

Topic : Choosing your Participation : From Shopping to Substance
A FATHER'S CUDGELS OF WISDOM TO A MOTHER

My father, Joe Concepcion, who has always been a pillar of integrity and public service in the country even in his youth, believed strongly that achieving without serving and giving means little. All his life, he has constantly served our nation with no grand expectation but one – **to see the Philippines in its fullest potential**. Of all the far-famed quotable quotes that my father has uttered, there is one that best encapsulates his crusade for the Philippines - ***Yes, the Filipino can***. This special quote will resonate in this hall in a voice of a woman, his daughter. And I dare say, **"Yes, the Filipina can build this nation."**

Nation.

Our nation has been called the Pearl of the Orient Sea and the Light of Asia. But in spite of all these positive affirmations, we have lost track of our own potentials. As women of this nation, we need to recognize the vital role we hold in building this nation.

When God created man He formed him from dust, but when God created a woman, he did so from the rib of the man. The rib, strong yet delicate and fragile provides protection for the most delicate organ, the heart, the organ that controls life and the lung which holds the breath of life. Just like a woman, a mother, the rib cage will allow itself to be broken before it will allow damage to the heart. As women, we have been given by God one of the greatest privileges in the world, that of molding and nurturing a living soul.

It is inherent in our very nature, to build and create.

I remember how proud our nation was when Efren Penaflorida was named CNN Hero of the Year, besting thousands of nominees around the globe. We were calling him our *bayani*. Interestingly, the word 'hero' can not even tantamount to the richness of our word '*bayani*' because a hero is just a person admired for his outstanding achievements and courage; whereas a *bayani ay galing sa bayan, para sa bayan*.

My father, 50 years ago, moved by Rizal's firm faith in the youth as the hope of the nation, hoped that given the right motivation and recognition, the youth will effectively build a great nation, so on June 19, 1961, he started the **Search for the Ten Outstanding Students of the Philippines**.

From then on, TOSP has recognized students who continuously and tirelessly live out the TOSP ideals of **Academic Excellence, Inspiring Leadership and Responsible Citizenship geared towards NATION BUILDING and grounded in good moral values**.

These are just some of the TOSP would eventually become Cecile Guidote-Alvarez, Dr. Patricia Licuanan, Dr. Alicia Lustre, Most. Rev. Antonio Ledesma, Dr. Edna Zapanta-Manlapaz, Sister Julma Neo, Atty. Rene Saguisag, Alberto Fenix, Vicky Garchitorena, Sen. Raul and Sonia Roco, Benjamin Tayabas, Dr. Pablo Trillana III, Ramon del Rosario, Jr., Fr. Manoling Francisco. Today, they are not just TOSP alumni but also and more importantly, our ***bagong bayani***.

**Talk delivered by Marie Concepcion-Young, President of RFM Foundation during the Women Connect :
Women to Women Mentoring Part 2 at the Philippine Trade Training Center, Nov. 8, 2011**

Because of how TOSP alumni have been unselfishly giving of themselves to serve our nation, a year ago, TOSP carried BAYANi as its brand:

BAYANi challenges living out heroism especially from our outstanding youth. The bayan is emboldened to represent the need for Filipinos to put the primacy on the nation. The 'I' is the individual who should stand out but not separate from the nation. The heart signifies the developing love for the *bayan* within the 'I' if the individual is to be a genuine *bayani*.

This year, TOSP is celebrating 3 significant numbers: 150, the birthday of the inspiration behind TOSP, Dr. Jose Rizal; 50, the anniversary of TOSP Program; and 10, the anniversary of The Outstanding Students of the Philippines – Alumni Community, the community of volunteers behind TOSP.

In this milestone year for TOSP, one man is the happiest, my father. He always wanted to see a greater Philippines brought to life through youth action characterized by servant-leadership. It was his vision and his work plan is very simple – put forward young role models and exemplars of excellence, selfless service to the nation, and strong sense of integrity and upright morals for the youth to emulate. **Youth – for the, with the, by the – youth.** He wanted the young people to believe that they are indeed destined for greatness, and this destiny is equally the nation's destiny. He wanted to inspire and galvanize the promising young people to affirmative action. He wanted them to carry on their passion and share it with others, so that together, we build this nation.

Build This Nation

Passion is a strong word. One of the most syndicated words these days. A TOSP mentor, Dr. Onofre Pagsanjan, reminds us every year during our TOSP National Formation Program in Balai Taal, Sir Pagsi reminds us to **“Love your calling with passion; it is the meaning of your life.”**

Joecon built on his vision anchored on a dream and a passion. A dream of a better Philippines brought about by idealistic youth who are crazy enough to share his passion to bring about a better tomorrow, to **inspire** others and to **spread the message** that **everyone** can be **outstanding** and can be *bayani*. And to be outstanding, one does not have to graduate *Summa cum Laude*. To be a *bayani*, **sapat na ang maglingkod sa bayan**, sharing with others what he is good at because passion should not only be one person's journey. For it to be nurtured, to flourish, to live forever, it should be **'PASS I(T) ON.'**

And then we build this nation from a concept of 'I' to 'we.' WE. We as 'women' (we-men) because we have our equitable share in building this nation.

