

TRAVELING HERE AND THERE

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There is one American whose job I would have coveted, that of the late Charles Kuralt of CBS. Mr. Kuralt traveled the continental United States in a large van or converted bus, without any fixed schedule and roamed the highways and towns of America looking for items of interest. He reported his experience on the radio, sometimes on television and later on wrote a book. My experience pales in comparison but here's what I've got, which I intend to broaden during these, our "golden" years.

All the stories that follow are somehow related to travel, whether intentional or unintentional. They are all true and no attempt has been made to protect the guilty. They are not in any order, chronological, logical or otherwise. Don't forget that.

Roundup in Montana:

Val and I were taking two of our grandsons, Andy and Ryan, on a trip to Montana and the Glacier National Park. Driving west from North Dakota, we left the Interstate and drove on a two-lane highway. Since retirement, Grandpa Mario likes to take the scenic route, usually getting lost in the process. I wasn't worried about gas, this being America and the ubiquitous gas station mini-market. We drove on and on, no towns in sight. There were towns indicated on the map, but they consisted of a few houses and nothing else. The landscape was immense, endless plains on all directions, with a beautiful blue sky and puffs of white clouds. The gas gauge kept going down, down. The warning light came on. Just when we thought we would have to use the cell phone to call emergency, here comes a "town" within sight. The town consisted of dozen houses and a solitary gas station. Out comes an elderly gentleman dressed in coveralls. I started to take the gas hose off the pump but he stopped me. Apparently, the self-serve mode had not yet arrived in this town. So he pumped and when I asked if they took credit cards, he gave me a blank stare. Credit cards hadn't arrived either. But we sure were glad to find this old fellow. Moral of the story is when traveling in Montana, keep your gas tank filled and relieve yourself at every opportunity. Americans aren't like Filipinos, they just don't stop, stand by the road, open their fly and let go. The kids have to "go bathroom." There are also few trees for the more modestly inclined. As for the ladies, well, life is not fair.

The above experience demonstrates just how large the American west is, especially the state of Montana. It is larger than the Philippines by about 30% and it had less people than the old city of Manila. That's right, scatter the people of Manila alone, not including Quezon City, Pasay, Makati and other environs, around the whole archipelago, Aparri to Jolo, and you have the population density of Montana more or less. Montana is relatively flat before you reach the Rocky Mountains the horizon sits low, making a glorious sky. On a clear summer day, nothing is more spectacular. No wonder they call it Big Sky country. I can imagine thousands of bison roaming the plains.

More driving. An accident involving an overturned semi on the road ahead on another two-lane highway caused a backup and it didn't look like it was going to be cleared soon. I asked a fellow in a pickup truck if there was another way west. He said follow that other guy. So we did. Pretty soon the paved highway turned into a gravel road. Val wasn't happy. Little rocks were bouncing into her Crown Vic's rocker panel. There was a small convoy of vehicles and there were billowing clouds of dust. We decided to veer off the main convoy, taking another gravel road. All we wanted to do was head west.

We started to see telltale signs of cow, or maybe it was buffalo droppings along the road. We called the droppings the work of the Phantom Pooper or poopers. The boys loved that title. It didn't take long before we had to stop. In front of us were a herd of black Angus cattle slowly meandering along the road and shoulder, relieving themselves quite frequently. We inched

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along, getting surrounded by the cattle. We would see an occasional cowboy or cowgirl on horseback gently prodding the beasts along. Apparently they were being herded from one pasture to another. They were gentle creatures, paying our vehicle no mind, but none of us wanted to go outside the car. We were more worried about the constant relieving than getting trampled or anything else. When they spray, they spray! They don't even break their stride. It took us a while to get through but finally made it back to a paved highway. That was the only authentic "cattle drive" we've ever and are likely to see.

Scenes From the Rockies and Great Plains:



Field of Canola grain in Alberta



Falls near Logan Pass, GNP



Grinnell Glacier, Glacier National Park



Missouri River in North Dakota; Lewis & Clark went thru here 200 years ago. Ryan, Val & Andy.

Glacier National Park Bears:

Black bears roam around in the Glacier National Park area, which is larger than the province of Batangas. These bears are smaller than the grizzlies and polar bears but can still tip the scales at 300 pounds. The other beautiful animals that inhabit the park are the mountain goat and bighorn sheep. The only way you can see these animals is by having a powerful binocular, which I had purchased for the occasion. But several times while driving around we saw black

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bears crossing the road. From a distance I thought they were black dogs but turned out to be bears. And oh, a black bear doesn't necessarily have to be black. They can have a tan or brownish coating.

*Two bears on a hillside.
I took the picture from
the road below.*



Bison, bugs:

Two years before the trip to Montana, Val and I took two granddaughters, Dasha and Stephanie to Las Vegas for the first ever Escobar reunion. That's my mother's maiden name and there are approximately one hundred Escobars that live in the United States and Canada, including spouses. About eighty made it to the reunion, coming from as far as Massachusetts. We stopped in three national parks, Grand Tetons, Yellowstone and Mt. Rushmore after the reunion. It was the longest driving trip Val and I have ever taken, putting 5,500 miles on the car. We had purchased a Crown Victoria with such a trip in mind. It is a heavy car, V-8 engine and rear drive.

In Yellowstone National Park, we had rented a cabin. Wildlife does roam freely throughout the park. One evening as we came out of our cabin to have dinner, a lady from an adjacent cabin stopped us. She shouted - "watch out for the buffalo!" There he was, in his magnificent glory, at least 1,500 pounds, munching away at the grass. We were told mature bulls could weigh over 2,000 pounds. The girls were petrified. The big guy wouldn't move as if saying I was here first. We finally went through the back and skirted around, but ready to sprint at a moments notice. Another time, we were taking a driving tour of the park and the bison were all around, within feet of the car. They were all rather nonchalant about the eastern tourists. Stephanie and I kept a running "argument" about nomenclature; she kept saying buffalo and I kept saying bison. Elsewhere in the park, there were large elk, pronghorn antelopes not much bigger than your pet dog and a solitary wolf.

It is different, traveling with girls than with boys. The boys are hyperactive and prone to mischief. The girls are quieter, but not all the time. One evening we heard this blood -curling scream from them when we were all relaxing in one of the cabins after dinner. Val was in the shower but she and I rushed to the bed where the girls had been. Guess what, it was a bug or two crawling on the bed that had upset them. They better not go to the Philippines. The cockroaches are so big you can almost ride them. Just kidding.

Head Smashed in Buffalo Jump:

What the heck do those words refer to? Picture the North American great plain centuries ago with millions of bison migrating and the Native American on foot. Yes, on foot since the horse had not yet been brought over by the Spaniards. After the Spanish brought the Andalusian horses over in the 16th century, some of the horses either escaped or were captured by the Indians. These horses were bred and transformed the life of the Plains Indians. How does an

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Indian on foot kill a 1,500 to 2,000 pound buffalo? Carefully. One method the ancients used was to herd the buffalo near a cliff and then stampede them. The buffalo would run and the momentum would cause them to go over the cliff, killing and maiming the animals. I suppose the Indians would apply a coup de grace to the injured.



Buffalo jump cliff south of Calgary in Alberta, Canada.

We saw one such cliff in the province of Alberta, Canada. The entire maneuver could take days. The young men of the tribe would cloak themselves in buffalo or wolf skins and steer a herd nearer and nearer the cliff. Before the herd realized they had their backs to the cliff the Indians would in some fashion get them to stampede. Sometimes the buffalo would turn around and stampede towards the poor Indians instead of the cliffs. That would not be a pleasant experience. But if the operation were successful, hundreds of buffalo would be harvested. There would be enough provisions for months. It is hard for me to imagine how life would be in those plains. It is immense. Alberta alone is more than double the size of the Philippines. But unlike our forebears who could paddle up and down the river or the sea, the Indians had no such luck. So they must have done a lot of walking.

When the horse and gun came, it became simpler for the Indians to hunt but the European also ruined it for them.

You look like:

Now we go back in time a little. One thing about Filipinos, we are mistaken for other nationalities than any other. I guess we aren't that distinct or more probably, too mixed up with other bloodlines that we have more similarities to others. And the Hispanic names fool a lot of people. Here are a few examples.

Native American: It was at a rest stop along the Ohio turnpike. In comes this really tall man with jeans, cowboy hat and boots. But he was no white cowboy. He had a Filipino like complexion and somewhat almond eyes. He took one look at me and started to ask if I were an Indian, as in American Indian. The politically correct term Native American had not yet been introduced. I said no, I am Filipino. He told me how much I looked like people of his tribe. Sorry, I can't remember which tribe he indicated although I could just choose any for this narrative since there are 500 Indian, oops, Native American tribes. Which may be one of their problems. Lincoln said something about a house divided.

Warm Springs, GA: This time it was in Georgia and we were visiting Warm Springs, the resort that was a favorite of President Franklin Roosevelt. Roosevelt had contracted polio and frequented Warm Springs to swim and nurse his weak legs. A woman in a gift shop collared me and asked if I were Hawaiian. I gave the standard reply of no, I'm Filipino, etc. etc. She then told me about her long lost Hawaiian love. Perhaps she thought I was a reincarnation. Or maybe

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there was some resemblance. The lady was in her senior years but not elderly. Maybe she just needed new glasses. I just hope I made her day.

Rome, Italy airport: I was checking in for the return flight to the US. There were the usual perfunctory security questions and this young lady officer looked at the name on my passport and asked if I were Italian. "Your name is so Italian!" And started to blab in Italian. But my Italian is limited to the essentials like ordering food (risotto per favore) and looking for the bathroom (dove il servizio.) But we had a nice chat. Besides, she was good looking.

Jackson barber shop: When we first moved to Jackson, I was given the recommendation to patronize a barber shop that charged \$3. This was in 1988 and that was half the usual rate. The lone barber was a thirtyish white fellow named Jim, whose surname I never did get. Of course the first question he asked was where I was from. With the haircut so inexpensive, he had a large clientele, who shall we say were for the most part southern whites. Maybe even rednecks. No yuppies among his customers. The other patrons and I got to know each other pretty well and we carried on the usual barbershop conversations. But the first time I was seen, the inevitable question came, where are you from. You're part Asian (why not full,) aren't you? By this time Val and I had developed a standard routine answer, since she was asked the question too. People noticed that she didn't have a southern accent or say y'all and yonder. We're from Jackson. When that wasn't satisfactory, the next answer was we're from Illinois. For my part, they were insistent and I finally said Filipino of course. There was never any mean spiritedness, it was just part of the culture. Southerners are more outgoing and friendlier. They talk to you while waiting in checkout lines and wave from their cars while you're in the yard. That rarely, if ever, happens in Illinois or Ohio. Waitresses often will call you honey. People you pass on the sidewalk will nod. On two lane country roads, people will stop their cars if there is a funeral procession going the other way. They will even take off their standard baseball cap. It is always sir and ma'm. I miss a lot of that Southern warmth. Come on, ask me where I'm from. Oh, someone also told me that in the south, football is not a sport it is a religion.

