

# Step by Step, 12 times 5

## Exponential growth to Fil-Am unity in Irvine!

*Intimacy is tempered by lightness of touch. We have moved through our day like dancers, not needing to touch more than lightly because we were instinctively moving to the same rhythm. There is no place here for the possessive clutch, the clinging arm, the heavy hand; only the barest touch in passing. Now arm in arm, now*

by Sarah Flores Delacruz (no blood relation to the author), the coordinator for the food event at St. John Neumann, whose initiative started first at data gathering: "Whose idea is it that we display our foods in several separate tables, or at separate locations across the hall?"

It turns out no one thought about it, the act was unconscious, unplanned, and it was not intended. But, what was unintended results in perpetuating a myth, an illusion that Fil-Ams are not united. So, Sarah planned for a convergence of the groups. She approached the separate groupings and requested they come together, even if she had to move her own table to join them.

That first symbolic act of reaching across the table, became the organizational tone for building this new organization.

A reaching out, a coming together, and an intention that all are welcome! So, from 12 families, it grew to 60 families in just two months.

The rest is awesome, bold history! 150 came to their first launch, a combined Christmas and a Happy New Year! Their logo in a banner, custom made in the Philippines, was impressive: a nipa hut on the borders, colored green, conveying a unity of past with the present and the future, a past of coming from the islands, to now their collective life in the present in Irvine, but also a future of green, perhaps of green technology. Within it are five images of folks in colors of the Philippine and American flags: red, white, blue, again a symbolic unity of both the Western and Eastern cultures, embracing both facets of the Filipino and American influences. Five images also symbolize two couples, though united, are with distinct identities of south, north, east, west, and a yellow neutral image in the middle, as if a mediator or a unifier of all these distinct differences, yet united towards a common purpose.

The President, Sarah Flores Delacruz discussed the group's plans for 2009, but first recognizing that 10 years ago, this formation would not have been possible, as the Fil-Ams themselves declared their cause is separate, individualistic, but not the current groupings.

They have a common belief that the *kababayans*



On November 2, 2008, they considered the formation of an organization. They had not come together for one purpose before, though they were volunteers for many church functions, including a Taste of Cultures from Around the World. Relegated to simply showcasing their culinary talents, they empowered themselves to reach across the aisle, to reach across the table and a core of caring pioneers invited families to be part of this historic umbrella organization.

belong together, and are in fellowship to reach to others in need. So, from three distinct groups, come one, TIFAC!

This April, they are planning a gala and an induction of their elected officers. In July, a *palangon Pinoy* and a fiesta style of *salon-salon*, a reenactment of the culture in the islands, in October, a taste of foods around the world and of course an attempt to have their own *Simbang Gabi*, just like the *simbang gabis* held now in different parishes in Los Angeles.

And the solid teamwork of the officers (Sarah Delacruz, Nellie Rafael, Nora Caffrey, Eleanor Fenech, Rose Soong, Cielo Tucay, Jing Sharma, Nesty Cruzado and Bernadette Figueroa) was apparent, from the hassle-free registration, to 21 entrees donated by the families: rice, *menudo*, beef stew, *lumpia*, *apritada*, sweet and sour fish, chop suey, *paksiw na lechon*, *kare-kare*, barbecue chicken, fruit salad, *pancit*, wraps, *maja blanca*, meatballs, *biko*, *guinataan*, *maja blanca*, *baklava*, carrot cake, pumpkin pie, apple pie. At the end of the evening, after two hours of dancing, and special performances by Sydney and Chelsea Mariano who wowed the audience with their violin duet, Nicole Ledina and Tamara Luechinger with their song

renditions as if contestants on the *American Idol*, the crowds shared their appreciation with loud applause as all these performers were younger than 10 years old.

The first launch of TIFAC was a blast and already, their energies are sending out ripple effects that Fil-Ams desire unity and work hard to initiate it and we wish that their unity is sustained for decades to come. And their next activities are ambitious, but quite needed for a suburban city like Irvine, where Fil-Ams are at the margins, and not quite fully integrated as part of the mainstream community: an outdoor picnic, a barrio fiesta, and an installation of officers. Many more activities are planned, including philanthropic activities to help the underprivileged as well as support activities for its members. Congratulations, TIFAC! And to those who say Fil-Ams cannot get their act together, I say to them, their falsely constructed myths were laid to rest!

