

## ***Amusing musings from The Philippines***

*This is a light piece of writing showing some of the funny or unusual sides of Filipino life. Let's call it "Amusing Musings". - I like that - Readers Digest would be proud of me. Ha! Where should I start? Let's just list them as points as they pop in my head: ENJOY*

### **On our roads:**

- Each time I go out on the road using "public transport" such as it is, we see signs on the road declaring the area prone to accidents. Now I have seen them in Perth so what's the big deal? Well; they are on every road across the Philippines and are spaced in such a manner, like every few kilometres, that you would suspect all roads across this country are accident prone. Well the roads are OK in places but really terrible in others. Poor John Moody took weeks to get over his bus trip back from Iloilo City. (He hit his head on the roof and hurt his lower back) Our trip to Tacloban and back was a seven hour experience and because the road through the mountains is very poorly maintained it became a bit of an ordeal. The locals seem to take all this so calmly and seem happy to suffer in silence. Not my way just yet but I'll learn. Maybe that's why Filipinos have low blood pressure.
- The local people dry their rice grain on the sides of the roads and in places actually use some of the road itself which presents all sorts of problems to the inexperienced traveller? The on coming vehicle flashes its lights indicating its coming through ready or not. This has given me some heart flutters I can tell you as the basic rule first there first to go does not always apply.
- Now let's get back to why I put the words "public transport" in inverted commas in the first paragraph. I will start by saying the poor people walk and since there is nowhere else to walk they share the roadway with everything else. Transport is quite varied, the choices being endless, so it seems. They can accommodate all kind of wallets from empty to full. First we have the wonderful beast called the Caribou pulling some sort of cart with goods for the market. No cost, just hop on if your game; the farmer is usually friendly and the speed might just gets up to 3kph. Then we have the Put-put, which is a bicycle with cab attached, which gets up to 5 kph and cost P5. The **Doctora** has her own Put-put and sends Christian or Jeremy to pick us up when she knows we need one. These boys are cared for by her and she treats them as if they were her sons. She is a remarkable woman all together. Then we have the Tricycle, which is a cabin some how plopped on to a motorbike, which probably has a top speed of 20 kph and P10 gets you just about anywhere in Town. Next is the wonderful Jeepney which is a little like a mini bus but that's too generous a simile. P40s will get you to Maasin, a one hour drive away, so still affordable. They are a little faster; may be 35 kph. Next the private motorbikes which are by far the most common private means of transport in the Philippines and they buzz in and out of the traffic like they own the road. I drove one yesterday and most of them are 100cc and very easy to drive. Then you have the bigger buses and of course those (formula 1) Taxis; they will cost P100 to P200, cheaper if they don't have air-conditioning. The Taxis don't seem to have any speed limit at all but the drivers are all very friendly. I have talked about these taxis in one of my Diaries so I won't go on about them here. Add to this the private vehicles, trucks and four wheel drives and you have one awful big traffic jam, mainly because they all go at different speeds which give you an overtaking frenzy. Many times I have just closed my eyes and prayed for deliverance. The horn is used very aggressively everywhere.
- All the bridges, and there are thousands I would guess, for some reason have been built above the level of the roadway, so you have to slow right down to mount and then later dismount. Really they are all like monster speed bumps, quite bazaar. Maybe they expect the bridges will sink in due time. The San Juanico Bridge is a Japanese master piece and believe it or not crosses the sea separating Leyte from Samar in the form of the letter S. I ask why this might be so and was told it stands for

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Samar Island. I should not have asked. It has to be more than a Kilometre long. An amazing piece of engineering if not a little bazaar when a straight one would have been half the distance and probably half the price. It looks great though. (Photos on website)

- Crowded buses with 20 people setting on the roof sharing the space with bags of rice and bags of copra is one thing but when they actually stop to pick up more passengers with my legs wrapped round my chin I call out puno puno (Full Full) but no they find space for yet one more. A motorbike flies bye with Mum Dad and four kids and I think I might like to join them to make seven and that would be a record by the way as six is the most we have seen on these machines up to now.
- The Saints names on the front of Put-puts and Tricycles are common enough, but it's the Tags on the back that can keep you amused for hours. "Don't expect too much just enjoy", "San Nino will protects you", "Enter without risk", "Jesus loves you", "Holy Mary express" and one I saw this very day "Love with all your heart" which I thought was good advise. The good thing is that they all have some religious article mounted in the drivers compartment, such as a crucifix or even more common, rosary beads, so one does feel a little reassured if not totally safe.
- Caribous are the tractors for the Filipino farmer and are prized as part of the family. Time and time again we see them on the sides of the road being grazed by their owners. They move very slowly and deliberately when working, so it takes a long time to work a field. We left at six from Hilongos and returned about 5pm to see the same man tending his Caribou. He had been doing it all day. Other animals on the road side are the mountain ponies, cows, pigs and goats. It looks like one big grazing corridor and with the grass so plentiful the animals replace road workers with their mowers which are such a hazard in our part of the world. I have worked out why this is so, cleaver me. Any arable land is cropped so little is left for grazing. Leyte has mainly rice, however Negros grows sugar.