Cozumel, Mexico: Val and I had flown in to the island of Cozumel off the Yucatan peninsula of Mexico. Being a tourist destination (no one goes there are for any other reason,) the immigration and customs checks are haphazard at best. I handed my passport over to the Mexican officer. They are usually bored, having to look at passports of 150 gringos at a time, several times a day, day in and day out, not really looking for anything. But this time he perked up. "Pariente," he said. That means relative. Conoce Señor this, Señor that? He was asking if I knew this fellow or that other fellow, all surnamed Orosas. He then pointed at his name badge, which I should have paid attention to, and it said Orosa! We exchanged some pleasantries and I tried in my best tourist Spanish to explain my heritage and likely that there was no relation. But you never know. Ever heard of the galleon trade? Spanish galleons went between Manila and Acapulco for over a hundred years bringing treasure from Asia to New Spain as Mexico was then called and finally to Spain itself. I'm sure some galleon crewmembers decided to jump or stay on one side or the other. The first Filipino TNT's (Tagalog acronym for undocumented immigrant) sneaking into Mexico and Mexican crewmen deciding life was better in Manila and its environs. So, the Orosas have a lot of namesakes in Mexico, who may or may not be related. A Quaker Oats colleague who had been posted in Mexico City told me there were a lot of Orosas in the phone book. Check it out next time you're there. Let me know.

Val and I have been to Mexico three times, not including some border crossing in Texas. It was my custom to grow a mustache for those trips. I can't recall whether it was in Cozumel or more likely in Cancun, but more than once I've been asked for directions. They were Mexicans too, not gringos. Guess I blend in. I look like one of the locals. Another time in Miami Beach, Val and

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I were just relaxing on a blanket in South Beach when a fellow nearby got up, approached me and asked “que hora es?” What time is it? Val wondered why the fellow picked me, instead of other people on lying around. Well, should he have asked Val?

London, no student visa:

I had just completed working the summer of 1963 in Germany, working in a couple of factories at I think three and a half Deutchmarks an hour. That was perhaps a couple of dollars an hour then, but you look it up. The first company was a metal working factory in the town of Villingen and the other, a textile factory in the nearby town of Donaueschingen. The latter is the source of the Danube river. Both were in the Schwarzwald or Black Forrest region of Germany. Why two factories? Well, an American student and me were fired after a month or so at the metal factory.

During weekends we would hitchhike and that weekend made it to Switzerland. Hitchhiking was a popular mode of transportation for students and there was no danger as there would be today. We were late getting back to work Monday and were told simply you're gone. Kaput. I guess the Germans don't like employees who come late, in spite of the explanation that we were in Switzerland. But now it was time to return to Pittsburgh and Carnegie Tech via London. At the London airport, the airline agent looked at my then Philippine passport and said “you can't board.” My student visa apparently was good only for one, not multiple entries. To receive a new student visa, it was necessary to visit the American consulate. I didn't have the foggiest where it was but the Pan Am agent arranged for a cab to take me. The driver was a friendly Englishman who asked me if I were Korean. My usual explanation followed. He said he was a veteran who drove an English tank during the war in Korea. The driver was very well dressed, jacket and tie were de rigueur for them. Even today, the London cabbies still stick to a strict dress code and the cabs are spotless. Hooray for them. So off we went to the US consulate, in the meantime he was giving me a narrative of his war experience. Once there, an American consular officer said, no problem, but I need fifty dollars. I did not have \$50 in cash nor did I have a credit card! That was before the days when you were sent credit cards in your freshman year whether you wanted it or not. I just had barely enough for the cab driver. So he explained that the visa fee was reciprocal based, depending on what the Philippine government charged Americans. He recommended I visit the Philippine Embassy to ask for funds. He said consulates and embassies keep a petty cash fund to help their citizens who are in dire straits. I guess I qualify for that.

My friendly driver had to look up the location of the Philippine Embassy. I explained my needs and the Pinoy gentleman who I talked to was very sympathetic. He was dressed very formally, one of those suits with tail. He said he would talk to the Ambassador, whose name was Gamboa. A short while later he returned and said the Ambassador was providing the funds out of his pocket, but I signed a promissory note. Back to the American Embassy, got my passport stamped and Pan American placed me on the next flight. I then sent a thank you note and payment back to Ambassador Gamboa when I reached Pittsburgh. Thanks again, Mr. Ambassador.

Wonder if airline agents, consulates and embassies would be as accommodating today? I venture to guess that they won't. Visa expired or not suitable? The answer would probably be tough, work it out yourself.

But remember, your embassy or consulate keeps a slush fund for emergencies. We don't want our citizens sleeping on the sidewalk or eating in soup kitchens. You don't have to hold out a cardboard sign at street corners. But keep the information to yourselves, we don't want to have too many people asking for our taxpayer money.

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Footnote to working in Germany in 1963: The German economic miracle was in full swing and they had a severe shortage of workers. They were begging for labor. We lived with the “guest workers” in dormitories and it was a virtual cross section of Europe. Or at least the poorer Europeans at that time. The most numerous were the Italians, but there were Yugoslavians, Spaniards, Turks and Moroccans. The Italians and other Europeans later went back to their homelands but the Turks and Moroccans stayed, presenting a social challenge to the Germans.

Big Island:

We were on the Big Island of Hawaii to celebrate retirement from Procter and Gamble. P & G paid for part of the vacation too, thanks to frequent flyer mileage during business trips. We went to Mass at a small church that could probably not seat more than 100. The church was somewhat historical and was called the “painted” church of St. Benedict. Legend has it that scenes from the Bible were painted on the wall of the church to illustrate the life of Christ because the Hawaiians at that time were not yet literate. Visitors are asked to introduce themselves to the congregation and are given crocheted lei by the congregation. And a big Alooooha. Only in Hawaii. After Mass, an older gentlemen, obviously a local, comes up to me and asks, “are you from Kona?” No, from Cincinnati by way of Manila. (Kona is the main leeward town of the Big Island.)



Akaka Falls, the tallest in Hawaii

Scenes from the Big Island of Hawaii



“Green” turtles sunning on a black sand beach.

You look like net, net: Hawaiian, Korean, Mexican, “Asian,” and Italian. Can’t count the number of times I’ve been asked if I were Chinese. Some restaurants even hand me the Chinese, not the English menu. Has anyone asked Hawaiians, Mexicans, Koreans, Chinese and Italians, etc. if they were Filipinos?

Beautiful Suntan:

This story actually is about Nadine and happened when she was perhaps 3 or 4 years old. I know we were living in Painesville, Ohio. We were traveling and had stopped at a restaurant. I cannot remember the exact location it could have been in Ohio. But Nadine and Mario were sitting there with Carol when a couple of middle aged to elderly ladies stopped by our table to

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admire the kids. One remarked about how beautiful a suntan Nadine had and inquired as to how she was able to acquire it. I had temporarily left the table a few minutes earlier to visit the bathroom. My timing was impeccable. Just as the lady made her remark I walked in and sat down. She looked at me, looked at my complexion and was agape. The two ladies smiled graciously and retreated to their table.

Our Big Blue Van:

Within days after Val and I were married in 1977, we purchased a Dodge maxi-van. Her brother Pat referred us to a dealer friend of his and we got a “good deal.” A word about Pat, who died tragically young of congenital heart disease at age 37 in 1982. He left four very young children but they all turned out great. We went to the wedding of Kelly, the third-born, last month. You very seldom see these long vans anymore, only churches seem to use them. They can seat up to twelve. The mini-van has replaced it for family transportation. To tell you the truth it was a horrible vehicle and I swore never to buy a Chrysler product again. It had the worst carburetor ever produced and kept stalling. We needed the van for our combined family of her four, Linda, Alan, Tony & Anita, and my two, Nadine and Mario. Val and I were in front, the girls used one bench seat and the boys another. There was plenty of room in the back for luggage or for someone lying down to take a nap. I made it a point to have a family vacation every year whether we could afford it or not. We couldn’t but did it anyway. So the van went a lot of places with the eight of us. We took them to Florida and Disney World one year. We went to Detroit Michigan to the workshops of Henry Ford and the relocated laboratory of Thomas Edison. Edison did his work in New Jersey but his friend Henry Ford moved the workshop and laboratory to Dearborn Michigan and preserve them in the Ford Museum. Whether our children realized that these two American geniuses changed the way how the world lived I don’t know. You’ll have to ask them sometime. Washington DC was another destination, to show them our capital and memorials to the men who shaped the country - Jefferson, Lincoln and Washington, with a side trip to the Mt. Vernon estate of George & Martha. The Smithsonian Institution is worth a trip all by itself. We saw the arch in St. Louis, the memorial to the western expansion and jumping off point for Lewis and Clark. We went to the upper great lakes, to Mackinaw Island. We went to Pittsburgh to meet my host family, the Snowdons and walk the campus of my alma mater, now named Carnegie Mellon University. We had excursions to the sand dunes of Indiana and an Amish community.

The van also had a very practical use, hauling the kids and their paraphernalia to the colleges they attended. And back home for the summers of course. Some friends borrowed it to move furniture. One of my cousins used it to take his family to Florida. The van accumulated a lot of miles, over 100,000 before a friend at Quaker Oats, Subodh Raniwala, bought it in 1988 and he used it for tens of thousands of miles more. Not bad for a vehicle having a lousy carburetor.

Wrong Flight:

This happened in wintertime and I was on a business trip to a town called Thief River Falls in northern Minnesota. The flight plan was to catch a commuter airline from the Minneapolis airport. My connecting flight from Memphis was behind schedule and I had to run to the commuter terminal. I heard the “final boarding” call for Thief River Falls and hurriedly proceeded to the gate. Gave my ticket to the gate agent and seeing people queued up the ramp of a plane, I stepped up. Commuter planes are usually lined on the tarmac and aren’t parked at an individual gate. Gave my ticket to the cabin attendant. Nothing said so far. Then the fateful announcement came after we took off. We are heading for Bemidji, Minnesota and not Thief River Falls which was another 100 miles or so north. The cabin attendant and I pointed at each other – aren’t you supposed to look? I look, she looks, but I didn’t and she didn’t and neither did

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the gate agent. No great tragedy so far. I can rent a car and drive, a little behind schedule perhaps. Cancel the rental car at the other place. Not a big deal, good for a laugh.

