

## CEBU REVISITED

In January this year, we went to Cebu for a class reunion. It wasn't any of those regular large reunions of high school or even college alumni. Rather, it was a mini-reunion of just nine (9) of us Elementary Schools classmates from Cebu Normal School (CNS) dating from 1951 to 1955. I hadn't met many of them since then. With spouses, we were fourteen (14).



Clockwise from bottom right: Vic Romarate (green shirt), Sammy Dunque, Roger Salinas, Ogie Reyes, Casi Nadela, Larry Chan, Elma Garcia, Leo Acosta and Danny Gil.

It all started when our University of San Carlos High School 50th Golden reunion in 2009 proved to be a smashing success with almost a fourth of our graduating class of four sections attended, from US, and from all over.

And over a dozen of them came from CNS. In the past 5 years, we have met a few times in Cebu, Manila, the US in a few mini re-unions in small batches.

When we finally got hold of 3 or more whom we hadn't seen in 60 years - from Thailand, Saudi, and Mindanao - and some of them happened to be visiting Cebu, we decided to have a reunion, before it became too late. It was a diamond anniversary.

As usual in many of my vignettes, I cull excerpts from the email exchanges:

*From Elma Garcia-Muangkroot from Thailand*

Dearest Childhood Friends,

First of all, thank you very much for your presence at our Diamond Jubilee gathering at Casi and Emma's lovely home and estate. It was so good to see each other again, after 60 years, and our reunion was truly joyful!

It was really Lorna Rodriguez [in Las Vegas] who started the ball rolling. She wrote to me for old times' sake and our communication led to our remembrance of other classmates.

Lorna had contact with some US-based classmates, and although Danny Gil is back in the Philippines, Lorna still had his contact information.

Danny Gil conceived this reunion and organized it after learning that I come to Cebu often.

Eva Nacar [in Florida] has been very encouraging and supportive with her communications, keeping us enthusiastic about this reunion.

Buddy [New Jersey] was very helpful with his remembrances.

Thank you to Ogie [Cebu] for Googling these remembered classmates, living or dead, sharing news about them and inviting them.

Hearing Tonette [Manila] on the phone with her infectious laughter was also very inspiring, as well as a talk with Cristeta Balili.

Thank you very much to Casi and Emma for offering their place and providing some food and drinks.

Thank you to Paz for ordering the food and for all others who brought food.

Thank you to Ogie for the poem and the follow-up comments.

Thank you to Danny for the pictures.

We all had a good time!

Sending my love and warmest regards and may God bless us all!

Love, Elma

*From Lorna Rodriguez-Sodupe in Las Vegas*

Hello, Everyone,

What a beautiful bunch of classmates accompanied by their equally beautiful spouses. What I would've given just to be there. Gazing at each of the boy's picture really jolted me awake. It was a shot in the arm for me, for those whom I immediately recognized like Danny, Roger, Ogie, and Casi. It was a kick in the pants, for the rest whom I didn't even dare to guess like Leo, Sammy, Victor, Laureano Chan. I couldn't connect their names to their faces without Danny's help. But every single one of you looks fine, as fine as above 70 years. old can be.

Life is good. God is good. An old actress, Helen Hayes once said, "The most difficult years of a person's life are between the ages of 10 and 70." So, let's all rejoice, for the difficult times are over! Really?

As for the muse of this coveted group, Elma Garcia, she sure can still make heads turn, can't she?

Lorna

*Then Ogie, the Cebu organizer, reported*

Classmates who came,

1. Elma Garcia
2. Danny Gil & spouse Lisa
3. Casi Nadela & spouse Emma
4. Leo Acosta & spouse Carmen
5. Sammy Dunque & spouse Alice
6. Vic Romarate & spouse Helen
7. Ogie Reyes & spouse Paz
8. Larry Chan
9. Rogelio Salinas

Classmate who pledged to come but failed:

1. Joe Espina & Spouse
2. Guio Ando
3. Dedong Briones

Classmates who helped organize the Reunion but could not come for good reasons. To them we are very thankful for their support.

1. Eva Nacar
2. Tonette Santos
3. Buddy Valenzona
4. Lino Pacquiao

Sorry if I missed a few names.

Special thanks to: the host couple Casi & wife Emma, Jardin de Busay developer

Ogie

*More from Danny*

We spent the rest of the afternoon reminiscing about old times.

There was a comic criss-cross of schedules that would have otherwise upped the attendees by two more. Tonette had prepared for the reunion a few months earlier and had bought plane tickets already from Manila to Cebu, but somehow, had misread the ticket issued, and was off by 2 days. It was impossible to change flights because that was the middle of the Sinulog Tourist season of Cebu.

NJ based Lino, comes and goes quite often to Cebu, but on that date, found himself in Manila yet as spouse Dula was still conducting a seminar.

But the fun went on as we recounted the past. Two of the attendees, whom we hadn't met in years, Vic and Sammy didn't finish their Elementary schooling in CNS. Vic went to on Univ of the Visayas where he was a star in the athletic field, and eventually spent many years in Saudi as a sports coach to the Royal family. Sammy on the other hand, went on to be a general and saw many years of soldiering in the various positions in Luzon and interesting campaigns of the Mindanao theater. Both are nicely retired now in Cebu with their respective businesses. Leo, another long-time-no-see attendee, is settled in Mindanao as a pharmacist, and he flew in for this occasion. The others: Casi, Roger, Ogie, Larry are Cebu-based whom we've met with regularly.

