chance. So if you want to continue, I will, too." I descended the stairs of mahogany banisters, made the sign of the cross, saying, aspirating the "J" as "H", *Jesus Maria Joseph!*

## Year 54 Work Hawaii '98-'99

### *Adelina Madrid Shaw*

Daniel, like his sister, was diagnosed with ASD, too. I could not imagine how devastating that must have been for haggard and challenged Pat.

The CG was a very traditional religious woman of the Roman persuasion. She was at home in the Methodist Church but did her real praying at the Catholic chapel.

I escorted the CG to political functions. It was in one of those that I met Adelina Madrid Shaw, one of Mayor Harris' aides who I later worked for in the Community Affairs Department. She knew my mother through community functions, particularly after a building fund meeting when mother stood up and declared that she was done talking, and wrote a check for \$100 to get the ball rolling. She was a minimum wage cook and "grandma" at a juvenile halfway house, and there she was prodding the well heeled Pinoy MDs and professionals into action. She became known widely for that act.

I began to be associated with the CG as her significant other. The older folks wanted to know when we were tying the knot. Making the relationship legal was not an option. I was a U.S. citizen and for her to remain Ambassador (her rank in the Philippine Foreign Service), she would have to go over some nifty hoops. The important question was whether we wanted to legalize a union. Both sides said, *Nyet!*

I did not wish brother Edward to be brother's keeper so I started working, first with an early

morning paper route. I used CG's diplomatic van to deliver people's paper, a class act.

I enrolled on a paralegal course under Brigham Young University held near UH-Manoa. After, I joined a workforce development program ran by the Honolulu Mayor's Office, WorkHawaii.

It became obvious that I did not measure up to the CG's expectations though she did stick to her guns, even when one of her disgruntled subordinates accused her before the Philippine Senate of immoral behavior. In any case, other factors contributed to the final dissolution of what was a happy opening of a window.

At WorkHawaii, I was the odd man who they did not know what to do with. My language was too raw for the sensibilities of the training department so I got moved to where we would convince employers to participate in a federally funded program of hiring welfare recipients so they can stand on their own. I had access to Ms. Shaw that gave the image of organizational clout. I did one accomplish a job that pleased everyone. I got someone a psychiatric review incriminating herself; a threatened suit against WorkHawaii's premises was rendered toothless.

I joined a group to Washington DC to get an economic development zone for Honolulu, qualifying it for federal funding but I was back on the top-down mode of enabling people once again, and that did not sit well in the guts.

While in DC, Pat and I talked about the terms of our divorce. She thought she was generous in offering a 30/70 split on corporate properties.

Previously, we supported 50/50 split of parties going through a divorce. I laughed, took the divorce papers, changed the formula to 0/100 indicating that I did not want anything. On the day Pat and I had our divorce, I was at a dinner at the WH lawn where Bill Clinton and Al Gore bounded in like stars.

But it was the heartbreak of leaving Pat and the children that I could not transcend, especially with Daniel's diagnosis, but Pat was hardnosed, and I could not get myself into being a neighbor and part time father. I still wanted to be Pat's husband.

The CG was not at all pleased when I returned to Honolulu. The news of my relinquishing all property rights stunned her legal mind. "You obviously did not think of us," she said, "I have lawyer friends in DC I could have called to help you." Our wingding was winding down.

My salary at WorkHawaii was garnished when Pat's lawyer included that in the final divorce judgment. I was flabbergasted. Pat claimed it was meant only as an option should I default on my child support. The lawyer explained when Pat inquired how it happened that the judge told her the garnishment request was a one time only option. The lawyer put it in and was automatic.

Saipan United Methodist Church just lost its new pastor for inappropriate behavior to one of the members. The female DS saw me at my brother's Church and asked if I would consider going. She did not do her homework. She gave me two weeks to decide.. I called her two hours later and unequivocally said, "sure."

**Year 55 Immanuel UMC '99-2000**  
*The Ripples*

The CG understood the symbolic. She sent me out of Hawaii in good style, right down on her bedroom floor.

DS (District Superintendent) Barbara Ripple and husband Jim Ripple started the Church in Saipan. She did not have to talk me into the assignment. I had already been to Saipan and knew what I was walking into. It is written somewhere that the conscious human was not one who rejoiced on fortunes or wallowed in despair over any given situation, but was the one who saw challenge at every turn. Challenge hosted adventure and I was a daredevil.

Shortly after Thanksgiving '98, I boarded a CO for Saipan after Abelina M. Shaw and her crew at the Community Affairs office, with my co-workers at WorkHawaii, used the occasion to invite me as honored guest, serving as my send off at one of the restaurants in Waikiki.

The former Saipan pastor did not last long. The church was broke and he borrowed money. He was also single. He was inclined to act cute to ladies who happened to be not enamored with cleric's prurience sticking out of their fingers. It did not take long for one lady to lodge a sexual harassment complaint.

I walked in as a mendicant monk who vowed the triune disciplines of poverty, chastity, and obedience, transformed into my understanding of behavioral standards. Which is to say, my vow of chastity assaulted the sensibilities of the

deaconesses of the United Methodist Church, with some fainting as they utter their curse to my consignment into eternal perdition.

Not Deborah, *mon ami*. She was dramatic in her confession: "I took one look at you when you walked out of the plane and I quietly uttered to myself after fifteen years of waiting, I finally met you, and I am grateful."

She was also with the church finance committee and she added: "and you will need my income." I was the neophyte, so I waited to be schooled. "We could have just stayed lovers," she mused later, "but because of your position, in a small island, we had to be blessed in public."

That we did, in May of 1999, she paid a buffet table at one of the beach tourist hotels. The *muksa nim* of the Methodist Church of Korea, and the Caucasian pastor of the Community Church (left over from GIs of WWII), with a Pinay Cincinnati-based Roman Catholic nun, concelebrated the nuptial ritual following the Methodist Book of Worship.

The marriage certificate bore signatures from the local Irish priest (Fr. Gary who was in the hospital for diabetes though slated to be one of the officiating clerics), the pastor of my *Sarang Hae* Korean Methodist Church, his counterpart in the Filipino UMC, the episcopal Guam padre who came twice a month to Saipan, the pastor of the Community Church, and Barbara Ripple.

It was a very auspicious occasion with not a few distinguished couples gingerly picking dietary requirements from the cholesterol-laden buffet

spread. After disappointing the CG in Honolulu on her religious expectations, I ignored lesson of experience and took on the new adventure.

We were a marriage made in heaven. Formerly married to a Francophile in Minnesota who was weeded in the 60s and was hooked, she retired and responded to the call for retired teachers to come to PSS CNMI on a promise to be in the retirement roster after three years of service. PSS reneged on its promise and a handful of people were affected, including Deb. That was my first social action cause on island.

There were three congregations meeting at the Immanuel grounds in Koblerville. When the Ripples ran with the English congregation into the arms of the CalPAC UMC net, the Koreans happily gave their blessings.

*Sarang Hae* Immanuel was my song that year. The Sino group smuggled Chinese Bibles into China, lent support unofficial house churches, a western supported protest against Beijing, but the Taoist superstition was simply replaced with other superstitions, and I was not a happy camper on that direction.

Deb and I opened a Marianas Resource Center at Oleai. We anchored the congregation in a geographically delineated human development project of my Church renewal bent. During the millennial turn, Deb and I experienced our first rift. She watched New Year fireworks at the Tinian Dynasty Hotel. With the congregation newly moved to the Oleai site, and nursing what was mostly a church of workers, I stayed behind while she went with her own crowd.

**Year 56 Oleai/San Jose 2000-'01**  
***The Marianas Resource Center***

In the UMC, it was known as MRC, Methodist Resource Center. That was deliberate. Access to the California-Pacific Annual Conference of the UMC's funding was a tactic.

The MRC was in Oleai, a small slice of Saipan's geography, ministered by the dominant Catholic Church, San Jose Parish, home to the worker's saint St. Joseph. I moved to the area where the Pilipino pastor and his family were situated so they doubled up as our facility caretakers.

Into my first year at Immanuel, I was clear that there was a connectional tie fudge. The local Filipino congregation thought they were part of a Philippine Conference since a Pilipino DS lent verbal support. The English congregation was part of the California-Pacific communion, and the Koreans remained connected to kin on the beloved Land of the Morning Calm.

I went to the Philippine Central Conference to determine the state of affairs but the Bishop deferred to his one of his lieutenants known for starting new churches. The Pilipino group had no standing in the connectional system of the church in the Philippines, a fact known to the current pastor. The group left their future to the will of God, inviting martyrdom more than real support.

This would not have mattered except for one thing: the English-speaking congregation's pastor was not only non-white but was also of Philippine descent. I was embarrassed that the

clergy family wallowing at the poverty level while I was, on paper, an "employee" of a US Annual Conference that had a higher standard of support for its clergy.

With the adequate care of the Pilipino pastor in mind, I strategized how we might move the two churches together within the CalPAC UMC family, thus, the incentive of relocating the English group to Oleai.

Deb was my mainstay in all the expenditures. IUMC had mission funds that added up during the Ripples watch. I stretched their use so that we could pay for what was needed, at the same time, use the funds according to the mandate by which they were given.

Jim was Barbara's main recruiter. My funding requests from CalPAC was slow in coming and by the time it did, it was at reduced amounts. But even with the little we had, the HI admin folks took it upon themselves to withhold them until we paid our share in the upkeep of the Conference. A connectional system was meant to operate that way, and it did. The glee and doom were equally shared.

From the beginning, Deb was right. I needed her. I really never paid myself a salary, a point Barbara later used to say that I chose to do that, though on paper, I did. The Pilipino pastor's residence needed repair. The house owner, and I, agreed on a progressive increase in rent; the church shouldered material and labor expenses on the renovation. That was OK. Saipan by then was learning about the Oleai MRC. A Women's Forum sponsored in the facility was

well attended. In a year, a photo of me and the Governor chatting graced the front page of the newspaper. Barbara was amazed at the speed by which I integrated myself in the island.

My view of the pastorate, however, was to facilitate it to serve a community, enabling the group to know how rather than deciding for them what, when, and for how much. So I started roundtable talks with a handful of the leaders.

At the time, the natural upfront person was a PR lady for CUC. Her husband was with the AG's office and they were natural allies. Two other members of leadership capability were an ex-PCV nurse at the Community College, and a teacher at the local Catholic High School. The latter had an accident previously that made his brain cells repeat words. The three of us were an informal troika who worked the community where we were located as the real venue of our vision and mission. But church was a "refuge", or, at best, a service station in emergencies, not a cadre of revolutionaries of the People of God to serve God's people.

A couple of lawyer friends at the wedding were local counsel to a class action suit against the garment industry. Five of the witnesses needed protective custody. The MRC was roof.