Do we feel that nation building is too ideal to be done?

Can Build This Nation

Yes, nation building is ideal but **it can be done**. In fact, our task is not as great compared to our ancestors who lived before us and had to sacrifice life to lay the foundation of our nation. Our task is to simply continue what has been started and laid out.

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As women, the mothers of the youth, it is our noble duty to make sure that our children grow with a strong love for country, to be proud to be a Filipino and a desire to be the best with others. It is gifted to us to bear and create a generation of patriotic youth.

When my father Joecon set off to conduct TOSP Search, he hoped that the recognition will move these model students **to do more and be more of who they are and what they did** that earned them the recognition.

He thought if one friend, or schoolmate was recognized for his or her efforts and services to the nation, it was more than possible than the entire student body would be moved to move as well. More than that, he knew that if there was a pool of at least ten people who were made aware of the fact that they are not alone in their life's calling, then this ten can work together and be a critical team of servant-leaders in whatever field they would involve themselves in.

Today, the move to recognize students has escalated and gone down to the regional levels where we now have 8 regional searches and a growing regional alumnae community. One of our chapters, has been cited as the first most outstanding youth organization in Southeast Asia for their cultural preservation program.

I believe that our youth does not have scarcity of such ideals. Our youth is just distracted. Technology has displaced the fire and passion that once guided and inspired Rizal, Bonifacio and Ninoy.

To penetrate the ironically technology barrier, this year, during our Welcome Dinner for TOSP National Program, we launched the **Bayanibolusyon**, a digital movement in Facebook to unleash the bayani in every Filipino, especially among our youth.

It also aims to personify yet humanize the concept of bayani, making it more accessible to our youth today through every day great examples of Filipinos coming from different walks of life. Maximizing social networking as a means of keeping in touch and sharing their thoughts and point of views, Bayanibolusyon aims to draw inspiration from the simple Juans whose lives are made remarkable by their generosity in spirit.

Bayanibolusyon serves as a way for them to share their stories of simple acts of kindness that made a difference to the life of another... all this to prove to the fears of cautious and uncertain Filipinos who have lost hope in heroism that there is hope because there are a few who are willing to make a difference. Learning from the **Every Day Great Examples** of Juans who are changing lives one deed at a time, (by simply answering the question, **Ano ang ginawa ko na nakatulong sa iba at sa kapwa ko?**) Bayanibolusyon aims to educate Filipinos that **heroism is simply an act of doing good**, that no act is too small or too big, and that no one is too young or too inept to do something, somehow. The novelty of the idea caught the attention of the national media. Manila Bulletin even gave it an editorial feature and cartoon!

Building our nation seems like a tough challenge. But my father has taught me, he showed me by example , "Dream the impossible dream. Reach the unreachable star." He lit that candle of hope for democracy, for the voices of the Filipinos to be heard, he dreams the impossible dream for a better country and he has lit that candle of hope in the youth...

Yes, nation building seems like an impossible dream and unreachable star. But it can be done. For the Bayan I love... **BELIEVE** that we are powerful beyond measure.

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The Filipina Can Build This Nation

TOSP has witnessed its very own alumnae transformed and stepped up from outstanding students to outstanding movers of our country. It has become a laboratory of leaders which has produced social development icon Sonia Roco, Corporate Social Responsibility visionary Vicky Garchitorea, Culture and Arts trailblazer Cecille Guidote – Alvarez among others. It is even interesting to note that as TOSP is an academically related awards program, the woman currently at the helm of our country's higher education mandate is actually the first awardee of the TOSP Search, Dr. Patricia Licuanan.

The newer and current batches of TOSP have also challenged conventions and braved the calls of nation building despite lucrative opportunities. Among many inspiring TOSP stories, I would like to share the story of **TOSP 2007 Cherrie Atilano, an Ilongga who graduated Magna cum Laude with a degree in BS Agriculture from Visayas State University in Region VIII**. Despite coming from a family of farmers, she gave up a well-paid job as a horticulturist for a multi-national company without hesitation when Gawad Kalinga invited her to work full-time. After pioneering projects that address agricultural productivity and poverty reduction through Bayananihan, she invented a bamboo treatment technology that can strengthen bamboo to produce premium products. She is now the president of Blue Bamboo Ventures, a social enterprise that closely works with GK communities to grow endemic bamboos. Her passion became her profession that when a big opportunity like Fulbright Scholarship got in her way, she happily waived it informing the scholarship committee that now is an untimely time to leave the country because GK communities are growing in unity, solidarity and excellence. Her decision and reason to waive the scholarship won the hearts of the scholarship committee who extended their scholarship to her indefinitely. Cherrie is just one of the many TOSP alumnae who chose to take the path less travelled but most challenging.

