

## CEBU ADVENTURE

When I left Cebu summer of 1959 to go to UP Diliman for college, I didn't realize it would be the last time Cebu could be considered as home. The following summer, my folks moved back to Manila, thus completing full circle the transient status we had since 1948 when my father was assigned to Cebu by the oil company he worked for. My mother taught English at the University of San Carlos (known better as USC), and as I went through various grade schools, finally settling in USC for high school, I felt more Cebuano than the Ilocano stock in my blood. Yet, I felt like an outsider. Growing up, I had no kith and kin to interact with. Furthermore, like one other fellow in high school, my Cebuano wasn't that good, as we were known to be "English-speaking" and indeed got a fair share of teasing from our peers. Perhaps that's the reason I maintained an out-of-school set of friends for most of high school. Only in my senior year did I bond more closely with the rest of the Boy's High School classmates.

All these years, I have kept in touch with my college friends. While in Los Angeles in the early 90's I sought out Carolinians by attending a few get-togethers of the local USC alumni association. But I didn't come across any information on my BHS classmates. I thought I never would see them again.

So it was a pleasant surprise when 48 years later, I got an email from one of the group asking if I could help organize the Golden Reunion. I jumped at the chance; starting by setting up an email group.

Two years of preparation cumulated in three days of activities. The photo below shows the group on the first day.



But I am getting ahead of the story. Remember, Cebu was not home to me anymore for the past 50 years.

"Sinulog" is quintessential Cebuano: an extravaganza that is an extension of the religious festivity of Pit Señor, wherein the faithful honor the statue of the Infant Jesus. Lisa

and I never have witnessed Sinulog, so what better time than now. So we arranged to stay in a hotel for ten days, catching the last few days of Sinulog ending Sunday Jan 18, then transitioning to the Thursday to Saturday (Jan 22, 23 & 24) USC BHS Golden Anniversary festivities.

Getting to Cebu from Tanjay is easy. We've done that before a few times. But this time, it was a nightmare. For one, the seas were very rough, and the normal 35 minute ferry ride from Negros to the southern tip of Cebu Island was taking as long as 1-1/2 hours. We started off Jan 16 Friday morning, hoping to catch the 9:30 ferry. With us in the van were Lisa's niece and husband and 2 kids, who regularly attend the Sinulog. But upon arrival at the terminal, it was a madhouse. There were hundreds of people milling around, and dozens of cars, SUVs, buses, trucks lined up waiting for their turn to board the ferry. We were number 70 in the queue. Worse was that of the 5 ferries owned by the Shipping line, only 2 were in service. These WW2 vintage LCT landing crafts are well maintained, but one was in dry dock, another (shown on left in lower photo – which we eventually rode) was undergoing some welding repair on its ramp.



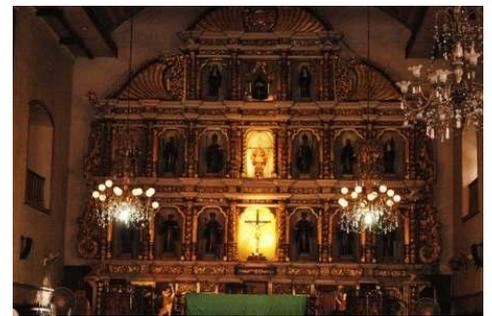
And the third craft had been blown by the wind against the pier on the Cebu side just the other day. It was only by 3:30 pm that we finally got across the channel and witnessed its fate, shown on right. A heavy lift was removing the Ceres buses and other cargo that had been trapped. Informatively, 10 days later, it was back in service.



That 6 hour wait to board was not without mishap. The dispatcher had instructions to let VIPs' vehicles jump the queue, so there were 3 town mayors who got ahead of us. We kept switching places as vehicles jockeyed for position. That at least took us further away from a truckload of smelly, squealing pigs.

Finally, after a 3-1/2 hour drive, with an hours stop for a late lunch at a German-owned resort/restaurant along the way, we were in Cebu City. We dropped off our passengers at their sister's place, and couldn't refuse the dinner that had been prepared, or the offer to lead us in their van to the hotel. I knew the route, but they said there already were many road closures, and they knew the shortcuts. We staggered into our hotel at 10:00 pm.

