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Br Carl Gaspar won the prize for the monthly quote:

"There is no such thing as strangers, just friends you have yet to meet"

Farwell to Davao City: This is the last Diary from this City. Next week, we will graduate then we will move to our new home in Leyte to a town on the west coast called Hilongos where some 50, 000 souls make a living, mainly from fishing and agriculture. The past six months have been spent preparing for what is ahead of us. We are still not experts in the Language but at least we have been given a good foundation and now all that's left is to live the language, as they say here. There is not a great deal of English spoken in Hilongos so we will have to immerse ourselves in it anyway. We will continue our studies when we arrive in Hilongos to continue the good work that MILC has begun. Hurrah!! At last we are moving into the real mission so please keep us in your prayers in the next few months. (The house shown in Diary 13 is the one we have chosen to rent for 12 months)



Culture input: This paragraph is dedicated to a local, Br Karl Gaspar (cssr), a well know Anthropologist here in Mindanao, who graced us with three lectures. He was positively brilliant and shared with us the history of the Philippines focussing on the hundreds of years of colonisations, migrations, invasions, and wars that have shaped and impacted on the culture and faith of its people.

Typhoons, earthquakes, floods and other natural disasters also have taken their toll on the country yet still a Nation is born and an Identity proudly proclaimed. He did help us to come to grips with what we understand as the local culture. I talked to him later and he said what he had given was a full semester of University input, so you can imagine it was packed full of information and very much filled with his own energy and the love for his country and its people. He was imprisoned by Marcos and his cronies in the 80s for siding with the poor and of course labelled a communist (as was our own Fr Brian Gore) and this certainly had a great influence on his future work. On his release he chose to join the *Redemptorists Missionaries*. During his ministry in Mindanao he spent many months living in the highlands with the indigenous people sharing their minimal possessions and primitive living conditions. The way these ancient people are treated reminded me of our own aboriginal people. Maybe some sort of apology is needed here too. The phrases "Tri-people" (**Indigenous - Muslims - Migrants**) might explain the tensions that exist here in Mindanao though it has being going on for centuries and is not a new phenomenon. The little story that had me in fits was about Fr Bowmans who had a reputation for being an

expert with explosives and helped the local people forge roads through the mountains. He was known among his fellow priests as “Ever blasting life”. I thought that was quite clever. A website that will help you learn about Hilongos is: <http://www.answers.com/topic/hilongos-leyte?cat=travel>

Food: Well I guess it had to happen, yes I am loosing weight, (not too much mind) and I put it down to the inability to customise myself to the local cuisine. Rice as you know is the stable food here and though I don’t mind it, having it for Breakfast, Dinner and Tea is not my cup of tea. I take very small servings and only when I need a little filling; I miss my potatoes something chronic. The variety of vegetables is not bad but I embraced very few willingly, so this is a small problem. Now would you believe it cabbage is called **repolyo** in Cebuano so need I say more? Baboy (pig) is served at just about every meal but Fish and rice are still the food of the majority. The variety of fruit more than makes up for the lack of familiar foods and apart from Durian, which people here drool over, I can eat just about any of the fruits. My favourites are pineapple and mango. The other little pitsy-pitsy is we eat with fork and spoon here, the knife no where to be seen. I must admit to hunting down a knife occasionally. It will be interesting to see how we cope in Hilongos which may not have the variety of food we find here in Davao.



Latest Excursions: Last weekend we were given a trip to Samal Island which is only a 10 minute boat ride across the bay. The car ferry trip sandwiched our day, which entailed a ride around the Island and a swim in the crystal clear waters of the Davao Gulf. We completed a pleasant day with a lunch at one of the many resorts around its coastline. The amusing thing was that not long

after we arrived at our lunch spot, a Karaoke session started up just across from our table. The young people just love a sing along. You just can’t seem to avoid the noise Ha! The photo finds Carl and me with Terry and Mark two of Marie’s children on the Ferry. We also visited the crocodile farm which had its own charm though I must say they did not look as dangerous as our own Australian species or maybe they were asleep. We did visit a local museum also which was enlightening. Our last excursion will be a return trip to Marahan to say good bye to our MJ friends who are setting up a new parish in the mountains.



