

# COMMUNITY JOURNAL

## A case for coming home ...for a visit, that is

**IMMIGRANT LIVING:  
101 AND BEYOND**



MONETTE ADEVA MAGLAYA

*“The world is a book, and those who do not travel read only a page.”*

— St. Augustine

(Continued from last week ...)

**F**ORTUNATELY, the dollar's value is holding up pretty nicely, this time around. I had to keep myself from wincing last year every time the exchange rate dipped against the dollar consoling myself on the upside that the rate was good for the Philippine peso.

Depending on your persuasion, God or the devil, is in the details. You map out the daily schedule from Day One to the end date and get all the advance information you need. Why? Because unlike in the US where information is like water available on tap, the flow of information in the Philippines, unless you are wired with a laptop and always in a place with wi-fi access, may be spotty and information, inaccessible. Paying an extra \$20 hotel rate per day for wifi access in your room is a stinker. A better way is to get a cellphone with local access and be good at texting. Filipinos are champion texters and they will leave you in the dust, if you aren't. Even the magtataho owns a cellphone.

Why go to the Philippines when there are a lot of choices out there at far less cost? Ask any emigre. A trip to the native country is in a class by itself when it comes to travel choices. For many first generation expatriates, the Philippines holds a special place in one's heart. It's a place you've seen before but would like to look at again with fresh eyes—notwithstanding the negatives: the seemingly endless spate of negative news, disconcerting tales of horrific traffic

congestion, the heat, the pollution, extremes in poverty and wealth and the vicious inanity of politics. Okay then, it's not perfect but no place in the world is. Nonetheless, it's still a special place. Period. No ifs and buts about it. Warts and all, there are a million and one reasons a Philippine trip is all worth it—particularly during Christmas.

With few exceptions, there can be no happier group of people come Christmastime than Filipinos. It's a perplexing phenomenon that the world has taken notice of with somewhat of a jaundiced eye. Christmas begins in September and ends with a bang in January of the New Year, the longest season of merrymaking anywhere in the world. It is as commercial and profit-driven as anywhere else, with cavernous shopping malls and a slew of holiday activities that can give other international shopping malls a run for their money. Dining out in restaurants can have you wearing clothes 2 sizes bigger in no time at all, if you don't watch it. There's just something about the Philippines during Christmas. Despite crass commercialism, Christmas joy among the multitudes seems genuine. The churches still get filled to the rafters with the faithful, unlike some churches in Europe that are more like empty, tomb-like museums than churches with just a handful in attendance. In a largely cynical, jaded world as we have today, JOY as pure, unfettered, unfeigned and childlike as all that, cutting across all social strata in a poor country, is a phenomenon as rare as the

appearance of Halley's comet.

Why do we come home? Part of the reason is the people—a complex combination of goodness and wickedness, of intelligence and ineptitude and of humility and pride. In the world stage, the Filipino has become the unofficial poster child of what an imported model worker is — and for good reason. Our best export is our overseas foreign workers, whose remittances, put together, from everywhere in the world, have been propping the Philippine economy, for decades now, in a big way. There are large numbers of OFWs that come home for Christmas just to be with their loved ones. The Filipino is an amazing worker. Whether we like it or not, the work we do has become our sense of worth. To be sure, we have our fair share of scumbags and scalawags whose shenanigans make us cringe and cover in collective shame. We have a disproportionate share of character flaws we laugh off self-deprecatingly with jokes we use in spades as we poke fun at ourselves. We don't take ourselves too seriously and maybe it's time we did, so the world will sit up, take notice and render to us the respect that we deserve. All told and for the most part, we are a God-loving and God-fearing mass of people—80 million plus strong with about 3 million Fil-Ams and several millions more scattered about the globe—who, in droves, contribute to the general good of humanity in an increasing number of places in the world in myriad capacities.

*“Edith Wharton was right when she said of travel, ‘... you find out how many good, kind people there are.’ This is true of this Philippine trip. With fresh eyes, you find out that your native land is worth coming home to again and again.”*

Edith Wharton was right when she said of travel, string of pearls from the Philippine deep, some *burnay* pottery and some Ilocano cotton blankets from Vigan. But the intangibles I've taken home with me are the best by far—shared experiences of grief, tears and laughter, rekindled friendships, a heartfelt appreciation of people I have met and will probably never meet again, a sense of genuine gratitude for life on both sides of the globe and above all, a deeper, newer and fresh understanding of our tiny, yet brilliant and beautiful place in the universe.

... you find out how many good, kind people there are.” This is true of this Philippine trip. With fresh eyes, you find out that your native land is worth coming home to again and again.

More importantly perhaps, a trip such as this forms part of a lifelong journey of self-discovery. This trip and others I have taken over the years in different other places, reveals to me those secret places about myself that I would not otherwise have known. I have brought back with me thousands of digital images as

a future, foreseeable crutch to my memory, to help me remember over time. I have brought back spare change and worthless trinkets and a

string of pearls from the Philippine deep, some *burnay* pottery and some Ilocano cotton blankets from Vigan. But the intangibles I've taken home with me are the best by far—shared experiences of grief, tears and laughter, rekindled friendships, a heartfelt appreciation of people I have met and will probably never meet again, a sense of genuine gratitude for life on both sides of the globe and above all, a deeper, newer and fresh understanding of our tiny, yet brilliant and beautiful place in the universe.