Deb went home on her vacation and returned with chin tucked in and wrinkles stretched to the side. She was very proud to have done it *for me*. I preferred the real rather than the plastic face. I no longer knew the woman I married. We were headed downhill thereafter.

**Year 57 Yuan Yinghua '01-'02**  
***The Shanghai Girls***

Deb was candid. "I am leaving, will you come with me?" I was just as precise with my, "No". She relocated near where Andrea and Daniel lived in VA. Deb was a physical therapist with SpEd. She made me understand that "doing something for me" was not such a bad idea. The choice of VA was proximate to her daughter who visited us in Saipan.

Kannat Tabla where we lived was too expensive so we moved to an apartment on top of the hill. We lived together after the divorce until she left for the mainland. Marriage of convenience was common in Saipan but no one had what we had, divorce of convenience. We were convivial in our parting. Deb, *mon ami*, will always be my girl for all season!

I continued with the MRC. The English service moved out to the lanai teaching our cooperative neighbors to keep their dogs quiet between 10 to 11 a.m. on Sundays.

Across the way from the MRC was a compound where a couple lived with the wife's sister and business employees. The wife was a Cultural Revolution red guard who saw her parents got re-educated in a farm, later retired from Ting Hua University in Beijing. The younger sister was home-schooled but was good enough to pass an engineering Master's degree and lived in Xingiang's Urmuqi before coming to Saipan.

After Deb left and I still kept getting two tickets to social events, I asked the younger sister (her

Chinese name means cherry blossoms so I she be called Cherry in this telling) if she would accompany me to a dinner for the Make-a-wish-Foundation at one of the hotels. If she survived the Cultural Revolution, she also could survive my company.

The Red Guard married a General who abused his powers. She moved to Saipan, married a guy from Hong Kong, and ran an X-rated store, a massage parlor and a restaurant. The husband was chef with a male assistant, Cherry attended to the store and cashiered at night. The female employees were call-masseuses. The red guard was the wheeler-dealer who made money by hook or by crook. Mostly by crook. She was an inveterate gambler who borrowed everyone's earnings and lost it all at the illegal gaming dens of Saipan and the legitimate tables in Tinian.

At the Foundation dinner, we were seated with a friend, the longtime rep of the Department of the Interior in the Commonwealth. As we were talking, Cherry put some food on my plate, cut the meat into small bitable chunks, making sure that the food and beverage were ready when I decided to eat. The gesture was very touching. I found me a new partner.

Cherry's schedule went late into half the early morning as the restaurant heated up with the drinking tourists halfway into the evening, who commandeered room(s), connected the karaoke, ordered food and girls, and do whatever they could with whatever the girls will allow them to do in the room. Then the place after midnight became the food center for the late night crowd, the hotel employees and Garapan entertainers.

Once in a while, visiting tourists held orgies. Cherry cashiered Bacchanalia! She was also a very inexperienced virgin at 52.

She brought me leftover food when she came home at 2 am (big sister started pushing her in my direction) and my MRC lights were still on. Her compound had a fire that razed half of their buildings previously so I started cleaning up the place in the morning earning a gate key.

Cherry and I set up late dinner/early breakfast in her room, slept together fully clothed while I got up early to go across the street to the MRC. We did not make a habit of sleeping together but it was a matter of time before we got under the same sheet together. The Foundation dinner was on Valentine's Day. By April, after a week of paper work, the Northern Marianas Mayor pronounced us man and wife.

In July, we flew to HK, took the HK-Beijing, a 28-hour journey, our honeymoon. We had a cabin with private lockable doors.

Returning from a US trip in September, a Japan transit had young girls from Shanghai coming to the CNMI on Eucon College's invite to learn English for the NCLEX Board. Three months into their stay, the students called asking if I could move three of them to NMC.

Eucon was premature in their hype. The school was not ready. The students were saddled with teaching Chinese to young students. The nurses complained that they even *paid* for it. They wanted not only their money back but to be out of the premises. MRC and I got me two wards.

**Year 58 Xin Yi One Heart '02-'03**  
***The Nurses***

Three nurses bolted out of Eucon late '01. One arranged to move in with her boyfriend. The other became MRC's guests. They were timid. They would not come out of the Center for fear of the neighborhood dogs. I also had bicycles at the Center and they were welcome to them. They watched me go to the lagoon everyday in November to swim so I told them that they could join me if they were inclined. A bike ride and a swim had its own magnetic draw.

They were two young girls, younger than my two older daughters. They thought I must be a wealthy man to be doing what I was doing. But my task was to get student visas, enroll them at NMC Nursing, and get their money back from Eucon. Enrolling them was no problem. I was previously in the NMC Nursing advisory board.

The visas took some doing. Eucon had started the process but CNMI Immigration did not have the category yet. We had to have notarized bank statements showing that their parents had the means to ensure that the girls were not going to be indigents while they were at the school. We got all the documents lined up.

Eucon objected to returning the girls' money because they broke contract. The Chinese dean, however, was more conciliatory and though there may not be one thing we agreed on, his stance merited respect. The girls were released from contract, and a portion of their deposit was returned. I also got MRC residents since I lived with Cherry across the way.

Before the girls came, and after gridding my village, I walked Oleai by day and dropped in on drinking spots at night. I located folks interested in joining a village consultation to talk about the future of the village. There were three watering holes in my neighborhood stake with a famous one by the lagoon. Another two were on the second floor of buildings, contact points for what Pinoys called (*ibon na mababang lipad*), "birds on low flight patterns."

I was not a regular at the beachfront bar, but I went once in a while. A proprietor of one of the dives asked me to her bar and I met the girls who lived behind the San Jose Parish Church. In two months, I snagged three of the girls to MRC evenings. I introduced them as former garment factory workers in search of other jobs.

I got to know one of the three well. She was out to earn enough money so she could house her parents and send her 6-yr old daughter to school. Divorced, she was 26 yrs old, spoke good English, and was popular among her bar's regular clientele. I stopped by at the bar to buy her a drink on slow nights.

She was pleasant to talk to, and it was enough that I paid for her beer ("don't buy whiskey," she said. "It is watered down and most of the money goes to the proprietor.") She also came to our MRC events with two other girlfriends.

One day at dusk, she bounded into the center while I was closing up for the night. She was flying out early morning and wanted to thank me for the way I treated her since we met. "I do not have money to donate to your Center but I

will thank you in the only way I know how," she said. I was single; didn't bat an eye.

Meanwhile, one of the girls named "one heart" (henceforth, Hearty) turned 21. I promised both that I would introduce them to young men but had not been able to, so I took Hearty out to dinner at one of the plush hotels. I ran through a birthday conversation on what was the most significant event of the past year for her, and what she expected to accomplish during the next upcoming one. In the evening's course, she related her whole family's story.

I walked her to the swimming pool by the lagoon where the lights were low and the pool reflected the moon. I took her face into my palms and landed a kiss on her lips, meant to be a birthday peck but a tad of tongue stroke across hers. She was stunned but was quiet, walking out to the hotel lobby holding hands like lovers though looking like a young girl holding on to grandpa. Driving out of the parking lot, she leaned her head on my shoulders and said: "I had never been kissed before?"

I was playful. "Would you like to learn?" She nodded. I parked under the pines on a lovers' lane and taught her how the French locked lips. She was a neophyte but an eager learner. A week later, she prepared chicken soup. She had never cooked before but she brought me a bowl in the Sino tradition of watered down broth. I asked, "When you graduate, will you make love to me? My heart skipped a beat when she said, "Of course!" She had ideas and I was mistaking concupiscence for love. Across the MRC, Cherry was fine. I was into a double header!



## Year 59 Defrocked '03-'04 *CalPAC*

The Shanghai girls moved to my Korea hotelier who hosted them for a month in '02. Red guard sister-in-law objected to their being at the MRC while I was away to the US, and though Hearty and I had refrained from exchanging fluids, our fondness for each other showed. They found an apartment near NMC after while I was away.

I returned a day early and I checked into one of the hotels. Hearty joined me for the night and we resumed our French tutorial. We moved the graduation promise ahead of schedule as well.

UMC, like life itself, became a bigger bite than I could chew. The Bishop (yes, Marushka, I had a female bishop) visited '02. My CUC PR church member had a Women's forum at a local bed-breakfast place with the Bishop. Strictly for the girls, I was not invited.

Cherry and I had drifted apart. We applied for a tourist visa to the US in Beijing in '01 but it was denied. Because she was my wife, she qualified for a green card. They did not wish for us, like many of the to others, to circumvent the process by going to a US sovereign territory to change status. Meanwhile, I took it my job to extricate Cherry from the familial stranglehold of older sister. She resisted and I acquiesced,

Meanwhile, Hearty's overnighter at the hotel alarmed her roommate who called friends and the police. When she returned the day after, the landlord was pissed off when she found out of the old the guy that kept her tenant away.

Meanwhile, Hearty and I started to like the bed times and together, we started to add moans to the chirping of the birds nearby. Her roommate moved out to board elsewhere.

I was delighted when CalPAC approved a grant request but it arrived in the person of CalPAC's social action lady, a rebel rouser who gets a lot of mileage from her work with Cezar Chavez in California. She brought labor union push to the Governor's office. She emailed earlier that she would go by my lead in our calls but she pulled her own agenda out faster than the drench of the afternoon rains in Garapan.

Before I started paying attention to Hearty, I had Cherry's English be evaluated at NMC to determine her level and hoped to enroll her at the College. I had hoped to get her off bonded servitude under her sister. I found out that she lent 10 years worth of savings as a loan that did not look like it was ever going to be repaid.

The young restaurant chef also quit and sought shelter at the MRC after red guard borrowed four years of his \$\$ without any signed papers, and he had gotten tired waiting to be repaid so he could remit it home.

Hearty girl and I had intensified French lessons. I had moved back to the MRC by then. Cherry took to defending her sister as I expected filial loyalty to be ticker than water.

Cherry started snooping at Hearty's place. She would sit outside of her window listening to us cavort and nursing her hurt. I was devastated. I asked her to leave when I caught her. Her car

would not restart so we called a tow truck. The police came as well, compliments of the lady landlord. It was a mess as Cherry cried her hurt some more in the dark.

Cherry went ballistic when I showed up at her house. I had to get the police to come and let me out of the compound. Red Guard wanted \$6K as compensation to grant divorce. That made the process easier.

I closed the MRC, returned the worship service back to Koblerville, with *Sarang Hae* Immanuel was glad to have us back. Barbara got the isle's psychiatrist to talk to me. She reported possible bipolarity.

I was not copied the report. The Bishop talked to me and dropped the bomb. "I am generally very liberal, but with the psychiatric report, I had no other choice . . ."