But that's not all. As we approached Bemidji, an announcement came from the pilot. We are having some technical problems or some words to that effect. Seems like the right landing gear was stuck. Maybe it was ice, it was quite cold that evening. More than one plane has crashed from ice buildup in crucial places. Ever tried to land with only one landing gear missing? Try driving with three tires, with the fourth wheel off. BUT, we would have to circle to use up the fuel in the tanks. Now, we're getting serious. And my friendly cabin attendant went through the emergency drill. "When I tell you, bend over, place your head between your knees and your hands behind your head." No, I won't repeat the standard punch line that follows. Don't panic, everything will be OK, she said.

Well, eventually the pilots used up the extra fuel and we landed, quite bumpy, but the pilot was able to keep the plane upright. Hope he got promoted. I couldn't help but sneak a look out of the corner of my eyes during the landing. Hey, if we are going to crash, I want to see the sparks flying. I'm not going to keep my eyes closed. What I saw along the runway was unnerving, to say the least. The runway was lined with fire trucks and ambulances. The firemen were holding their hoses out. They were serious! This was close! And I was on the wrong plane to boot. What an inglorious end it would have been. If the plane crashed during the attempted landing and everyone was lost, there would be a mystery of the extra body! And DNA testing hadn't yet been perfected.

The rest of the week was pretty dull compared to the flight in. Oh, did I mention cold? The cars are equipped with extension cords and the parking spaces both downtown and at the hotels have outlets where you plug in the engine heaters for the night. You plug the engines into the electrical outlets, otherwise the cars won't start in the morning.

Students coming to America:

My itinerary to Pittsburgh back in 1962 consisted of Manila to Hong Kong, Wake Island, Honolulu, Seattle then Pittsburgh. I picked Seattle because there was an International Fair being held there and I wanted to see it. Seattle's Space Needle was built for that occasion. The Philippines had a pavilion shaped like a "salakot" or conical straw hat with a wide brim. There may have been some other stops in between but I don't recall. The jets then, DC-8 and B-707, didn't have the range of jets today. There were several other Filipino students on the plane and we instantly got together, three women and two guys. One was a dentist on his way to internship in New York City, a lady going to the University of Tennessee, a lady going to Iowa State and the last lady whose destination I can't recall. This last lady was quite unusual. She was attractive, had an American name, Nancy Stuart, but all Filipino features. No one asked and she didn't volunteer how this came about. We all had a great time in Hong Kong. One of the ladies knew a Hong Kong family and the Chinese family took us around. Shopping, eating, etc. Then as now, it was a shopper's paradise. But not for some students low on cash. One memorable experience was the floating restaurant Tai Pak, which is still around. To get there, you take a little boat manually operated by a couple of Chinese women. A gondola, Hong Kong style.

The lady going to Iowa State happened to be Lea Ebro, who worked at Procter & Gamble during my tenure there. Neither one of us knew about our plans. She was a nutritionist working in food service and I never really knew her except for the nod when coming in for lunch. We all kept in touch for several years but finally lost contact. The lady that went to UT was Venus Gomez, and after a brief search was able to find her name in the faculty list of a university in the state of

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Washington. Remember, if you have email, you can get tracked down. No privacy period. Just enter the name in a search engine, you'll be surprised at the results. I recall that she had gotten a Ph.D. I sent her an email and her reply was that my name vaguely rang a bell and asked for details about our meeting but then never answered my second email. I sent a picture of her taken at a later meeting a couple of years later, which probably made her remember who I was. Enough to say, yuk, I'm not answering that guy again.

Lea Ebro also went on to earn her Ph.D. also and became a professor at the University of Oklahoma. The last time I checked their faculty list, she was still there but I hadn't tried to make contact. She might remember me and have bad dreams.

Funny, I can remember the girl's names but not the guy. Just some coincidence, I'm sure. Maybe he had an unusual, hard to remember name.

The Anabaptists:

Bet you never heard of that name or term although you have heard of the Amish. The first Anabaptists came to America three hundred years ago to escape persecution in Europe. Amish are Anabaptists but so are the Mennonites. They are part of the same community but lead very different lifestyles. A town called Berlin, Ohio has the largest concentration of Anabaptists in the United States. The Mennonites use modern machinery and conveniences like cars, electricity and telephones. The Amish do not, and still plow their fields with horses and light their homes with kerosene lanterns. The farms are beautiful, almost manicured and no electric or telephone lines strung across their lawns to mar the landscape. No satellite dish either. Their mode of transportation is a one horse black buggy. The men dress identically and so do the women. All Anabaptist women cover their hair. For three hundred years they have lead quiet lives, practicing their Christian faith and maintaining their culture, unmoved by the modern march of time. They are a people who are self-sufficient, are never on welfare and are at the bottom of the juvenile delinquency list. Their craft and woodwork are outstanding, so much so that others claim Amish made when it isn't.

The Anabaptists give the lie to the claim of the politically correct that the government needs to accommodate the different cultures and languages in the public schools. The Anabaptists have been productive Americans for three hundred years and have kept their culture and yes, their own dialect. All without government help.

No Beef in Kingsville, Texas:

Val and I were on our way from Illinois to Texas to visit one of our best friends, Tito & Joan Valbuena. They had moved from the same subdivision we all lived in Crystal Lake to Brownsville, Texas where his company had transferred him to their other plant. The plant was actually in Matamoros, Mexico so he had to cross the border every day. On the way down, I wanted to stop at the fabled King's Ranch. It is the largest ranch in the world, almost the size of Batangas. They had developed the Santa Gertrudis breed of cattle to withstand the heat of the Texas summer and grow faster than the European breeds like Angus or Hereford. We toured the ranch, an awesome place. The ranch has their own town, with schools for the worker's children. All the workers are of Mexican heritage. The story is that the original King couldn't find enough cowboys and workers so he went to a town in Mexico and imported the whole town. The present employees are fourth and fifth generation descendants of the original workers. For dinner, I wanted a large juicy King Ranch porterhouse or t-bone steak. When we inquired at the hotel where we could go, a lady said there aren't any steak houses in town like they type you'd find in any large city. What? There are thousands of cattle out there, nice and fat with marbled meat. She said all the cattle are "exported" to processing plants around the country. There is no

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processing plant in Kingsville. What is the moral of the story? If you want a nice King's Ranch steak in Kingsville, Texas, home of the world's largest cattle ranch, you would have a better chance of finding it in Cincinnati or Chicago. They don't process any beef at the King's ranch. The meat is still "on the hoof" when they leave the King's Ranch.

Amarillo, Texas:

We are back in Texas many, many years later, when we were on our way to Las Vegas for the 1999 Escobar reunion. Our route took us from Tulsa, Oklahoma to Amarillo, Texas and later to Gallup, New Mexico. Heading west just out of Amarillo town proper, we started smelling this stench that got stronger and stronger. It was a combination of urine and manure. Within minutes we could see the source. It was the largest feedlot I had ever seen. Thousands upon thousands of cattle penned in square corrals neatly laid out. The number of cattle we saw at the Montana "roundup" pales in comparison. There was not a blade of grass to be seen. They had either been trampled or eaten or covered, with a layer of manure. In each corral was a mound of brownish black wet looking goo, obviously the accumulation from the animals. So this is how our hamburgers and steaks get nice and juicy. Standing on the byproducts while they are fed a protein rich corn and soybean diet. Even with the blowers going full blast on the air conditioning and the windows closed, the stench was still overpowering. How could anyone work there? Ah, man can get used to anything when it comes to the pursuit of commerce. They were wise enough to locate the pens several miles outside of town.

Amarillo has an interesting restaurant called appropriately enough, the Texan. The decoration was rustic, wood planks as floors, walls covered with mounted game such as elk, moose, deer, rattlesnake, etc. The Texan's claim to fame was a 72-ounce steak that would be free if you could eat it by yourself. That is four pounds of meat or 1.8 kilos, to be eaten in one sitting. From the size of Americans today, I believe there are quite a few that could accomplish this feat.

Smith Equipment Company:

I was then with Quaker Oats Company in Barrington, Illinois and we were working on a granola bar project. Granola bars of the chewy kind were a huge success for Quaker, creating a new market and kicking the butt of General Mills, who were making a crunchy granola bar, which was harder on the teeth. We wanted to get ahead and make another bar by covering the chewy granola with milk chocolate. It is one of the best projects I ever worked on. We had unlimited supplies of milk chocolate. Anything leftover from formulation and pilot plant work was thrown away so it was only one step for me to "recycle" the leftovers. If you can imagine, doggie bags for pounds and pounds of chocolate. Quaker didn't mind at all. The kids loved it.

But now it was time to order large equipment for the factory being built. Based on pilot plant experience, we decided on a German company named Sollich KG, located in the town of Bad Salzuflen, Germany. Look, I am coming to the travel part. Well, Quaker wanted tight security and not revealing that we were buying any chocolate equipment. People like Nestle, Mars and Hershey might get offended. A fictitious name was made up but not very imaginative. Smith Equipment was chosen. But what did you expect from these engineers and nerds. An arrangement was made to visit the Sollich factory in Bad Salzuflen to conduct some testing and decide the final specifications. Now those Germans aren't dumkofs, they knew something was up. We told them we were designing a plant for a client that didn't wish to be known at the present. They could easily verify the existence of Smith, check with Dun & Bradstreet, etc. and discover that we didn't exist. But if you want to sell equipment, so what if the client is goofy.

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So off we went to Bad Salzuflen, Germany. I had to ship material over there, including chocolate of course, and we had to make sure it was not traceable to Quaker. So the material first had to be transferred to a broker and all offending information removed.

On to Germany and were picked up at the airport by the Sollich people. This was my first experience to be on the German Autobahn. That's the highway without any speed limit. I was on the front passenger seat and was watching the speedometer. Up, up, until he maintained around 170 km. Per hour. That is over 100 mph. Our German driver wasn't wearing a seat belt either. So us Americans (I was traveling with a senior engineer named Nick Kedo) didn't put our seat belt on either or we would look like wimps. In retrospect, I should have, I was supporting six children at the time. But I thought, at least death would be instantaneous at this speed and the Quaker accident insurance would be generous to Val and the kids. I am worth more dead than alive.

