

OPINION & FEATURES



DEDICATION. An inmate at the island province of Cebu impersonates the late Michael Jackson as he leads in the music icon's 'Thriller' to pay tribute to Jackson Saturday, June 27. More than 1,500 inmates became famous in YouTube with over 23 million hits after they performed Michael Jackson's 'Thriller'. The 'King of Pop' died in Los Angeles, CA Thursday. He was 50. AP Photo by Bullitt Marquez

In remembrance

THEY may be behind bars, but the 1,500 inmates at the Cebu Provincial Detention and Rehabilitation Center have earned their share of global fame with the debut of their YouTube dance video, *Thriller* in 2007. And they owe their inspiration and the recognition that they were afforded from the man who started it all – the pop icon himself, Michael Jackson.

The King of Pop passed away on June 25 from cardiac arrest in his home in Los Angeles and the world was never the same.

Memorial gatherings, tributes and 24/7 news updates on investigations following his death continue to flood the airwaves until now.

The grief of his passing affected the inmates of Cebu just as profoundly. And they could only lament and find comfort by giving their idol a most fitting tribute last June 27 -- one that required nine hours of rehearsal, stopping only to eat or when rain started to

pour. According to the Associated Press, the *Thriller* video "has attracted 24.3 million hits since it was posted two years ago, with nearly a million of them in the 24 hours since news of Jackson's death spread."

Despite his passing, Michael Jackson continues to touch and uplift the spirits of the Cebu inmates and they will continue to draw inspiration from the man who brought them fame and most importantly, a renewed sense of self-esteem. (AJPress)

EDITORIAL

One voice

VERY often, when we are faced with challenges that overwhelm us – poverty, climate change, corruption – we feel inadequate, almost paralyzed into inaction. We think "What can I do?"

Indeed, what can one person do to make a dent in these deep-rooted, widespread, often global problems?

Many years ago, I watched the movie *The Power of One*. It was about a young white boy in Africa and how he was able to stop the discrimination against and the abuse of black Africans in their own community. I would recommend it to anyone who despairs of the situation in our country and in our world.

I am fortunate in that, while I grew up in a rather protected family environment, I was educated by the missionary sisters of the Holy Spirit. They impressed upon us, even while we were in the primary grades, how our donation of ten centavos to the missions could change the lives of children, of the disabled, of the homeless, of the illiterate. At that time, ten centavos was the price of a 6-oz bottle of Coke, the price of a jeepney ride. It was then roughly equivalent to a nickel.

ESSAY
Vicky P. Garchitorena

They urged us to share what we had, no matter how little, and to share not just our coin, but also our time and our talent. As I grew up, I would tutor classmates who found math difficult and teach catechism to public schools students. I also took on the larger problems of society through our Social Catholic Action, the College Editors' Guild, and eventually became an activist in the political and social fields.

One of the songs that inspires me when I feel that I am not making inroads into solving a problem is the song *One Voice*. Some excerpts:

*One Voice,
Singing in the darkness,
All it takes is One Voice,
Singing so they hear what's on your mind,
And when you look around you'll find
There's more than One Voice,
Singing in the darkness...
Hands are joined and fears unlocked,
If only One Voice
would start it on its own.
We need just One Voice facing the unknown,*

And then that One Voice would never be alone...

*Shout it out and let it ring!
Just One Voice,
It takes that One Voice,
And everyone will sing!*

The movie and the song capture the essence of movements that are now capturing the imagination of world. In search of heroes, we look for individuals who, working quietly in barangays, in urban areas, in the mountains and valleys, strive to improve things in their neighborhoods. They help educate children and adults, plant trees on riverbanks, inform families on health issues, train teachers or co-operatives, organize microfinance initiatives to help the entrepreneurial poor.

A month or so ago, I came across an article on a Filipino who has been cited as a CNN Hero. What an honor. And when I read on, I realized why. Efren Penaflorida was born into a humble family, with very little by way of human comforts. His father is a tricycle driver; his mother takes in laundry.

As a teenager, he was often bullied by toughies in the neighborhood. Instead of retaliating, he decided to organize a better teenage group to give the teens a choice. His group grew beyond his wildest dreams, to about 2,000 at last count.

Given a scholarship by World Vision, he could have just turned his back on his difficult childhood. Instead, he has decided to pay it back. Every Saturday, Efren and his many colleagues go to slum areas in his neighborhood with pushcarts packed with blackboards, chalk, books, and crayons and offer free classes to the children in the streets.

