

LA Mayor honors Pacquiao

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on the importance of maintaining and cleaning the environment in Historic Filipinotown and greater Los Angeles.

Pacquiao, who is training for his upcoming May 2 fight against Ricky Hatton, said that he accepted the invitation to this program because he chairs an environmental taskforce in his home of General Santos City, Philippines.

"We have a similar program to plant trees, that's why when they invited me to this program. I said okay," he said.

In recognition of Pacquiao and Villaraigosa, two trees were planted to honor the men in front of the

SIPA headquarters.

According to SIPA, 200 new trees have been planted around Historic Filipinotown and more than 200,000 new trees in the city of Los Angeles as of February.

Villaraigosa challenged the crowd to plant their own tree in honor of Pacquiao.

"I want everybody in this town, every one of you today in honor of Manny Pacquiao," said Villaraigosa. "Plant a tree in front of your home, a tree in your yard, a tree in your community in honor of a world champion, that is considered the best pound-4-pound and a good human being."

Giving Villaraigosa a hard time

Before Pacquiao and Villaraigosa met with the estimated 300 people in the crowd outside SIPA, media members gave Villaraigosa a hard time about who he was rooting for in the Pacquiao vs. Oscar De La Hoya match last December.

Villaraigosa, a Mexican-American, said that he's a good friend of De La Hoya's and admitted he was rooting for his friend during the fight.

"I know I'm being honest, I've known Oscar for a long time," said Villaraigosa. "But I have to say that Manny showed that he was the true champion that night." (*Joseph Pimentel*)

Emmanuel Pelaez, 'Mister Right' of Philippine politics

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why did Macapagal have to lose to Marcos in 1965?" Aquino was supposed to have said in her speech, referring to Macapagal's failed reelection bid.

But Aquino was never to deliver the speech. On the same night that Macapagal was supposed to bask in the glory of having reached his 79th year as the only living ex-president aside from Marcos, with whom he was being compared in a vastly better light, Marcos died in exile in Hawaii, and the traditional Filipino respect for the dead dictated that Aquino restrain the prepared speech's vitriol.

Not only that. Aquino had to announce to the public on Macapagal's own birthday celebration that Marcos had passed away.

Thus in 1989, as in 1965, Marcos rained on Macapagal's parade.

Missing destiny

But Marcos had played a spoiler even before. Aquino might not have rued Macapagal losing his reelection if his opponent had not been Marcos, but Emmanuel Pelaez, the man from whom Marcos had stolen the Nacionalista Party (NP) nomination in 1964.

Pelaez was Macapagal's vice president who had stood the best chance of replacing him in the elections of 1965. Appointed initially by Macapagal to his Cabinet as foreign secretary, Pelaez later broke away from the president and returned to the NP where he seemed assured of the presidential nomination.

But alas, Marcos, the Senate president at the time, broke away from the Liberal Party after Macapagal indicated he was running again for president. He then joined the NP and grabbed the presidential nomination by vote-buying and dirty tricks.

Pelaez missing his date with destiny is powerfully told by journalist-historian Nelson Navarro in

What's Happening to Our Country: The Life and Times of Emmanuel Pelaez.

According to the biography, Pelaez and Marcos met at the Manila Hotel in July to agree on the ground rules for the nomination fight in November 1964. They had a "gentleman's agreement" to conduct a clean and honest campaign for the nomination. It was an agreement that Pelaez, writes Navarro, "would stubbornly try to stick to."

In the NP convention, Pelaez stood his ground against the counsel of his advisers to match the Marcos vote-buying machine. "What kind of a president would I make if I were to indulge in such activities?" asked Manny of his alarmed advisers. "I'd rather be right than be president."

Indeed, Pelaez became Mister Right, and Marcos the NP standard bearer and later, president and corrupt dictator.

Mindanao roots

Navarro wonderfully evokes the life and times of Pelaez, from his Cagayan de Misamis roots to his Manila education at the Ateneo de Manila, University of Manila, and University of Santo Tomas, then on to his heady political rise, first as congressman of his home district, and later as outstanding senator.

Handsome, tall and learned, Pelaez seemed the perfect embodiment of the old political elite, with its social entitlements and professions at public service.

But as Navarro points out, Pelaez was different because he had integrity and a sincere intention of reforming the nation, as shown by his closeness with President Ramon Magsaysay, perhaps the most populist and most popular president in Philippine history, who heavily relied on his counsel, especially on agriculture, land reform,

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Pelaez biography covers relevant themes today

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an intimate account not only of the statesman whose political career spanned the Magsaysay, Garcia, Macapagal, Marcos and Aquino eras but also of the key personalities of those periods.

What's Happening to Our Country? provides an interesting glimpse of the pre-Marcos era when "for one brief shining moment, (Emmanuel Pelaez) stood as the nation's one great hope against the coming Marcosian darkness." In the months prior to the Nacionalista convention where political upstart Ferdinand Marcos wrested the presidential nomination, Pelaez was the "acknowledged frontrunner, way ahead in the delegate count," recalls Navarro.

Pelaez's fatal mistake was that he had entered into a gentleman's agreement with Marcos not to resort to fraud or buying the votes of the Nacionalista Party delegates. Pelaez kept his word despite Marcos' mockery of that agreement. Even as the vice-president's aides urged him to make use of the contributions that had poured in from backers bent on seeing Marcos defeated at all costs, he

wouldn't budge. As recounted in the book where history is retold as passionate narrative, Pelaez's unwavering answer to frantic campaign advisers and financiers was: "I would rather be right than be president."