I was stunned. I returned to Saipan and asked for a copy of the report. It was a template, a botched case if I knew one. But as has been my brother Edward's dismay, I tended to cry rather than fight. I committed professional *hara kiri*. I self-defrocked.

By the time I hit island, the congregation already knew when my last day was going to be, and a retired female missionary was coming to take my place. My ex-PCV nurse buddy at NMC was candid. She quoted an unquotable from the Bishop. She added, "We set you up to fail, you did not stand a chance from the beginning." She remained a \$taunch \$upporter until she left island. I owed her a bundle.

## Year 60 STaRPO '04-'05 CK

Not unlike Deb who would have remained bed playmate without the legal hassle, Hearty would have been happy with her tutorials and move on but she had to pay full tuition at the College and a marriage of convenience was smart. We had already been exchanging fluids a little short of a year, and thought there had not been shortage of admirers, she preferred to stay with me.

Hearty did well in school. When she took the NCLEX at the computerized testing center in Gualo Rai halfway through her second year, I teasingly told her that if she failed, she could just keep walking straight to the lagoon and drown herself. She did so well that she was told to stop after the 75th question of a slated 150-question test!

We were playful in '04 in contrast to the almost forced wedding in '03 at the Mayor's office. Two of my friends were sponsors but waiting time outside Saipan Mayor's office almost got the Hearty to walk out and forget all about it. We were ready to say "I do" before the Tinian Mayor's office day before New Year '03 but the Mayor was otherwise preoccupied. It was fine. We had the bridal suite and we did not waste the ambience.

In '04 we had another chance to be on a lively honeymoon mood again. The Saipan, Tinian, and Rota Parents' Organization (STaRPO), formerly the Parents Association of Children with Autism (PACA), had an agreement with PSS SpEd to occupy a vacant community center

in CK by the Cathedral to provide programs that would assist children with ASD, Down syndrome (dubbed as Mongoloid meant to be descriptive until its obvious racist connotation became clear), and cerebral palsy. The SpEd director who drafted the MOU was diagnosed to be terminally ill; sought therapy in California.

The unfinished building was left to idle so as a STaRPO member, I offered to have the place repaired. I advanced three months worth of my current rentals for materials, provided we lived in the facility, care for the surroundings and plant trees in the yard. It was a real win-win situation for everyone. Hearty and I had been married more than a year and I still got sticky fingers.

I subbed at PSS in Oleai, Tanapag, Kagman, San Antonio, and MHS before landing at San Vicente Elementary School (SVES) where the principal asked if I wanted to do it fulltime.

STaRPO had meetings with its members and the CK place became a community node. We assisted a parent of a cerebral palsy US-born girl but whose CNMI's visitor's visa had to be renewed every 90 days. She cleaned STaRPO, rolling her child's wheel chair down the street on the way over.

The child had a referral in San Diego but the mother, though she secured a US visa from Manila, did not have the means to go with the child. A buddy from Houston provided mileage awards, got the round-trip ticket, and mother-child were on their way. A couple had a boy who was blind. His peripheral vision needed

SpEd attention. That's how I discovered NMPASI and their white hat guys. At STaRPO, we were a conduit between need and resource.

After three months, Hearty located an apartment in As Lito. She started working at CHC and in private homes as a hired nurse. I made fulltime teaching at SVES as well.

We took the honeymoon for granted. I adjusted to the 37-years difference (met Clairol at the hairdresser), though we still looked like grandpa and his grand daughter in public. Like most folks who were not glued to TV, Thursday's market at Garapan was sacrosanct. "I feel like staring folks think I just snagged a Japanese tourist for the night," she began to say.

I became self-conscious in public and I took to letting her wander around by herself, or with a girl friend, separate from me so she/they can have the field by herself/themselves without being mistaken as girl(s) on the prowl who got lucky with an old man.

STaRPO continued to be my "MRC". But the place kept getting broken into, nine times by my count, three times reported in one of the dailies. I refused to be victimized. I cleaned up.

The Immanuel pastor who replaced the retired female missionary was also a former missionary in Hong Kong. Serendipitously, he got a DPL lease and made the CK STaRPO into Immanuel UMC. Someone took over the cleaning.

Asked why I left the church, I blurted out, "I grew up!"

FORe@PLAY.cn  
Wang Zhimu

"Pay" attention was such a commercially loaded word that "playing" attention came as fresh and stimulating as the Siberian wind coursing down Great Hingan Range to the Manchurian plains.

That's what I told my Chinese students in Oral English at the Shenyang Aerospace University, aka, *Hang Kong Hang Tian Da Xue*. We "play" attention before we "pay" attention.

Admittedly, students do not struggle past tests and burn midnight oils to get the honor of a certificate or diploma from the University. They labor for the promise of economic rewards that having an oilskin allegedly provided. This was true when China had yet to adjust to practical know-how from the hereditary eggheads and the privileged educated class of its *illuminati*, now to the irreverent techies and subscribers to China Mobile's services.

The name *Wangzhimu* was inspired by movie director Zhang Yimou who I first encountered in his movie *Red Sorghum* with new face Gong Li who was born in the city where we are currently a resident, Shenyang, Liaoning in *Dong Bei* of the old Manchuria of the Manchus. The directorial and acting debuts of Zhang and Gong proved to be a productive liaison, lasting more than two decades.

In Hanyu Pinyin, "Zhimu" was James and "Wang" was the closest thing to "V". I liked it for its close contracted proximity to the director's name, and the "v" (*la vie*) in French,

so, I merged my Basque name from the region on the other side of the Pyrenees, and, walla, I get *j'aime la vie*, "I love life", which graces the title of this FORe played reflections!

Foreplay has a very sexual meaning in English. A reader will have to slide out of preconceived notions on our title. "Wang" is also slang in the English language used as a handful, pun overtly intended, at once, playful and played upon, but our discovery of that came after we had already made the name choice. *No hay problema*, Sofia Vergara, but oh, were we a bit younger, we may have fun with the use and abuse of the same.

In the member's profile of INHS60, my High School class, in the column on the name of my spouse, it did not have enough space for five. I was candid enough to admit that I successfully completed my fifth marriage. No one in my class was crash enough to comment but the runt of the litter was best kept at arms length.

In Wangzhimu's playful way, I've successfully fulfilled the aims and goals of my recruitment as a husband. I am on my seventh now at this writing, and hopefully, my last, but placing my passive role of having been chosen upfront was not far from the factual truth. Save the fourth where my spouse and I glided into place on free fall, and the betting on the fifth was on even money, the deals on the others after five were closed out by the fancies, the fumes, and the fantasies of the significant others involved!

Am I denying responsibility for my behavior? No way, Mariko! I was up to my neck all the way by choice though I may add that choosing

on my side occurred after the fact rather than at the onset of the decision-making process. It does not diminish the accountability, it only sets the chronology of events. I am, indeed, playful with my language! Why not? I do not teach it to others for the money?

Perhaps, the lightness of being reflected in this section might also be with the leitmotif of its subject matter. Finitude after all is normally avoided in thought, forsaken in deed, and gladly ignored when encountered. Most of what humans do abstract daily life on the value of self-hood (we call it money), and charge humans a bundle for letting us forget the inevitability of demise.

Casinos and theme parks we build take us out of the aches of moments to the adrenalin high of pleasures. In my case, I live on the dopamine rush of willing playmates fore-and-aft of life's out-of-schedule and calendared moments.

*Yo play-o, ergo sum*, I say, and I could not say it enough. This is not promoting a hedonistic lifestyle. It is to acknowledge that not only are we one and unique individuals, fulfilled greatly in the unconditional expenditure of the same, but that we are free to choose how we present the face of that unrepeatability, and determine the way we dance the expenditure. I decided not to pay attention. I play attention, instead.

Me, and Zorba the Greek, we play. And we dance. In the Levant, a glass of spirit was lifted and *l'achaim* shouted, gulped, the glass stomped and smashed on the floor. Clashing bamboos of life in the storm, this Pinoy bird dances.

## Part V Celebration of finitude: death as a sunset rider

Not the old Year sickle-dressed Grand Reaper, or a Sith in *Star Wars* was my image of the sunset rider. It was more like two *Easy Riders* vrooming down the highway while the music blasted *Born to be Wild* in full percussion.

I held a memorial service Year 76, invited foes and friends alike so that they could speak the truth to my face rather than make up lies when I was gone. The service memorialized 86 years of existence, with the last 76 years celebrated and the remaining decade cast into automatic cruise-control into the future.

Human civilization had been preoccupied with imagined continuity into tranquil eternity. Its theological treatises were constructed through out western civilization on the pillars of the supernatural to mirror but divert our attention from our finitude, a rather foolish enterprise by the time one reached 60 when, in my case, I no longer could distinguish the colors of my socks, let alone saw them on my foot when I looked down and only saw the folds of my tummy!

The *Easy Riders* of Peter Fonda and Dennis Hopper in '69 added to my image of life's journey, and solidified my resolve that if I was going to be a hippie or on drugs, it would be on intentions and with eyes open, rather than a falling into conformity with peer fashion, or just in laze of nothing else to do. I crossed into 60 with rocking and shocking tremors. My father enjoyed in his last year staring at certificates from various awards, and died at 94 in '06.

When he was 92, he already had difficulty recognizing who I was.

Father had a practical streak about him. He used to say that the only real estate he would leave us was whatever got stuck on his shoes. He advised that we die broke. He showed us how. I followed in his footsteps.

I once gave my father \$1,000 FU money while visiting Hawaii from D.C. and asked him to use the cash with mother on whatever struck their fancy. The following day, I discovered that he divided it among his grandchildren for them to spend in Ala Moana Mall.

(FU is the "f" word in local parlance, with FU-money as outside budget, solely to be spent on whim. When I handed the cash with a note, I wrote "*for you*" for "FU money" in parenthesis. There was no virtue in upsetting the folks.)

I once read of a son who would not touch any of his father's considerable fortune because he was resolved to make it solely on his own. If there was anything conveyed to us by my parents that was not easy to forget, it was the sense of self-sufficiency, self-reliance, and self-confidence that they showed us. I passed on the same sense to my own children. It also defined the essence of my relationship to the people of the villages where I resided.

One of Whitney Houston's well-known tunes, *One Moment in Time*, became NBC's song coverage for the Seoul Summer Olympics of '88. It was meant at the time as pointing to the one achievement one can make in a moment in

time, particularly at the Olympics. I hummed the tune all summer thinking my whole lifetime as my one moment, 86-some years long!

This part, as I vroom into the sunset of my years, saw how I made peace with finitude. "I will die". Or, to paraphrase the poetry of a guy named Kazantzakis (out of memory), "the day you are born is also the first day of your dying." Dying from illusion is another way of stopping my world so I can get off delusions and get on with the real me in the real world.

