



# Feed Your Mind

A Collection Of

# Positive & Happy

# Thoughts

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*Editors*



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# Foreword

Welcome to “Feed Your Mind: A Collection of Positive and Happy Thoughts”!

This unique e-book is a source of inspiration and joy, filled with carefully selected literary works guaranteed to bring a smile and a spring to your step.

Inside these pages, you will discover a delightful array of poems, stories, and anecdotes crafted to provide an abundance of happy, inspiring, and rejuvenating thoughts. The creative works of writers infuse this collection with an authentic and vibrant energy.

“Feed Your Mind” is more than just a compilation; it is a transformative journey to a more fulfilling life. It serves as a poignant reminder that no matter the circumstances, there is always a silver lining, room for growth, and a pursuit of happiness.

Immerse yourself in these pages, finding solace, encouragement, and a renewed sense of wonder. Let these uplifting thoughts ignite a spark within you, propelling you to not only embrace life’s joys and overcome challenges but also actively spread positivity to those around you.

I extend heartfelt gratitude to the talented writers who have contributed their works to this collection. Your passion for creativity and dedication to spreading happiness through words are commendable.

Wishing you a delightful journey through these pages.

Ava Mae S. Magallanes, AB, MAEd, PhD

# Preface

In a world filled with chaos and negativity, seeking solace in positivity is not merely an option but a necessity. It is within this void that “Feed Your Mind: A Collection of Positive and Happy Thoughts” manifests – an e-book anthology curated from different literary works by budding writers. This anthology aspires to establish a positive ambiance to its readers through the literary pieces that tackle love, utopia, hope, and happiness.

The poems, short stories, and anecdotes written within the pages were not merely born by firing neurons nor stringing metaphors; they sought the heart and soul of their authors. These literary pieces might be written in a white and opaque sheet, yet they mirror the vivid experience of the writers and serve as a testament that despite adversities, life always brings hope and has something good to offer. Behind every downpour, there is a rainbow waiting to paint your sky with hope, however seldom might it be.

Allow your fingertips to glide across each page, indulge every literary piece, cherish positivity, and let yourself fall into the world of love and happiness once again.

Enjoy the ride!



# Acknowledgement

We extend our profound gratitude to all the authors who shared their souls and passion through their works. The amount of emotion, love and dedication they have invested in writing reflected on the quality of their masterpieces.

Our heartfelt thanks to the entire Institute of Industry and Academic Research Incorporated (IIARI) family, reviewers, editorial assistants, and the production team. Your commitment to quality publication manifests in the invaluable feedback and support. The quality is indeed embedded in the policies and procedures.

We also acknowledge the support given by our families, friends, and colleagues. Your support has been our strength and motivation to complete this book. Your immeasurable contributions have fueled our passion to become positive in all aspects of life.

Finally, we extend our deep gratitude to all the readers. We dearly appreciate your time to read this book. Whatever emotional state you are right now, may this collection bring you light and sunshine.

- The Editors -

# The Editors



**ERSYL TATOY BIRAY, PhD, LPT**, has baccalaureate and graduate diplomas in English language teaching and educational management from Aklan College, West Visayas State University, and Aklan State University. He has served the Aklan State University in Banga, Aklan, Philippines for 32 years as instructor, and was designated administrative positions including ASU Kalibo Campus Director and Vice President for Academic Affairs. He was a recipient of The Netherlands Fellowship Program in Maastricht, The Netherlands, and Bandung, Indonesia; the Philippine Association of State Universities and Colleges (PASUC) Region VI Junior Executive Course; the US Department of State Regional English Language Office Special Program; and the Commission on Higher Education - Development Academy of the Philippines (CHED-DAP) Leadership Program. He has worked as Institutional Sustainability Assessment (ISA) Assessor of the CHED for 4 years until 2017. He was also commissioned by the Department of Education (DepEd) as Language Editor for its Mother Tongue Based - Multilingual Education (MTB-MLE) learning resources project. He retired from public service in July 2023 with outstanding performance. Today, he is actively engaged as language editor, peer reviewer, editorial board member, and research consultant of refereed international journals, aside from being a dynamic Senior Accreditor of the Accrediting Agency of Chartered Colleges and Universities in the Philippines (AACUP), Incorporated.



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# Chapter 1



***Poetry*** is an expression of ideas and feelings usually written with rhythmic qualities.

## The Intersection

*Jayben Matiang*

I know this place.  
For me, the sidewalks and signage  
Aren't Greek or math.  
My feet are stepping fluently on the pavements,  
and the intersections don't appear like puzzles.  
But it still seems like,  
I am lost.  
I searched for you among the pedestrians,  
But you're nowhere to be found.  
This isn't my home.

You're not in this place.  
But someday,  
If these tangle of buses were to untie,  
I promise that I will return.  
I will then find you,  
Love you,  
Marry you,  
And live without shame.

## Stardust


*Jayben Matiang*

We are a product of chaos;  
A fragment of fireball  
Scattered through the void  
Afterward descended onto earth  
Wherein we were clothed  
With life and existence.


In our flesh,  
Therein lies primordial dust  
And our bones  
Have been fossilized  
By calcium found  
In the remnants  
Of the stars.

We are flawed beings;  
Arrayed with decaying skin  
And embedded with demons  
Similar to a devouring black hole  
Lurking in the cosmos.



The page features decorative floral and leaf motifs. In the top-left corner, there are stylized flowers in shades of purple, pink, and blue. In the bottom-right corner, there are blue and green leaf-like shapes. The background is a light, soft gradient.

In spite of, I pursued  
Through art and beauty  
Behind these imperfections.  
And upon my quest,  
I have never found  
Such a beautiful mess  
Until my eyes were caught  
By your gaze.



## Whispers of the Heart

*Jerwin Guerra*

Soothing whispers gently caress my face  
As I sit upon the shore,  
Embracing the warmth of the salty breeze,  
Gazing at the golden scenery.