So the tests were conducted successfully and Quaker purchased the equipment through "Smith." During the week we were in Bad Salzuflen, we were wined, dined and I believe Sollich was trying to get Nick and I inebriated to get more information. They gotta be curious. But Nick and I kept mum. There was one technique they could have tried but I'm sure Nick and I would have resisted that too. You believe that, don't you? One last item about one of the dinners. We were introduced to mett (?), which happened to be ground pork. And it was raw. No kidding, raw pork. Heck, these guys look healthy, so I partook. I don't think Nick did. It wasn't that great. Like steak tartare, raw meat just doesn't have the flavor. But I didn't get sick. I'll try anything once.

The chocolate covered granola bars were branded as Dipps and became a big hit for Quaker. We later got together with the Germans and we all had a good laugh. They said they didn't suspect it was Quaker. I believe them, since Quaker wasn't in the confectionery snacks at the time.

Hitchhiking in Europe:

Well, not really the entire Europe but mostly Germany and Luxembourg with some short forays to Belgium and Switzerland. It was really a simpler time. There were youth hostels all around, some of them old castles with rooms converted to dormitories. The cost was minimal and everyone chipped in to sweep, clean the bathrooms, make beds, etc. It was strictly dormitory style, rows of beds and common bathrooms. Kitchens were available. Most of the other "hostelers" were Europeans of every nationality, but there were only a few Americans. Sometimes there were Japanese.

To get from one location to another, a popular mode of transportation with the students was what the Germans called "auto-stop" or hitchhiking. I was traveling with an American from North Carolina one time and we hitched a ride with a woman who had small kids in the back. Could that happen today? You think some fair skinned European would pick up a dark Filipino who wants to go from Frankfurt to Basel, Switzerland? Get real. Another time, it was a well-dressed German salesman on his way to Switzerland. We had no particular destination in mind, so if it is Saturday, Switzerland is where we're going.

I met a German student named Horst Keller and we traveled a little together then kept contact all these years. Almost everywhere he went afterward, he sent me a postcard, North Africa, Eastern Europe, you name it. Never having married, he had a lot of opportunity. He never stopped apologizing for his poor English, which was order of magnitude better than my German. Noch ein bier is the best I can do. Today, Horst lives near Frankfurt.

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Let me see if I can recall the names of the towns (I had to consult a map) – Luxembourg City, Echternach, Vianden, Clervaux, Trier, Strasbourg, Saarbrücken, Freiburg, Heidelberg, Nurnberg.

The Hun:

I was with P & G during one of my numerous trips to Italy and we were staying at a town called Castelfranco. There were three of us on the trip, Amy Dawson and Chad Adamson, besides myself. Amy's mother had joined her for the occasion. It was Amy's birthday that Friday, so we decided to celebrate by going to dinner at a restaurant called Tamburello (tambourine.) We hadn't been to dinner there but it was highly recommended. We subsequently had dinner there several times and it was great. There are no chain restaurants in most of Italy, all individual and they are terrific. These people take their food and their wine seriously. So, here we were, four of us in a small European car with Chad driving. I always let Chad drive because all European cars have stick shift and I haven't driven a stick shift in 15 years. We couldn't find Tamburello. Then we passed a sign so decided to turn left so we could turn around. As we were turning left, a car tried to pass on the left and smacked our car. We somehow wound up on the opposite shoulder and he was in the ditch. Fortunately no one was hurt. Now this is where the fun starts.

We exchanged licenses and guess what the guys name was? Attila, as in Attila the Hun and he was a Hungarian. So, Americans and a Hungarian meeting in an accident on an Italian highway. People stopped and offered to help, speaking all in Italian of course. We asked that they call the policia. We waited and waited and waited. Finally I went to a nearby house and asked to call Celeste Zanotto, the manager who is the liaison for the company we were visiting. He finally came and so did the policia, over a hour after the accident. If we had an injury or someone bleeding, he would have bled to death by now. We had to drive to the station so the cops could finish the paper work. Guess what, Chad got a ticket. Seems like in Italy, to make a left turn, you have to stop on the shoulder on the right, wait till all traffic has passed and finally make that left! Crazy. There you have it, we spent Amy's birthday in an Italian police station after getting into an accident with Attila the Hungarian!

Maria Y. Orosa St. in Manila:

Let's have a change of pace in our travels, returning to my birthplace of Manila on a very recent trip. Manila is a very old city, founded in the late 16th century. Even before that, it was a trading post we called Maynila, with Muslim chiefs called datu(s.) European occupiers like to change indigenous names when they don't like or can't pronounce it. So Maynila became Manila. Manila is not large in area and today it is very congested. There is a section of town called Malate where the names of the streets were originally named for American states. And I am sure the names were Spanish before that. After Independence, we started renaming the streets. The beautiful boulevard that ran along Manila Bay used to be Dewey but is now Roxas. One of the streets in Malate was renamed Maria Y. Orosa, after my aunt who was killed during the liberation of Manila. She was a remarkable woman who received two Master's degrees from an American University back around 1920 and had pioneered in food processing and preservation. Today Orosa St. is a bustling "trendy" street. It abounds with well appointed nightclubs and restaurants, including a couple of gay bars. The streets are packed with pedestrians well into the night.

During my visit in February of 2002, one of my cousins, Fermin "Mitoy" Orosa, invited my brother Toto and I to dinner without saying where. Officially, Mitoy is a third cousin and we had never met. Off we went into town and came into Orosa St. And there on the corner of Orosa and Nakpil was, you guessed it, Café Orosa! It was a relatively new eatery and the menu had an Italian theme, pasta and stuff. Of course Filipinos have to add their special touch. How about having a pizza with squid? So, come to Manila, look for Orosa St. and have dinner and wine at

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Café Orosa! May the Café Orosa develop a loyal clientele and prosper. No one in the family has any ties to it. Maybe we ought to charge them for using our name.

Dos Palmas:

One of the most relaxing four days Val and I have ever spent is the time we were in the resort of Dos Palmas, an island off the eastern coast of Palawan. Dos Palmas is privately owned, only about 20 hectares (50 acres) in area and is situated northeast of Palawan's main city of Puerto Princesa. You have to ride a large banca for 45 minutes to get there. There are several cabins built on stilts about 50 meters from the beach. The rest of the cabins are along the beach amongst the coconut palms. The waters around the island are warm, clear and calm, perfect for snorkeling and SCUBA diving. There are several spots with beautiful coral formation populated by some of the most colorful fish you will ever see. We were in the island in April of 2000. I snorkeled around the pier where the staff fed the fish regularly so the fish were smart enough to stick around for tourists like me. But they had a terrific idea, something I hadn't seen anywhere. A small raft was constructed and towed out near a coral reef. The raft had a roof, benches and table and anchored. The staff took you there in the morning and you could snorkel to your heart's content. They gave you a large flag, which you wave when you wanted lunch then wave again at the end of the day. It was absolutely gorgeous.

Almost exactly a year later, Dos Palmas became a household word in the Philippines and in the United States. Muslim bandits belonging to the Abu Sayyaf raided the resort and kidnapped the guests who were in the premium cabins, the ones above the water. Most were Filipinos but three were American Christian missionaries. The rest of the story has been well covered, suffice it to say that one of the missionaries was executed, and during a rescue operation over a year later, the husband was killed. The woman was wounded but rescued and returned to the US.

We missed the excitement at Dos Palmas by a year and that isn't funny. Val didn't come with me during my next trip in February of 2002 and the above incident is one of the reasons. Now I can never persuade her to go "island hopping." All you have to do is relax at a beach at any of the resorts and it won't take long before you are approached by a Filipino banquero offering to take you island hopping. He will have a banca or outrigger canoe of differing sizes. Some of the bancas have motors some are hand paddled. The itinerary is negotiable, but they can take you to several small islands in the course of a day. Since there are over 7,000 islands in the archipelago, there won't be a shortage of islands. I tell Val that the boats are equipped with bamboo outriggers and therefore unsinkable. Also by having snorkeling gear you become drown-proof. She doesn't believe any of that and after the Dos Palmas incident, island hopping is off our agenda.

Villa Escudero:

This family owned resort is not too far from Manila and can be enjoyed during a day excursion. It has an interesting museum and is a working farm. But what is distinctive, to my knowledge the only one of its kind in the world, is the outdoor restaurant. It is in the middle of a stream. You read that right, a restaurant in the middle of a stream. The stream is shallow, only ankle deep but the cool clear water flows fairly fast. The streambed is mostly smooth rock and can get slippery. The Villa Escudero people placed benches among the rocks and you sit there with the water massaging your feet. The servers bring the food to your bench. I think there is another benefit. You drop a utensil and you can just wash it off right there.

The Sport?? Of Cockfighting:

It is impossible to discern the Filipino soul without looking at cockfighting. That's what some have postulated. But let's first look at the game. Two roosters each weighing about 4 pounds or

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so are equipped with a razor sharp spur. After being released by their handlers in the middle of a 15-foot ring, the cocks perform their dance of death. 99 percent of the time, the loser dies. Their neck feathers bristle and each one tries for an advantage. At the right moment, one or both would try to jump over the opponent and slash him. The spur points backward so he has to slash back. When the spur hits, there is blood and feathers flying. Sometimes it only takes a few seconds, sometimes several minutes. This activity has nothing to do with entertainment. Gambling is the be all and end all of the “sport.” There is a language all its own. One of my cousins from Iba a top breeder and each one of these cocks could cost hundreds of dollars. My Escobar cousins have tried to explain it to me but even the words escape me. Meron (with), wala (without) are used to designate the handler of the cock. Since the roosters are difficult to distinguish except by the really initiated, one of the handlers wear a hat while the other doesn't. You place your bets on the guy with or without. At one time the cocks had either a pula (red) or puti (white) ribbon on them. People would holler sa pula or sa puti to indicate their choice. There is a man referred to as “Kristo” with outstretched arms that tracks the wagers. Kristo is Christ and if that is not a perversion, I don't know what is. Just before each fight there is bedlam and everyone shouts the wagers. How anyone can keep track I'll never know. The closest analogy is the trading pit at the Chicago Mercantile Exchange. Then everyone quiets down and the cocks become the center of attention.



This is not just your average rooster he is a proud Philippine fighting cock, bred to kill or be killed. He is worth hundreds of dollars. This one belongs to a cousin in Iba.