At 62, I discovered I was not immune to heart breaks. A marriage with no prospects of living long, though I entered it advisedly and with due consideration, came to an abrupt end while I still had my eyes where they were meant to be. I harbored no regrets.

Then came spondylosis of the cervical bones that added fragility to finitude. I was finished with SVES. I quickly married a former factory worker who was on her way home to check on her folks, and her house investment, determined to return to Saipan. Away, I went overtly undercover to uncover the delights in the *House of Horus* in Oleai. My Jiangsu lass came back and decided I was too old for her and flew the coop.

A damsel in distress from *Dong Bei* hollered for help to reunite with NYC husband. I found out he was too far gone in his Alz. Meanwhile, I fell in lust in Saipan!

By 2010, Friendship Villa of *Hang Kong Hang Tian Da Xue*, a techie brain yard, became home.

## Year 61 SVES ToY'05-'06

### *The Awards*

My 60th year came with a shaved head. Well, not exactly. I intentionally went to the barber to get it shaved for PSS. I knew a lot of people at the PSS' central office but I didn't know anyone who I would consider offensive. However, I felt that something systemic was not right with the way teachers were treated. I went bald to protest the treatment, but more importantly, for the teachers' acquiescence to their treatment. To the first, the protest was highly symbolic; to the second, it was for real. The corporate teachers were my baldheaded targets.

President Bush's education law was known as No Child Left Behind, so I had t-shirts printed *No Teacher Left Behind*, and handed one for each of the BoE (Board of Education) members during one of their meetings. I had it available for the teachers as well.

ACT was the Association of Commonwealth Teachers that gathered teachers to group-think their situation and come up with efforts on their own behalf. Ad hoc meetings were held at a *pala-pala* (open shed smaller than a Polynesian house which served as pattern) by Kilili beach. The wide rectangular shed, useful when a *matai* made his solo discourse while his subjects sat on the ground, was too dispersed to accomplish anything other than the therapeutic value of airing out individual's amplified displeasures.

I volunteered my classroom at PSS for after-school meetings. The criticism that I did not seek PSS permission first was manageable and

dismissible. What became insidious was when the suggestion that as a Veep to a Micronesian President, I was usurping the prerogative of the leader. Whoa! When the President himself was quoted to me as claiming the same, it gave me pause. Viewed as such, I had forgotten to give obeisance to the rituals of social pecking orders. Ironically, effectivity in participatory methods was dear to my heart, and a core practice in my pedagogy, so to get a wild boomerang leveled my way, I gave it serious thought. I resigned.

In the winter of '05 I took Xinyi to Hawaii and then to Detroit. She met my Hawaii family and then we flew to Detroit where I showed her an American city in the winter to disengage her from any more harping about when we were going to move to the United States.

My father was in a care facility in Honolulu and siblings reminded me that I was the oldest boy in the family, and should frequent his side, so I was set to quit SVES and move back to Hawaii. With the SVES ToY, and my certificates being displayed with my father's citations as we were both named Jaime Vergara, I went ahead and made my last year at PSS be one for the awards.

My Principal asked me to write an essay that she applied towards the Citizenship Education Teacher Award 2005-06 from the Veterans of Foreign Wars and her Vice-Principal consented to add my name to the Governor's Humanities Awardees as an outstanding teacher 2006 (not to belabor the fine point, but I did just recently resigned from the Humanities' Board that made the choice, so they had two awardees that year), so my father's care home walls in Oahu was

fully papered with certificates bearing his name on my account. The Vets award came with this note:

*Teachers change our society  
one day, one class lesson,  
one student at a time.  
There is no more important job,  
and there's no one  
who does the role better ...  
Thank you*

I drank to that one!

I announced that I intended to don a dress at Hopwood Junior High during the Education Day fest '06, but was prevailed upon by fellow teachers not to. Some were not in favor of the cross dressing, so I deferred from putting on a ribbon on my baldhead.

Dandan School held a cross-dressing event not too long before and was severely criticized by the homophobic crowd. That was my incentive to draw up a skirt and pull down a blouse, to let colleagues know of their misplaced bias and draw attention to our own prejudices. The legal rights of the third gender was debated in the nation, but my protest was more towards those who made too sharp a division between female and masculine traits, thus, raining disdain on the tomboys and the effeminates amongst us.

Unlike our confrontational Ambrose, who really thought that he should have gotten the PSS ToY by merit at another time, I had no illusion that the ToY award was but a popularity event like a gladiatorial contest to pacify the crowd. Also, I got clear that no one got extra points for rocking the PSS boat.

## Year 62 Tatang Iming '06-'07 *On surgery*

Father at 94 quit breathing in '07. Almost two years before, I brought my Xinyi to his bedside, and at first, he was lost on who the hell I was. When I finally told him, he asked which of my children was Xinyi. He played one game of "tell me who you are, and I'll ask you why you are making me meet all these strangers!"

I was teaching my 6th Grade class in Saipan when I heard of my Dad's passing away, so I packed quickly to get on a plane for Honolulu that usually transited through Japan or Korea. By the time I hit Aloha land, my stomach was churning, and before I could get to the wake, my nurse sister dropped me off at the hospital.

At first, the Doctor said that I might have burst the appendix so I had to go into surgery pronto. The surgeon assigned to do the slicing made another diagnosis and decided that it was the gall bladder that needed to go. The appendix was fine. Shaken a bit, I began to doubt the wisdom of the hospital visit, but the ambience spoke of order and rationality, so I decided to trust the discipline.

My father was interred at one of Oahu's slopes in Mililani where he and my mother invested on their plots long time before. True to form, my father did not wish to be a burden at the time he was to be joined with the elements on Mother Nature's soil. At the time of his internment, the surgeon was slicing into my tummy so my father and I conversed in the wonderful world of no one's nether nether land. It was an hour's

visit with few laughters and the passing of the torch, as it were, from the grand orchestrator of life's rhythm to his junior and eldest son.

The sadness that graced the occasion was not so much in realizing how much was missed of the significant times that bonded father and son in the joint march of the flowering of our lives, but in the lucidity that however I tried from then on to retrieve memories and relive them, the events remembered are no longer the same as it was at the moment of their happening. My pastor Dad, even in the hour of his death, still preached on just the facticity of forgiveness: the past is done and one can bitch about it, or be grateful.

*Tatang Iming* was what his nieces and nephews called him, "Tatang" being the honorific title bestowed on older man, and "Iming" a *palayaw* (nickname) of "Jaime", given to him to indicate both respect and endearment.

My father was a poet in his Iloko tongue. In his old age, he delighted in translating a Church school Bible study material into Iloko, and one time, when their dwelling on Oahu was almost condemned for health reason because it was a warehouse more than a homenest, my pastor brother, nurse sister, and I conspired to have them moved to another room while we cleaned out the old one.

The youngest of the brothers whose job in the State included protecting the rights of felons, thought we abused my parents trust. We did. He turned sentimental describing how my father scrounged the waste bins outside his building for some translation paperwork, but I knew he

was out to preserve, it not for all posterity, but because it embodied who he was. He was not ready to be dumped yet though he understood that his efforts would be consigned to the dustbin of history in time.

My father as the Superintendent of a district in the UMC of Cagayan province attended ITI '73 where I apprenticed as a future pedagogue. We were studying a book titled the *Saviors of God* by the Greek poet Kazantzakis, and in one of his lines was one about the next generation superseding the previous one. Father proudly stood up and declared to the audience that the line had come to pass that day.

Campus Crusade for Christ had four spiritual laws to market its evangelical message. They captured the attention of students in colleges and universities. The CCC was a bastion of respectable conservative Christianity. The Ecumenical Institute was on the other end of the spectrum. It similarly packaged a 44-hr weekend course where the Christ-word is stated as: *Life is good. The past is approved. I am accepted. The future is open.* That Christ-word grounded through Imaginal Education was what kept me going on EI's vision and mission.

A colleague grounded the "Life is Good" part further into a triune formulation experienced as Awe, continually confronted by the Awesome, and celebrated in the lifestyle of Awed Ones.

*J'aime la vie*, my signature, has this line: yesterday, appreciate; tomorrow, anticipate; today, participate; in all, celebrate - my feeble translation of the Christ-word.

## Year 63 The Shanghai Goodbye '07-'08 *Green Card Xiexie*

A colleague once said that her life was difficult, but mine was always a mistake. I had two big ones in '07-'08.

First, when I was having financial difficulties, I asked my wife Xinyi to share her earnings in the upkeep of the apartment. Workaholic Xinyi had jobs in addition to the ones she held, first, at the Community Health Clinic (CHC), then to the clinic of Dr. Tony Stearns, and later, a clinic that was patronized by Tan Holdings, which published my column in their daily newspaper.

What I did not know was that in her house, the twain of her parents' income never crossed. Papa always paid the bills, did the groceries, the dishes and the laundry. It is said that when a girl marries, she chooses a dependable man from Shanghai. That I used Xinyi's money for home expense was a big NO-NO. It did not help that I was older than Xinyi's parents.

In regards to the age difference, Xinyi and I had already shared fluids for a year before we were married, and one of the reasons we legalized the union was to avail of cheaper College fees and to apply for the desired green card that she had hoped to acquire as a nurse when she came to Saipan. We liked each other a lot and were fond of each other's company, but when she visited home in '05, she applied for a two-year stint as a nurse in the U.S. at the same time I applied for a visitor's visa for her to go with me to Hawaii and Detroit. She was circumventing a process since going as a nurse easily qualified

her for a green card. I applied for her to travel with me that summer but was denied. This had further implications than the procedural glitch I thought it was. It was a second mistake.

The U.S. trip included a symposium with the Realistic Living Institute located outside of Dallas TX that took seriously the metaphorical translation of biblical symbols into the language appropriate for the times.

I also attended NAFAUM sessions in Virginia (National Association of Filipino American United Methodists), and then joined teachers from around the nation in Washington DC to teach accurately the U.S. Vietnam experience in the 60s and 70s. I met there the famed historian Stanley Karnow who I knew through his book, *In Our Image*, on the U.S. experience in the Philippines. He wrote the definitive history of the U.S. experience in Vietnam.

It was a full summer, but I left my sweetheart behind in steamy Saipan, mulling the offense of my boo-boo on house finances. My beauty lass also drew the attention of young men who kept trying to lead her naiveté into compromised situations. For her blooming womanly charms, she even got words of undying affection from an admirer in another island, who also had a pregnant girlfriend living with him at the time.