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**RHIZOMES**  
Prosy Dela Cruz, J.D.

face to face, now back to back - it does not matter which. Because they know they are partners moving to the same rhythm, creating a pattern together, and being invisibly nourished by it. - Anne Morrow Lindbergh

**A**BIRTHING of a new Filipino-American organization, called TIFAC, would have sounded redundant, if not for the reality of over 350 civic organizations amongst Filipino-Americans in Southern California. But, not TIFAC, also known as The Irvine Filipino American Community! Its birth was met with enthusiasm, an energy that could not be contained, that dancing amongst its intergenerational community of 60 families filled up the floor with their robust, vibrant energies, over 150 in an overflow capacity in a club house in Irvine. Even the DJ, Jun Alcantara did not find it difficult at all to get folks to dance. Dance they did. Dance to the tunes of the 50's, 60's, 70's, and certainly some rap songs. Dancing to the tunes of *Dancing Queen*, *YMCA*, and *Makarennna* and folks were swinging, folks were line dancing, folks were jubilant. It is an organization that had to happen.

Previously, they were three disparate, separate organizations and it felt uncomfortable to see one table of Filipino food and across is another table of Filipino food, conveying impliedly that Filipinos could not get their act together or disunited. But, the reality is they are not, in fact, they could not wait to form fellowship with one another. In fact, their positive energies got them moving quickly.

Then, a bold process of unification was initiated

# The passion and death of Juan de la Cruz

**O**NE, Juan is condemned to death. One morning, Juan de la Cruz wakes up to find he has been condemned to death. Or democracy has, which is his body, his spirit, his being. He wakes up to find a president he did not vote for, a ruler he did not assent to. It is a death sentence. Soon democracy will be no more, soon he will be no more.

Two, Juan is given his cross. That cross is someone who lied about going away, someone who stole Juan's money and his hope, and now has stolen his freedom and his vote. At least the person, or divinity, who once carried a burden as heavy as this, a weight as crushing as this, did so willingly to save the world. Juan does so unwillingly, unable to save himself.

Three, Juan falls the first time. Juan hears a tape recording of the ruler plotting with a Comelec official to usurp the throne. Alas, two blackguards come to the aid of the usurper in her desperate hour, and save her. Both get their just desserts. The first is ousted as speaker of the House, the second is reduced to obscurity, the richest punishment for someone who has always had an exaggerated view of his importance.

Four, Juan meets his mother. Corazon Aquino, the Joan of Arc of EDSA and spiritual mother of the nation, joined the clamor for the usurper's resignation, oyster, or demise, whichever came first. Though none of the above has happened, she continues to pursue it with much purpose. Juan sees her look at him with fortitude, through the tears in her eyes.

Five, Simon of Cyrene helps carry the cross. The NGOs, the academe, several justices, several bishops, and media help carry Juan de la Cruz's cross. One is tempted to include the former government officials, but they helped foist the cross on Juan de la Cruz to begin with.

Six, Veronica wipes the face of Juan. An angel, in the form of Angel Lagdameo, wipes the brow of Juan. It is a luminous act, especially after the Pharisees joined in condemning him to a slow and painful death, chortling "bad is good" without being Michael Jackson, though looking like him after the doctors wiped Jackson's black face white. Suddenly, a shaft of decency pierces through the ungodly temples.

Seven, Juan falls the second time. With the aid of several decent congressmen, however that seems like a contradiction in terms, Juan tries to impeach the usurper not just once but twice. But with the aid of Barabbas' descendants in Congress, Juan fails.

Eight, Juan meets the children of Jerusalem. In his



**THERES THE RUB**  
Conrado de Quiros

subject state, Juan finally finds the eyes to see the plight of others. He sees the children who sleep in the streets, their brains fried by hunger and rugby, he sees the girls barely past puberty selling their bodies in dark alleys, without Sting's *Roxanne* to romanticize the fact. He realizes that stealing kills, it is the food plucked from the mouths of children, it is the roof ripped from the heads of children.

Nine, Juan falls the third time. Aided by a centurion named Danny, who repented after piercing Juan's side with his spear, Juan tried to shake off his cross for a third time. Alas, with the aid of the chief centurion, the usurper kept him bound to it.

Ten, Juan is stripped of his garments. Juan is stripped of his possessions, the pillage growing by the day. Juan is stripped of his life, the killings growing by the day. Juan is stripped of his spirit, his listlessness growing by the day. Juan is stripped of his dignity, his shame growing by the day. Juan is stripped of hope, his future dimming by the day.

Eleven, Juan is nailed to the cross. Juan wakes up every day to excruciating pain, the sensation being of nails driven to his hands. Or head. He has contracted heart disease, hypertension, cholera, and various other ailments, if not indeed being turned to stone, from looking at the modern-day Medusa.