The moment of truth for the fighting cock has arrived. He either wins his master a lot of money or he winds up on the supper table, an ignominious end to a warrior.

What has this got to do with the Filipino soul? Supposedly it mirrors our best and worst. Wagers are always paid and nobody ever cheats. The decision of the judge is always final and never questioned. (Sometimes there are two comatose chickens and the judge has to say who uttered their last breath first.) The owners and trainers are dedicated and hard working. I would be too if my rent money depended on it. And what about the worst? It is true some have been known to bet the rent money. Cockfighting is one Filipino activity I just never got into or be excited about. Bet on a chicken? I don't think so.

Rome and Vatican City:

The eternal city to which all roads lead. There are dozens of great cities in the world, whether they are modern ones like New York City or ancient ones like the Mayan city of Chichen Itza, which is no longer inhabited. In fact Chichen Itza was covered by the Yucatan jungle for half a millennia before being uncovered and restored. What makes a city great? In my view, there is science & technology that is ahead of its time, culture that endures, works of art, great vision,

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being the center of a civilization and it has to endure. The Mayans had astronomy and math figured out 1,000 years ago, building their city-temples when big cities had yet been established in Europe. The Mayan civilization extended to what is now Guatemala. But there is nothing like Rome and the Vatican, which I consider one, melded together by history. The genius of its artisans, architects and builders is incredible. The vision of the leaders is unequalled. If I only had one city in the world I could visit, that I would recommend above all others, it would be Rome. And I was lucky enough to visit twice. Walking is the only form of transportation you need to see the works of Raffaello, Bernini and Michelangelo.

And for a Christian, especially a Catholic, it is hard to equal the emotion felt when you enter St. Peter's Basilica, see Michelangelo's Pieta on the right and the great altar up front. And walking towards the altar, you finally stand under the dome, with the words scripted (in Latin of course,) "thou art Peter, upon this rock I will build my church, and I give you the keys to my kingdom." "Tu es Petrus et super hanc petram aedificabo ecclesiam meam et tibi dabo chiave regnem calorem." Below the altar are the tombs of St. Peter and Pope upon Pope. And if you stay long enough, there will probably be a Mass – in Latin. Someday Val and I will return.



My favorite picture, taken from atop the dome of St. Peter's overlooking St. Peter's square and the Bernini columns. Straight ahead is a small section of the river Tiber.

Venezia:

Let us go a couple of hundred miles northeast of Rome to the city of Venice, or Venezia as the locals call it. There may be cities that are older and have been inhabited longer, there are certainly more modern ones, and there are cities with more magnificent structures. But when it comes to a combination of charm, architectural distinctiveness, or simply a city that is a testament to man's genius and ability to carve a civilization out of ideas but no physical

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resources, no one equals Venice. Rome was huge, an empire, but there aren't any livable structures left. Consider that Venice was built a millennium ago, on wood pilings in a marsh in the middle of a lagoon. It is being pounded by the elements. But the buildings are still standing and occupied. People sleep, cook, and raise families in these buildings. When what is now the United States and Canada was a wilderness and populated by nomads traveling on foot, Venice was trading with Asia and was a mercantile power. They had an accurate map of the areas in the Middle East and Asia where they traded. Marco Polo came from Venice. See the Palazzo Ducale, the palace of the King. Ornate marble columns and balustrades abound. OK, the Romans had better, but except for the Pantheon, their massive structures have tumbled. The Venetians resource was their boldness in building ships and venturing out to explore and trade. You can't even have a decent garden in Venice there is no land but that didn't stop the Venetians. And those gondolas what can be more romantic? Next time I will take Val for a ride.

Murano:

Ever heard of Venetian glass? They are beautiful works of art. Shapes can be intricate, like a sculpture. The Venetians also mastered the art of giving color to the glass. Murano is actually an island and legend has it that the Venetians relocated their glassmaking to this island in order to prevent prying eyes from discovering their secrets. Today, you can tour the glassmaking shops and showrooms. A master glassmaker or glassblower has to take an apprenticeship and it would be years before he becomes a master.

Val and I received a private tour and were being shown around the display cabinets. There was a jewel case that I fancied. Red glass with gold trim. I made a mental decision that I would go as high as \$500 to buy it. Not exactly a prudent decision but imagine my surprise when the shop wanted \$1,500! We could buy several Waterfords for that money. No coming down either. Later on Val said I should have bought it. We wound up ordering two wine glasses with a thin gold trim on the lip. We use it for special occasions.

Y2K at Quepos, Costa Rica:

Remember 1999? Everyone was concerned about Y2K and the possible meltdown. The world is going to be paralyzed due to some stupid clerical issue. Are you going to convince me that the people who design these infernal computing machines are smart? They can't instruct their machines to tell the difference between 1/1/1900 and 1/1/2000. Of course they were still flying high with the tech stock boom but that would soon end and I would be one of the casualties. Well, if there is really going to be a problem, I want to get away from it all. So Val and I decided to spend the days around 12/31/99 and 1/1/00 in Costa Rica. There was hoopla everywhere regarding the new "millennium." People can't count either since the new millennium actually begins on 1/1/2001. We choose a town called Quepos, which had Parque Manuel Antonio, one of the many national parks in Costa Rica. The Ticos (that's what the Costa Ricans are called) have done a tremendous job of preserving the rain forests. There are no large developments and no logging of the trees. Costa Rica is what the Philippines would look like if we took better care of the environment instead of selling out to the illegal loggers and dynamite fishermen. If the industrial world crashed, we would be between the rain forest on one side (east) and the Pacific Ocean on the other (west.) We could live off the land! I don't hunt or fish so Val would have to do the honors, just like mama lionesses.

Costa Rica was wonderful. No crowds, great seafood and reasonable prices. In one beach, no one was within 50 yards of us. The fried bananas and fresh papayas taste the same as from the Philippines. But black beans and rice with every meal can get a little boring. We are surrounded by greenery and bougainvillea in bloom. Our room has a veranda and a hammock. The hotel

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even had a “pet” iguana, which resided inside the hollow railing along the steps. Guests would leave food out for the critter. I have a picture of him snacking.

We toured a section of rain forest. An enterprising American placed cables and planks between the tops of trees and you could walk along the forest canopy, looking down on the shorter trees and a clear mountain stream. As thick as the forest was, you couldn't see the ground. It was fun, walking along a swaying footbridge 100 feet above the forest floor.

We went to the hotel dining room to await 1/1/2000. The dining room was actually the rooftop of the office and had a tremendous view of the Pacific. Our 12/31/99 dinner was going along well, the food was fresh and delicious, and we were getting lubricated with some beer and tequila. All of a sudden it was dark. Sparks were flying from a nearby electric pole. Y2K has arrived! The morons were right! I will be stuck here and not have to return to work for a while! I am euphoric. I told my boss Wendy that there is a possibility we could be stranded in Costa Rica. Well, it turned out to be an electrical short that was fixed in a couple of hours. We continued the dinner by candlelight and welcomed 2000.

Costa Rica is full of wildlife. At Parque Manuel Antonio, there was a colony of monkeys near the beach. They would sit among the trees waiting for a handout. We had a very interesting encounter one day. We were hiking along a gravel road when I saw this grayish looking thing crawling across. I didn't really know what it was until we got close. It turned out to be a sloth, the slowest moving creature I had ever seen. Because the light gray color of the sloth's fur matched the color of the road, he was hard to see. I had to stop a car that would surely have run over it.

Breakfast:

Breakfast?? Yes, as in el desayuno, fruhstuck, la colazione. Why would anyone want to write about breakfast? Because breakfast is the most important meal of the day and I want to dispel the notion that it was invented by an American named McDonald. For your edification, McDonald's was founded by a man from Chicago named Ray Kroc. For whatever reason, us Asians like canned stuff while the Caucasians have long ago discarded the habit. The Hawaiians, but mostly Japanese-Americans, like Spam. Restaurants in Hawaii will always have it on the menu, sliced and lightly fried. It goes good with eggs, estrellado. Hawaii is the number one consumer of Spam on a per capita basis. Then Filipinos like canned corned beef and Vienna sausage. When you mention corned beef around the Midwest, they will think of St. Patrick's Day (March 17) when it is traditionally served boiled, with cabbage and potatoes. And the corned beef comes from a big hunk of fresh meat, not canned. I've never known any native born Americans (except the Hawaiians) who have entertained the thought of eating Spam, corned beef or Vienna sausage for breakfast. Then there are the Costa Ricans, Mexicans and Cubans. It is rice and black beans for breakfast. Of course you get it for lunch and dinner too. In the southern American states, it is grits, which is the hard part of the corn kernel that is ground to about half the size of a grain of rice and boiled. To give it flavor, you take the fat from frying bacon, thicken it up with starch and pour over the grits.

Coffee? Well, coffee is not coffee either and was not invented by Starbucks. I think the best is Kona coffee from the leeward (west) side of the Big Island of Hawaii. Kona is five times more expensive than most other coffees. The brew is rich and flavorful. Supposedly there are strict rules on what can be called Kona, just like what can be called Bordeaux or Burgundy. But beware of cheats, they put a few beans of Kona in a batch and print a large Kona on the can. How about espresso? The Italians raise everything to an art form but sometimes there should be limits. Espresso needs an elaborate piece of equipment to make. And it is the smallest serving of coffee I've ever seen and the most expensive cc for cc. The cup is the size of a

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thimble. Then they kill the flavor with whipped cream and sugar. After all that trouble of brewing it, they drown the flavor of coffee. When you order coffee in Venezuela, they ask you how you want it, “negro grande” or “maroncito.” The “negro grande” refers to a big black hombre so it is strong and the other is weaker and loaded with milk and sugar. Why do people ruin coffee by putting milk and sugar?

My breakfast? Strictly mundane American, after all I worked for Quaker Oats once. Cereal with milk is cheap, fast and nutritious. Just stay away from the sugar. But once I am in Manila, it is dilis and daing. If you want to “gross out” an American, describe those delicacies to them and watch their reaction. Just remember what I said about being the most important meal of the day. Where are we going for breakfast?

The Seniors Hang Out:

I don't know how this particular phenomena started or when but it is now found all over the world. Senior citizens will gather at a McDonald's, take advantage of the bottomless cup of coffee, free newspaper and gab, gab, gab. You would think my fellow seniors would've solved every imaginable human problem by now. I see this phenomenon in our town of Fairfield Ohio. My late brother and his “jogging group” used to congregate at the McDonald's in Green Hills (Quezon City.) We observed some Americans of Japanese heritage doing the same at a McD in Kona, Hawaii. And so on. I guess it keeps the seniors off the streets where they can make mischief.