The green card, or the absence thereof, became a subversive subterfuge on a game I was not too good at, or willing to play. Xinyi's parents had discretely inquired about the progress of a card acquisition. Xinyi's manner of broaching the subject to me was not received well. It also was

made when I discovered that she applied to go to the U.S. as a nurse without my knowledge, so when she brought up the subject, I snapped and said that each time she brought up the matter, I relegated two months of my inattention on the matter back. She wanted to be assured that I was on her case.

In fact, I engaged the services of one of the top law firms on island to represent my interests with U.S. Immigration on Xinyi's green card 3 years before. I plunked a deposit on their time but was told that we either had to wait for three years worth of required income tax returns, or draw an affidavit on why, as a mendicant cleric, I did not file tax returns in the previous two or three years, which the office was only too happy to assist. In '07, I filed my third year tax return. I was ready to process Xinyi's papers.

On my way back from summer, she asked on the phone if I could front for her a PC laptop. I couldn't since I already purchased some items for her and had maxed the credit line on my MC. She picked me up on my return from my trip, dropped me off at the apartment, and told the taxi to proceed where she was staying. She moved out the day before I arrived.

I was stunned. Ironically, I sent greetings to kin and friends that Christmas projecting that it was not going to be long before I let Xinyi go. She had a life in front of her while I was reduced to relishing the memories of the past.

In a characteristic patriarchal fashion, I took her going as my option. Xinyi thought otherwise. She knew it to be hers!

## Year 64 Spondylosis '08-'09 *The House of Horus*

What began as my mistaking concupiscence for love ended up as mutual affection. Xinyi and I amicably divorced in September '08 two months after she flew the coop. She went to Shanghai a month before with the Director of Immigration. Against her father's objections she married the CNMI official a month later.

My suspected spondylosis, after reporting neck pains to my MD, led me to resign from SVES. School principal Ms. Kinai Salas suggested that I sought medical retirement from PSS so I could handle my own therapy, but Gov. CNMI at the time quit contributing to my retirement fund; it was also my health insurer. Knowing how time consuming it was to secure medical referral, I traveled to the Philippines, getting a Magnetic Resonance Imaging (MRI) on the neck cervical musculoskeletal system.

Cebu confirmed a degenerative osteoarthritis of cervical spondylosis. Other than removing, or altering, an irritating bone gone awry so it does not put too much pressure on nerve endings, I sought alternative healing measures, or physical therapy, on my condition.

As a journalist friend once said, every time you are in transition, you seem to bounce back well. Shortly after Xinyi walked out, I tutored Korean ladies in English and while I liked one of them, a widow to a well-placed Korean trader, interior decorator and charming mother of one of my former students, we had difficulty talking. The son also did not welcome his former teacher's

not too covert attraction to his mother, given that the Dad, though it was for his health that they moved to the tropics, had only recently died.

It was after one of my language sessions while walking to my pick-up that I saw a petite bundle of energy trying to get out of the rain. I asked if she needed a ride, and she said, "Yes," with a beam that warmed the blood in my foot sole.

Zhou Yun lived in what looked like a series of garage rooms turned into apartments not too far from the Post Office by the pricey lagoon shore. Housing was at a premium, particularly those who chose to stay behind in Saipan after putting in time working in a garment factory fulfilling contractual arrangements. Zhou Yun accepted a proffered umbrella from the rain, so I walked her to her room. The magic was instant and I stayed longer than I had planned.

I ran into Xinyi and a girlfriend in an upscale boutique with Zhou Yun one day, and Xinyi was sport enough to sidle up and whisper: "You never brought me to this place before, and now you're parading your new girlfriend all over the place." I could have hugged her.

After Xinyi got remarried, she advised that I not let Zhou Yun go and marry her, too. We were actually ahead of the administrative game. As was the case of many Chinese nationals who opted to stay behind after working in a factory, Zhou Yun had to deal with immigration, which at the time, was still controlled by the CNMI. She paid a mirage of a restaurant in Garapan that specialized in visas at high cost, worked

illegally as a waitress at a bar in Chalan Kanoa, and performed bed services to customers when called upon, when she needed the money, which was all the time!

At first, I registered her as my maid, moved her to my place (I moved next door after Xinyi left, to neutralize the space), and began a tumultuous relationship. Zhou Yun was one fiery creature who fought for what she wanted. I had to call the police a couple of times when I thought she was heady and going out of control.

We did get married. It became obvious that she needed to go home to her ailing mother, as well as attend to a house that she bought with her Saipan earnings. I followed her northwest of Shanghai to Jiangsu where she was formerly married to a guy that was a labor recruiter and had sent workers to Saipan, Japan, and Korea. He had a second family while Zhou Yun was away, precipitating the quick dissolution of the marriage after a surprise Zhou Yun's vacation trip home. She was smart enough, however, to put their house investment in her name.

Zhou Yun, married to a US citizen, found no difficulty returning to the CNMI. She left with a round trip ticket. Back in the ranch, I left the apartment and rented a room at the San Jose Hotel in Oleai I called *The House of Horus*.

Zhou Yun and I were going to live next to a Palau-Chinese farm family to transform a hill with a spring into an orchard of fruits and cut flowers, investing some tools into the project. My wait for Zhou Yun was longer than planned. I did not twiddle my thumb.



**Year 65 Dong Bei '09-'10**  
*Fly me to New York*

She was a frumpy looking damsel hanging out of the parking lot and I ask if she needed a ride. Saipan not having a public transport system other than taxis, I made it a habit to offer my passenger seat to anyone who needed one, and headed in my direction.

Xiao Yan just joined the ladies at the nearby bar where most of the members of the House of Horus worked, illegally as the owner confessed, for the proprietress could only carry two helpers in her bar. If she wanted more, she had to pay substantially at Immigration, and not ask any further questions.

Xiao Yan (literally, "little flower") came from Shenyang to meet her NYC husband of 3 years who promised to meet her there. She paid an agency \$6000 to get a round-trip ticket to the CNMI, and a month-long visa with options to renew every month. Like everyone else who had been talked into coming to a U.S. territory, she was mesmerized by the zip code that read like Hawaii's at a high cost.

Her husband at a care home in NYC's Coney Island had a heart attack and cannot locate his travel papers. I had a scheduled trip to the US mainland so I volunteered to go see the hubby and get him to Saipan if I could. The hubby when we met was way in advance in his senility that it was unconscionable to bring him over, even if he had the necessary papers to get on a plane. (It turned out that with a U.S. issued document like a driver's license, he could travel

straight to Saipan without a passport since he was not going out of a U.S. territory, but the carrier Continental Air was unaware of that.)

Xiao Yan had a Shenyang friend in NYC who introduced her to Tom three years before, and had been ready to welcome Xiao Yan and her son into the city. Tom made two trips to China and filed the petition for wife and step-son but even with the help of an immigration law firm in NYC, something went wrong. Xiao Yan appeared in Guangzhou for an interview and the office sent her a letter 9 months later saying that they doubted her marriage was for real ("not a bona fide marriage" was the term used).

Zhou Yan in China seemingly was in no hurry to return. Meanwhile, Xiao Yan ran out of visa time so I enrolled her at a Business College where I was a part-time teacher (most students were there for the immigration cover) and got her a year-long student visa. I made another trip to NYC to make sure of Tom's situation before making a final recommendation. His condition had turned worst. Besides, after talking to Xiao Yan's lawyer, Immigration considered their case closed as the appeal time on the previous denial had expired.

*Dong Bei* was a name I'd heard before because of the number of garment factory workers that originated from Manchuria (Liaoning, Jilin, and Heilongjiang provinces) lodge between Russia, Mongolia, and the Koreas. So after Xiao Yao returned to Shenyang, I followed not too long after. I had emailed the Dean of the Shenyang Aerospace University International Education Center before, inquiring about possible teaching

positions in the staff. He was interested in folks with technical skills, particularly in aviation, but he was gracious to thank me for asking. I informed him that I would be in Shenyang that year, and I got a lackluster invite to drop in.

I met Zhou Yun in Shanghai on the way back and she was not yet ready to return. The ticket I got her was expiring and because it was gotten from accumulated mileage, its validity was only good for a year. Her mother's condition had not gotten better. Her friend at the farm married to a guy from Palau made a slip when she asked if I had met Zhou Yun's son. I met a very helpful "nephew" when I was there who drove around in his car. I was, of course, surprised that Zhou Yun did not tell me about him.

When Zhou Yun finally came back, I was in the steamy House of Horus, writing all about it in the local paper. Colleagues she knew, and also knew her, lived in the premises. Zhou Yun had a reputation among the ladies for her temper. A week after she arrived, she decided that she had no interest in working the orchard. I mentioned her son and she was furious that her girlfriend was too loose with her mouth. I was surprised that her anger totally ignored the message and focused on the messenger. Besides, she said, I was too old for her, and she would appreciate it if I did not look for her anymore when she left. She hid well. Attempts to find out where she went came to naught.

Xiao Yan, meanwhile, talked to Tom in NYC and drew up divorce papers. The marriage USCIS considered unreal came to an end. I seethed at the unfairness of it all.

## Year 66 Falling in lust '10-'11

### *Kim*

Shortly after Zhou Yun faded into the uncharted pathways of one of Saipan's ghettos, I started to map out my next move. I had hoped to live with Zhou Yun in Jiangsu but she was under a different kind of pressure. When PSS indicated that it no longer wanted my services, I looked at *Dong Bei* for my next destination.

Four consecutive relationships with ladies from China gave me no problems coming in and out of the country. Yinghua from Beijing at 50 got me on a train from Hong Kong to the Capital city. Xinyi past 20 got me to walk the Bund in Shanghai. Zhou Yun way past 30 showed me the man-made canal of Jiangsu, and now, Xiao Yan who is on denial that she is approaching 50 has me freezing my butt in Dong Bei. In 2010, I fell in lust with Kim, not yet 40.

She is Jen in China, Kim in Korea. She is of Korean descent who lived in *Yanbian* Korea-in-China in Manchuria next to *Chaoxian* (NoKor). She came to Saipan to work in the garment factory when the allure to come to "America" was touted by recruiters in China. She did not finish her contract. She loved a Pinoy engineer, married his Chamorro friend to legally stay in the CNMI, and ran a methamphetamine outlet, distributing enough without upsetting the cart ran by the big guys from Japan and Korea. A natural outlaw, she was a fun girl in and out of the drug market.

Kim was a housewife whose husband sent her to work. Sickly, he expected Kim to provide

for their daughter's growing needs so when the opportunity came to work "overseas," she was delighted and literally jumped on the plane.

When she and her lover moved around to ply their trade because of the popular demand for their product, they kept the business for a long while until he ran out of visa options and had to return to the Philippines, which is just as well since he had gotten themselves to be users of their own drug.

