

OPINION & FEATURES

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

EDITORIAL

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. (A/Press)

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, California Thursday, June 25. He was 50.

AP Photo by Bullit Marquez



One Voice

by VICKY P. GARCHITORENA

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.

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 cooperatives, 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. Efrén Peñaflores 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, Efrén 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.

Efrén 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. ■

Time for immigration reform is now

(Editor’s Note: This editorial was produced in association with New America Media www.newamericamedia.org, a national association of ethnic media, and was published by ethnic media across the country this week to bring attention to the urgency of immigration reform.)

THE White House and members of Congress must move quickly on enacting a just and humane immigration reform package that will reunite families, reinvigorate the economy, and remove the term “illegal or undocumented immigrants” from the dialogue in this country. Ethnic media, which reaches over 60 million adults in the United States, calls on Congress to move decisively on immigration reform be-

cause there are few issues as important to the nation’s well-being as an overhaul of the inefficient, inhumane and economically debilitating immigration system. More importantly, we are also urging our readers and viewers to contact their Senators and Congressmen and let them know that immigration reform must be a national priority.

The immigration system is broken not just for 12 million undocumented immigrants, but also for specialized workers blocked from joining the American economy because of narrow quotas, and mothers and fathers and brothers and sisters of US citizens who must wait for years before being reunited with their families.

Our nation needs comprehensive immigration policies that will replace a broken system of raids and roundups with one that protects all workers from exploitation, improves America’s security and builds strong communities. It’s time to end the division between workers, which has allowed big business to exploit both sides. Clearly, working-class citizens and immigrant workers have much in common – dreams of better homes, education for their families and quality healthcare. There is more that brings us together, than separates us. United we can be a strong force for change, changes that that bring more workforce safety and humane conditions.

Immigration is often portrayed as an explosive, divisive issue. In reality it’s not. Since the repeal of the national origins quota system in 1965, which discriminated against certain immigrants, a consensus has been building towards an immigration system that respects the country’s core values. These include economic opportunity, equality under the law regardless of ethnic background, and an embrace of the world’s most innovative, energetic and ambitious workers. Now, with the country facing serious competition from workers abroad, it’s more important than ever to create a world-class immigration system. It’s good for families, good for communities and good for America. ■

Pop

NO one believed a friend of mine when he came in to announce that Michael Jackson had just suffered a heart attack and was near death. He had heard it on the radio, he said, on the way to us.

Someone said it was typical of Jackson to manufacture an affliction before a major concert, to get out of it. He had done it a number of times and was due to mount a series of concerts in England. Maybe he got cold feet, maybe he was seized by a sudden panic he was not up to it. Another said it was probably just another promotional gimmick for the tour. That was pretty much all Jackson had been reduced to, mounting spectacular gimmicks in lieu of spectacular performances.

An hour later, news came to dispel the speculation: Michael Jackson was dead at 50. It was early afternoon in Los Angeles. The speculation turned from cynical to sympathetic: Death has a way of dissolving the bad memories and regurgitating the good ones. It was probably due to drugs but not the illegal kind that dogged rock stars like Jim Morrison, only the paranoid

kind that laid low people like Elvis Presley. Elvis too had suffered from all sorts of afflictions, real or imagined, and had been a walking botica before his death.

THERE’S THE RUB

Conrado de Quiros

Over the next few hours—and days—the networks burned with news of Jackson, vying with one another to discover the most obscure details about him. Almost overnight, his death took on the aspect of the death of Princess Di, young and old, or at least middle-aged who had witnessed Jackson’s coming of age in the early 1980s, gathering in various places to pay homage to and hold vigil for him. Jackson might only have been the King of Pop to Diana’s Princess of Wales, but for much of America—and England (the networks showed as well grieving hordes of fans there)—there was precious little difference.

The public reaction to Jackson’s death stoked conflicting emotions in me.

What a waste of talent, I thought like most everyone. But in more ways than one. I too had marveled at Jackson’s awesome gifts in the early

1980s. I remember that Fred Astaire paid him the ultimate compliment by saying he was the best dancer he had seen, greatness stamped on him in every way. Most specifically in his discipline and control. Other dancers gyrated more wildly, other dancers contorted more gymnastically, but they did not have his discipline, they did not have his control. He had economy of movement, he had precision. Those were the marks of the maestro.

hJackson’s fall from grace has been well documented, notably his cases of child molestation. I myself dated that to the time he first showed a deep-seated desire to become a white man. He would justify that by saying he suffered from a disease that bleached his skin pigmentation. And what, turned his nose from flat to chiseled, too? That was the real waste.

My other reaction to it was to marvel at the breathtaking extent to which pop culture has seeped into our lives—or at least to the lives of Americans and Filipinos, though other peoples are not altogether exempt from it—or the extent to which the media tend to soak up in this culture. I do not know which is the cause and which is the effect, the public compelling the media to soak up

on it or the media setting the public awash in it. Probably chicken and egg. But it does add whole new meanings to the term, “idiot box.”

At least, as the movie “The Queen” shows, the Lady Di phenomenon had ramifications for royalty that went beyond Diana’s pop icon status. But the hysteria over Jackson’s death? I leave others to analyze it and give it the importance I do not feel it deserves. But such is our sense of proportion: Harold Pinter and John Updike, two giants of literature, die, the one in December last year and the other in January this year, and we do not notice they are gone. Jackson dies, and we are bereaved and bereft. As sense of proportion goes, it’s Hayden Kho, the world version.

I remember Edward Murrow’s speech (as delivered by David Strathairn) at the end of “Good Night and Good Luck.” He had just ended Joseph McCarthy’s reign of terror in the 1950s and was enthusing over the newfound power of television to educate, to enlighten, to form informed opinion. He dreamed of the day when TV would be better known for provoking thought than eliciting laughter.

The way things are, that day is still ways off. A long way off. (Inquirer.net)



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