Like my Cherrie, I have faith in us. I have strong faith and confidence that we, Filipinas, can build this nation. Look closely and you will realize that the feminine word of our people, Filip-ina even defines our role – ina, to nurture, to mother, to bring up with care and affection. Again, how can we not be real Filipina in her truest essence if being a mother is natural and inherent in us?

I remember the humbling years of the TOSP – Alumni Community ten years ago when a group of three alumna braved their fears to talk to my father and asked his approval to include a Formation Program in the week-long TOSP National Week.

As much as they were grateful for the recognition and social itineraries that they were lavished with during their respective TOSP year, they felt that it had to include a formation program that would cultivate a shared commitment to the country and develop a network of leaders. Due to the inclusion of the formation program they established, TOSP underwent a major reorientation from an awards program to a youth formation program. It began to focus on what these young leaders can do to and for the Philippines, rather than just zeroing in on what they have achieved and accomplished as students. Ten years after, TOSP is not only celebrating the 10th year anniversary of its ultimate makeover but also, the birth of the TOSP – Alumni Community. In the span of a decade, TOSP – AC has actively brought the TOSP message to regions all over the country, creating 8 active TOSP-AC Regional Chapters with a 9th in the process of being launched with 2012 search.

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The alumni community continues to equip students and communities by providing free services through capacity trainings and formation programs to various schools, organizations and institutions all over the country. Ten years after, the same woman who talked to my father about the inclusion of a formation program is still actively leader-*shaping* TOSP – AC as the National Chairperson. Her name is Pamela Asis – Layugan. Despite her busy professional life as an international consultant at Asian Development Bank, a wife to Josh (dubbed as the President of 'The Outstanding Significant Partners') and a mother to Mattie, she still lives and breathes the essence of servant-leadership to TOSP causes.

The most recent project of the TOSP – Alumni Community is called 'I'TAYO NA! ITayo na! The School Build Challenge. Devastated by Pedring aftermath in his hometown, San Luis, Pampanga, TOSP 2011 Gelo Apostol took the initiative to form iTAYO NA! with the assistance of TOSP – AC, TOSP – Region 3 and TOSP – NCR to repair and rehabilitate 110 classrooms in 7 schools and renew hopes and dreams of more than 5,000 public elementary school students by giving them flood-proof innovative yellow plexiboards as blackboards and durable armchairs with lifetime warranty. Currently, it's a shared commitment with the Municipal Office of San Luis, Department of Education – San Luis District, Gawad Kalinga and Pilipinas Natin of Presidential Communications and Operations Office.

It will kick off this 26 November through a 3-day, 2-night Bayanihan Camp in San Luis, Pampanga. By the way, (Story of Gelo) Gelo is a full-time scholar and top student at the Ateneo School of Medicine and Management (will eventually join Fr. Xavier (1994 tosp)).

Each year, I am personally inspired by the stories of young leaders I meet in TOSP Program. If only I can attend simultaneous TOSP – Regional Programs in various regions every summer, I will because each TOSP alumna is a different inspiring story. I can't wait to be inspired and blown away with stories like that of a vendor's son who studied under the boulevard's lamp post and even graduate as Siliman University's Summa cum Laude; or of a Muslim woman who was elected student council president of a Catholic school and mobilized the largest student-volunteer mobilization for Gawad Kalinga in Region 3; of a student nurse in Iloilo City who wrote and read his own children's book on how to save the environment and the shared the story to hundreds of public elementary school students and eventually won the top prize for Bayer's Environmental Envoy in Germany; or of a doctor who chose to be a pre-school teacher to address the needs of education of kids in her community in Mindanao. These are real stories of a *bayani*.

I have to thank my father who asked me to continue his legacy to youth and country through TOSP, who first introduced me to service to men and country, and who handed me a torch of hope to carry on. He challenged me to fill in his shoes... He showed me how powerful one lit candle can be. Because it is that one lit candle which refuses to die that would inspire one more candle to be lit, one more to pass it on and soon what was impossible and unreachable would be a country we could all be proud of.

If it weren't for his example, I would not be on this stage, sharing the good news about our Filipino youth.

As president of the RFM Foundation, we are more than humbled and fulfilled to invest on the Filipino youth through TOSP. We have to show the youth that they can do better than our generation. We have to affirm that they are still and will always be the fair hope of motherland.

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Nation building is a lifestyle that starts small, from a habit. I challenge each one of you today to make that commitment... to make a difference. It's easy, it's addicting... just do one act of kindness and do it for 21 consecutive times to form it into a habit. Put your heart into it and before you know it, you are living and breathing it already. That's nation building. And that's the way nation building should be. Like heartbeat, it continues and goes on.

So my fellow Filipinas, mothers of the Filipino youth, let's be wise, inclusive and generous with our choices because our choices today define the future of our generation. We have to do our equitable share in nation building. We have to dream, dream big and take the Philippines with us.

Like my father, I have lit my candle, I continue to encourage my children, my employees, my circle of influence to dare to dream the impossible, but even more than dream, dare to make a difference. Be a Bayani... find the Bayani in you and in each person you meet... and pass it on.