Kim moved to Tinian and opened a bar where she hawked the services of girls, on the one hand, and sold drugs on the other. At first, she only sold drugs in Saipan, and later, got into Tinian. She walked into someone's territory. Not too long after, she became a felon in the CNMI serving a year's sentence. The CNMI misplaced her passport so she was not deported at the end of her term; when found, the passport was expired and they had to send it for renewal. She was not told about all of these, and a friend in Tinian got her a lawyer who got her out of prison and filed a suit to recover damages for her incarceration beyond her sentence. The lawyer happened to be a friend of mine and that was the tenuous connection.

Well, not really. It was lust at first sight. After she was released from prison, she came to live in the House of Horus where I was living. She was taller than I by a couple of inches barefoot, but we smiled to each other when we met in the hallway. Her friend in Tinian who claimed all business and personal belongings when she was indicted and led to Saipan's new federal prison, got her the lawyer, supported her monthly fees

and expenses, and was sex partner for a week each month. I got all the above info later when I got to know her better but in early '10, I invited myself to her attention. One afternoon, I asked her to my room intentionally leaving the door left wide open. She came and closed the door behind her with a beatific smile. I do not associate religious experiences to incarnate this way but the epiphany was sublime.

The chemistry sparked like Chinese fireworks on Lunar New Year. I've had my share of dilly-dallying from Texas to Maine, Seoul to Sydney, Hong Kong to Saskatoon, but Kim's presence just made my hormones go into atomic fusion.

When I could not locate Zhou Yun after she disappeared and remembering her wish not to be found, I had a lawyer draw divorce papers. Before the CNMI relinquished its control of immigration to the Feds, I ran into her at the government office. She needed help and she made it clear I was welcomed back to her arms. The judge decreed divorce the same day we resumed acquaintance in tender embrace.

The schedule worked well. When Kim was with her sponsor, I was with Zhou Yun. Kim and I started acting like an item, finally asking me to move in with her so she could tell her Korean admirers that she had a live-in partner. Tinian still had a call since he paid her bills, but Kim soon started thinking striking a different path. On my next trip to Dong Bei, I delivered a laptop to her daughter.

Kim wanted me to meet her family and planned for us to know each other better.

## Year 67 SAU '11-'12

### *Macroeconomics*

After I delivered Kim daughter's laptop in Tumen, Jilin, I proceeded to Shenyang where Xiao Yan and I signed papers at a government office and each given a passbook saying we were married. I went back to Saipan to close out my affairs. Zhou Yun finally had enough of Saipan and left for Jiangsu. She was funny in that she introduced me to her friend who was abandoned by her Chamorro husband with a baby. She filed suit to settle her status as an abandoned wife of a citizen. I was nice uncle to baby and friend to her. It worked well since her immigration lawyer was the same one as mine.

It was Kim and I that had a torrid love affair. We could not get enough of each other but I also found out that her former clients as a dealer gave her access to meth for recreational use. I was at a quandary. I did not wish to get caught nor snagged with a drug user.

A word about drugs, which in my experience, were the potted plants illicitly grown around Lake Susupe. There were three occasions when I reefered in my life. The first was in the Blue Mountains of Jamaica where the stuff naturally grew. *Rastas* incorporated it into their religious acts. I inhaled at the start of my visit. I was in good shape so the experience was exquisite; then at the end when I was exhausted, and it was a bummer. I had nightmares.

The second time was in Nigeria where the stuff grew in the fields like the rest of the weeds. A training nurse let me draw on a reefer while I

sweated a malaria fever. I was disoriented. I was told that I started climbing the walls.

With a statuette PCV assigned to Bohol in a Cebu hotel, I had my third. The ambience and experience were an altogether heavenly one. I understood why Bill Clinton definitely inhaled.

But meth and chemical concoction were alien to me. The closest thing to addiction was caffeine. The raw physicality of passion kept me in Kim's game; she was honest enough to acknowledge that she received a packet of meth from friends. Not a prude, I asked to join her.

We were awake in bed for more than 24 hours straight but I felt like I ran a marathon, or spent considerable hours in the gym. The resultant dopamine and oxytocin excretions/secretions were neither felt nor enjoyed. I preferred my highs on normal terms from Mother Nature.

I took it my task to get Kim out of Saipan back to Dong Bei. Allowing concupiscence without illusion of some edifying emotion, nor the good assistance of meth, we slept our way down from frequent heights of raw unassisted and unaided endocrine releases up As Terlaje way.

When the Feds finally got around to deport her, she was ready. We informed them that she was leaving on her own volition. We lived on the sale of my pick-up, withdrew Church retirement fund, and emptied the old savings account to get her a decent start where she was heading.

Three weeks later, after it became clear that PSS was done with me, I followed her to Yangi,

Jilin. We took 10-days to cuddle "goodbye". Kim, now Jen again, moaned her last with me in a cheap but clean hostel. We parted well.

I went to Shenyang Aerospace University to interview for the faculty of the International Education Center, and after the Dean and his Associate, along with the lawyer, chatted with me, we scheduled a demo lecture on economics at the Friendship Villa with foreign students and Chinese English majors attending. After another sit-down with a faculty member grad of the London School of Economics, I was done. My parade-in-review was acceptable. I was invited to process my working visa. I lectured to foreign students on Macroeconomics, but discovered lukewarm passion for econometrics so I had another teacher handle it since it could not be excised from the course.

I petitioned for Xiao Yan to immigrate to the U.S. USCIS Saipan told us it was a 3-month process. Three years later, the papers had not moved beyond the initial review stage. Xiao Yan waited three months in Saipan while I taught in Shenyang. After my stepson and I joined her in Saipan over summer, we closed out my apartment. I carried two suitcases to my new home.

Up to this point, my heart lingered in the shores of San Francisco Bay. "I left my heart in San Francisco" worded my hum but I gave up and my heart mate was indecisive. My inner clock and my knees caught up with my years. It was time to cut out of wasting dreams and hit my own jackpot with my remaining years. I bought into a Shenyang residency.

**Year 68 Nei Menggu '12-'13**  
*The grassland*

Xiao Yan and I took our son to Inner Mongolia (Nei Menggu) riding the train from Shenyang to Manzhouli, the city by the Russian border that displayed signage in four languages: Chinese characters, English words, Russian Cyrillic, and Mongolian script.

I was not a cultural anthropologist but I read and reflected enough about culture stuff that the emphasis on any of the parameters of human consciousness, time-space-role-story, is often evident in cultural art, social behavior, and a group's political orientation.

The civilization of Europe latched on to time. We were drilled in school to the various eras (e.g., of Elizabeth) and ages (of explorations like that of Magellan, Columbus and Cortes). Dates and personages were measured and valued in their indelible marks on time.

This was not surprising given that the stories of the Levant went from the beginning to the end, the alpha and the omega, genesis and rapture in the books of the Christian Bible. Taking the Levantine stories and putting it on a time frame was why I went by the *anno domini* calendar.

The Han (the people rather than the perspective) who constitute 90% of China were rooted on geography. Family name located in ancestry. History was not told by ages and eras, but by the dynasty (hereditary ruling family) presiding during a period described by seasons of Mother Nature in summer, winter, spring and fall (e.g.,

Spring and Autumn period) and the points of cardinal directions (e.g., the eastern and western Hans).

The *Zhongwen* language had five directional points. In addition to east-west-north-south, there was also the center, *Zhong*, the "middle", from which was derived *Zhongguoren*, the word Chinese call themselves. One's social standing was defined from one's distance to the mandate of heaven held in the middle, presently a temple of heaven in Beijing.

Chinese historiography had succeeding dynasty account on the previous one, providing enough distance to depict both the yin and the yang of the rule. The Han dynasty's record of the Qin rule was often referred to as negative but it was actually a balance of what was affirmed and denied at the time of the writing.

Nei Menggu ("the other side of the mountain"), next to *Da Hingan Ling*, the range separating Dong Bei from the grasslands, stretched from the Gobi to the streams and springs that fed into Hulun lake emptying to the Amur that separated Russia from China, with cities like Hohhot, the capital, Baotuo, Ordos, and Chifeng across from the Liaoning border. The demarcation line had not always been there, but when the Qing was weak, it ceded control of what became Russia's Far East. Many native residents became aliens in their own land.

Our trip to Nei Menggu in the summer of '12 was, first, an experience of Russia west of the Urals, not unlike encountering Moscow in the downtown section of Harbin in Heilongjiang.

The turrets and domes in the city of Manzhouli looked like Petrograd before it was renamed in honor of Lenin, now called St. Petersburg. The backdrop of the grasslands makes Manzhouli native to its location rather than a neighbor to Lake Ladoga close to Finland.

The grasslands where the Yurts used to house the herders of sheep and cattle, horse and mule, sheltered dwellers from the rain and kept the hearth's heat in winter, became tourist attraction along with the eerie sounds of open grassland song and the hoof of spring jubilation.

The grasslands strung electrical wires to power southern cities, with coal-fired plants tucked in hills or mounds of deceptive coal piles, trucked 7/24 from the pits of Shanxi, or mined northeast Nei Menggu. The smog around the cities of Beijing, Shenyang, Shanghai, Taiyuan and Shijiazhuang was China's hydrocarbon emitted from the grasslands, part of the phenomenon of global warming and climate change.

We stayed in unbeaten paths, dependent on the train and occasional bus ride through unpaved forest roads. From *Hulun Nur* to Hailar, to the Amur through forest deer herders in Erguna, kin to the Beiring Straits crossers to the Americas, Zhonghua-speaking white Russians in Shiwei. I swung with the Jurchen folks of Mordaga to Mohe on rhythms from the Turkic-Altai tribes. I felt Kim by my side in the way she danced in our little room in Saipan, her DNA long ago coming from the grasslands of Nei Menggu.

I hid the interior castle of my aroused world to myself, my depravity privately my very own.

## Year 69 Liuliude '13-'14 *A Taste of Szechuan*

In my old neighborhood in Falls Church VA was a restaurant that I never went to because my family was spice-allergic. It was a Chinese restaurant that specialized in Szechuan cuisine. (I retain the old spelling for the food since the new Hanyu Pinyin now spells the name of the province as Sichuan.)

In 2013, I took a 40-hr train ride from Shenyang to Chengdu. The route went through Tianjin, Zhijiazhuang, Xi'an, on to the capital city of the Sichuan basin and foothills to the Himalayas. I took one of the soft beds, i.e., there were four rather than six berths in the cubicle, with a door that was shut during the night to discourage any unwelcomed intruders. It was not bad.

Going through Xi'an, I remember the terrain of 1989 when a hotel by the city's bell tower was the only place foreigners were allowed to stay, surprisingly staffed by Filipino personnel as, I was led to understand then, Chinese workers still hesitated to labor in a hotel establishment like "servants".