Throughout the rest of Pelaez's career as congressman and senator in the '60s and early '70s, as an assemblyman from 1978 to 1984, as fierce crusader against the controversial coconut levy, and as President Aquino's man in Washington during those tumultuous years, Pelaez would often recall the convention and other defining moments in his life when he paid a stiff price for defending his political integrity.

The Navarro volume finds relevance today when the integrity of the Philippines' highest officials has time and again been questioned and has become cause for persistent political destabilization.

In the early 1982 at the height of Marcos' rule, Pelaez integrity once more caught public attention when he denounced the injustice of the coconut levy and the coconut trading monopoly, which left many farmers destitute. Soon

after, he suffered an assassination attempt. As he was being wheeled into the operating room, Pelaez said the now famous statement: "What is happening to our country?" The phrase became an indictment against the Marcos administration.

In honor of the statesman, the Emmanuel Pelaez Foundation is also involved in projects on environmental awareness and preservation such as reforestation and regeneration of the coral reefs; a housing program in partnership with Gawad Kalinga; and training facilities for the fishermen in Medina, Misamis Oriental. Proceeds from the book will be earmarked for these programs. ■

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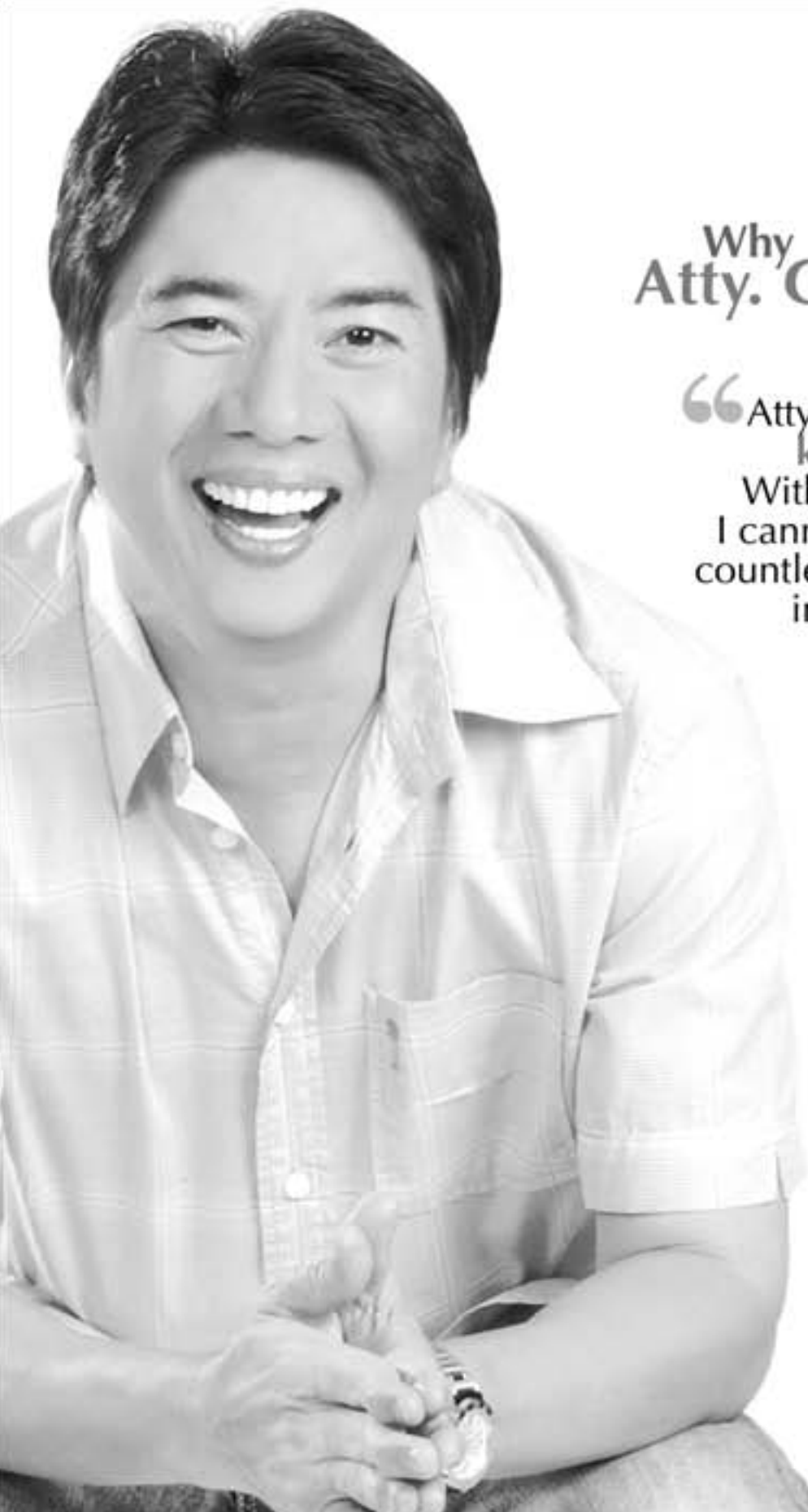
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