

## ***Amusing musing 4***

***The sights that had me amused lately are worth recalling so here goes.***

### ***Rice our staple diet:***

Firstly rice is not my favourite food, as you know, but on my way down to Maasin yesterday, we saw the rice growing in little small allotments most of the way down. These are owned by individual families we are told and you can purchase the use of this



Peter near the rice field

land. (You can never actually buy the lot outright) One Hectare would cost you \$1000 American Dollars for a year and you get your money back at the end of that time. A strange system, whereby you share the harvest with the owner, 50/50 and of course you pay for labour and seed etc. The narrow stretch of land between Hilongos and Maasin is

fertile soil between the mountains and the sea. As you approach Maasin the mountains come closer and closer to the sea till we find Maasin setting on a very narrow piece of coastal plain.

The families seem to share a Caribou between them this being the main cow power (nearly said horse power) The Caribou moves so slow it's a wonder any work gets done at all but they are very strong. The Caribou owner seems to stand on a long piece of timber and the animal drags both through the slush (well that's what it looks like to me). Then lots of people, men and women, get in rows and just plant individual rice plants in the watery bed a few centimetres apart. It seems easy enough but I get a sore back just looking at the process. After the planting they erect real scarecrows (tawo tawo) and hundreds of little bits of rags on wires. They even have hides all in aid of frightening off the birds which would eat all their hard work if they had half a chance. It looks so funny so I have added a photo or two to help you understand what it looks like.

We also saw grain being put out to dry which is a very common sight here. Well I saw two goats happily eating the grain off the drying floor and more than likely poohing in it also which did not encourage me to increase my intake of this staple food. I then went to the market to see how the rice was distributed and found that prices varied quite a lot. Good quality rice down to rough rice which is my name for it. Good rice is about P35 per Kg while Government rice can be bought for as low as P21 per Kg. Government rice is usually imported from Vietnam or Malaysia. The Government is trying to control things here but it's an uphill battle as local vendors try to get as much money as they can for their product. Some are hoarding it hoping that the shortage will put the price up then out it comes, not nice and it's illegal too.

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There is room for bargaining, which I tried, with very little success. Having white skin puts you at a huge disadvantage as they think for some reason you are loaded with money and probably a tourist to boot. I usually say “Wallay Tourist, ako Missionaro” and this usually helps a little though I still have to pay more than the locals. The two ways I like eating rice are in the form of Sticky rice (Sweet rice-cake) and rice porridge which is also quite sweet dish which could pass as dessert. Christian, my Kauban, eats rice like there is no tomorrow. I watched him put away three large helpings in one sitting, truly amazing. My little effort falls somewhat short of this huge intake.

### ***Free rides:***

The kids around here have a great game going, where they hop on the back of any Put-puts travelling past. (Bicycles with cabin attached) At one stage I was on a put-put and the kids were eyed by my driver so to prevent the unwanted extra passengers he picked up his pace (paspas) which was quite hilarious really as kids start running after you, presumably seeing it as a great form of recreation. Most times they manage to climb aboard. Then the poor fellow legging the bike has to stop to remove them which he does not seem to enjoy doing. Sometimes if there is only one or two I ask the put-put driver to let them be and I pay him a little extra for the extra workload.

### ***The hazards of shopping in Hilongos:***

Now the locals can get a haircut for P20 but the good lady demands P50 from me which I find a little annoying but since it's just a little over a dollar I don't complain too much. It's over \$15 at home for a haircut so we are doing well. Carl experienced something that is more common than I would like. He tried to buy a pretty lamp at one of the Hilongos shops for a birthday present for Becca, our landlady. Well the shopkeeper had to ring the owner in Manila, who was not home, so she was unable to give us a price, therefore unable to sell the lamp to us. This happened to me in both Davao and Cebu City which simply means that most of the shops around the Philippines and certainly here in Hilongos are owned by absent landlords. Carl offered them P1000 (\$25) which was very generous, I thought, and still they would not sell. Apparently if they get it wrong they have to pay the balance out of their own wages which is very small anyway. Carl so much had his heart set on this gift. (Carl finally bought the lamp with a little local help later in the day and a little bargaining)

Teaching Maths has its difficulties too as I was trying to buy some cheap calculators for those students who don't know their tables. Well I ended up buying ten at the market for P50 each. The main shops were selling them for twice that and the exact same item, so one really has to shop around to get the best price. I tend to ask what the local price is

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for an item before revealing if I want to buy or at least try to ascertain from a local what it should cost before entering the shop as we can no longer trust the vendors here who just can't help trying to get a little extra from you because you're white. Even the put-put drivers try to charge more than the going rate for a short journey. We have not been able to convince some of them that we are not tourists but missionaries.