There was nothing about the city from the train station, nor of the neighboring high-rise condos and apartments, that looked familiar, but then, that trip was more than twenty years before. I am not sure the old archaeological digs of Qin Shi Huangdi's terracota army was still isolated in the middle of nowhere as it was before. With replicas of the terracota army all over the world, like the panda in every store in China, I was sure the place had by now the feel of 42nd St. in

New York City, or, a highway store in Texola, Oklahoma on the border of Texas' Panhandle near Route 66.

Chengdu in late June was not bad. Kangding in the Garze Autonomous Region was even better though I did not expect the sweater temperature in the nippy bite of night. Kangding sat up in the hills where on a clear day I stared at snow-capped Hialuogou glacier in the distance. I was at an unfinished park where the Kangding love song *Liuliude* was carved in stone. I learned a spiffy nationally known tune that day.

But the allure of going further northwest was short lived as the rains pummeled the swelled streams and rivers, and the carved roads along the mountain side got piled with falling rocks, or split into canals by the torrential waters from the instant falls. I hightailed it back to Ya-an, site of two massive earthquakes in the last five years, and nibbled at my barbecue sticks along the stalls by the river when the weather offered respite from the rain, or looked at the bright lights that lit up an old palace on the bridge across Langqiao river from my hotel window not to far from a light-blinking tree in a round about on one end of the bridge.

I hit two tourist traps after I decided I was not going to be a victim of the fickle downpour. One, in an old village that turned cobblestoned streets into quaint with not so quaint goods for sale, was touristy Songli, upstream from Ya-an.

Then I got on a bus to Qionglai where a former language student in Shenyang attended a flying school, changed to another bus headed for Ping

Le, instead of heading up north to Jiuzhaiguo of the famed lakes and sceneries as the battered roads succumbed to the raging rivers, stopping land traffic all together.

Ping Le, however, did not disappoint. Tourist stalls by the river were good places to browse through the offerings of many products coming all the way from Thailand on its Malay tail by Phuket in the Andaman Sea, and the Strait of Malacca, area of political influence of protest leader Suthep Thaugsuban, whose proposal of selecting a council of elites was a twist from election to accomplish democratic aims.

I segued to Chongqing, famous for deposed Mayor Bo Xi Lai. The city was fully equipped with a Mafia straight from NYC. I understood why Bo got himself in trouble cleaning-up the crony capitalism and rampant corruption that had embedded itself into the city's affairs. The city once played the role of capital of Sichuan, and national Guo Min Tang capital against the Japanese in WWII. It became a Municipality larger in land area than Tianjin, Shanghai, and Beijing combined. Bo was not up to the task as he had problems of his own including abuse of power in shielding his murderous wife.

The train back to Shenyang had to be in two segments, with one stopping by the idyllic city of Shiyan in Hubei, famed for *Tao* in Wudang Shan. Built along the winding stream of the valley, this was inland China in the river of rapid change sweeping the country.

Then I caught the bug and a fever. I went back to SAU a week ahead of schedule.

**Year 70 Calgary Stampede '14-'15**  
*To Dee I sing*

I thought I saw my last of the Great Lakes, the Atlantic, Gulf, and Pacific coasts of the North American continent. Maybe, the Atlantic and the Gulf, but in the summer of '14, I visited my friend Dick in Dallas, meditated with folks of the Realistic Living Institute, and huddled with the four boys of my two eldest daughters, the first in Schaumburg outside of Chicago, Illinois, and the second, on the Oakland side of the SF Bay Area. It was a North American adieu.

It began as my introduction to the family of an old friend from Davao, formerly married to a Canadian colleague, who has two sons. She was in HK over New Year's Eve '14 on her way to Pea Eye. I went down to give her company, or in her view, to get me out of the stress of the recent disapproval of my working visa in China. To Dee I sing was born.

Dee and I go back to Mindanao when I visited her while I was in Davao to seek funding for our development projects. She attended the Baguio ITI '73, my first training as a teacher. She joined the EI/ICA/O:E network later and married one of our colleagues, left the Order and raised their two sons. On the last year of her service in the city of Calgary where she did property management, she retired May '14. The form of the last friendship was over. We had however feelings of growing old together.

The writing of this memoir started after the HK visit that led into the North American adieu as I geared towards the celebration of completion.

**Year 71 The Publishing House '15-'16**  
*The Seven-Year Itch*

Civilization was not natural. One worked hard on it. Mother Nature did not care. All it knew was procreation, genetically programmed to reproduce. We decide to be happy, a choice we make and work on. We keep our cup flowing to the brim. To be fulfilled (filled full) comes with the territory.

In my claim to intentional living, I will hold a virtual first memorial service on my 70th year to memorialize my 86-year long existence that began August 1, 1945 to its terminus December 15, 2031.

A memorial service is usually held by friends and kin at the completion of one's life. I held a virtual one 2015 so frenemies can tell me what they really think about our relationships without worrying about making up what to say. Truth was fine. To my face while I still was breathing was fine, too. I said, "Leave the lies to when I am dead" when it won't make any difference.

Meanwhile I meant to teach, write and publish that year. The teaching came naturally as it was needed, and since I used English lessons as the vehicle to my pedagogy on life, I had occasions to really teach. I also wrote. The columns for the *Saipan Tribune* kept an audience focused on their own journey while reading about mine. That remained the style of my writing. What I wrote was not published but posted for anyone on cyberspace to copy, for readers to notice the content and the form, and do the same on their own, not to duplicate, but to replicate.

**Year 72 Garden Apartment '16-'17**  
*Plant and grow*

The orchids and spider plants were blossoms and greens in my garden in Manchuria. The orchids survived indoors when carefully tended. Spider plants proliferated like mice and rabbits in the field. My living room at the Friendship Villa at SAU looked like a botanical solarium with the spider plants and their long flowering branches reaching down from the top of the tall bookshelves to the floor.

The northern end of the Garden Apartment that I co-purchased with the Liu family, Xiaoyan's, did not get much sun in the winter. I devised ways to make it a haven for winter creatures that wandered into the terrain, like birds, mice, and rabbits. Summertime, I grew a good mix of greens and blossoms, a few ornamentals and a lot of nutritional.

A Pennsylvania former Quaker colleague and his Liaoning-born wife left me their orchids and plants when he reached his 65th year at SAU. He could not be part of the teaching staff any longer by China's employment guidelines so he and wife Chunxia went someplace else where he made more than he received teaching.

The hen and chicks (*sempervivum*), Christmas cactus (*schlumbergeria*) grew, and the orchids (*doritaenopsis*, *phalaenopsis*, and *cymbidium*, no kidding) were water sensitive, a challenge to raise, but were a valued gift and their blossoms were worth the efforts. I became a gentleman gardener I had a healthy green garden this side of Eden!

**Year 73 'Sang Pinoy series '17-'18**  
*The Ten Chicken Scratches*

Moses had his Ten Commandments. Almost all of us have ten digits on our hands and feet. On my Seven Year Itch, I had ten writings as my aim in a format of writing-made-easy. These 86 pages in 86 years got the ball rolling, but it was not easy.

I *'Sang Pinoy* tatak ordinaryo *j'aime la vie* for grandchildren on my 86 years in 86 pages

II *Pinoy sa Puso* is of the affairs of the heart and other places, for all the girls I've known

III *Pinoy Saipan* chronicles life with the UMC, ST, STaRPO, 10 years by a lagoon, and SAU

IV *Pinoy SVES* journeys through the art & discipline of PSS motorcycle maintenance.

V *Pinoy Panda Chinoy* travels to Chung Qing, Zhongguo, Manzhouli and Heihe

VI *WangZhimu*, James V in China and the imaginal road to Santiago de Compostela.

VII *La Liga Ekumenika* of church renewal, human development, and spirit life

VIII *Pinoy Hemingwei*, a personal journey of meaning and oblivion, the old man and the sea

IX *Pinoy englisCHe*, oral English with Chinese characteristics, spoken and written by a Pinoy

X *Pinoy Journal* are 365 quotes, 365 days, 365 world-wise and street-smart reflections.

**Year 74 Journal Writing '18-'19**  
*365 Quotes, Reflections, and Days*

The quotes come from *ancient* sources of varied ethnicities and religious foundations. Because of my location for the 12 years prior to 2031, I deferred to the wisdom of *Chinese* sages of all ages; then leant on global authors and speakers, and a worldwide network of colleagues.

The Journal format invited reflections from the readers to notice what authors actually said, not their meanings but their words, then trace how the words sounded inside their interior castles, what impact the words had on their database of past orientations, what feelings had ensued that plumbed the depths of readers' thoughts and the planned necessary deed crying out to be done.

Most of our previous Journal writings tended to stay at the level of facts, which were necessary, but they did not reflect emotions or meanings and hardly indicated the imperatives waiting to be addressed. The illusion of an objective one-to-one correlation between a word and a unit of reality was a civilizational mistake. There was no knowledge separate from the reality of one who knew. Thus, the authenticity of what was real depended on noticing of sense experience rather than false precision of exacting words.

The Journal writing pushed the envelope further than previous practice. They reflected temporal authenticity more than eternal verities.

I did not live in my journal records save as it allowed me to experience my experience again. The journal was secondary to my journey.

**Year 74 The Winter of my disconnect '19-'20**  
*Of bends, knuckles, elbows, and knees*

I got down and dirty to inventory the state of my physiology. I grew up on organic products but survived on my adult years on agriculture that depended on chemical input from the seed hybrids and clones to the fertilizers used in production methods. It was costly.

The challenge of food production came to fore for me as the world's population moved into urban centers and turned to the mechanized world of commercial farming. The small farms of old rapidly gave way to the bottom line of corporate business before healthy living.

Singapore pioneered vertical gardens that any area in the equator can emulate. A total of 50 hectares of vegetable vertical gardens supported the requirements of a whole city like Singapore, a marvel of marrying technology and nutrition. But this was an isolated case. The worldwide reality of poverty and hunger remained when there was no more reason to compete in the dog-eat-dog world of supply-demand market economics.

The world turned to its head to feed the body but forgot why it headed that way, and the body was left wilting on the wayside while the brain got higher pay in the office of obesity and high blood pressure. Obesity became a challenge in my waning days.

How was I a being in my body rather than in my head? The pointed question was better than the pat answers. Such was the fabric of my life.

**Year 75 The glow of our sunset '20-'21**  
*Sitting on the lagoon canvas chair*

Where I laid in viewing my life journey so far, it was clear that females dominated my every turn, were preeminent in my habitable spaces. That I grew up in a culturally matriarchal ethos does not reduce the element of choice that I made. I lived off my relationships with women, not in abusing favors, nor taking advantage of charms but in benefiting from encounters to be mutually beneficial, in my mind, to all.

