

**IMMIGRANT LIVING:  
101 AND BEYOND**



MONETTE ADEVA MAGLAYA

(Here's a condensed version of an old favorite, a belated "Ode to Spring," sort of.)

**T**HE delightful tongue-in-cheek quote above is a humorous dig at the tedious nature of gardening. But spring will soon give way to the dog days of summer when a slice of heaven could mean rocking slowly under a tree in a hammock with a book in one hand and a chilled margarita on the other.

I am a reluctant gardener. I was thrust into it by circumstances since I have a thing about not wanting anything dying on my shift. Nothing I did seemed right at the time. I tended to over water not knowing about the dangers of root rot. Very few plants like to have wet feet. Plants died on me the same way Jerry Seinfeld's plants tend to commit suicide on his watch.

My track record at growing things was dismal, yet I have often wondered what it would be like to watch something grow. I marveled at my mother's green thumb. She can stick a seemingly lifeless stump at a clump of earth and grow a new beautiful plant

# Lessons from the Garden

*The best way to garden is to put on a wide-brimmed straw hat and some old clothes. And with a hoe in one hand and a cold drink in the other, tell somebody else where to dig.*

—Texas Biz Bender,  
Don't Throw in the Trowel

nearly every time. I wasn't one to give up easily though. Tenaciously, doggedly I hung on to an image of me as a confident gardener. My education on the art and science of growing things had begun. I took baby steps and stumbled countless times and still do. I became quieter within as I began to observe and seek to understand the process of growth, the seasons and the cycle of life. I read voraciously volumes upon volumes about plants and watched public television that featured gardening. Nurseries and gardens have become my favorite haunts where I could ask those who knew better. I boned up on my rusty, halting Spanish quizzing the gardener as best I could. Finally, I slammed on the brakes fearing I had become boringly, compulsively obsessive. But I found that unless I got down on the ground myself, nothing happened.

I have discovered gardening to be a quiet, solitary pursuit somewhat fit for hermits and loners — unglamorous, unexciting, backbreaking, time consuming, manual, icky, down in the dirt labor that was certainly not meant for immediate gratification. So, why do it at all? I don't really know. Must be borderline idiocy. Of course, I speak only for myself. For one thing, it teaches you the patience of Job and the virtue of humility. I have failed more than succeeded and am still working on it. But as time passed, I have been encouraged by modest results. I became synchronized with the seasons and their gentle nuances. I took baby steps and was off and running at one point. At times, I would even become bolder with the temerity to dispense advice a la Martha Stewart and help a few others with their

own patch of earth. I must confess however that lately, I have become a slacker and it shows. I squirm at the sight of how neglected the garden looks.

I know I will have to take up gardening 101 once again and devote time and energy to see results. Back to square one, I suppose. It will be easy because I only have a small patch of earth to work with and a bit of paid help to do the grunt work. Did I mention that I have a garden the size of a postage stamp? Oh, all right, maybe a wad of postage stamps. But it is small, really small — just the way I like it. Truth to tell, I don't think my aching back, my diminutive size and what I have available in time, energy and resources, can tackle anything bigger.

Years ago, I bought a discarded ugly duckling — a pot bound areca palm tree with about three pathetic fronds for half a song and a dance. This is one gardening fairy tale you could believe in. Well, it has turned into a tall, graceful swan with luxuriant fronds. I gave it rich soil and placed it in a bigger pot, top dressing it and sticking some time-released fertilizer pellets. That palm tree is like a person that grew because it was given the opportunities and the environment to do so. But it took a bit of work, some imagination, and a dash of patience and considerable time.

I could call most plants by name these days and seem to instinctively know what to do when a problem arises. If things don't work on my own accord, I seek help. I still am a failure with azaleas. Azaleas have been dying on my shift so I am staying away from them. I suspect it has something to do with the amount of light and too much water that has drenched the soil because of an unusually wetter, longer winter season. I said goodbye too to a beautiful sago palm that must have suffered root rot. Farewell too, to a French lavender bush that gave me so much fragrance. The garden gets a lot of shade being in a Northwest orientation so I am quite alright with the fact that I will never have roses which I would love to have but can't. Believe me, I tried. So I just admire them in my neighbors' gardens with a southeast orientation.

My journey to self-discovery has been made easier by

understanding the process of nature, the seasons and the nature of things: of why a seed no matter how good cannot grow in a certain type of soil; or how a young tree cannot grow in the shadow of a mighty oak; or of how much light a plant needs to burst with flowers, of the impeccable timing and the cycle of the seasons that are in God's perfect divine order like a well rehearsed dance or a Beethoven symphony; of why you must resist moving a plant from a place where it is growing so well to another place simply to satisfy a whim or a feng shui decorating principle; when and where to prune, of knowing when to water by sticking a finger in the soil or noting the droop of the leaves; or the merits of clay pots and plastic pots; of when to re-pot or top dress; even how to propagate. The most important lesson perhaps is learning when to leave well enough alone and letting go; of accepting death as part of life. I make it a point to take pictures when the flowers are in full bloom, knowing that no matter how pretty they are, their beauty is fleeting. I am left with beautiful images and pleasant memories.

The irony of it all is that the more I know, the more I realize how little I know. I guess that is the paradox of all lifelong learning. I now appreciate more clearly the delicate balance on which our planet depends for it to sustain life — of how vastly critical it is for everyone to do their part to ensure that life continues. One can see life's longing for itself in the perennial grass that grows. There is great wisdom in gardening. If you dig in the garden long enough, you will find an infinite variety of the parallel laws that govern all life with unsurpassed clarity. Gardening has taught me a zen-like passive skill of enjoying quiet solitude, of observing what works and what won't, of doing what needs to be done with very little struggle and ultimately, of accepting and of simply letting go when all I have done is all I can do.