Jan 17 Saturday was the tail end of activities for the Sinulog, including a fluvial parade at the waterfront, and more importantly, the "Solemn Procession of the Miraculous Image" (as per brochure) starting from Sto Niño church. This we had to see. We took a cab and walked part of the way to the downtown area near the original USC campus, perched ourselves on one of the many flatbed trucks serving as some sort of mini grandstand, and watched as the solemn faithful walked by, many carrying replica statues, silently praying. I mused to Lisa about how this orderliness seems so much in contrast to what I remember the final Sunday's highlight would be in the church, with people dancing in frenzy, waving their arms heavenward and chanting "Pit Señor" rhythmically, as if their forcefulness would propel their prayers faster upward. Years ago when I was about 9 years old, I was with my grandma at Sto Niño (see photo on right – the original statue is in the center) and we got caught in the surging crowd inside the church, when one man went berserk and started punching everyone around him, me included. While on the grandstand, I took lots of pictures, but later, found that in the downloading and arranging of photo folders, I had inadvertently erased 2 days worth.



Was this a portent of things to come? Was I being punished for my irreverence? Because, pretty soon, the slight cough I had started manifesting itself more openly with fever, and I started feeling giddy. We had met up with Lisa's kin again, and we all went back to the hotel early without waiting for the miraculous image to pass by.

Fortunately, Lisa the pharmacist had all the medications on hand. I downed Tylenol and allergy pills, and waived them off to go to Ayala Mall for shopping and dinner. Lisa said she'd also get some antibiotics. Well, pretty soon, it seemed like déjà vu for me. My fever apparently got higher because I started having weird delirious thoughts. As a kid, I was prone to convulsions and still can vividly remember how the mosquito net would transform into an undulating space-time fabric with me trapped in a capsule. And I distinctly recall our neighbor chewing guava leaves and spitting it into my armpits. Well, this time, I just took more Tylenol.

The next day Jan 18, Sunday, was the finalé. The City Government had a huge parade that was to wend its way 3 blocks away from the hotel. The Sto Niño church had its Solemn High Mass and Pit Señor celebration. I stayed in bed most of the whole time, though later in the afternoon, I felt well enough to suggest to Lisa that we could walk 3 blocks away to witness the parade, but she nixed it.



That night, there were fireworks displays in various places over the City. Ayala Mall had one, and from the hotel corridor, I took a number of shots, including street crowds.



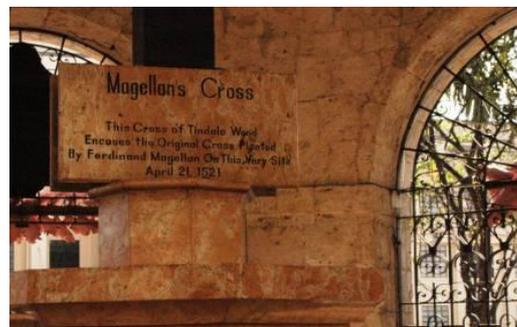
Jan 19 Monday was when I made a positive effort to get up and be well. I announced that years ago, we used to have pine trees for Christmas, and these came from the mountains on the way to Toledo City, on the west side of the island. Just like our earlier days in the US, when we'd do spur-of-the-moment drives to whatever caught our fancy, we should do the same now, and see the pine trees. Lisa agreed, and we invited Lisa's kin to join. They, too, were excited about it. We picked up the couple at their sis' place, and only then did I find out that yesterday, they all had gone to Sto Niño church and had done the Pit Señor ritual, with my getting well as their main petition. I didn't anymore ask them to elaborate on how they danced and sent up their petition. But I was grateful. The next day, they took the bus back to Tanjay.

The round trip to Toledo took just over 3 hours of easy driving. On the way back, we took the northern route from Balamban, as shown on the map. In the 50's there was just one route across the island. We did see lots of pine trees and other great sights, but as I said earlier, I lost the photos.

