

OPINION & FEATURES



Still rooting for Manny

THE whole Philippines, plus Filipinos all over the world are showing their support for pound-4-pound king Manny "Pacman" Pacquiao as he face Ricky "The Hitman" Hatton in Las Vegas this Saturday.

There is no doubt that Pacquiao remains a hero for most of us not just because he's a champion in the ring, but he is a symbol for Filipinos who worked their way to success. Once a poor, simple man, Pacquiao is now on top of the world – a prized athlete, admired by many and respected by his fellow fighters.

Of course, we are praying that he will again win this fight. Although we have been

used to seeing him defeat his opponents in the past, we all know how hard he has trained every time he goes in the ring, and what physical beating and pain he has to endure just to bring glory to the Philippines.

With this, we are, as always, rooting for him. Because win or lose, he is still a champion in the Filipinos' hearts. (AJPress)

EDITORIAL

An artful life of change

“YOUR community needs you, but maybe not as a constant presence. Your community might need you as a presence that offers courage and spiritual food for the journey, a presence that creates the safe ground in which others can grow and develop, a presence that belongs to the matrix of the community. But your community also needs your creative absence... This does not mean you are selfish, abnormal, or unfit for community life. It means that your way of being present to your people necessitates personal nurturing of a special kind. ...It is a service to those for whom you want to be a source of hope and a life-giving presence.”

— Henri J.M. Nouwen

Christian Education, focusing on liberation theology at the Pacific School of Religion in Berkeley. She attributes her Berkeley education as the source of her free-style thinking, allowing diversity of perspectives to influence her, but with an awareness that we are interconnected as human beings.

She describes her exchanges with students, mostly from middle school to high school with planned mentoring to help them analyze their life's direction, and instill an early process of academic rigor towards high school and ultimately, college and professional careers.

She does this through an association she co-founded Philippine National Day Association

(PNDA). This group develops middle school and high school children through arts, theater work, called Lahi-Arts, leadership training and of course, competing for scholarships and attending leadership seminars. Years later, those they have mentored are now professors, doctors, lawyers, social workers and environmental leaders.

Criteria of excellence rooted in service to others. At an early age, these middle school children are asked to meet criteria of excellence: educated to pursue high school and college, and therefore, not a drop-out; conscious of community and how it affirms them, involved in their community, whether it is faith-based, region-based or talent-based, and conscious of their Filipino heritage. This criteria represents a wholesome development of a human being, conscious in extracting their abilities to develop themselves towards their fullest human potentials. Yet, it is also balanced as it encourages a healthy sense of self.

For example, when a judge was their community's guest, a young middle schooler created her portrait in 48 hours. When it was displayed, it had a stunning resemblance in likeness with the guest and she was touched by this heartwarming gift. But, more importantly, one young talent was nurtured and now, inscribed in a pathway of artistic excellence!

Leadership does not come from social isolation, it does not come from social withdrawal, being focused on one's needs, but it comes from being of service to others. It reflects a spirit-conscious understanding that healthy leaders are bred by one's community: balancing living a life as an individual, but also

publicly engaging folks to help others succeed, and in doing so, we become more connected.

It is this unique interplay of healthy selves, human folks giving rise to healthy communities, which got me excited in probing how they proactively build communities.

It reminded me of what the Filipino Federation of America once did for their membership, in the early 1920's and 1930's, whose goal then was "Humanity be Served" and this federation encouraged healthy living, exercise, faith, and service to others.

At that time, education was not considered a pathway for pioneering agricultural workers, even though they kept themselves literate by reading books, writing essays and poems. The integration of Filipinos and Filipino Americans in higher education was limited, and an early exception to that was UCLA, where the first association of Filipino students was founded in 1929.

Helen Summers Brown was one of UCLA's early graduates during that period, whose community engagement led her to be one of the co-founders of our cherished community library, Filipino American Library, housed at FASGI on 135 North Parkview Terrace in Los Angeles. Just as Helen founded FAL which has evolved to host its own Spirit Awards since 2000, an awards night intended to recognize the human spirit of excellence and service to community, PNDA likewise has done their 2 decade-undertaking of giving awards and mentoring since 1989.

PNDA's award is called Gintong Lahi Award, golden race, a golden heritage award that is bestowed on a community member who has excelled in arts, academics, athletics, or leadership. It is highly coveted award that draws out community involvement.

Targeting the 8th to 12th grades as the focus of their mentoring as an organization, PNDA at first struggled to find funding and resources. Later, given its hard-earned reputation of doing good for the community, PNDA attracted other civic groups who offered their resources to be part of PNDA's scholarship efforts, including mainstream banks who provide regular scholarships.

Another of PNDA's awards is called Lakandiwa Award, presented to a role model, a hero the community can look up to, not popularized by the media, but one who provides inspiration to others, through the examples of the lives they lead. They are



Cynthia Bonta, in her visit to Los Angeles. The bike painting (at the back partially shown), broken up into three distinctive parts, each with a unique identity, was created by Corina Delacruz.

conferred the title of *Lakandiwa*, with a stole made up of the colors of the Philippine flag, a stole which gains further significance, as past Lakandiwa awardees wear them repeatedly at community events. As more folks wear the Lakandiwa stole, leadership became synonymous to living a life of substance, a life of community service, a life of personal commitment to excellence! Lakan is derived from Lakay in Ilokano, older folks, diwa is idea in Tagalog, so it is recognizing our elders as sources of wisdom and sage!

