

**IMMIGRANT LIVING:
101 AND BEYOND**



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Log off and enjoy your hot chocolate

"The happiest people don't have the best of everything... They just make the best of everything that they have."

— Author Unknown

SKIM and scan FWD messages when I can. I'm not big on forwarding stuff, leaving that for others to do. I still prefer personal one-liners. Communication has become efficient, almost done by rote, and sometimes borders on the cold and impersonal. I still don't enjoy being part of a network to be used for someone's purpose or agenda. There's a stubborn part of me that rebels and chafes at becoming part of a statistic or used for a purpose to advance someone's agenda. We've all become easy targets for privacy intruders. Nothing seems sacred or private anymore. There's more than enough out there in the public records to fill a dossier on anyone with an SSN. We are living in the Information Age and the currency we trade in are bits and bytes of information. It's like living in glass houses these days. There's too much transparency and I am becoming resentful.

No wonder our sense of mystery and awe at anything in this life is fast eroding. That is why I regard social networking with a bit of trepidation and suspicion. And frankly, who's got the time? I am probably one of a vanishing breed, always itching to get out of the virtual world and into the real world of doing things, creating, fixing, cooking, gardening, making memories and connecting personally and laughing until my sides are nearly split. By choice, I am offline and often unwired on the weekends. My personal motto these days: LOG OFF AND LIVE.

There's so much living yet to do: so many recipes to try, seeds to plant, topiaries to shape, weeds to pull, walls and blank canvasses to paint, places to see, photos to shoot, plays to watch, games to play, puzzles to

solve and mysteries to unravel, books to read, people to meet, goals to achieve, skills to learn and courses to take, stuff to give away, stories to write, naps to take and a thousand and one more things to feel, see, touch, taste, hear and soak in before the end game. With all that's in the past, life still feels like a tabula rasa —lots of living to do, so little time. Sigh.

It doesn't help that the virtual world encroaches. If you spend even only a few hours on the internet each day, then you are a de facto active, living, breathing denizen of Cyberville, part of the audience of the world stage. Witness Susan Boyle's instant global fame in the audition of "Britain's Got Talent," which has over 50 million hits on youtube in a matter of days. What we see is a frumpy, dowdy old maid from Scotland who lives alone with her cat, a complete unknown, wowing the judges, even snarky Simon Cowell and pretty much the skeptic audience and the rest of us in Cyberville. By her plaintive song, her magnificent singing and just by being true to herself, the world sat up and took notice. How many can do that these days? Boyle has become somewhat of a phenom for our times, which prompted one wag of a British publication, to ask the question of our obsession with sexy, good looks: "Is Susan Boyle ugly or are we?"

Personally, I am rooting for her and every Charisse Pempengco, every Arnel Pineda and every phenom who whacks us out or our smug ways and wows us via the great equalizer and media decimator —youtube. I am hoping fame and fortune don't change their core beings overly much.

If we permit it though, the

virtual world can usurp reality. We tend to spend inordinate number of hours glued to the screen. We've seen how the last US election played out over the internet and how the new rules for power, money, media and political gamesmanship are all being rewritten right before our very eyes. God forbid a chilling scenario for one megalomaniac individual with a lust for power and omnipotence, to muster enough resources and harness the power of the web to shape minds, move people to action and rule the world by Blackberry or iPhone. China foresees this and similar to its effort to stave off the incursion of enemies in its domain during its long history by building the Great Wall, it is doing all it can to firewall, censor, block or neutralize this unstoppable force, particularly youtube, with a cadre of internet police. The threat is real.

Until that purely imaginary fateful day and just for the moment, I am picking and choosing from the constant flow of messages in my inbox, only this one below. We receive forwarded jokes, prayers, stories, photos, news, slideshows, petitions and everything else that goes round and round unregulated on the internet loops. Some are for laughs, others inform while some can make you think harder or even take action. Pet peeves are those that are pure drivell and chain emails with a punitive clause, like a curse of bad luck, if you fail to forward. For malevolent messages and all the rest of the junk from scammers promising riches, simplify your cyberlife and hit DELETE. Do not engage.

Sometimes a golden nugget comes through that deserves to be amplified. So simple, it hits you right between the eyes. I

searched for the author's name but like many other pieces flung by anonymous, creative beings in Cyberville, authorship is largely unknown and unclaimed. To the originator of this metaphor then, whoever you are and wherever you may be, please accept a profound thank you, from the rest of us. Here it is.

The Hot Chocolate Story

A group of graduates, well established in their careers, were talking at a reunion and decided to go visit their old university professor, now retired. During their visit, the conversation turned to complaints about stress in their work and lives. Offering his guests hot

chocolate, the professor went into the kitchen and returned with a large pot of hot chocolate and an assortment of cups—porcelain, glass, crystal, some plain looking, some expensive, some exquisite -- telling them to help themselves to the hot chocolate.

When they all had a cup of hot chocolate in hand, the professor said: 'Notice that all the nice looking; expensive cups were taken, leaving behind the plain and cheap ones. While it is normal for you to want only the best for yourselves, that is the source of your problems and stress. The cup that you're drinking from adds nothing to the quality of the hot chocolate. In most cases it is just more expensive and in some cases even hides what we drink. What all of you really wanted was hot chocolate, not the cup; but you consciously went for the best cups... And then you began eyeing each other's cups.

Now consider this: Life is the hot chocolate; your job, money and position in society are the cups. They are just tools to hold and contain life. The cup you have does not define, nor change the quality of life you have. Sometimes, by concentrating only on the cup, we fail to enjoy the hot chocolate we have. The happiest people don't have the best of everything... They just make the best of everything that they have.

Live simply. Love generously. Care deeply. Speak kindly. And enjoy your hot chocolate!

But first, LOG OFF..

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