Twelve, Juan dies on the cross. Like a headless chicken scampering about, too shocked to realize it is already dead, Juan ambles about too numb to realize he is already dead. While being nailed to the cross earlier, all he could mutter was: "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" Too dead to hear God's answer, which was: "Didn't you hear? I help only those who help themselves." It is not clear into whose hands Juan commends his spirit.

Thirteen, Juan is removed from the cross. Juan gets some respite from the agony and even glimpses ecstasy in new elections, one that promises to lift his cross from him finally. Elections have never done him much good, but better death than torture.

Fourteen, Juan is laid in the tomb. Even as he hopes so, Juan's tormentor prepares to torment him some more, cajoling Herod's descendants in Congress to alter the course of the stars, or change the Charter. Even as Juan dreams the dreams of the dead, he has been laid out in a dark and cavernous place, there to be buried forever.

Sometimes, the Resurrection is added as a fifteenth station of the Cross.

Question is, does Juan have one? (*Inquirer.net*)

# 'A tree in arid souls'

**G**REED is a shabby thread that runs through Holy Thursday's fabric. "What are you willing to give me if I turn him over to you?" Judas haggled with the high priests. They paid him 30 pieces of silver.

The physician in Luke spotted a psychological detail: "From then on, Judas kept looking for an opportunity to hand him over, without creating a disturbance."

Thirty pieces of silver became a universal symbol of cupidity. This mercenary quid-pro-quo taints much of our national life today. You see it everywhere, from Jose Velarde's bank account to the Abu Sayyaf's insatiable appetite for ransom to Jocelyn Bolante's fertilizer scam.

"Greed is a tree that grows in arid souls," the Ilocano axiom says. *Newsweek* underscored that truth by publishing its list of *11 Greediest Persons of All Time*. Iscariot didn't make it. But two women did: Empress Dowager Cixi and Imelda Marcos.

In a starving China, we are told, Cixi dined with golden chopsticks at 150-course dinners. Imelda went on "\$5-million shopping sprees to New York and Rome, reportedly owned the world's largest collections of gems and 3,000 pairs of shoes." (Wrong. Only 1,060 pairs, she says.)

*Newsweek's* "honor roll" list includes, among others, Mongolian warlord Genghis Khan, Roman general Marcus Licinius Crassus, Wall Street swindler Bernard Madoff and Pope Sixtus IV. Did Michaelangelo have Sixtus IV in mind when he painted the *Last Judgment* in the Sistine Chapel? He depicted there a pontiff in Hades.

"Put yourself in Imelda's shoes," a Guardian columnist once suggested. "How would you react?"

Imelda's loyalists leaped in to say their heroine "was only greedy in giving." Avarice, retorted her critics. The 79-year-old widow zippered her lips.

That has not always been the case. "If you know how rich you are, you are not rich," she told *Inquirer* in March 1998. "But me—I am not aware of the extent of my wealth. That's how rich we are."

Imelda pledged to give \$800 million to hard-up Filipinos—if she became president. *Hindi siya nag-i-isa*. Judas slobbered over aromatic nard used to anoint the Master: "Why was this oil not sold for 300 days wages and given to the poor?"

The poor, in any case, never saw Imelda's \$800 million then. She limped in fifth in a seven-way

## VIEWPOINT

Juan Mercado

presidential race. Fidel Ramos squeaked through. Decades later, she's still pledging to share Marcos' wealth.

Marcos' funds are stashed in five "account groups" abroad, the Supreme Court has noted. These are: Azio-Verso-Vibur Foundation, Xandy-Wintrop, Charis-Scolari-Valamo-Spinus-Avertina Foundation, Trinidad-Rayby-Palmy Foundation accounts, Rosalys-Aguamina Foundation, and Maler Foundation accounts.

None supported a single project here. They are like Erap's Muslim Youth Foundation that never had scholars. Courts tried to get back every centavo Filipinos got from the Marcoses: \$638 million from shell foundations and \$36.4 million that a US district court in Hawaii ordered to be given to martial law victims.

The *Newsweek* list holds up sorry examples. But men will learn at no other school. And locals have proven quick studies. Yet, "he who is greedy is always in want," Horace wrote.

With martial law bayonets, Eduardo M. Cojuangco Jr. squeezed levies from defenseless coconut farmers. Kickbacks in the ZTE broadband scandal ballooned from 20 percent to 60 percent. Cupidity of local officials over the potentials of sand and gravel contracts torpedoed an P80-billion shipyard project in Misamis Oriental.

The Jose Velarde account bloated from one peso to P3,233,104,173 in a year. It dwindled when the impeachment case against Joseph Estrada started. Jose Velarde and Joseph Estrada were one and the same person, the Sandiganbayan Court found. Did Erap gag? "The greedy choke easily," say Boholano and Hilongo proverbs.