Serene rural life reassures my existence,  
Yet the void inside always persists.  
I yearn for a life that reassures my future.

The green sceneries ease my burden,  
While the urban maze eases my heart.  
Vibrant hues of nature feel like home,  
Yet city life makes me feel most alive.

A busy and fast-paced life thrills me,  
Tranquil life in the rural is unparalleled,  
But city life promises me a better future.

## **We're Done!**

*Jason M. De Miquel*

During our first meeting  
I can say I was truly falling  
and swore, I'll love you till the very ending  
Together, we're happy and fleeting  
as if we are the only ones in the surrounding  
I got amazed at the love story  
we have started,  
all doubts felt were discarded  
Because everything then was very splendid  
Until the day came that we parted  
Unconsciously, I didn't know what happened  
Why you and I need to be separated  
and the love I gave got wasted  
'till I realized, it wasn't really reciprocated  
you gave me hope that we can be together  
and the status of ours was not that really matters  
Reality made me realize that I will never be better  
For in your eyes I'll always be a cheater  
The perfect time will come  
Both of us will find the real one  
Bitterness of the past will all be gone  
and confidently, I'll say "were done!"



## Through the Halls of Struggle

*Stephan Salana*


I walk, my footsteps blasting  
Through the halls of struggle.  
Each step is a reminder  
Of pain and hardship endured.

In the field of academia, we step with might,  
A tapestry of challenges, long days turned into night.  
With eager hearts, young minds so full of dreams,  
We embark on a journey, where struggle gleams.

Everyone wants to live carefree;  
To fall in love and have an amazing thought -  
Voices of those who fought  
And those who lost their way

The hustle and bustle of social interactions,  
Navigating friendships, overcoming distractions.  
Cliques and insecurities, a delicate dance,  
Through heart-wrenching of acceptance, we find our stance.





Through sleepless nights and mountains of books,  
We shall prevail for knowledge is what it took.  
In these halls of struggle, we forge our way,  
With courage and passion, we seize the day.

I will not be deterred  
By the obstacles in my way.  
For I know that every struggle  
Leads to growth and strength.

Through the halls of struggle,  
I will find my own way.  
A path paved with resilience  
And the lessons of yesterday.



## Prison

*Ariel E. San Jose*

I was not accused.  
I did not slaughter someone.  
I did not go to court for a trial.  
And I was not given a sentence.

All I want was to provide my family a good life.  
I want my children to go to school  
and my wife not bothered of what to spend.  
And I want to pay forward my parents.

Here I am in this room,  
white, cozy, cool, but mute.  
What I hear is my whisper and  
what I have are my tired PC and mobile.

This prison has no bars and padlocks.  
But a space beyond reach.  
A feeling more than longing,  
an exceeding sadness.

## Unwished Beloved

*Amada G. Banaag*

I often wonder of how  
God can touch a heart  
And fill it with love, gentle and warm-  
For another person whom  
Before was not loved  
But now is the beloved - YOU!  
It was unimagined,  
unwished....

Yet it comes. who am I to oppose  
The will of the ONE DIVINE?  
Am I greater than the Potter?  
Am I wiser than the Wisdom of Ages?  
Do I know myself more than He  
Who formed me in my mother's  
womb?

Do I really know what lies  
Beyond more than the Master Planner do?  
Oh, I've got to obey;  
Do His will to love you  
With the love HE has given me  
To give you - though unimagined  
unwished.  
But now is the dearly beloved - You.



## A Tale of the Chronicler

*Amada G. Banaag*

In a desert land  
Yes, in an arid land,  
I wilt, I wither  
Only to bloom again...

I rose and fell,  
cried and laughed;  
cared and abandoned,  
still I bloom....

Like fire in the winter cold,  
Like ice in the summer solstice,  
I thrive and I bloom.

In the hands of a smith,  
I arise like the phoenix  
From gloom--- I bloom!

## A Tale of Quandaries

*Amada G. Banaag*

You are my happy pill  
I wonder if I am your therapy.  
You are my excitement  
Am I the calm of your raging sea?  
You are both my pain and my panacea  
Can I be a soothing balm to your wound?  
Now, this makes one human;  
To feel,  
To ask,  
To wonder....  
If.

## A Tale of the Youth

*Amada G. Banaag*

Youth is but a fleeting myth  
of passion and fire  
of wild chase and burning  
desire to be  
free  
and  
alone.

But like any myth,  
It ends without bidding farewell.

So it goes- with its  
passion and fire  
to be replaced by sobriety  
and compassion,  
Till all desires are burned and lost into oblivion.  
sunsets and dusk into the  
night of peace and calm.



## Manika's Enchanted Horizon

*Leonard Y. Idala*

Upon Manika's perch, where peaks entwine the sky,  
A saga unfolds where dreams and realms amplify.  
Eagles pirouette in azure, a celestial high,  
From Manika's viewpoint, fantasies soar and magnify.

In morning's cradle, a sun of gold ascends,  
Mountains adorned, as the day elegantly extends.  
Clouds weave tales on peaks, where the journey transcends,  
Manika's realm, where nature's enchantment ascends.

Rolling hills narrate stories, hues in secrets untold,  
A living canvas, a spectacle captivating to behold.  
In the breeze, trees whisper tales of eras old,  
At Manika's embrace, the mysteries of nature unfold.

Rivers carve hushed whispers through the rugged land,  
Reflecting sunlight, a liquid strand.  
Nature's opus, a symphony so grand,  
From Manika's viewpoint, where wonders eternally stand.

As the sun descends, casting hues ablaze with fire,  
Manika's silhouette is a majestic spire.  
Dusk unveils a canvas, a celestial lyre,  
Where the mountain meets the sky, desires to take flight.