Who knows how many lives he has transformed? The young boys and girls who were inspired to follow him – away from the gangs and from drugs and violence; the kids who are encouraged to stay in school because of his Saturday lessons out of his pushcarts. The communities who realize that they can take their destiny into their own hands and that they can improve their lives and the lives of others through simple acts of caring and concern. All it takes is time, a generous heart, and the courage to reach out to others, not caring whether one is rewarded or recognized or applauded.

Efren has shown the Power of One. He has shown how his One Voice has resonated with thousands of youth who now raise their voices with his in a chorus of hope. May his tribe increase. ■

Gawad Kalinga: A Potent tool for Philippine unity and nationhood

PEOPLE talk/write about our current economic, social/political crisis and quite frankly, most often, that is all we do. We just talk and talk...write and write... complain/gripe about the problems plaguing our country but many of us just either have not, cannot and will not do enough to address/resolve the issues confronting our people. Indeed, there are many clarion calls from different sectors to unite as one nation and help in alleviating the deplorable economic plight of our impoverished countrymen. I, for one, have always invoked the distinct possibility of somehow transforming a fragmented, disillusioned and seemingly desperate Filipino people into a united, inspired and hope-filled Filipino Nation with our Christian faith as the solid foundation for such possibility. Indeed, I still believe that the Filipino, in general, is a God-fearing, morally upright, peace-loving, generous/hospitable, industrious/hard-working, honest and trustworthy people and yet ironically, for one reason or another, its beloved country of birth has degenerated into quite the opposite, becoming one of the poorest, most corrupt societies in the process. I dare to say again, that it is simply because, among others, our religious/political leaders with the influence, authority and the resources to make a pivotal difference in our country, just do not put into practice what they supposedly believe.

For a while, I thought that maybe, this essence of Filipino nationhood was a rather futile, quixotic quest. But not anymore. By the grace and favor of God, there is one group/movement which has been issuing similar calls for unity/the essence of Filipino nationhood and



THE FILIPINO NATION
Ramoncito P. Ocampo

doing probably much more in accomplishing the same more effectively than any government, religious or private sector ever thought or imagined possible... one particular group which truly stands out and virtually, in a class all by itself! Gawad-kalinga (GK)!

In the recent GK Global Summit held June 11-13, 2009 at the prestigious Marriot Hotel, Boston, Massachusetts, the slogans...Less for self...More for others...Enough for all...and the latest one, *Walang Iwanan* (No One Left Behind), reverberated throughout the summit which was well attended by no less than Vice-Pres. De Castro, Sen. Pangilinan, Sen Zubiri and local governors/mayors as well as by more than 600 delegates worldwide. The GK Movement which aspires and envisions the transformation of the Philippines from an impoverished Third World country to a progressive First World one by 2024, truly exemplifies a profound biblical Christian exhortation written in 1st Timothy 6:17... *"Tell those who are rich in this world's goods not to be proud and not to rely on so uncertain thing as wealth. Let them trust in God who provides us richly with all things for our use. Charge them to do good, to be rich in good works and generously sharing what they have."* After all, isn't it a fact that we brought nothing into this world and we cannot take our millions, vast landholdings, expensive toys or adornments into the other world? The good that we can do to the least of our countrymen, we do it unto our Lord and God Jesus and the good that we neglected to do and could have reasonably done, will be held against us for sure.

True stories of how Gawad-Kalinga fostered peaceful co-existence between the ever-warring Moslems and Christians in Mindanao as well as restored the sense of dignity/self-worth of the poorest of the poor of our country befitting a child of God. By providing them not only



with decent shelter, livelihood, a healthy environment but most importantly, a spiritual value formation based on basic Christian principles of love, trust/accountability, family and strong sense of community, such expressions of solidarity evoked and continues to evoke not only a sense of genuine compassion for the poor but also a profound sense of mission/purpose which essentially puts our so-called Christian faith/love into actual practice. After all, 1st John 3:17-18 asks...*How can God's love survive in a man's heart who has enough of the world's goods and*

yet closes his heart to his brother when he sees him in need? Little children, let us love in deed and truth and not merely talk about it." Indeed, talk is cheap, it's now time for action and involvement and Gawad Kalinga (GK) is definitely in the forefront of it all...*Di ba?*

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