U R What U Eat:

Since we have just discussed breakfast, let's continue on to the subject of the other meals. As far as I am concerned, there are only two kinds of people in this world who are consistent, meaning not hypocritical about what they consume or shove down their gullet. These two are the Chinese and the Jains, although some of my Chinese friends would make an exception, saying it is Cantonese. As if the Cantonese are not Chinese. Anything that crawls, flies, swim, walk, run, jump, roll, swing, hop, skip, slither, can and will wind up on the Cantonese dinner table. And it would be delicious. On the other hand, the Jains of India do not believe in terminating any kind of life. So, only veggies wind up on their dinner table. And it is delicious too. I've had both. The Jains do it by the delicate application of spices.

What about the rest of the world, especially Americans? Well, there sure is a lot of inconsistency. We eat tons of chicken, beef, pork, fish, and with Thanksgiving coming up as I write this, turkeys. But certain species are sacred. It is OK to eat Charley the tuna but not Flipper the dolphin. Cats and dogs are humanized. Would you believe some Americans call their pets on the phone while away from home? Did you have a good day Fifi, Fido or Fluffy? Millions of dollars are sometimes spent to rescue a single animal. Examples are the whale from the movie Free Willy and a dog mascot on a sinking freighter. Yet millions are abandoned, left to fend for them selves, to become feral animals if they are lucky to survive. If they are not so lucky they will starve or freeze.

A cow broke lose in our fair city of Cincinnati on its way to becoming hamburger. That made the headline since the cow refused to cooperate in getting caught. It was finally tranquilized and captured but instead of the hamburger factory, it is now spending retirement in a farm. I don't think the sale of hamburger and chili went down during several days of this episode. Humanize, glamorize, raised in “factories” (the large operations are not called farms anymore), slaughter, consume then abandon what we humanized in the first place. What explains this dichotomy? When you find out, let me know.

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As for me, I will try anything once. I've had kangaroo burger in Australia, alligator in Florida, sheep's brains in Chicago, raw pork in Germany, kidney in England and I think horsemeat in Italy. By the way, the sheep's brains are called sweet meats by the Greeks who prepare them as an appetizer. I've had the worm at the bottom of a Tequila bottle. But I will not eat balut. No way.

Nothing beats a good old lechon, a suckling pig roasted on coals. No Filipino celebration is complete without it. Forget your cholesterol level.



Anywhere, USA:

In every city and suburb in American, there will be a stretch of highway that contains the same fast food places, auto dealers, the superstores and discount shops. Or it could be strip malls with the smaller establishments like copy places, video rental, packing services, etc. There may even be several similar locations depending on the size of the city. I'm not mentioning the store names because they get enough publicity already. And you could not possibly know exactly where you are unless you observe the license plates of the automobiles. It could be any town or suburb in any state in the contiguous states. In other words, there is mass homogenization. That is why I loved Door County in Wisconsin and other similar places. Homogenization hadn't crept in, there was some local or regional flavor retained. The southern states are less homogenized and still preserve local cuisine and practices. I love modern conveniences but we really don't need the one million square foot behemoth of a store (I'm exaggerating.)

Civilization Meter:

I have a simple gauge on how to rate or judge the state of mind and civilization in a society. It is the condition of their public toilets. I am serious. Any people that don't give a crap, pun intended, about keeping a place clean knowing full well that someone is waiting right behind them to use the same facility has something lacking. Wouldn't you expect people to give you the simple courtesy of flushing, using the trash can instead of the floor, wiping the sink, etc. and of course vice versa? The cleanest public bathrooms I have ever seen were in Switzerland, Germany and Austria. Guess where I've found the worst – the Philippines. The rest of the other countries I've visited are in between. It is no accident then that the people of the three countries I first mentioned have the highest standard of living, the longest life expectancy and people who are polite to strangers. You are least likely to get mugged or victimized by random violence. Which comes first, civilized people or clean bathrooms? We Filipinos prefer to call them comfort rooms. They are neither bathrooms nor comfort rooms they are toilets. As far as the United States is concerned it is a mixed bag. Generally they are in good condition, excellent in hotels and most restaurants but don't try the ones in gas stations where you have to ask for a key.

Hofbrauhaus:

During my hitchhiking student days, the furthest east I got was München, or Munich. If you ever go to Germany, it is obligatory to visit Munich, home of the Oktoberfest. And quaff beer at the Hofbrauhaus. I even learned the German drinking songs like "Ach du lieber Augustine" and "In Munchen Steht ein Hofbrauhaus." The beer is served in liter steins (about a quart) and carried

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to your table by these zaftig Teutonic women with blond and braided hair. Some of them could carry eight or even ten steins. No trays, just their hands.

A couple of years ago, Val and I joined a tour and we stopped at the Hofbrauhaus for lunch. I said it didn't look the same. I was looking for the buxom blonde frauleins, but now they have men serving too. The heck with equal opportunity, the Hofbrauhaus having waiters is like Hooters with guys serving your beer. Certain traditions must be respected. Val said the frauleins I saw back then are now grandmothers.

Dachau:

One of the destinations I went to was sobering, the concentration camp operated by the Nazis at Dachau outside of Munich. It was one of the very first built by the Nazis. At the gate was a sign that read "arbeit macht frei" or work makes you free. I don't know what the Nazis were trying to communicate with the sign. It was nothing but a cruel joke. Seeing and walking through the dormitories wasn't bad, but when you got to the "shower" rooms, a chill goes up your spine. The victims, without regard to age or gender, were told to strip and get into this room for a "shower." Instead of water, they got lethal xyklon B gas. Nearby were ovens where the bodies were then burned. Men, women, children, mostly Jews, but also Gypsies, political prisoners, union organizers and the disabled who were of no use to the Nazi regime met their end at Dachau. Yes, we've all watched documentaries on the History Channel and seen the movie Schindler's List. Oswiecim (Auschwitz in German) and Treblinka, both in Poland, achieved greater notoriety but being in any one of the "camps" would chill your bones to the marrow or get you enraged. To be there brings a different feeling that is indescribable. How would you have reacted if you had been an American soldier who liberated these camps in 1945? After you've seen the piled up corpses and walking skeletons?

I regret that I'm ending with this account, but what we sometimes see during travel is not always enjoyable. But travel is always educational.

Editorial: Thinking about it, I didn't really want to end with my trip to Dachau almost forty years ago. This editorial is going to be about traveling in America. Disney World, Disneyland, Universal Studios, etc. are the destinations of choice for Filipinos, Americans and foreigners alike. But Disney is more plastic than organic and the studios of MGM and Universal are make-believe fantasy. Get off the beaten path. Who wants to zip along on the Interstate at 80 miles an hour and stop at the same fast food places you would see within a mile of where you live, almost regardless of where you live? Filipinos have a habit of driving straight through to their destination, taking turns at the wheel. The heck with that, slow down and see America.

Get lost! Take two-lane highways, the gravel road in Montana. Here's what Val and I have done. One of my favorite places is Door County, a peninsula that sticks out like a thumb in northeast Wisconsin. It has glorious fall colors. The last time we were there, there still weren't these combination gas station, fast food and supermarket rolled into one. We didn't see the golden arches or the Colonel. What we saw were mom and pop restaurants, antique shops, galleries of proverbial starving artists, little hotels (no Motel 8 or Holiday Express,) small cheese factories, places that made wine from cherries, apple orchards with hard cider. The lake trout return to little streams and harbors to spawn and die. Witness the cycle of life. I call Door County in Wisconsin Americana gone by.

Driving through Indiana, we saw a farm raising bison (ok, Stephanie, buffalo.) In Florida, there were acre upon acre of oranges and grapefruit glistening in the sun. You could stop the car and touch the fruit. You can't do that off the Interstate. There are no fences in the orchards – can

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you imagine that in the Philippines? In Georgia, we found places where they sold boiled peanuts. Nilagang mani. You can't buy that at Burger King. We have made detours through college towns like Oxford, Ohio, Bloomington, Indiana and Oxford, Mississippi. There were old buildings with slate roofs and ivy covering the walls and oaks that have to be 100 years old. In Oxford, MS we found the home of novelist William Faulkner. In the square is an old bookstore with shelves and shelves of books, chairs in secluded corners where you could read, for free. You just have to pay for the coffee. I think Borders, Barnes and others got the layout idea from this bookstore. Walk the old section of Charleston in South Carolina and see the Spanish moss hanging off the humongous old trees. If you come in the spring, you'll see the biggest and prettiest azaleas grown. During fall one time we just decided to go east from our home in Jackson Tennessee to the Smoky Mountains just to see the fall colors. We were rewarded by heavy traffic from like-minded people but also by leaves of gold and orange and red and the cool crisp air you can only experience in autumn. I can imagine music in the background and hear the words "the falling leaves drift by my window."

Walk around the squares or plaza of small towns where they have the city or county building. Some of them have distinctive architecture and most will have memorials to their youth that fell in distant wars. The older towns, especially in the South will have civil war memorials. The antebellum mansions evoke a bygone era of "Gone With the Wind."

Walk through a Civil War battlefield and listen to the park ranger's lecture. It is hard to imagine the carnage that went on in such a short period of time. Places like Gettysburg in Pennsylvania, Vicksburg in Mississippi, Shiloh, Chickamauga and Chattanooga in Tennessee. During the battle of Gettysburg, 15,000 brave men of the Confederacy charged through an open field a mile wide to attack the Union line, braving withering cannon and musket fire. It was one of the defining moments in American history. During the dedication of the cemetery a few months later, Abraham Lincoln delivered one of the greatest speeches by an American, his of the people, by the people and for the people speech.



Garden of stone, Civil War cemetery in Chattanooga, TN.

And don't forget the Native American's point of view. They are hard to find, but sometimes you will run across storytellers where you'll hear their story and their pain. Hear the legends of the wolf, the buffalo, the eagle and the crow. The best site dedicated to the Native American is the Crazy Horse memorial in South Dakota, not far from Mt. Rushmore. See it! During our trip to Glacier National Park, we heard a storyteller-singer describe the life of Montana's Blackfeet tribe. Get off the @\$!#~*&)*)@! Interstate and see America.

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Native American Celebration Our Lady of Snows Shrine Belleville, IL



TRAVELING HERE AND THERE

"I love my own my native land, Philippines my Philippines" - opening words to a song.

RETURN to the PHILIPPINES

(I made this trip in Nov. of 1986 to see my 89 year-old mother who was in failing health.)