There were 2 more days before the USC BHS grand reunion, and we made the most of it. I met up with a Tanjaynon friend who had settled in Cebu as a tour guide and he guided us for an afternoon and evening of really interesting places. We had dinner with a 2nd cousin from UP whose folks had settled in Cebu. We had car trouble, when the car alarm remote had its small special battery run out. And this happened in a seedy part of town, late at night, where the tour guide was showing us the oldest house in Cebu. And he had just been explaining the nuances of night and pick-up life in the city. I dispatched him and Lisa in a cab to buy that battery, and fortunately they found one. In the meantime, I waited in the van, with hood up, obviously looking so disinterested that a few of the statuesque and dolled up girls who strolled by didn't even attempt to offer their services.



Left photo is the oldest house in Cebu, known as the Yap-Sandiego house. It gets decorated to every occasion: now Pit Señor, then Chinese New year, then Lent, Halloween, Christmas, etc. Right photo is a simpler tomb in what the guide described as the Rich Cemetery, with Mausoleums for illustrious families. Unfortunately, it has been encroached upon by squatters, so one can see fighting cocks with their old tire roofing, shanties, and children galore. Left photo is a city view at dusk from the "topside" a vantage point high on the city's hills, with

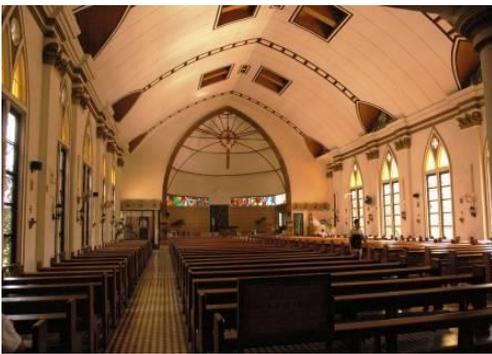


Taoist temple in foreground. Above right is Magellan's cross, encased within an outer sheathing of Tindalo wood.



High School at the downtown main campus. Others remembered how they gazed upward from below the bridge.

The first day of the Golden Anniversary was a tour of the USC campuses. First stop was the Boy's High School building in Mango Avenue. We were the pioneers there; having transferred from the downtown campus in sophomore year. The small creek adjoining the property was still there, and it brought many memories back: as an arena for fist fights and as an escape route from PMT and other school yard activities. Now, there were at least 4 more buildings. Shown on left is the original building. We remember those trees as saplings. Some of the guys could rattle off more names of girls from the adjacent Sta Theresa and Immaculada high schools as compared to those from the USC Girl's



Then, after mass (see top photo on first page) and lunch, we boarded a plush, air conditioned school bus and were driven to the downtown main campus. The four story buildings still were the same, set into a box like arrangement which created a quadrangle in the center. But the empty space and basketball courts behind were now fully utilized with a gym, auditorium, and other structures. The chapel on the third floor still retained its austere look of simplicity. Then we bussed to the Talamban campus. It didn't ring any bells as it was built after we graduated.

Later that night, we had dinner at a popular Filipino restaurant.

Day 2 Friday was an optional excursion named "Island Hopping". The other two options for "Golf" and "Arts & Crafts" shopping didn't have enough signees. All these preparations were handled by the Cebu Group. The US/Canada, Manila and other non-Cebu based alumni deferred all decisions to them. After all, many of the "Cebu Manoy's", as we called them, were heavyweights in business, tourism, politics, etc.



Captain's fingertips: bamboo pole connected to a SS tiller, throttle control tied to the leg of the Captain's chair, and PVC bilge pump behind it. In 45 minutes, we were at one of the many islands ringing Bohol. See map above.

After half an hours drive from Cebu to Mactan, we got to the jump-off point. There were about 30 of us who piled into the outrigger boat, including catering crew and lechon. And the boat was fast, propelled by a V-8 diesel engine. I was especially fascinated by the controls at the



Food was excellent with the lechon, and especially with the fresh crabs, shrimp, broiled fish, clams and seaweed salad, prepared by the island's caterer, all laid out in the second floor hall of an excellent concrete structure; no cheapie bamboo or sawali lean-to. The shore was inviting with white sand, and indeed, a contingent of Korean tourists was enjoying it, more so with the rental Skidoo and scuba gear. Alas, we felt we were too old to frolic, save for one brave soul who did a little swimming.