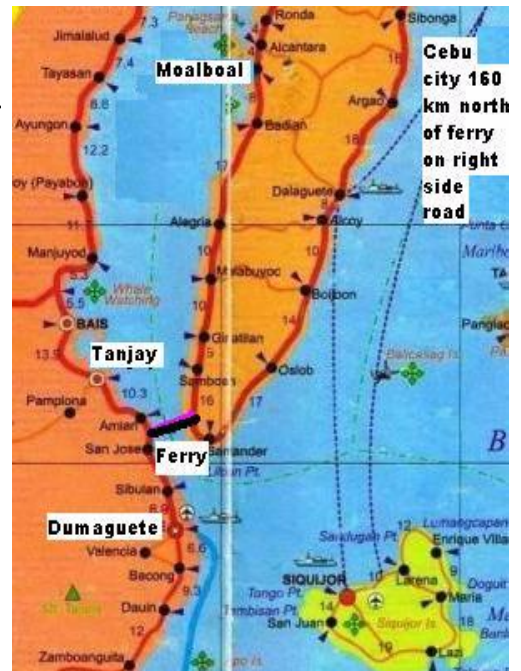
For me and Lisa, our trip to Cebu also coincided with a mini vacation for our daughter Babette and her two kids. She had a scheduled trip to Aklan for the Atiatihan and her flight to Kalibo originated in Cebu. She would fly back to Cebu a few days later and take the bus to Tanjay. We brought a nanny to help us with the two grandkids on the way back,

Going there, we took the more traversed route of the ferry ride and drive up to Cebu via the East side. See the map above.

On the way back, we decided to take the West route, which was more picturesque. The grandkids enjoyed it a lot. And we stopped for a late lunch at Moalboal.

The town was teeming with activity, with lots of foreigners milling around and after we asked around, found that this was a tourist haven for a lot diving enthusiasts. There is a promontory or finger of land jutting out to the sea which is fantastic. We vowed to revisit Cebu again.

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Three months later, after having been very busy going back and forth to Manila, we decided to take it really easy, especially since it was our 48th wedding anniversary. We went to Moalboal just by ourselves.

Here are excerpts from my email to our children while we were in Moalboal.

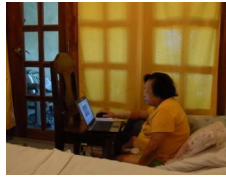
We've been holed up in this secluded resort in Moalboal, Cebu. The town is a haven for lower budget foreign tourists seeking dive sites at Pescadores Island and vicinity.

We sought out yesterday noon the highly rated Lantaw Restaurant in the midst of this much smaller Boracay-like strip, but alas, they didn't have the lobsters or prawns as advertised on their website. Seems as if that was at another chain restaurant elsewhere.

We however are at a newer area, 5 km away from this madding crowd. Only 8 rooms in 4 cottages available at this Italian-Pinay-owned Sea Turtle House Resort, frequented strangely by Russian tourists.. Internet is OK on Ma's laptop, as with the magic jack phone. It is spotty on my laptop, and non-existent on the ipad and iphone. Cable TV is not working, but DVD player had lots of stupid action movies.

Today, May 6, is our anniversary. The main reason we are here. We drive back to Tanjay tomorrow. Here are a few pics. File names are self explanatory. If I had snorkeled further off, I should have seen some turtles. I got turned off when we witnessed a rescue effort. An Englishman and his Pinay wife went snorkeling far out, and she got the cramps, tried swimming back, then yelled for help. We relayed the alarm, and a slew of rescuers rushed over. Later, we chatted with one of the rescuers and he matter-of-factly stated that there have been many drownings at the more popular area half a kilometer away where the sand is a white wide expanse (unlike the beach in our area with corrals and reefs). Said there was a strong rip tide. So there went our plans to go there or do more snorkeling (for me at least). We're getting old.

Here below are pertinent photos of the trip



Left: View from the room looking to the sea. Above: Inside room with Lisa at computer.



Left: The fabled Lantaw Restaurant which proved to be a dud.



Above: The view from the restaurant of the fabled Pescadores island and boats that bring divers there.

Left: The commercialized Boracay-like strip of hotels, bars, restaurants that come alive at night.

Below: Just our silhouettes.



Low tide that afternoon where one can walk on the corals and pick up starfish. Makes excellent snorkeling views at high tide.



-oOo-



High tide. That's me on left. Couple on right went further out where wife later called for help. Left below: some of the rescuers.

We recently attended a wake of a nonagenarian relative who was very close to the church, and no less than the Bishop officiated. In his homily, he paraphrased statesman Churchill who had said that life is an adventure as we approach our inevitable end, and that we should consider every remaining day a new adventure.

Seemed so apt especially after our anniversary, a milestone of sorts, where renewal is what it's all about - call it a reboot of love, faith, essence, etc. That is what life is all about, too, I guess, with mysteries and all.

In closing, I Googled "Brideshead Revisited" to see if any profundities in the novel is parallel to the namesake of this recent adventure. But no, author Evelyn Waugh's theme wasn't at all that simple and paraphrasable.

So, I'd like to end with the usual flippancy and levity I always like to inject in my ramblings; an anecdote about the song "Ah, Sweet Mystery of Life."

South Korea's strongman Syngman Rhee had a son in NYC working for the Time-Life magazine. He was missing for some time on a hazardous assignment, and when a colleague finally found him, he said "Ah, sweet Mister Rhee of Life at last I found you."



Me and my snorkel gear.



Fully clothed Lisa at low tide vs bikini-clad Russian tourist at high tide. Having a super telephoto does have its advantages.

Danny Gil, 21 May 2015