## Love Hurts


*Mary Lou S. Sta. Maria*

Shadows deep, a shattered heart,  
Its pieces scattered, torn apart.  
A symphony of silent cries,  
Echoing through love's demise.

Once vibrant hues now fade to gray,  
Memories etched, then swept away.  
Promise whispered, now unheard,  
A fractured tale, love's final word.

In solitude, a soul retires,  
Engulfed by melancholic fires.  
Lost in the ruins of what was,  
A broken heart, no solace does.

Yet from the ashes, strength may rise,  
A phoenix born, with wiser eyes.  
Healing whispers through the pain,  
A chance to mend, to love again



## Everything is a Silhouette

*Jim Paul S. Ungsod*

Humans repealed my trust,  
Disguise they've made an art and cast,  
Sweet smiles tore my skin,  
A feast dried my blood within,

How colorless it is,  
A shadow seems there is,  
Woah! Gloomy, spooky image  
All the world's joy is ravaged.

Visions that tripped one off  
Dim of light I deciphered to quaff,  
Turned down, hesitated to hand,  
Inhumane and heartlessness abound,

A felicity's pinch I shall have enjoyed,  
Melted dolorousness and color deployed,  
Embroidered and secluded, at least  
So self, an island but at ease.

# Glimpse

*Jim Paul S. Ungsod*

A man is indeed a king of disguise  
He conceals what should be told otherwise,

Atop his feeling is felicity  
When a glimpse is with subjectivity,

Fears, self-doubts, and worries seemed a nightmare  
To him, that's seems a new moon whom no air,

Courage is a long plus thorny journey  
When will it be so entirely handy?

In the rings of his head, he tranquilly spins  
His vigor name and his vague face that glimpse,

Mi amore, forever, yours is this heart,  
Yours is this for no one else will I trust.

## Camaraderie

*EJ Villanueva*

I was put into place I am not used to be  
Seeing unfamiliar faces that are new to me.  
I heard the loud laughter of those buddies.  
While observing who's finding the same room intently.

I walked towards the hallway uncomfortably.  
I climbed the stairs to find my way.  
And finally found the room I wanted to see.  
But the room wasn't yet open as I arrived early.

I pondered for a while to make my mind busy.  
I reminisced my time as an examinee.  
I cherished those moments as an interviewee.  
While telling myself good luck on my next journey.

Then I entered the room where our class would be.  
I distinguished people who were very friendly.  
Honestly, I was shy, silent but an approachable personality.  
Thanks God, I still made friends to be with me.

A course in education, in English we are  
Unique students who chose this one with certainty.  
We may come from different societies.  
But we're moving forward towards camaraderie.

## Unworthy Dedications


*Nikka Ela C. Cuales*

I dedicate these masterpieces to someone  
who is uninterested in reading them.

I was a fool;  
I was stupid;  
I was dumb and so pathetic.

How patiently I carved on a paper  
those metaphors, rhymes and lovely phrases;  
tried spotting for some mistakes  
that led to countless nights that I was sleepless;  
even had my mom disturbed  
just to make me a cup of coffee  
while I write on our terrace;  
I also used to sit alone  
and contemplate by the furnace;  
sincerely poured my heart  
and soul on every masterpiece;  
however, I only dedicated them to some jerks  
who later on said they were all useless,  
every single line of 'em was delicate  
but little did I know,  
they were left unread  
and I knew right there and then  
that I was rejected.





I was so full of myself  
got me wasting hundreds of pages  
can't believe I begged for love and attention—  
jeez, I'm so foolish  
I let my guard down,  
allowed myself to get hurt  
oh, I remembered—  
I loved someone more than I loved myself  
but all along, I was wrong  
because I was just infatuated.  
the differences between love and infatuation,  
that I can't even decipher  
yet, how dare I weave masterpieces  
with confessions of how I feel? Pathetic.

Yesterday, I ripped everything that I sew—  
burned all the scratches because I wanted to start anew  
I wasted my teenage years—  
devoted myself to someone  
who made me shed thousands of tears  
I was hopeless and restless.

But you know what?  
I can't let that happen again  
everything about me has changed  
because of the unbearable pain  
no more pathetic confessions,  
no more devotions  
'cause regret hovers over me  
got me stayin' up all night 'til three

should've dedicated them to me  
because it's me who really deserves.

# In This Desolate World

*Mark Anthony Dray*

In the darkness deep where hope decays,  
landscapes are cold and grey.  
Whisper of a world gone astray,  
In whispered fears where dreams betray.

Rusted cities, towers tall,  
Witness to humanity's fall.  
Silent streets devoid of life,  
Echoes of anguish and strife.

Machines and relentless drones,  
Rule the land with hearts of stone.  
Freedom's cry, a distant wail,  
In this bleak, a hopeless tale.

Yet amidst the darkness, a flicker of light,  
A spark of resistance, a will to fight.  
For in the depths of this despair,  
Hope endures beyond compare.

So let us rise against the tide,  
In this dystopian world, we'll not abide.  
For even in the darkest night,  
Hopes flame burns eternal, shining bright.

# I Kiss Oman Goodbye

*Raquel Ballares*

Today, I'm starting a new day in another country.

I'm starting a new life, a new job, a new hope.

Today, I kiss Oman goodbye.

I have lived in Oman for more than twelve years

I have had a lot of "firsts" in this country

First serious loving boyfriend, first to kiss and love the man I chose

First to be truly deeply brokenhearted because it wasn't meant to be

First to be fooled and taken advantage of by the man I thought was mine

First to break a blue pen in front of a student out of classroom annoyance  
and overhead disrespect

First to be hospitalized with oxygen covering up my whole face, full  
antibiotics, and injections due to severe health condition

First to be betrayed by people out of money, career, fame, and power

First to learn to deal with people and circumstances through great diplomacy,  
bureaucracy, grace, and kindness

First to feel so weary, competing, and chasing my career, love, and life that I  
desire, but no doors seemed to open, no chance, no luck anymore

First to fight for what I know was right and I deserve

Yet, I kiss Oman goodbye.