Can you tell a country that bags top slots in lists like Transparency International's dossier of *World's Most Corrupt Leaders* and now *Newsweek's* grasping eleven?

Yes. It's one where the affluent few buy ever larger locks, raise higher the walls of gated enclaves and withdraw from the needy. "Self worth becomes net worth," as a banker puts it. And people no longer blush.

"Government by quid-pro-quo is a blind alley," *Cebu Daily News* said in a Holy Thursday issue. "It leads, as Judas discovered, to burial in a potter's field."

*Newsweek's* list is no reason to give up. There was, after all, only one Judas—but eleven others who, despite their flaws, ultimately stood by what was decent. (E-mail: [juanmercado@gmail.com](mailto:juanmercado@gmail.com)) (*Inquirer.net*)

# Day of Valor honors war heroes

**A**PRIL 9 is the actual observance of *Araw ng Kagitingan* (Day of Valor). As it falls on this Monday Thursday, President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo moved its traditional celebration to last Monday, April 6. A fitting celebration of the 67th Commemoration was led by President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo at the Mount Samat Shrine in Bataan. The occasion was graced by US Ambassador Kristie Kenney who made this year's tribute to the war heroes



**ROSES & THORNS**  
Alejandro R. Roces

more meaningful with the awarding of the \$9,000 each lump sum compensation to the first batch of Filipino World War II veterans who have qualified for these benefits under the \$787-billion stimulus fund passed by the US Congress last February. At least 26,000 veterans have so far applied for the lump sum benefits as of last week.

Beyond the history books in elementary schools, few people care or remember that *Araw ng Kagitingan* commemorates the bravery and heroism of the Filipino soldiers who fought to their last breath in three places—Bataan, Corregidor and Bessang Pass.

Bataan and Corregidor were the last two strongholds of the US Armed Forces, Far East

(USAFFE), and the Philippine Army. After massive damage inflicted by the Japanese on the US forces in Pearl Harbor, the Japanese proceeded with their crippling air attack on the US air force and navy stationed in the Philippines. Clearly, by then, the Japanese dominated the US forces in Manila, having stationed their troops there for more than one year. The remaining forces in Bataan could not sustain their ground due to lack of firearms and reinforcements and finally surrendered to the Japanese Imperial Forces on April 9, 1942.

We must not forget the 70,000 captured Filipino and American soldiers who died during the Death March starting on April 9 from Mariveles, Bataan to San Fernando, Pampanga. They

were made to walk without food and water 90 kilometers from Bataan to San Fernando, after which they were made to ride a train until Capas, Tarlac. After this, the battered, sick, unfed and wounded soldiers were made to walk another 13 kilometers to Camp O'Donnell, where the 54,000 who survived, were finally jailed.

The soldiers in Corregidor continued fighting after Bataan fell. Being heavily armed and fortified, and due to its strategic position guarding the Manila Bay, the rock citadel of Corregidor was the last fort to fall before the surrender to the Japanese. The Fall of Corregidor finally came on May 6, 1946. It was one of the most heavily bombed islands on earth during the war.

Unlike our military's defeat in Bataan and Corregidor, we remember their victory in The Bat-

tle of Bessang Pass. However, for a long time, it is rather referred to as a forgotten victory. Three years after the defeat in Bataan and Corregidor and the fall of the Philippines to the Japanese Imperial Forces in 1942, Filipino guerillas fought and won what is known in history as "The Battle of the Clouds". It was in the Cordilleras, where they fought the troops of General Yamashita, "the Tiger of Malaya." Supreme Commander of the Japanese Army in the Philippines, leading to his capture and surrender on June 14, 1945. The Battle of Bessang Pass is the first Filipino military victory; it redeemed our military's defeat and somehow avenged the death of thousands of Filipino and American soldiers during the Bataan and Corregidor wars.

Putting all these historical events into one memorial cel-

ebration on April 9 of every year under Executive Order No. 203 dated June 30, 1987 should in no way make us forget or diminish the acts of bravery of our soldiers who fought to their last breath in each of the wars that were fought to defend our cause. We in this generation, must seek to perpetuate the gallantry, deeds and ideals that all our soldiers fought with, as recorded in the pages of our history, to win the wars for love of our country and its people. It is our duty to awaken the awareness of our *kababayans*, especially the youth, and steadfastly keep in their and their children's memories, the deeds of our brave soldiers and veterans that won for us the freedom and independence we now enjoy. It is only from a memory of great people and a great past that our youth can inherit a great example. (*Philstar.com*)