Photo on left shows part of the group on the island.

But it was the affair later that evening that really started getting more interesting, nostalgic and fun-filled. This was the "Luau" at the posh Maribago resort in Mactan. For starters, a group from the Girl's High School was joining us. It's a long story, but the joint venture didn't pan out, and the girls were having their own reunion.



The signs to the Luau site stating it is on Alegrado Island. Dinner was excellent, not to mention the entertainment afterwards.



Part of the beach front with the island further out. A short 3 minute catamaran ride brings one there.



Fr Mar dancing the hula with one of the Resort's dancers, He was the youngest priest on the faculty when we graduated.

At the Luau, there was the food, and drinks, and music, and dancing, then entertainment by the Resort's staff, and of course the never-ending stories of those who hadn't seen each other in 50 years. But the most enthralling presentation was a series of videos by our Pete "Spielberg" Roble, who had stitched together before and after photos of many of our classmates, added dramatic music, and visual effects.

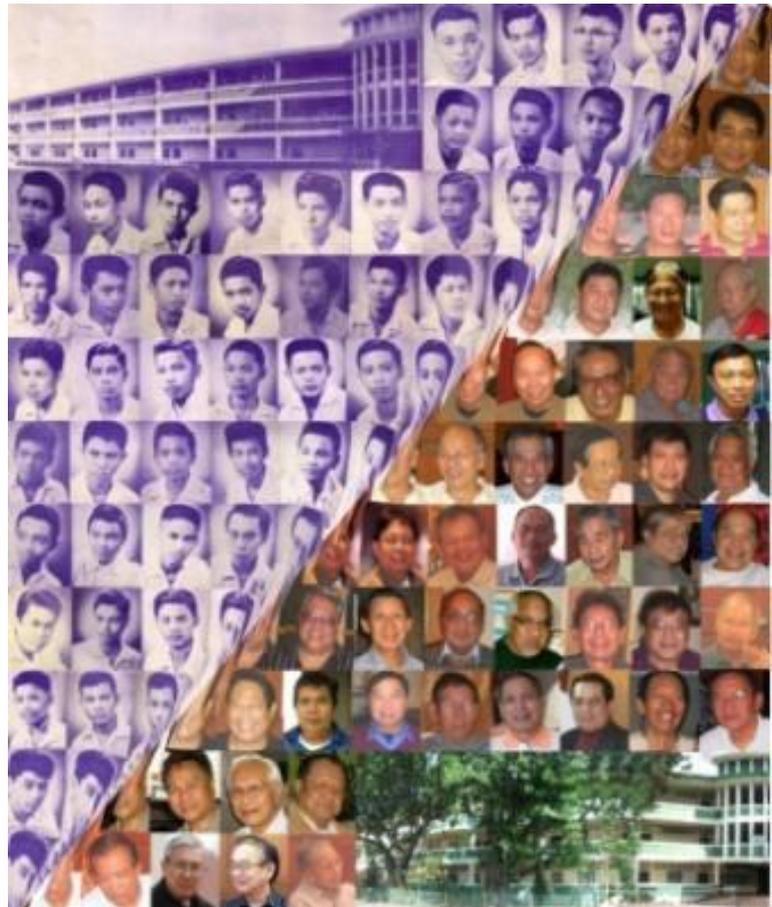


Finally, by 11:00 pm, it was time to go. Some had reservations to stay overnight at the resort's hotel, but most opted to get the bus service back to Cebu. Photo on left shows some of the Girl's High guests.

But the 3rd day Finalé dinner-dance at Casino Español was even grander and more climactic. The video clips were shown again, plus photos from our actual high school days. This brought cheers of recognition and nostalgia.



Nemy Bugarin, from Canada, gave a haunting violin presentation, that broke into an impromptu song for all.



Indeed, our Golden Anniversary was a smashing success. But also just the beginning for some of us, tasked with the role of putting together the Souvenir Program. The above photo will grace the front cover, a positionally accurate Before & After mosaic, with a time-warp swirl on the diagonal interface. As for me, I have come back full circle again: more Cebuano-Visayan, married to one from neighboring Tanjay. Danny Gil 28 Jan 09