I thank you Oman for the bitter-sweet memories

Thank you for the enormous horizons you have shown and given me

Thank you for the vibrant, pinnacled high-rock mountains

Thank you for the grandeur where the sun rises and sets

Thank you for the silvery-blue seas in the midst of a full moon

Thank you for the deepest clear green ocean I've ever seen

I thank you Oman, and I kiss you goodbye!

## I Left my Coat

*Vianca D. Pamacol*

Felt like best days were unpredictable  
Rating the feast on the table  
I was wearing my coat in the cold breeze of December  
Expectedly putting clothes in layer  
Noticing everyone is gracious.

Doing what they do, I took off my coat, not being suspicious  
Seems everyone is fond off  
Sociable habits hereof  
In that moment, don't want to say goodbye.

Putting the smile on my face, I left my coat  
I left my coat, which was all about the friendship  
I established on that certain occasion  
I feel attached to them; everything felt cozy with them.

I left my coat has a literal meaning,  
but at the same time,  
It could be metaphoric in the sense that  
I'm fond of them.

It feels so great that you are surrounded by the people  
you adore and cherish, and no matter where they are - near or far,  
they have a space in your heart.

## Crossroads

*Johanna Mae M. Erodias*

The salty air touches my tongue,  
The sound of waves whistling in my ears,  
Oh! The province's intimacy  
Reminds me what I used to be.

My eyes were filled with cars and buildings,  
People are bustling,  
That city lights remind me of what I want to be,  
Reflecting on my independence.

The city educated my mind,  
As what the province reassured my heart,  
What should I choose - my safe place or my responsibility?

## Blinded by the Dark

*Wilmar R. Villaflor*

I've read a poem about something in class  
At the very first, it refers to a woman  
But now I've realized it is about someone  
who would just bite the bait alone

In a forest of kindling, there lives everyone  
In this generation much more important to try something  
Terrible right? But I've got a more terrifying one on Christmas Eve,  
A very terrible gift I've received. I even don't know anything,  
I've trusted someone worth nothing

A lot has happened,  
I didn't even tell I saw everything, but there goes nothing  
I was blind and wounded, trying to catch up with everything  
I ate it up and spit it out

There lives a scar, a year and a half has been thrown on Christmas eve  
There goes the heat using the wine without the bread  
He gave his to someone on Christmas Eve  
Without even realizing what her partner would feel after else

Yes, it's wrong, but I think I'm gone  
This is just another story  
In this life of beauty  
Being well for a day, being broke for a year  
Why did this happen to me?  
Karma isn't blind, honey!




## Grip of Resentment

*Krixiamae L. Palalan*

Time passes by like a whirling wind  
Laughter and memories that we have shared  
Memories that we felt yesterday  
But turned into flashes of memories that fade away

After six years with no father figure  
I just knew that our family will never be the same as before  
My mother's always there for me  
My father, that doesn't mean I don't need you around  
But I think now you're too busy  
With the new family you have found.

I missed the way I used to feel  
The warmth of comfort you made me feel  
But let us go back to today  
That our family is torn apart because you continue to move away.



Father, I have never felt your love  
Of years that you are not with me  
And Now you're reaching out to me  
I just let all the resentment be with me

Father, I have resentment inside me  
And I bury it properly  
When dusk falls, I tear apart  
Yet I heal whenever dawn comes  
When everybody gives voice to  
That "the father is the pillar of the home."  
What makes me doubt it?  
because you don't ever show it.

And if the time comes,  
That you won't feel the love I have for you  
I will still reach out for your hands  
And I will utter my "I Miss You."

# World Peace


*EJ Villanueva*

Wandering in the world of realm.  
People are running for their lives during turbulence.  
I saw how Earth is in a chaotic chain.  
No one could break through and tame.

Gun shots, explosions and children in pain.  
Fathers and mothers' blood sticks and stains.  
Dead bodies of soldiers are on the lane.  
Wrecked vehicles run out of brakes and gasoline.

Pride, envy and undying sin, Steals our humane!  
Developed presence of dangerous keen,  
Carve massacre out of powerful names.

This is not the actual world we aim for.  
But these are what we had attained.  
'Cause our faith from God are fadin'  
We lost track of good to evil.



Now I realize why the world is stern.  
'Cause people are not reuniting.  
They believe in their own terms  
Without listening to the agony of living.

Indeed, from the past, we should learn.  
Just like how the history has shaped.  
Values and beliefs must be proportionally the same.  
Where our ego should know where to turn.

Peace isn't happening overnight.  
And it's not naturally inclined.  
'Cause Peace starts with unifying our insights.  
Then, accepting people in each of our lives.

World Peace is an ideal wish.  
But it would only be possible if we all bow our heads,  
Seek the presence of the Lord.  
And shout for World Peace.



## How About Us?

*Jerwin Guerra*

We're humans, yet unbosoming  
Unique but often unappreciated.

We strive for respect,  
Yearning for acceptance.

Voiceless in this society,  
Unvalued in their eyes,  
Forgotten by people,  
Yet, we're humans, too.

## Chapter 2



**Fiction** is a creative, imaginative piece of writing. This includes *short story*, a brief short narrative with a single setting, *fantasy*, a speculative fiction involving magical elements, *fable*, a story featuring animals like human beings, and a *novel*, a long narrative dealing with imaginative human experience.