Nota Bene: Monette Adeva Maglaya is SVP of Asian Journal Publications, Inc. To ask questions, send feedback and requests as well as to inquire about advertising in any or all of the 6 print editions of Asian Journal in California, Nevada and New York/New Jersey and/or advertising in the Print Edition Online of Asian Journal, e-mail monette.maglaya@asianjournalinc.com. HAPPY HOLIDAYS TO ALL READERS! MAY GOD'S GLORIOUS SEASON BRING YOU PEACE AND JOY

## ‘Balitang America’ to air ‘Yearender Townhall Special’ on TFC

From PAGE 9

It is important for ethnic media to act as a bridge between the community it serves and the key decisionmakers who impact that community,” said News Bureau Chief Ging Reyes. “So, we worked with community members to draft a statement that spelled out what Filipino Americans believe should be done to solve the problems of the community and the nation. The townhall successfully came up with a letter to President-elect

Barack Obama, which we will deliver to the Office of the President after the show is aired.”

“The townhall meeting format of the *Balitang America Yearender Special* is an effective stimulus for civic participation,” said Chinky De Jesus, managing director of ABS-CBN International. “I applaud the *Balitang America* team for this strong community-building effort that manifests the cornerstone of ABS-CBN's service to the Filipino worldwide.”

The townhall special's panelists include: Polly Cortez, Regional Quality Assurance manager of the US Department of Treasury; bank executive William Tecson Jr.; real estate professional Alan Lorenzo; Immigration Attorney Lourdes Tancinco; IBF & IBO flyweight boxing champion Nonito Donaire; standout Filipina American boxer Ana “The Hurricane” Julaton; Veterans' Equity Advocate Gomercindo Bondad; America's Best Dance Crew member RJ Navalta and the

Supreme Soul dance group.

*Balitang America* reporters and correspondents are Henni Espinosa, Lenn Almadin Thornhill, Rodney Jaleco, Steve Angeles, Don Tagala, Joseph Pimentel, Monette Rivera and Bev Llorente.

*Balitang America Yearender Townhall Special* will be aired on December 31, 2008 from 5:30 to 6:30 pm, with replays on January 1 and 2, 2009. It will also air on ANC on January 1 and 2, 2009, with time slots to be announced soon. ■



ABS-CBN North America's News Bureau Chief Ging Reyes (center) is joined by *Balitang America* Executive Producer Vivian Araullo and reporters and correspondents Henni Espinosa, Lenn Almadin Thornhill, Rodney Jaleco, Steve Angeles, Don Tagala, Joseph Pimentel, Monette Rivera and Bev Llorente.



# IN REUNION THERE IS STRENGTH.

In our continuing efforts to serve the Fil-Am Community, Asian Journal will be featuring profiles of Filipino-American associations here in the United States.



Please submit a brief background of your association, a list of current officers and your contact information for the benefit of our readers who may want to get in touch with you.

FAX. (213) 481-0854 • Email. pr@asianjournalinc.com

## LEADERS' DIGEST

Filipinos are everywhere in America—from the East to the West coast. However, as the second largest Asian community in America, we still have to empower ourselves to become more visible in the political mainstream. Unknown to us, fellow FilAms are making a difference across the US—as appointed and elected leaders in their respective areas. The *Asian Journal Leaders' Digest* aims to present to readers these leaders who have made—and continually making a difference for the Filipino American community.

### Ed Balico

#### Councilmember, Hercules City

**F**IRST elected to the Hercules City Council for a four-year term in November 2000, Ed Balico was also appointed Vice Mayor in December 2001 and became Mayor in 2002. Balico was reelected in 2004, garnering the highest votes ever in the history of Hercules City. Because of that, in December 2006, he was appointed to serve a one-year term as Mayor.

Prior to being elected to the City Council, Balico served as a Planning Commissioner for six years and has served both as Vice Chair and Chair of the Commission during his tenure.

He has also been appointed to various regional agencies as Board of Director for West Contra Costa Integrated Waste Management Agency, WESTCAT, West Contra Costa Transportation Authority, Contra Costa Transportation Agency, Contra Costa College Foundation, and as Executive Board of Director for the League of California Cities, East Bay Division.

Recently, Balico graduated from the League of California Cities Mayors and Council Member Leadership in Action, wherein there are only ten elected officials in this level. He was also instrumental in the formation of the Asian Pacific Islanders Caucus of the League of California Cities.

Balico holds a Bachelor's Degree in Mechanical Engineering and has completed numerous certifications in the fields of Project Management, Total Quality Management and Problem Solving Process. He worked for one



of the Fortune 100 companies for 20 years and left the company as a senior project manager. He currently owns a real estate and mortgage company. ■