MUSINGS of a TRAVELER or OBSERVATIONS from a NATIVE SON

A British journalist once compared American tourists to bad Bulgarian wine - "They don't travel well." I try not to fall into that category. Traveling to one's native soil is at once exhilarating, frustrating and bittersweet. Exhilarating in recognizing your roots, rediscovering your heritage. Modern American life is based on mass market, efficiency and homogenization. Its prosperity requires constant consumption and planned obsolescence. It is dedicated to modern man's concept of nirvana - instant gratification. While it allows a clean, healthy life devoid of want, its cultural roots are shallow, ephemeral. Looking back to one's roots provides a distinction, a pride, a solid underpinning, a ballast through our journey in life.

It's frustrating to see the same old problems you left still there. Being away and having worked in the world's greatest industrial power for almost thirty-five years gives one a perspective, a realization that although some problems are deep-seated much can be accomplished with a change in attitude. We can start by collecting the damn garbage. Then putting policemen in major intersections (every corner would be better) to transform the chaos called traffic into some semblance of order. (Last time I counted in 2000, three out of traffic signals didn't work, not that anyone pays attention.)

My visit always provides an opportunity for mini-family reunions whether it is with my brothers and sisters or with cousins. Unfortunately my visits are infrequent. The Orosa clan, while never monolithic, was held by a common fabric. At one time it was the indomitable Lola Simplicia Ylagan Orosa. Then for twenty years after her death, the older statesmen/women. The clan will never be the same again, but to the older generation of super achievers, we owe our genes and our status.

My boyhood friend who spent as many years in the U.S. as me said he was homesick for Philadelphia (of all places). Like my friend, I somehow was programmed to adjust and thrive under American life better than I accept a lot of the Filipino's way of doing things. The Filipino does extremely well whether in Sydney, Australia, or Chicago, Illinois, or London, United Kingdom. That proves there's nothing lacking in our innate talent, but the country is mired in poverty. Maybe it is the weather. But it can't be that simple. Look at Singapore, they are even closer to the equator, therefore hotter. Whatever the answer is, whatever is required to transform our people from being exploited in their native land, we better find the answer soon. The Cassandra's pessimistic view will become a self-fulfilling prophecy.

Manila Nov. 7, 1986

N.B. Since the above was written sixteen years ago, I have been back for a visit no less than six times (12/93, 3/96, 6/97, 12/98, 3/00 and 2/02.) Unfortunately the traffic and garbage issue isn't any better, may even be worse.

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RETURN to the PHILIPPINES

(I made this trip in December of 1998 to attend the celebration of my sister Charito and her husband Pepe's 40th wedding anniversary. Val wasn't with me, and I kept a journal to share with her.)

Quezon City, Philippines

December 12, 1998

Saturday afternoon:

As I write this, the sun is trying to peek out of the clouds. Typhoon "Norming" is on its way to the South China Sea with expected landfall on the Vietnamese coast. If one had planned to go island hopping this past week to Cebu, Boracay or Palawan, too bad, it would've had to be cancelled. Norming's path was through the central Visayas and the resorts were drenched. Am catching up on the latest family news and it's the usual mixture of good and bad news. Brother Augusto and sister Charito and their spouses are doing great. Toto is spry and active at almost 80, driving all over the place, though I think he should hire a driver and save him the wear and tear. But nephew Enrico is incapacitated by a stroke he suffered three weeks ago, a massive hemorrhage that has paralyzed his right side, unable to speak and swallow. As a 48-year-old musician, his career doesn't look too promising. There's a mountain of bills to pay and his friends already had a concert at Blues Land to raise the money. Another one is scheduled shortly after I leave. No such thing as Blue Cross or Blue Shield or HMO's here, you're on your own. Cousin Naring was operated on for colon cancer and is undergoing chemotherapy. The succeeding generations of Orosas obviously aren't as hardy as my father's generation. Another cousin on my mother's side had a stroke a week ago. The guys that had the strokes are 5-10 years younger than me!

Mel Orosa opened Blues Land a couple of months ago, a restaurant and bar featuring live blues music. Sat for hours there Friday night and got my year's quota of second hand smoke. Not to mention wear and tear on my hearing aid. The food is quite good and the music must be authentic, as attested to by the large enthusiastic crowd. Every table was taken although most of them didn't come in till after 10:30. The operation is a family affair – Morris sings and plays the harmonica and Mike plays a guitar. Their cousin Enrico was the lead guitarist before his stroke. Mike's son Marc even played a set with the drums. And of course mother Lourdes is ubiquitous. Morris is a late blooming musician, never got involved with bands before. As for the music they play, most of it is unrecognizable to me, the only name that I could identify was B.B. King. A lot of the customers join the band, some bringing their own instruments. After the customers leave, the regulars "jam" till the wee hours. Morris tells me the blues originated among the African Americans in the Mississippi delta and spread to Memphis, Chicago, etc. From Mississippi to Manila. I wish Mel and his brothers success, they worked hard, it's a labor of love and hopefully the blues phenomenon is long lasting. Besides they don't have any other regular jobs. Might check out Memphis' Beale St. sometime, where supposedly the blues are still played regularly.

Can't tell by observation but everyone tells me things are economically worse. Real estate and car sales are down, victims of the Asian flu that started in Thailand and Indonesia. Mel's and his in-laws business as supplier to Toyota is sharply curtailed and he's concentrating on his restaurant. But you couldn't tell the economic doldrums from the traffic, everyone is going somewhere at all hours. But then I can't judge one gridlock from another, all I can tell you is, it would drive me insane if I ever had to drive here, no pun intended. There are new traffic rules meant to alleviate congestion, cars have to be off the street at certain times during the day or certain days, depending on whether they are odd or even numbered. The formula is quite

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complicated and the trick is to have both an even and odd numbered car, which the rich people do anyway so as usual it's the working stiff that suffers.

Saturday evening:

Toto, Morris and I visited Enrico in the hospital. He was undergoing therapy when we came in. Right arm and leg are not functioning and only grunts emanate from his throat. The future will depend on his determination but the old lifestyle is out the window. Since he is without an immediate family with regards to a spouse, his sister Bessie will wind up taking care or arranging care for him at Tita's house in Teacher's Village. He'll be able to spend Christmas at home.

Two days of Toto's driving and the traffic is making me a nervous wreck. I keep giving him hints about hiring a driver and just sitting in the back relaxing. He deserves the break. I should also just tune out the traffic, its only going to get worse as rapid urbanization and population growth continues. According to the news, sales of automobiles are down an astounding 45% but they could stop selling cars for years and the traffic won't get any better.

Toto's grandson Marc, who has A.L.L. (acute lymphoblastic leukemia), is graduating from high school next year and wants to attend medical school. He is currently in remission but the only long-term solution is a bone marrow transplant. Medical school is a long-term plan but I say give the kid all the chances in the world even if the odds are against him.

Sunday Dec. 13

The 40th wedding anniversary of Charito and Pepe started off with a Mass at their parish. I was duly impressed – not one but two Bishops celebrated the Mass. One came from one of the southern provinces just for the occasion. There were six priests in addition to the Bishops. When Val and I celebrate our 25th, does anyone suppose we could get the Bishop of Cincinnati to preside? Fat chance. A few Orosa cousins came but they were showing their age. The eldest surviving cousin, Dr. Cesar Ylagan, gets along fine at 85 but his wife now uses a wheelchair. Naring tells me his doctor advises that all his cancer is gone. Reception was at the Quezon City Sports Club, with a buffet but most guests left early. Traffic dictates a lot of daily decisions around here. There were two Escobar cousins I hadn't seen in a long time, so long that I don't even remember and wouldn't have recognized them. All in all this celebration made the trip worthwhile.

Speaking of the Quezon City Sports Club, Toto continues to bombard me with his war stories about the club. He was unpaid President for a year, trying to straighten out the financial mess. It's been turned around and under new management, but wonder how long before it reverts to the usual shenanigans. Seems previous management and some officers were skimming off the proceeds. During Toto's watch, this couldn't happen since he was checking the books daily. Just think that this club is made up of the local elite and professionals. At one time the cops had to be called because after the old slate of officers were voted out they refused to vacate. If this is what the elite do, no wonder the country can't pull itself out of their rut.

Monday Dec. 14

The big local story is the Supreme Court turning down Imelda's deal with a lower court to turn over the Marcos loot if she gets to keep 25% and given immunity from prosecution. Lawsuits are flying all over. Only the Swiss are going to benefit from all these, bet they'll get to keep the money because the Filipinos won't be able to agree on how to divide the leftover loot. Another

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legacy of Ferdinand E. Marcos and as Mark Anthony said “the evil that men do lives after them, the good is oft interred with their bones.”

Tidbits:

My unscientific survey is that two out of three traffic signals don't work and there's nary a traffic policemen around except in major intersections. I guess it saves electricity, nobody follows the traffic rules anyway.

Charito's only grandchild, three-year old Bea, goes to a preschool every morning with her nanny. Some kids not only have their nannies at school, the bodyguards are around too. The future leaders of the country get their start in life cared for by nannies and shielded by security personnel living behind fortresses. Yes, I had a nanny myself.

There are advertisements in the newspapers for armor-plated vehicles like a converted Chevy Suburban. They are armored by O'Gara, which happens to be located in Fairfield, Ohio. Never saw those ads before, the moneyed class must take the kidnappings seriously. The other day we saw a Mercedes with three escort SUV's, one in front with lights flashing and two behind. Morris said it was probably a Congressman. A quarter of a million dollars worth of vehicles to transport the local politicians in style in traffic where you're lucky to average 5 miles per hour. Another heavily advertised product is automatic pistols, 9 mm and 45 caliber.

Erap's administration passed a record budget but it only comes out to \$200 for every man woman and child in the country. The US federal budget comes out to over \$6,000 per capita, not including state, city and real estate taxes. And there's a surplus!

According to Charito there are a lot of priests in the country and the seminaries are full. With America facing a severe shortage maybe we can start exporting priests to the US.

For a non-driver, Lou sure knows the streets around MM. So she navigates for Toto but whenever he takes a route she doesn't favor, she responds with a lot of yelling. If I were married to a woman like her, I'd certainly be in jail because she'd be in the hospital or worse. As Winston Churchill responded to a woman's suggestion that she would poison his coffee, “if I were your husband I'd drink it”.

Judging from the attendance at Charito & Pepe's affair, the old Orosa family solidarity is gone. There are quite a few no-shows. In my grandmother's time, whenever there was a family function, everybody showed up.