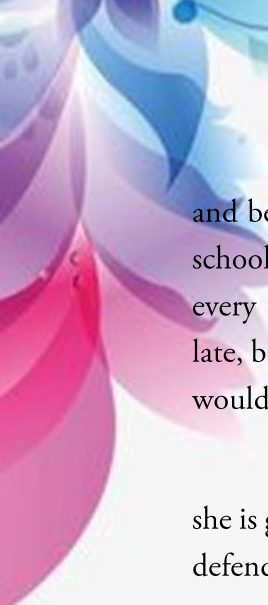
## The Quiet Goodbye That No One Heard

*Ma. Adelfa Tamayo*

Adelaide Zyann Estrada is an 18-year-old girl living a simple life. She is the youngest of nine siblings. She loves to skateboard and, at the same time, listen to music. She wanted to be a policewoman, but her parents didn't like it for her, so she took the education course that her parents wanted for her instead of her dream course. Even if she doesn't want it, she pursued it because she doesn't want to disappoint her parents by disobeying their wants.

One day, while Adelaide was walking down the street, she saw an old man passing by on the highway. She helped him, and the old man talked to her until they came to a distant place. The old man thanked her, and Adelaide smiled at him. She loves helping people, especially those who are old or have disabilities. Before she left, the old man praised her that this remained in her thoughts, "You're a good girl with a big heart. I hope that soon you'll become successful." After that, she headed home after a tiring day in school. She was excited to tell her parents of the good news that she's a dean's lister. After dinner, she told it to her family, but again, it made her sad because she felt her family doesn't care and is still not proud of her. She's tired of showing her family that she's doing her best, yet still, they don't appreciate everything about her small successes.

Also, she felt that all her siblings hated her because when she is sad, they always say that Adelaide is overacting, and sometimes they made fun of her for being soft-hearted. She did know where she would place herself because when she does good things, they still see Adelaide making mistakes

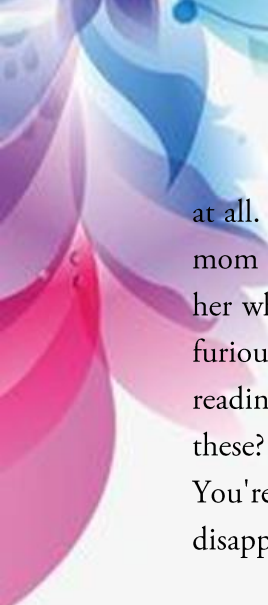


and being lazy. She never felt like being asked if she is okay the whole day in school or how her day in school was, yet they throw bad words at Adelaide every time she comes home late because sometimes she indeed comes home late, but every time she defends herself that their class was overtime, her family would not believe in her and continues throwing bad words at her.

They say that Adelaide is avoiding her work in the house, which is why she is going home late. She just always keeps her mouth shut because when she defends herself, it is disrespectful for them because, in their family, it is very wrong to answer someone older than you. She thinks that everyone in her house hated her. She doesn't know what kind of treatment she receives because everything she does is limited and wrong. Her life is like a roller coaster ride, always doing the same stuff and doing what her family wants for her. Sometimes she feels that she has no rights for herself because she is like a puppet controlling everything inside her, and whatever she does, she doesn't feel that her parents are proud of her.

A day has passed, and while Adelaide was working on her homework at school, she didn't notice that it was already late to go home. While on her way, she was afraid that she'd be punished again by her family. She opened the door of her home, and she wasn't surprised. She was confronted by her sister "Adelaide, you're late again! How brave are you to go home late? Probably you're just hanging out with your worthless friends, or you already have a boyfriend! "


Adelaide was so furious to hear such unjust accusations that she burst into tears. "You don't understand me at all! All of you don't understand me at all! I've always tried my best to be a good daughter, and you all have wanted to be me. I sacrificed my whole life and happiness just to please you all and make you all proud of me, but you didn't even notice or pay attention to my efforts



at all. Why are all of you doing this to me? Huh! Such a drama queen! Look, mom and dad, she is just making excuses to escape her faults! Look! I caught her while she was dating her boyfriend at the school library! " Her mom got furious while looking at the fabricated picture of Adelaide while she was reading at the library with her classmate. "Adelaide, what's the meaning of these? You're too young to have a relationship; haven't we already told you? You're disappointing us! Her Dad was also looking at Adelaide with disappointment.

This time, Adelaide burst into tears, and her whole body seemed to be submerged in the cold water of cruel reality. Her heart seemed to stop beating, and her mind was blank at that time. Her whole world crumbled just like that. She couldn't endure those looks of despair from her parents. All she wanted at that time was to keep silent and slowly close her eyes so she would not hear or see those cruel, judgmental eyes. "Oh my! Adelaide, what is happening to you? Wake up! "Her mom realized that this is not an act of drama as Adelaide seems like she has totally passed out and unconscious; they noticed some bruises on her arms and body like she was tortured and punched by numerous people. They rushed her to the hospital, and there she was diagnosed as a late-stage cancer patient. Leukemia! Of all the cancers, that was the worst choice, as there was no cure for late-stage cancer patients like her.

The whole family seemed to be drowned in despair and guilt, but it was already too late, as Adelaide was in critical condition and in a coma. It was highly likely a miracle that she was still alive until now. We have done our best to keep her life, only a miracle could wake her up." Those words pierced their hearts and souls. They couldn't believe what the doctor said, so they rushed in to the room where Adelaide was admitted. They saw her sleeping peacefully, but there was a tinge of sadness and sorrow in her face that they could vividly



see and remember as her last expression before she passed out. "Adelaide! My sweet heart, I'm so sorry! This is your mom; please wake up! I promise, we will make up for you. Forgive us if we didn't appreciate your efforts. I know we are wrong, so please wake up. Do you hear me, Adelaide?" Her mom and dad, as well as her sister, are full of regrets and sorrow. They want her to forgive them and wake up so as to become a family again.

But it seemed like Heaven has decided that it is time for her to rest. Adelaide looked like she heard her parents as tears flowed in her eyes, yet her heart is slowly stopping to beat. It was already late!" Call the doctor, Adelaide, don't give up, please! Doc, please save my daughter! "As the operating room was filled with the noise of a flat line signifying that someone will pass away, her family was filled with Grief and sorrow as the Doctor declared her final fate.