If there was offense, it was in violating social proprietary rights that dictated one owned another, rather than each limiting boundaries of experiential exposure. When royals owned people, there was meaning to "belonging" to someone. I may not have been the most faithful of lovers, but when I was with someone, they were never peripheral to my sight, vision, or attention. But they were not mine, and I was never theirs though we might have bump into each other horizontally in the darkest of night.

At 70, I took Gandhi's choice of celibacy. Oh, I still had female company, but the otherness of the significant other became more preeminent. I married my task of writing in my Seven Year Itch in the same way as others married their careers and professions.

At 75, I put some closure to my writing so that the following year became full-blown memorial to my existence. The next decade that followed unwound entanglements, opened closed nooks, released pent-up emotions, and let the dry wind of the tomb be the cleansing guide.



FORe@GET.cn  
*Hemingwei*

Our forget-ability was a done deal. It went with the nature of existence. To be human was to be forgettable. Sure, we left footprints on the sands of time, but the desert winds tarried not to wipe them out as soon as the steps were taken, nor did the shore waves desisted on high tide from reaching the shore. Typhoons and hurricanes went to where fierce winds never ravaged roofs before.

Though luminaries had been known to leave their names in golden letters in the annals of human history, even Abram and Iesu, Socrates and Descartes, Ruth and Susan, Chardin and Chomsky, they became faint personae pictures in the wide billboards of human memory. Only as they were carried forward, not through genes as through their teachings that the aromas and the scents in their wake were noticeably trailing behind.

It was the descriptive metaphors of presence that brought them to life, and only because their teachings reflected our own. The pedagogue in me carried many of these gents and few ladies, mostly gents as taught in my upbringing, but precisely because of their stark absence in the normal curricula of common consciousness did I allow the women of my time front seats in the meditative council of my soul.

But Ernest Hemingway had a brilliant way with words and how he arranged them to express the internal grid of his consciousness. They say that his genes carried a self-destructive impulse

to cut short a journey when running into the abyss of one's existence. That's too pat of an explanation as it relieved him of the responsibility in running the destiny of his fate. No, the burly Hemingway blew his old brains out because he could no longer abide the aches and pains he suffered from two plane crashes during his African safaris. Also, he sauced himself out of the creative writing profession.

I am neither homicidal nor suicidal. Though I was able to hit a target at 50 meters in a frozen Michigan lake one December day when I was barely twenty-one, clearly handy with a rifle, I am allergic to the bang of fireworks and the flash from the barrel of a gun. Neither would I point the thing on me nor level its nozzle in the direction of another. Taking my life or that of another is out totally out of the question.

But in the last three years, I assumed the name *Hemingwei*. Many readers of American English novels related my name to the Oak Park, Illinois born-and-raised Miami-Havana resident turned Idaho recluse, only to discover that I was served in different flavors. I wore my new name thus: *He* meant gentle, *Ming* was regal, and *Wei* was the ever-affirming big heavenly YES with tight clenching fist pumped downward on the elbow in big bold exclamation points! Ergo, I was the constantly affirming regal gentleman, big time!

Still, to FORe@GET is not about abandoning something as it is thrusting forward to acquire that which is not yet. It is about getting a thing, a state, or a process from the visualized field of the not-yet into the reality of the NOW. Giving flesh to now takes on a new meaning.

It should be obvious by now that we prefer our living on the fresh sauce of today rather than the perfected menus of yesterday, or the idealized offerings of tomorrow.

Let us ground those three a bit.

Yesterday is hardly anything we appreciate. It was never cooked right, and we spend too much time recalibrating the dial so that it may come out right. And if we can't, we carry either guilt or remorse for the days we can no longer return to and rectify. This, or we rename it our golden age since it is so easier to manage than today's complexities.

Tomorrow is idealized. We say, "I will surely be happier when ..." pointing to a condition in the future. "I will be better if and when ..." at once, conditional and anticipated. That, or the doomsday scenarios like an Armageddon and an apocalypse.

Yesterday is either not good enough or was the golden age; tomorrow is where our fortunes lie, or it is doomed. Today is the focal point, a split second that teeters us over one or the other.

One day, the "today" of my life became a one moment in time, in my case, 86-some years of human existence. So yesterday was before my time, and tomorrow will come after. My sole responsibility is the now, designated as my one moment in time, all 86 years of it.

It is trite and we've seen it many times before: "*One day your life will flash before your eyes. Make sure it's worth watching.*" True.

**POSTLUDE: Beyond Forgetting**  
*All mine to give*

My sister had the whole poem memorized when it became popular in 1961. It was the flowering time of our generation's romantic impulse. The free form poem was titled *Beyond Forgetting*. I recall that my Gladys story printed in my High School paper had the same title. I was one with humanity. I desired deeply to be remembered forever, too. But rooted in the existential soil of personal relationships, in this case, the Romeo and Juliet syndrome version Pinoy.

Many cultures had enshrined that impulse into their religious rituals. The ancestral "worship" of the Sino tradition that honors and reveres the ones who had gone before and from whom they derived genetic and cultural inheritance, is still commonly practiced throughout all of China, the Koreas, Japan and Vietnam, and their own respective ethnic towns around the world.

Growing up under the influence of Protestant missionaries particularly of the Methodist kind (originally a disciplined rendition of the social gospel), the language of eternity prevailed in my household. God reigned in His kingdom (we had not feminist theologians yet) and all is well on the ground.

With the Death-of-God becoming respectable beyond Nietzsche, I focused on the here-and-now, and plumbed the depth of ordinary human existence through a person not looking up the sky, or another universe next door, but looking down on his boots, and how reporting how his digestive system reacted to dinner's offering.

Portion of Rolando Carbonel's poem:

*For a moment I thought I could forget you...  
For a moment I thought  
I could still the restlessness in my heart.  
I thought the past could no longer haunt me  
nor hurt me....  
how wrong I was.*

*For the past...no matter how distant...  
Is as much a part of me as life itself.  
And you are part of that life.  
You are so much a part of me....  
my dreams...my early hopes...  
my youth and my ambitions...  
that in all my tasks...  
I can't help remembering you...  
many little delights and things remind  
me of you....*

*Yes, I came and would my pride...  
mock my real feelings.  
Would the love song...  
the sweet lovely smile on your face....  
be lost among the deepening shadows....*

*I have wanted to be alone...  
I thought I could make myself forget you...  
in silence and in a song....  
And yet I remembered...*

*For who could forget the memory  
of the once lovely, the once beautiful...  
the once happy worlds such ours?*

*I came because the song that I kept  
through the years is waiting to be sung.  
I can't sing it with out you...*

A bit syrupy but it was moving at the time we first encountered it. Since I sought not to be in

the hallmarks of eternity but in tombstones of kin and progeny's cemetery, I began writing this annual page of memory. The clarity that my time to be known by my grandchildren is at the sunset stage fueled the effort. Wanting them to get a glimpse of who I am/was, however, is less important than to see them be conscious and be actively engaged in the dance of theirs.

The format is also what I share with those who would shout their glory and wail their woes to no one in particular. Self-consciousness, after all, is desired of everyone in the democratized psychical space of our time. Why would we not want everyone to write a page of every year of living and treat one journey of life as a whole but with many parts as one would perceive?

For the logisticians, the paper size is A4 with the Times New Roman font at 12 points. The division is three columns for readability ease, the margins set at 0.5". Some texts aligned left, titles and quotes centered, and some versions justified when printed. The form determined write-up. I fitted words into the format rather than use the best vocabulary in my armory of literary arsenal, nor of the appeal of common usage.

The aim ultimately was not to disseminate the content of my recollection as to invite others to do the same with just a page for every year of one's existence, for the writer and ze immediate audience rather than for posterity. Of 7 billion people, one memory, one person, written one sitting at a time, might get many of us to know each other better. A life's write-up, anyone?

**Year 76 The Memorial Service '20-'21**  
*When the Saints go marching in*

Why not let your friends tell you the truth while you are still alive rather than embellish the lies they will make when you are dead! Bill Salmon of Arizona got that thought into my head.

On Bill's 80th birthday, he held two Memorial Services for himself, one with the tea-totalers, *teetotalitarianism's* remaining practitioners, and the other, the BYOB crowd that outnumbered the first by conservative count of 20 to 1.

My first Memorial Service was a drop-in at a Saipan *pala-pala* shed in March 1-7, 2014 when I visited Saipan to straighten out my standing with the US Social Security system. Every day after office hours, I parked myself by the lagoon across from the *Saipan Tribune* in Gualo Rai to shake people's hands who stopped by and take a picture for posterity, as it were. Other drop-ins occurred in Manila, Honolulu, and Shenyang.

I wrote the *Mardi Gras and a Memorial Service* on my Saipan Tribune column so folks knew of my parking by the *pala-pala* while I was on island, and folks who read my column obliged the gesture by showing up. I wanted to tell my Editor of the number of folks who came but having already submitted so many *pro bono* articles to an essentially non-revenue generating part of Tan Holdings, I did not think impressing him with the number of readers was going to add more pennies into my monthly check.

The other time was at Year 76. That ushered my entry to the delicate Decade of Silence.

**Years 77-86 The Icing on the cake '21-'31**  
*A Decade of Silence*

It was the first movie I saw that stayed longest in my memory and tugged the deepest on my heartstrings, one called *All Mine to Give*.

An orphaned family had no means to remain as a unit together so the eldest farmed out each member for adoption. I saw it just after my father left for graduate school. I thought, should anything happened to my parents, my oldest sister would not have had the stamina (my early prejudice) to see all of us kids to separate homes. I was the oldest boy capable of the feat in cold blood.

I faced the decade of silence in cold blood. Oh, it was not a passive thing, rather an active passivity, like active listening. The nerve endings were alert, and the zing of things that went wrong still hurt as much, but I went with Mother Teresa in one of the scribbled signs on the wall in her Calcutta orphanage:

*People are often unreasonable, irrational, and self-centered.*

Forgive them anyway.

*When you spend years, create what others destroy overnight.*

Create anyway.

*The good you do today will often be forgotten.*

Do good anyway.

*Give the best you have, and it will never be enough.*

Give your best anyway.

In Dec. 15, 2031, I ceased snoring the night.

I trail into oblivion with dag hammarskjold's words, he, a general secretary, the united nations.

*tired  
and lonely  
so tired  
the heartaches.  
rain water trickles  
down the rocks.  
the fingers are numb.  
the knees tremble.  
it is now,  
now that you must not give in.*

*on the path of others  
are resting places,  
places in the sun  
where they can meet.  
but this  
is your path  
and it is now,  
now that you must not fail.*

*weep  
if you can.  
weep,  
but do not complain.  
the way chose you  
and you must be thankful.*

I am!  
As it was in the beginning  
is  
was  
and  
had ever been.

