

## STATUS REPORT 6 – AZAGRA FARM – ANIMALS (LOCAL & FOREIGN) + SHAMANISM

When Nitoy told us that they needed more lumber for the rest house construction, we told him to fell more coconut trees. Like in the past, he'd choose those that are least productive. Two days later, he pointed out five stumps near the balete tree, and matter-of-factly said he had done the proper incantations. We kiddingly remarked that the elementals would be happier since they'd have more space around their abode, and he readily agreed. By this time, our curiosity got the better of us. Consider the following: Lisa's grandfather Pio was known to have been a "spiritista", even reputedly had a crystal ball, despite the fact that he had finished in Letran Manila, and was Aguinaldo's guide and translator during the General's revolutionary campaign in Negros. And as I had written earlier, Nitoy did all the rituals (such as chicken sacrifice to the elementals of the earth and trees) when we started improving the farm. Just the day before, he had stopped the carpenter from starting the nipa roofing on the rest house until a more auspicious time later in the afternoon when the tide was coming in. Could it be perhaps that this "talent" had been handed to him from the grand old man Pio? We asked him, and Nitoy smilingly said yes; his father had taught all these to him. His father was an illegitimate son of the grand old man Pio, but was banished by Pio's wife to the hinterlands, then much later rehabilitated by other family members to Tanjay. Obviously, the "talent" had taken the route in their bloodline. The term is "alabton" – sensitivity to the earth spirits, a positive attribute. In contrast, many folks fear the "aswang" or "abal", the local term. Certain families reputedly have members who harbor those malevolent traits. Passing on the "power" is via a white stone that has to be accepted by the younger family member.



Above: Lisa and Shaman Nitoy and the rest house

Anyway, we don't believe in any of these, but do move with trepidation when around those who believe, and we respect the traditions. So when I went to the balete tree to take pictures of the coconut stumps, I muttered under my breath entreaty to the abode, all the while avoiding walking under the coconut trees lest the elementals become displeased and let loose a coconut or frond to fall. As an aside, everyone in town knows about the balete tree in the adjoining farm, cut down by the owner to make way for more sugar cane acreage. He died suddenly and unexpectedly of some malady, and only was in his late 40s.

A day later, I couldn't find my camera. I searched high and low in the house, in the van, and it was gone. Aha, we started rationalizing, the elementals hid it. Fortunately, a more thorough search by one of the maids yielded it, under the car seat. No, none of the images on the camera captured any suspicious looking thing.

A few days later, two of my aunties from California came to visit. Both are just a few years older than us, and one brought her two pre-teen grandkids, and the other had her American husband. I had explained much of the above discussions to them, and to my surprise, and upon my auntie's coaching, the kids paid their respects.



Above, they toss American coins as an offering, prior to approaching the balete tree for the final photo op. Notice the tree stumps in the middle photo. See any hobgoblins lurking among the aerial roots of the balete?

The young visitors enjoyed themselves immensely. See three photos below. Too bad they hadn't come a week earlier when another goat gave birth to two healthy kids. We were there 15 minutes after birth.



Left photo, the mother goat licks the kids clean right after birth. Then within the hour, the kids are strong enough to stand up and suckle the mother. Her teats are dripping with colostrum, the first milk, laden with all of nature's ingredients to prime the kids to a good start.

Given that there are nine more pregnant goats, we will be seeing lots of action soon.

But what really surprised me was the American guest, Keith. As a retired electrical engineer from Lockheed, he didn't believe the farm boy from Missouri that he once was while growing up. Here in photo he shows how to handle a cow. He related lots of farm lore, including how he'd spot distressed birthing cattle by the length of time that they lay on the ground, after which he'd have to reach in and loop a special chain around the calf's neck and pull. Then, with the calf out of the womb, he'd watch out if the mother cow, now not any more incapacitated, might try to attack him, so he had a tractor nearby to jump into and drive off. American cows are much bigger.



But what I really enjoyed were his recollections about his farm boss' family: wealthy, extreme Anglophiles who went to the extent of importing English bloodhounds for foxhunts, complete with all the paraphernalia such as tailored hunting clothes, fox horns for the clarion calls, horses, etc. Trouble is, there were not enough foxes in Missouri. So part of his job was to fatten up previously purchased foxes, cage them at the hunting grounds' boundary in places where natural habitats such as gopher holes might entice the foxes to stay, then lay trails of "fox essence" scent to the cages, and finally just before the hunt, release the foxes from their cages. Alas, he related, the foxes ran to the neighboring farms where there were chickens to eat, even before the bloodhounds could get to them.

Now even if it's my turn to be a farmer, I don't think I'd do anything like that.

After all, there is the beach and beach house. Here, Lisa and the aunties relax and take a nap under the lean-to at the beach house' shore frontage.

A merry Christmas to all.

Danny Gil, 24 Dec 08