With systematic, proactive development of community leaders, PNDA demonstrated through these ordinary lives, what constitutes an extraordinary community leader: one who knows himself, grounded in one's roots, proud of who they are, linked, and one who gives meaning to their lives by serving others.

What is a good Filipino-American leader? The description of a Fil-Am leader became a healthy, integrated person, with wholesome identity who proclaims not only that you are a Filipino, but one who is relevant in community service. Being a good Fil-Am also means being a responsible American citizen, contributing to the mainstream.

One of PNDA's public supporters is of course, former Mayor Christopher Cabaldon who recently affirmed his Filipino heritage and who met with Cyn to give her and the community a heads-up that he would publicly affirm himself as gay. Given Prop. 8 that curtailed civil rights of gay folks, this is quite significant in declaring that our community must also lead in this effort.

Prior Lakandiwa awardees were Jon Melegrito, NAFFAA's press relations officer and an active union leader and civil rights advocate. Others include Justice Tani Centil Sakaue, Bill Tamayo and Rene Cirria Cruz, all active



Le Printemps, 1868-1875 by Jean-Francois Millet.

AJPress Photos by Prosy Delacruz.



Diedra San Pedro, the middle school portraitist who did this portrait in 48 hours. Judge Cantiel, shown here appreciating the gift as a Lakandiwa awardee. Photo provided by Dinnah San Pedro.

advocates in the field of civil rights and social justice.

Fight like a roaring lion for a democratic space! I asked Cyn if community involvement has its downside. Having been involved myself for 35 years, I am acutely aware of some folks' excesses in leadership, who promote their personal agendas, and would bend the community's activities to suit their personal needs, while accusing the rest that they did not embody the community's interests, a case of reverse aggression to suit their personal agenda. Our former leaders who resided in the White House for 8 years since 2001 publicly displayed these excesses in America.

Cyn wisely responded that she fights like a roaring lion for democratic space, articulating her perspective to the best of her ability, and then, allowing space for others to be heard and personally submitting to the majority through a democratic vote. Cyn shared that she is happy being fully heard, content that democracy works and when her ideas win out in attracting support from the entire core, she is even happier. When defeated, she knows that the group has made the right decision, as long as democracy was exercised.

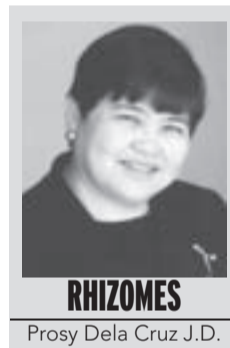
Imagine the creative spirits unleashed by Cyn and her colleagues within these young minds and hearts! Imagine PNDA, as a pathway towards ex-

cellence, that unleashes young imaginations for a better world, to leave an America better than they found it.

It is what the impressionists did in the early 19th century in France, even if surrounded by poverty, drought, hardships and sufferings, they painted with pastels to evoke feelings of a more vibrant future, as this painting of *Le Printemps* of 1868-1875 by Jean-Francois Millet who created this landscape, or similarly the bike in its three distinct parts by Corina Delacruz in 2008, and Cyn who keeps painting a new landscape within each student to imagine their lives towards excellence, leadership and community involvement.

What an artful life of change for nearly 7 decades! Can we follow this road dedicated to "Humanity be Served"?

Prosy Abarquez-Delacruz, JD was a regulator of industries which manufactured foods, pharmaceuticals, medical devices, cosmetics and bottled water for 27 years, as part of a state public health agency. She witnessed many businesses decline when they focused on profits alone, without regard for the workers in the workplace. Conversely, she witnessed businesses thrived when workers were educated and when owners made them partners and treated them as value creators in the workplace. She co-created Food Safety with FIBR, a food safety training institute with Food Industry Business Roundtable, that trains small business manufacturers on good manufacturing practices and quality principles, now in its 8th year.



RHIZOMES

Prosy Delacruz J.D.

When I met Cynthia Bonta, I noticed her zest for life, akin to a young person, with vitality and energy, sharing stories, and laughing until dawn. She was doing outreach for a filmmaker's documentary at the Women's Film Festival in Los Angeles. After a plane ride late evening, I expected her to rest right away. Instead, she got busy to help organize this event. Her week's work is taking care of her grandbaby, barely months old, while her children pursue their legal careers.

I immediately got curious, as she was atypical from older folks who limit their activities. I recently heard a 94-year-old surgeon who appeared on Oprah remarked, "I do not hang out with older people, they remind me of death. I hang out with younger folks...so I can feel younger." The opposite works for me, I hang out with Cynthia, decades more in age, yet young in perspective, high in energy, profoundly wise, and open-minded. Her open-mindedness makes it easy to talk with her, as she deepens any thread of conversations, whether in art, spirituality, human condition or developing a community of leaders.

Cultivating a community of leaders based on excellence. I asked Cyn where her open-mindedness comes from. She shared her background as an ecumenical scholar for the World Council of Churches, taking Master's in

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