A month after Adelaide passed away, the Estrada residence was feeling empty and darkly cold. As we witnessed the story of Adelaide, we realized that we shouldn't judge or neglect someone that is dearest to us as there will be a time where they will somehow leave in a painful way we don't expect. So cherish your time accompanying them and never stop loving them.


## The Stage and The Podium

*Ma. Lorraine Anica Calaua*

People would often think that the world of dance and speech and debate is like apples and oranges when they are more of a case of swings and roundabouts. These two worlds don't often collide yet have more similarities than you think. Dance is a sport that creates art through sequences of body movement and dance can be categorised and described by its choreography. Dancers would say that dance is their escape and their constant. Each beat and step give life to the music because the dancers are the heart of each dance. Speech and debate is the use of critical thinking wherein the minds creatively build and create reasoning and stance on different topics like international relations, education, economics, and many more. Debaters see speech and debate as their battle ground where their souls are burning every minute of their preparation and every minute of their speech. Debaters give life and emphasis to different stances, arguments, and evidence on issues our world is and could face.

Dance and Speech and Debate involves more than just an individual but involves and represents a team. Both dance and speech and debate build good relationships between your team because of the need of teamwork. Similarly, you both deliver performances in front of large audiences wherein you bring justice to either your choreography or speech. Both of these are sports where all teams fight for the win and while doing this they exercise their self-confidence and build good foundation of different values like respect, creativity, adaptability, collaboration, and more. Speech and debate and dance is like art, this is the art of expressing what is true and relevant in this world,



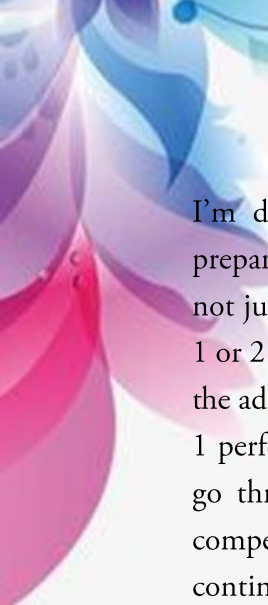


showing the need of urgency for issues, and finally to show who you truly are not just as a team but as an individual.

Being a dancer for the past 6 years of my life, I always thought shifting to the world of speech and debate is impossible because I will be completely shifting gears. In reality, yes I shifted gears but it wasn't as difficult as I thought. Dance has instilled and trained me how to be confident and how I will position myself while performing in front of a big audience, while in speech and debate this was better nurtured because of the constant pressure of performing my speech in front of a crowd. As a dancer and a debater, you would do anything to fulfil your role, keeping up with either the skills or matter needed to be relevant, to be right, and to be true. In both worlds, I fight for what I believe in, I fight for what is right, and I fight for my art.

While there are similarities in both dance and speech and debate there will always be differences present. Dance needs rhythm not just through beats of a song but also through your movement, whereas speech and debate need critical thinking to create different arguments to support evidence that are advantages on the side you are fighting for. Dance is a language beyond words, wherein the sequence of movement is a form of communication to express your beliefs and feelings. While speech and debate are verbal and vocal to fight for their side and fight for what is right. The stage feels and carries the dancer's movements, and the podium will always carry the burden of the debater fighting for their side.

As a dancer, I was physically challenged every single day, to keep up with my teammates and to dance my heart out. Even if there is this challenge, I always keep in mind that after months of preparation and 1 or 2 performances



I'm done I have overcome it. But as a debater, everything is at speed, preparation is not for months and months but just 15 mins, performances are not just 2 to 3 minutes but 7-minute speeches, and performances are not just 1 or 2 times a day but can be 4 or 5 per day. Mental reset per round is needed, the adrenaline rush leaves me speechless every time. Dancing is fulfilling, after 1 performance you would feel that right away. But as a debater, you need to go through a lot before you reach that, going through mentally draining competitions but most importantly competitions that show you why you continue to push yourself and fight for your art and why you continue to stand on that podium and speak your truth. Dance may express all your emotions through your movement, but debate is the game of delusion, you fight for your side and prove you are better, you are the best.

Dance and speech and debate build a good foundation for confidence, courage, and respect for your art. Speech and debate is not a completely different world from dance, but we can better see it as the meaning of the choreography of a dance is translated to words and fought for. Speech and debate are the verbal version of dance; this is the art of arguing what you know is right. There may be differences on how these two arts are shown and shared to the crowd. But at the end of the day, both the stage and the podium will hold what the dancers and debaters believe in and fight for.



# The Ant Who Prayed

*Jim Paul S. Ungsod*

A young award-winning, champion, wise, and a very intelligent bachelor named Max Tonner is heading his way to a verdant, pollution-free, and a small town of Humsik from a busy city. In the said town, there lived his grandparents who took care of him when he was just a little boy. To get to his grandparents' house, he will ride in a tricycle which he will see again after 20 long years of hustling in a modern city.


"How vintage this feeling is. After 20 years of driving myself in my car, I can't seem to ever remember this feeling of riding this thing." Max said to himself as the noise of the tricycle gets inside his ear and the wind blows in his eyes signaling that the tricycle is moving fast.

"Sir, your new here? Are you to vacation?" *Manong* tricycle driver said with full effort to communicate with Max.

"Opo, Manong. Dito po muna ako sa Lolo't Lola ko, may work project po kasi akong gagawin dito sa lugar ninyo." (*Yes, Sir. I'll stay with my grandparents as I have a project here in your place.*), Max replied.

"Ay! Akala ko, sir, di ka nakakapag-Tagalog." (*Oh, Sir. I thought you can't speak Tagalog.*), *Manong* driver said as he scratched his semi-bald head.

"Dito naman ako lumaki, Manong. Ang Mommy ko, mga De Vera ang apelyido." (*I grew up here, Sir. My mom has a De Vera surname.*), Max



respectfully conversing with the driver as he lowers down his 'kasosyalan' (being socialite) and socialize with a local.