### ***Basura:***

Rubbish collection does exist here in Hilongos but the truck comes from Cebu via a five hour Ferry journey once a week and is easily missed, so people dig holes near their houses and just bury the stuff. A bit like out of sight out of mind. If they have been doing this for years Lord only knows what the ground water is like, and it's very close to the surface here too. Needless to say we buy filtered water for our everyday use. I did see a rubbish truck in Maasin yesterday so they have a more reliable collection system down there. It is amazing how they don't need street sweepers here in Hilongos like in the big cities. Each resident takes their little bit of road outside their house or shop and every morning they diligently sweep the area clean with little bamboo brooms. The front of their shops are kept beautifully clean whether its dirt or paved. The whole of Hilongos is kept pretty clean in this way. Yes I know what you are going to ask, do we keep our section of road clean? Yes we do and it's spotless thanks to Bibi our house lady and cook. By the way we pay her more than our poor teachers get each week. Not a good thing for our teachers to find out but what can you do. Just because one employer is unjust it does not mean we have to be unjust too. A lot of rubbish finds its way into the sea here and the water is quite dirty and certainly not safe to swim in. I have been swimming in a local resort pool (P50 a pop) but have been banned from same as I have caught Typhoid and on top of that had to cope with two bouts of lung infection. Not a happy chappy for several weeks.

### ***School:***

Band competitions and concerts seem to occupy a lot of our students time. I forever have to excuse my students for some activity that needs time for practice. Having a whole week with my complete class is something I have not experienced too often lately. Saint Teresa's School won the band section so all the practice certainly paid off. (P5000 prize money – new instruments are on the way) The students were beside themselves with joy God bless them.

We are in the middle of Term Tests now which also entails no regular classes. The marking system here is so complicating that I have to give my results to a local and they

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arrive at a final grade by some mysterious method even Frank has trouble mastering. Frank is also putting in many extra hours doing unusual activities with his 4<sup>th</sup> years. Yesterday he was up at 3am to go with them to a shrine on a hill overlooking Maasin. The shrine turns out to be a shrine to my patron Saint St Francis Xavier. I have promised to go next time. Apparently they do this when the exams are due, especially if they are the entrance exams for College. Unfortunately you do the terrible ascent in total darkness so I don't know how Frank managed it.

### ***Banking:***

Carl has had all our money in his name for the last 12 months which in The Philippines is not a good idea; should he have decided to part this world we would have had all our funds frozen until a Lawyer could distribute the lot to his family, Philippines law apparently. So we now have it under all our names and any two of us can sign the cheques. Also we are incorporated so no individual can access the funds as they are now owned by an organisation called "The Edmund Rice Brothers The Philippines inc." Needless to say this all took many many weeks and countless trips to Maasin to accomplish and many documents later. We also now have a second account we are calling "The ministry account" which is specially created for the many good causes we support here. (This is the account we put any donations from Australia in, so please feel free to offer your spare pennies any time) We have spent over \$4000 on worthy causes since we have been here (Its 12 months now since we arrived in the Philippines so we are doing well and are happy to do our bit for the Hilongos economy)

### ***Suroi Suroi:***

We were bundled off to the local tailor recently for fittings. It turns out our deputy Mayor wants us to have a Filipino dress shirt called **Barong Tagalog**. Very nice shirt indeed and



Doctora (White) and Carl in Barong Tagalog

the photo taken at Becca's birthday party show us the new outfit which is to be used only on special occasions we are told. Becca's birthday party was

such an occasion, so we thought, but we quickly took them off as it must be a public occasion and

Carl and I felt a little over dressed.

Well I felt my first earthquake today and though it was a little one I still felt strange. Frank, being a New Zealander, did not bat an eyelid of course he just moved under a door jam. I stayed put just enjoying another new experience. Well enjoying may not be the right word but then we all are having so many these days. It was a strange feeling

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Vin with Presentation Sisters Cebu

altogether. I missed the Meckering earthquake in the West some years ago, which was according to reports, very big indeed but I did see the aftermath and was truly impressed with its destructive force. The last thing I did this week was just shoot as many shots of various Hilongos scenes as possible. (Camera of course) I will put them together as a collage one day as it portrays Hilongos day to day life very well.

Until next time from Peter T – Hilongos