I translate all the prices back to dollars and they are cheaper than during our last trip in June 1997. Since the currency devaluation in the Philippines is significantly less than in Thailand and Indonesia there must be better bargains out in the other ASEAN countries for travel. Val, are you listening? Maybe instead of Costa Rica we can go Bangkok, Bali, Kuala Lumpur, etc.

During the anniversary party, one of my cousins gave me a copy of her reissued book about Maria Y. Orosa and her work. The author, Helen Orosa, is one of three sisters who are the premier intellectuals of the family. They are prolific writers but all already in their seventies. Two still write newspaper columns about the arts. One of them wrote about Maria Orosa a few days ago. She is also an art critic and at one time had a modern dance company.

On Tuesday Charito & Pepe took me shopping for the items on Val's list. Got stuck just outside of Green Hills shopping center. Wish I had a camera to record the gridlock in two intersections. I

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wonder why man is so stupid when he's in a crowd? Most of the gridlock is preventable. Val, you better like what we purchased because I'm never going to go shopping in this town again. Between the gridlock and the tight squeeze in the malls, it's not my idea of fun.

The Filipino has a bipolar quality when it comes to driving and walking, he likes to drive like a madman to gain every possible advantage in getting there even if it only means gaining a few meters. Five miles an hour is average and all the dodging and weaving is counterproductive. But once he gets out of the car, he is also the slowest walker in the world.

I've seen a few humongous mansions under construction or just built and the accompanying fortress-like walls are getting taller and more imposing. And next door to some of them are hovels made of corrugated sheet metal and scrap lumber. Asia Weekly rated the Manila area as low in crime. No wonder, we just surround ourselves with bodyguards and fortresses that would've made the medieval barons proud.

Frankie's wife Cecille told me she is taking fertility pills, trying to have a second child. She had to take the same pills before Bea came along. Told her that in the U.S., most fertility pills result in multiple births. She probably didn't appreciate that.

The Asian Games, Asia's version of the Olympics, is currently going on in Bangkok. The several hundred strong Philippine delegation has a few silvers and bronzes and one gold so far while China and Japan dominate. At one time, Filipino athletes dominated Asia. No one could beat us in basketball and boxing. We just lost to the Koreans by twenty points! I have an explanation. We expend so much energy fighting the traffic, we are pooped out by the time we get to international competition. By the way the only gold medal was in snookers. I think it's related to billiards.

Saw the basketball game between the Philippines and China on TV. The guys from China were huge, a couple of them look like they could play in the NBA. The rest of the Asians have grown a foot but Filipinos haven't. Have to switch from rice and fish to Big Macs. We're playing Kazakstan for the bronze. This was supposed to be the Asian Games but the Kazakstan players all look caucasian. Transplanted Russians I suppose.

There are several new franchises I hadn't seen during our previous trips, Starbucks, Kenny Rodgers and Chili's. There's several brand new 7-11's. Bet you Hooters is next, the only problem will be to find well endowed Filipina waitresses.

Cecille and Frankie have added to their domestic staff, a young woman to do their laundry. She insisted on ironing my underwear, tee shirts and socks and I insisted it wasn't really necessary.

This is the only city I know of that doesn't have any pigeons. There are two possible explanations, first that there are very few scraps to survive on and secondly the locals have caught them for dinner.

Wednesday Dec. 16

Got invited to lunch at Ciudad Fernandina which is owned by our old family friend the Lims and run by Marcellus or Marc Lim. He is quite an entrepreneur just like his late parents. He next project is a modular system for purifying water. Potable water is getting harder to get. It was pouring when it got time to leave and he offered his chauffeur to drive me over to Central Colleges of the Philippines, my alma mater. It took an hour to traverse maybe four miles.

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At the college, went to see the President, my old boyhood friend and contemporary Atty. Crispino "Babes" Reyes whose family controls the school. His father and my father were friends and associates. Hadn't seen him in thirty years and we talked for several hours. He initiated getting the portraits of former Presidents, which included my father. So now Vicente Orosa occupies a place of honor in the school's boardroom. To find someone to provide him with a photograph of Vicente for the artist, he searched the Internet and he found me, 10,000 miles away. I of course referred him to my brother and sister who were only a few kilometers away and supplied photographs to their portrait painter. Also had a chance to visit with one of his administrators who dates back to my school days and this lady remembered the full names of our class!

After leaving the college, I couldn't get a cab and all the jeepneys were full so I hiked back to Horseshoe, taking only 30 minutes. It would've taken longer than that in a vehicle. Can't understand the taxi situation. Empty cabs are cruising but for some reason they won't pick up fares. Doesn't make sense cruising around empty when you could have a passenger paying. But then whoever said the Filipino was a logical being.

Thursday, Dec. 17

Atty. Reyes invited me to the regular Rotary lunch at the Manila Hotel. To illustrate just how traffic dominates, my sister and brother in law suggest I go with their son Joel to the Cultural Center of the Philippines when he went to work, to avoid having to get a cab from Quezon City to Manila later in the morning. The CCP is only a short distance away from the Manila Hotel. Fortunately, there was a morning performance of the Nutcracker at the CCP which occupied me for almost two hours. Got a free box seat compliments of Joel. The performance and the sets were terrific, better than others I've seen. The audience was mostly white kids coming from the International school. The cab ride from the CCP to the Manila Hotel was exactly \$1.00 and the guy was overjoyed when I gave him a 25-cent tip.

The Rotary Club of Manila is the elite of the elite. Babes Reyes introduced me around to the former mayor of Manila, the Canadian Ambassador, the ex-Secretary of Justice, the President of the American Chamber of Commerce, etc. etc. Babes moves around in lofty circles. He smokes real Havanas and was passing them around at lunch. I didn't take advantage, telling him he just passed around over \$100 worth of cigars. Manila Hotel is nice and plush, its lobby beats anything I've seen. Val and I will have to stay there sometime to celebrate something, anything. Celebrate life! A few Rotarians asked me about Clinton and why the Republicans are so preoccupied with the affair. Something like this would be brushed off in the rest of the world. Had an interesting speaker, a Filipino whose Ph.D. is from the University of Chicago. He started the Social Weather Service and I thought for a moment that it actually had something to do with the weather. But it's a polling organization that measures QOL or quality of life. The speaker claims it's a better measure than GDP. Bottom line most people think they're poor and their optimism is directly proportional to their economic status. A Rotarian told me he can't quite grasp why the U.S. considers \$16,000 per family the poverty line. Everything is relative. I like the Rotary, will have to check up on them sometime.

Babes is treating me like royalty. During our boyhood I was actually closer to his younger brother who is now in Philadelphia. This must be how he gets ahead, moves around in the right circles and treats everyone well. Builds up his network. Went back to CCP in time for merienda. Filipinos are forever eating and Babes is no exception. Got caught up in another gridlock. We've got to harness that talent of ours, I don't mean getting into ridiculous and gratuitous gridlock but the ability to somehow extricate ourselves out of it. What looks to me like an impossible situation always gets untangled without the benefit of any civic authority. At the college, Babes' 94 year

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old mother was in the office signing checks. She's the grand old dame and has to sign the disbursement checks. I doubt that she remembered me.

Friday Dec. 18

It's pouring again and the meteorologists call it "intertropical convergence". Its not a precursor to a typhoon, just a convergence of low pressure zones. Basically it means the meteorological dummies don't know. Always an explanation AFTER the event, never a prediction or prior explanation. Just like the stock market gurus. We only had two days of dry sunshiny weather since last week's typhoon which slammed into Vietnam and caused more damage there than here. December is normally dry and it's the wettest on record. El Nino, Nina, global warming, convergence and all that bull shit. With this weather the streets get flooded and traffic goes from a crawl to a standstill. I refuse to go anywhere.

Got the news that a first cousin passed away at age 69. By contrast her mother (my Dad's sister) lived to be 94 but this cousin went to the U.S. to study and learned to smoke. The emphysema got to her.

Nephew Enrico went home after three weeks in the hospital. He's in a wheel chair and undergoing daily therapy.

Sponsored a birthday party for Toto at Blues Land. Had a good crowd, about 45 immediate family and cousins. The Blues Land's cook is a lady that used to cook for Toto and his family. Food was terrific. Brought several cans of Pringles to snack on before dinner. It was a big hit as usual, people were even eating crumbs out of the bottom. Next time I'll have to bring a balikbayan box full. This get together and Charito's anniversary makes the trip worthwhile, gridlock, lousy weather and all.

Both brother Toto and cousin Naring have a collection of letters from my father, an aunt and an uncle to their parents. These were the three that went to the U.S. between 1906 and 1920 as study. Next trip I'll have to bring a digital camera to copy these letters and save for posterity.

Saturday Dec. 19

The sun is back out with a vengeance and everything's dried out which means the traffic moves a little better. Went to the wake of cousin Fely Orosa Ylagan. She died two weeks short of her 70th birthday. Saw a couple of more cousins. Funeral is being held up for her daughter who's coming over from Virginia. Had forgotten Filipino wake customs, one of which is the abundance of food for the mourners. As soon as we walked in, we were offered food. I settled for mango juice.

Went to the faculty Christmas party of Central College at the invitation of Babes Reyes. This is an annual event since he became president and complete with lechon, buffet, unlimited beer, entertainment and door prizes. This guy doesn't do anything small. Had a great time, ingested several kilos of tender pork saturated with fat and thousands of milligrams of cholesterol washed down by cerveza San Miguel.

More Tidbits:

My Pringles shirt is a hit with relatives, with everyone hinting they'd like to have one. Gave mine to Pepe, after all it was their anniversary.

The Philippine mango is the best tasting fruit in the world, you can have apples, pears, peaches, etc. nothing beats the mango.

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Tokyo Narita airport is still the pits but there's a new terminal that is more spacious and modern except its not user friendly. Whoever said the Japanese were efficient were smoking something. In cars definitely but not in airports. Had a small coke which cost Y300 or \$2.60, same price for a can of Pringles. Let's sell to the Japanese instead of Wal-Mart. The airport toilets are equipped both western style (raised commode) and Japanese style, which is a commode that's floor level just like the ones in Italy. If you can't squat, you're in trouble. But they are sparkling clean. You take a pee and right next to you a cleaning woman is scrubbing the next urinal. These little ladies, none of whom are more than five feet tall, must be expert at comparing different nationalities.

Finally, I enjoy visiting but I'm sure glad to be back. Thank God for my family and for the good old USA!