"Ah! ganon ba, sir? De Vera pala kayo, kilala po 'yan dito, sir." (*Ah, is that it, Sir? So you're a De Vera; they're well-known here, sir.*). The driver said and Max smiled timidly as he was a little flattered.

As they were taking up their way, Max observes that the land of his childhood has a lot of potential areas that can be transformed into high profit factories and condos. This is his vision because he is a young entrepreneur who invests money on the creation of infrastructures and selling it in market prices to make profits.

This makes Max a busy person who have no time for God. In fact, he works untiringly every single day and spare no word for a simple chitchat with the Lord. He always answers, "Why pray for something when I can attain and achieve it myself?" to those people inviting him to go to church or to any other religious gatherings.

From afar, Max now sees the smiles of his grandparents as they excitedly await him outside the gate of their house. Their house is located beneath a river that is shaded with beautiful mountainous scenery that will fascinate every eye that sees it. The excitement escalates in the face of Max's grandparents as he draws nearer the house.

"At last, the smiles that I've longed the most are now glimpsing in front of my eyes." Max excitedly said to himself as the tricycle slowly stops in front of their gate.


"Apo koooo!" (*My grandson!*), greeted Lola Minda, Max's grandma with a teary eye. They embraced each other tightly as to cover up the years they have separated. Thereafter, Max's grandpa took his turn hugging him and the three of them got inside their beloved house.

"Apo, akin na muna 'yang mga dala mo at ilalagay ko sa kwarto mo. Sundan mo nalang ako apo upang makita mo ang bago mong kwarto." (*My grandson, may I have your baggage and I will bring it in your room.*), instructed Max's Lolo, Lolo Job as he carries Max's bags. "Salamat po, Lolo." (*Thank you, Grandpa.*). Max happily replied to his grandpa whom now entering Max's new room.

"Ito nga pala ang kwarto mo, Apo. Inilagay namin dyaan ang mga litrato mo noong bata ka pa." (*This is your room, grandson. We placed your childhood pictures in there.*), said Max.

Upon having a glimpse of his old room, Max starting playing flashbacks at the time he was free and was able to do anything he wants without having the intervention of unhappy thoughts.

"Apoooo, lunch is served. Hali ka na rito at magtatanghalian tayo." (*Come here now and we'll have lunch.*), shouted Lola Minda with excitement knowing she will be having a meal with his apo after a long time. After, Max hurriedly changed and went to the dining room, upon sitting he smelled his favourite dish, it's the classic Filipino dosh called adobo. As he had his first bite, memories continue flashing beneath his eyes signaling how her grandparents took care of him when he was just a boy. The dine continued,

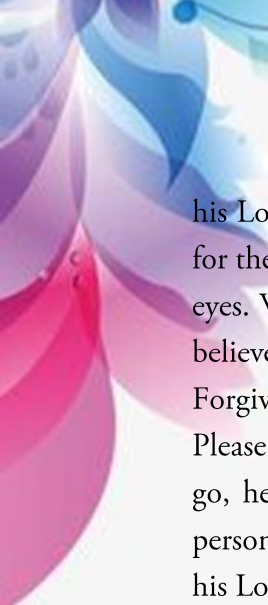


smiles, giggles, laughs, and talks filled the house that afternoon as they were reminiscing the old times. As 6 in the evening approached, Max's grandparents requested him to join them in saying prayers for the usual 'novela' that is commonly done by Filipino families every six o'clock in the evening, but Max refused as a baseline of telling his pagan beliefs.

Lola Minda rebuked him and insisted of joining them. She also reminded Max that above everything, Jesus Christ should be thanked, loved, and shouldn't be deprived of time and attention. After hearing, Max smiled vaguely and joined them as a sign of respect to his grandparents and not because of humbling his heart to the Lord.

As they were praying and of course Max just kneeling, the noise of the rain began to sound from their iron roof indicating a heavy rainfall. Max is interrupted but his grandparents were calmly undisturbed. After several minutes, the river expectedly overflows from its normal range and escalates in their basement which now alarmed Max. He was trying to tell his grandparents but they refused to listen and continued with the novena.

"Lola, Lolo, napasok na po yata ng tubig ang basement natin." (*Grandpa, grandma, I think flood water has seeped in our basement.*), Max told his grandparents but were left unattended. A small cracking sound entered Max's ears and the sound crawls and crawls and was followed by a splash of water. Their window broke because of the river's pressure and entered their house. Lola Minda and Lolo Job were now alarmed but it's a bit too late to act into safety because a lot of water from the river has entered their house. Max swam into the door to open it from it is stocked from the outside. He nervously feared not for his life but for his precious ones. As the water continue to rise,



his Lolo and Lola is deemed scared as they cling to top of their wooden shelf for their lives. Upon seeing, Max had the greatest fear of his life and closed his eyes. With his thoughts, he humbly spoken "Lord, I have sinned. I ceased to believe in you and pursued that everything will be done by my mere abilities. Forgive me, Lord and spare the life of my Lolo and Lola from verge of death. Please, Lord, please. Thank you, Jesus Christ." After letting those brief words go, he heard a voice calling him "Maxxx, Maxxxx." He foreshadowed two persons as he slowly opened his eyes. When we were fully conscious, he heard his Lola Minda speaking.

"Ito talagang batang to, pinagdarasal, aba'y tinulugan lang kami." (*Oh, this son, should've been prayin' but had slept.*), Lola Minda told Max. "Oh sya, pumunta ka na sa silid mo at magpahinga na. Bukas, wag mong tutulugan ang novena Apo ha." (*Okay, go to the bedroom now and have rest. Tomorrow, don't sleep during the novena, grandson.*), she added. Upon hearing Max hugged both Lola Minda and Lolo Job and realized something that evening.