### ***Government bureaucracy and all that:***

- At the beginning of each Barangay you have this information board - wait for it - yes made in concrete with the names of their Barangay captain, the local Governor and sitting Senator chiselled out for all to see. The only trouble is that they are woefully out of date. I am not sure if the sitting member can't afford what was once affordable or they just don't want to put up a modern cheap one or they see it a shame to alter the original. No answer to this one.(Our Barangay has 500 dwellings)
- Of late I had cause to visit our Barangay Hall. (Barangay Atabay) I was able to talk to our captain (A lady) and was introduced to the councillors; yes you guessed it, most seemed to be related but never the less very friendly and helpful and this system of employing your own has merit as I will explain later. I found out our house did actually have a number (518) which was news to our land lady. The same day I also visited the Mayor's Office in the grandest building in Hilongos. Well at least I got to speak to the Mayor's sectary who proved to be a real asset to our cause. Her name is Kate and she happens to be the niece of our dear friend and benefactor, **Doctora** (Not allowed to say her name in my writings). Kate has started the ball rolling towards some sort of solution to our visa run-around, as I have called it. We were treated royally with lunch and a video of Hilongos culture. Camera men were down from Manila to record the celebrations here which consisted of native dancing.
- I have had cause to visit Government departments from time to time and found that the said Dignitary or Supervisors would introduce you to the staffs that were invariably related to them in some way. This is not necessary a bad thing as you can expect wonderful harmony to reign in the office and it's done all over the Philippines and so has no negative effects that I can see. If each group look after their own then everyone is cared for. Our latest experience was enjoyed when we

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went to the immigration centre in Tacloban. One sheet of paper we filled in; went the rounds of nearly every desk in the room as each had their little bit to do. One to stamp with a seal another to estimate the cost another to actually process the money etc, and then back to the supervisor for final OK and big hand over. Hay! I am not knocking this as one of the desks picked up we were being over charged by P1000 and returned the money to us via the supervisor of course. If anyone in the room happens to have some bereavement in their family, the office closes down for the day as family duty takes precedence over business. Harrah! Says I, one for family first party.

- Have you ever had a window run-around? (We seem to do a lot of it here) If you read my Licence saga you will know what I am talking about. Visa renewal is done every two months and it cost us over a \$100 every time. Not particularly funny I grant you. We are trying to get a two year missionary visa but may have to wait till June. At the moment we are on that awful Tourist visa. Carl believes they should be paying us as we are here to help them and are not tourist. I couldn't agree more, but it's not going to happen in my life time and certainly not his. This is the problem here; as all foreigners are treated as owners of pots of money and the tax man seems to think he should have at least half it. An example of this was thrust back into our consciousness in Tacloban recently when the supervisor informed us that an extra P1000 (\$25) had been added to the visa renewal process since we last had them renewed in March. (Sorry, back to this window thing) Window one two and three might get the job done if you're lucky but the record is the seven windows we had to negotiate at the Land and Transportation Office in Bacolod. I think you would call it bureaucracy gone mad at home.

### ***Final couple of stories:***

- Ferries start their journey with a public prayer for a safe journey over the speaker system which is comforting as Ferries do have a bad reputation here and they seldom run on time. I do enjoy the experience and the fun at each end trying to stop the porters grabbing your luggage. Our Journey across to Leyte for the first time was a costly business as we had to pay five porters P500 each (Total \$70) for the privilege of carrying our luggage a 50 meters to the boat. We later worked out P500 should have been the normal fee for all five of them put together. An expensive lesson. No wonder one of the Porters danced outside our window singing balik-balik. (Please Return) Filipinos said the selfsame words in 1942 to General MacArthur but I don't think they were dancing then.
- The people here are on the whole a happy people regardless of misfortune that may befall them. Cock fighting is an abscission and one of our teachers was making big money so he told me, unfortunately for him, no sooner was he pocketing it and it was disappearing. He learnt later he was sitting next to a professional pickpocket. "He must have needed it more than me" he said smiling. The fighting birds are not given names because their life span is not particularly long. I called one, housed at our place, Charley which was unwise as he lost his first fight. Anyway that's one Cockerel that is not going to wake me during the night with his calls. Unfortunately there are thousands of them ready to take his place. It seems anyone who is anyone has a couple of these poor creatures. The smallest bet, I am told, is P2000 (\$50). I was amazed and am wondering who could afford such entertainment. Well it is only P20 to get in just to watch and the fights are fast and furious I am told. I have not been to one though we have passed dozens of them. They call them Sabongs, which I find amusing. I think my last thought is loaded with humour and that is Filipinos spend millions trying to be white (Western) and Australians spend millions trying to be brown. (Tanning) When watching TV, not that I do much of that these days, you see Filipino actresses as white as us. I am not sure how that is done. - Goodbye from me till next time.