Oftentimes in the past, my next-door neighbor has told me that I have grown my garden well. I wanted to tell her that she was partly right. The truth is, the garden grew me more than I grew it.

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*Hi!*  
**Society**

By MONET LU

## The Remarkable Ruffa G

**T**IME AND TIME AGAIN, my good friend Ruffa Gutierrez has proven that you can't put a good woman down. After a stormy couple of years during and following her very public break-up with ex-husband Yilmaz Bektas, she is now gliding more peacefully through life.



As someone close to Ruffa, I was witness to her personal struggles. I first met her when she was a 15-year-old girl with her mom Annabelle. Even then, I viewed her as a kindhearted and nice person.

Over the years, Ruffa and I forged a tight bond that can only be built by sharing common experiences. I'm close to the Gutierrez family because we've been present in each other's lives in both low and high points. Back then, I was just bouncing back from a turbulent career and financial crash when the Gutierrez family was also trying to start a new life in Los Angeles, California. We went through the same challenges as we tried to reinvent our lives. I vividly

remember picking up the Gutierrez family (Eddie, Annabelle, the twins, and Ruffa) from the Royal Hotel in my beat-down station wagon.

*Siksikan talaga kami sa kotse* on our way to my salon on Beverly Blvd. I would give them haircuts. We would share a humble meal of fried *galunggong* and rice that we ate with our bare hands. Afterwards, I would drive them back to their hotel. Those were simpler times! Ruffa went on to become a sought-after actress and international beauty queen but she would still come back to the states, where she enjoyed relative anonymity, away from the maddening crowd and chismis. I saw the multi-faceted Ruffs, as I fondly call her, throughout the years. There's the fun-loving Ruffa that I went out to clubs with.

There's the kind-hearted Ruffa who has passion for helping the less fortunate.

When Ruffa gave birth to Lorin at Cedars Sinai (Beverly Hills), yours truly was also there to help the family welcome the new baby into this world. I saw Ruffa in so much pain that I had to take a moment to thank the Lord for not making me a full-blown woman. And then when Ruffa was in labor with her next baby, I was again at Cedars Sinai with her publicist Jun Lalin to anticipate Venice's arrival.

After the children's birth, Ruffa went back to Istanbul to resume her busy life as wife to a multi-millionaire business-man and mother to Lorin and Venice. In between, she preoccupied herself with volunteering for charities and working in fashion as president of Fashion TV Turkey.

Her friends and family had high hopes for her marriage to Yilmaz but as their highly-publicized breakup would show, it's just not meant to be.

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**"Powerfully told and well-written, *What's Happening to Our Country?* is the biography of a vice president biographies. In a way, perhaps, Palaez didn't really miss his date with destiny."**

— Lito B. Zulueta, Philippine Daily Inquirer

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**WHAT'S HAPPENING TO OUR COUNTRY?**  
THE LIFE AND TIMES OF  
**EMMANUEL PELAEZ**  
By Nelson Navarro

## LBC offers new service – Instant Peso Padala

*From Dollars to Peso in an instant – for only \$3*

*"The IPP is an innovative product that will deliver value and convenience to both the recipients and senders of LBC's money remittance service in the US," says Hugo Bonilla, president and CEO of LBC USA.*

**S**OUTH SAN FRANCISCO – As an innovator and leading provider of *padala* services for Filipinos in the US, LBC Mundial Corporation (LBC USA) brings its money remittance services to an even higher level by introducing a new form of delivery to the Philippines.

Responding to the growing needs of Filipinos in the US who send money to the Philippines, LBC USA launched its new Instant Peso Padala (IPP). Starting May 1, 2009, LBC branches in the US that offer money remittance services have also started offering the IPP.

Like its name implies, the IPP service allows recipients in the Philippines to immediately pick-up the money sent from the US from any LBC branch in the Philippines.

"The IPP is an innovative product that will deliver value and convenience to both the recipients and senders of LBC's money remittance service in the US," says Hugo Bonilla, president and CEO of LBC USA.

He further notes that the IPP "will allow Filipinos in the US to immediately respond to the financial needs of their loved ones in the Philippines, particularly in cases of emergencies."

By eliminating the waiting time for money remittance, LBC USA has given Filipinos in the US a better way of meeting the financial needs of their loved ones back home.

"The IPP service is LBC's response to the changing and growing needs of Filipinos for money remittance services. Through the IPP, we hope to help them help their families and loved ones back home better and faster," adds Mr. Bonilla.

The IPP service is initially available in Metro Manila branches of LBC but will soon be offered in all 750 LBC branches located all over the Philippines. Money remitted through the IPP service is limited only to P10,000 per transaction.

Prior to the introduction of IPP, money sent by Filipinos in the US through LBC can be delivered using four methods – LBC's ATM Bilis Padala service, home delivery, branch pick-up and bank-to-bank deposit.

LBC's ATM Bilis Padala service is the fastest money remittance service offered by the company – with the money available for withdrawal from any ATM in the Philippines after only 15 seconds.

While many LBC customers still prefer the traditional home delivery service and branch pick-up or the convenience of the ATM Bilis Padala service, LBC has also learned that many customers want the flexibility of sending money anytime.

With the IPP, both senders and recipients can enjoy the safety offered by the branch pick-up and home delivery services and at the same time the convenience of immediate availability of the funds.

In addition to the benefits of IPP, customers using the new service can also avail of the new lowered pricing that LBC has implemented starting May 2009.

For as low as \$3 for every transaction, customers can avail of the value and benefits of sending money to their loved ones in the Philippines through IPP.

For more details on the new IPP service, please call LBC USA at 1-800-3385424 or visit [www.teamlbc.com](http://www.teamlbc.com) for the location of LBC USA's 60 branches in the US.

(Advertising Supplement)