From Frank Perkins: “For the last four weeks of our language study I made the choice to move out of the

Missionary of Jesus Community house and board with a local family down in the village, which is about 1 KM away. My reason for this option centred around challenging myself to be in a situation where English is not the preferred language, and so hopefully my ability to pick up spoken Cebuano would improve. Also it would be a golden opportunity to experience Filipino family life first hand. I have now completed two weeks of living with the Hiponia Family (Mum Dad and three children) and am loving it. The family is delightful and very welcoming. They have had other foreign students from the Maryknoll Language School before, but no one as slow in picking up Cebuano as me. We have a lot of fun, although a large slice of what is said at the dining table passes me by. Everyone, including the grand parents next door, and the family across the street, want to tutor me. A couple of nights ago, the youngest child, an eight year old girl, had my book of Cebuano short stories. She chose one, read it aloud in Cebuano and then translated it fluently into English. It is quite a humbling experience for someone who has been a teacher for 33 years. The children are very out-going, certainly not shy, and this helps a lot, however they find it strange that I am such a remedial learner. Hopefully I will enjoy the final two weeks as much as the first two, and be able to report much progress.”

Wakayo, an African brother, lives next door and is also enjoying the challenge. There is a Birthday party for one of the children this weekend so I will visit Frank with the camera.

Politics - Church and State: “He, who risks nothing, does nothing, has nothing, is nothing and is a slave that has forfeited all freedom. Only a person who risks is free.” and “A people that values privilege above its principles soon loses both” The first quote was sent to me by Adam my friend and colleague in Perth and the second which has been exercising my mind lately, is attributed to Dwight Eisenhower. We seem to be living in troubled times as our President here is under a lot of pressure to step down, not only from the people but more interestingly from the Filipino Catholic Church. There is a lot of talk about “people power” and two past Presidents succumbed to this phenomenon in the past so I guess it could happen again though I doubt it, as the vacuum created may well present an even bigger problem. It’s the church’s involvement that has me fascinated. Not the Australian way. The media is full of it every day and a big march Friday captured the news. With all the talk about corruption, the privileged may well have compromised their principles here, so we will keep you informed on this one.

Contribution from Neil: “I’m not long back from Australia where I celebrated my Diamond Jubilee. Actually I celebrated twice, firstly in Brisbane with the other Jubilarians and then in Townsville with family and friends. I was delighted that our community

leader, Rod Ellyard, was able to join in the Brisbane Mass and lunch. The big thing coming up for us right now is the building of our own house. Currently we live in a rented house which was organized through the kindness of Columban Fr Paddy Hurley. This house is comfortable enough, in close proximity to Kabankalan Catholic College, the shops and markets, and the Cathedral. However, it is on a very busy, noisy road. There are three “guard dogs” here which belong to our house girls. They, the dogs that is, are very sensitive to anyone passing by our front gate and discourage the entry of friend or foe by a vigorous round of barking. The night spots just across the street serenade us most evenings till 2 a.m. or later. Our first move has been to acquire a suitable piece of land on which to build. Through the kindness of the Zayco family we have been offered a block of some 1000 sq. m., only a couple of streets away from our present location. This area borders on a cane field in a much more tranquil area. Latest advice is that there is no obstacle to our buying this land and building our home there. We favour building two small single-storied houses linked by a covered area. We will probably have three bedrooms in each house with the necessary facilities. Other areas, such as chapel, lounge, kitchen, dining room, laundry and open area, are planned as adaptable to larger numbers of people as required. The outside space would allow us to have the locals, especially the kids, in for gatherings, such as visits, games, meals, etc. All of this in keeping with our modest means and of course being sensitive to the local inhabitants!” Neil was hospitalised recently however we hear he is OK now and back home TBTG.

Our constant companion: Frank tells us there is relief from the constant barrage of noise we experience when we move to Hilongos, as it is not as bad as Davao City. Christopher Reeve said *“I think we all have a little voice inside us that will guide us...if we shut out all the noise and clutter from our lives and listen to that voice, it will tell us the right thing to do.”* When I read this quote I wondered if I would ever hear my little voice again. I would like to claim these words for myself as they are a great reminder of what we need to do. The idealistic life of the perfect student is all but over I’m afraid.

Until next time.

Br Peter (cfc) Davao City 2008