## A Day in the Life of Angkol Tasyo

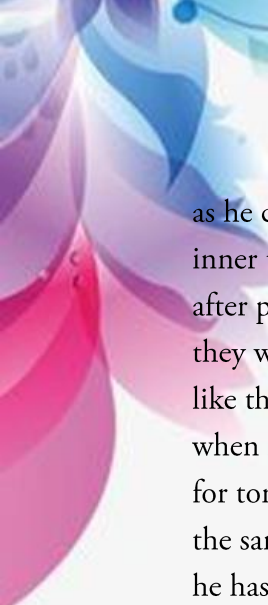
*Kian Mc Cloed T. Alar*

the splattering of rain in the roof  
drowned the rooster's crows  
and the seasonal smell of petrichor  
permeated Angkol Tasyo's nose  
as the dawn breaks  
he rose from the rigid rattan bed  
gargles in a second, after a minute  
disfigured sunny side-ups were served  
drove his princesses to school  
in an old and cranky habal-habal  
that outlived his dear queen  
the only woman he loved in his lifetime  
to the kingdom he builds  
he then fared  
a kingdom with no royalties -  
just scaffoldings yet to be scraped  
later, the whirring of the machines  
and the pounding of hammers  
clashed in deafening unison  
and there he was in the corner  
toils in a tattered t-shirt, tongue-tied  
sweat glistened like crystals,  
while he braved the scorching heat  
and also smoked cigars in intermittent beat



eyebrows furrowed and heads pulsated  
as they gobbled their meager lunch  
the new overseer was snob and stingy  
it was like Nene's uncle but in a plump body  
at exactly four, he invades another land  
to scoop and pack, scoop and pack  
the brownest sugar one could ever find  
an hour for a hundred and fifty is not so bad  
especially if 'bale' is okay for Ante Milag  
a pan de koko and juice is a must  
when he trudgingly walks home  
these were his daughters favorites  
that every day he all tags along  
the twinkles in their innocent, doe eyes  
and the priceless smiles in their faces  
as they munch noisily the food he brought  
puts off his exhaustion and lethargic mood  
in a father's love split second  
that's why he is ready again to meet the pigs  
he forgot to feed earlier because of haste  
all fleshy and healthy, set to be killed in July  
as Aya will bid her elementary days goodbye  
a bowl of sinigang will suffice for dinner  
then they will tune in for Batang Quiapo  
while watching, the two will fall asleep  
and Angkol Tasyo will carry them to bed  
darkness prevails when the lights went off  
darkness also prevails in his thoughts





as he contemplated about life and all  
inner turmoil commence and will roll  
after putting up a fight to battle them  
they will be later shrugged off  
like the alphabet he should have learned  
when he was in primary school with Basyo  
for tomorrow is another tough day  
the same, old tune  
he has been singing all along  
the rooster will crow again  
at the crack of dawn  
but because he truly loves his daughters  
he will continue to go on.



## Oeuvre

*Jayben Matiang*

Someone asked me: What triggered you to create those literary masterpieces?

I smiled, then I replied: “Because of my debt. I mean she loved me so much, and saying a simple I love you too wouldn’t be the best way to pay her love. I made her feel that she isn’t just a normal person for me, that in my literatures I called her as ‘Divine’, my ‘Goddess’ and my everything. I even compared her absence to a rayless depth, or to a world that cannot sustain life. I also compared her smile to a bloomy meadow that could give me a calmness, or to a beautiful sunrise that never failed to enthrall me. But I never compared her literal soul into something, because for me she has no comparison. Imagining a life without her triggered me to create a dying and afflictive poetries. And not to exaggerate, but I meant every words that I wrote on the sheets. I just created art from the most beautiful creation of God that I have ever seen. Before I leave this world, I promised to myself that I will create a thousand more proses and poetries as long as she can read. And she, as my only title and subject”.



# Home

*Jayben Matiang*

Calling you as my ‘home’ might sound cliché, but love doesn’t actually require complicated metaphors in order to be defined. Just like writing a news, sometimes all we need is clear and explicit phraseology in order for everyone to understand – because what’s more heart-touching than to be called ‘home’ when it is the nearest representation of a feeling of how to be kept, loved, and accepted?

It's the threshold of dreams and hopes. A carpentry of love and affection. A fate of safety and comfort – all these things are what pertains to the word “home”.

You see, to define love, you don’t have to build kingdoms, browse a thesaurus, or even compose whatsoever unnecessary exaggerations. Sometimes, all we need is the warmth of someone’s embrace, a shelter when we can’t find ourselves, and to lay our heart in the safest place.

For me, that is love and my home is no other but you.

## The Sanctuary

*Jayben Matiang*

Thou art my sky. The thing that is cognated to heaven and everything celestial. All of my whispers through the falling comets appear'd to be true as thou fill'd the spaces between my fingers. Look, I bled myriad times before, and I have undergone several lamentations which prompt'd my eyes to lose their sparkle. Yet as I found thee, thou brought them back into their initial luminous temperament. And when thou kiss'd my lips and curved a smile, I perceived there was forsooth a realm for me in this vast universe. A realm wherein chaos does not reign supreme. Wherein the turmoil is still lovely. Wherein the nights are less gloomy. When being solitary because of poignant days is not the case. Where love is real and genuine. Withal, I feel as though I have everything I ever need'd because I have thee. Thou art a place with doors open and quiet walls that I can call home. In thine embrace, therein clings tranquility.

O' my love, regardless of labyrinths I shall mislay myself in, thou wilt invariably be my perpetual haven.

## Your Name

*Jayben Matiang*

Your name — my bardic mind has been forging poetries and axioms ever since I heard of it. All of my literary notions and aesthetics that were lawed by stylistics and its branches thoroughly pertain to its very syllables. It is the specific name that I can utter in a prayer with such fluency that my tongue moves in a fluid motion without a trace of doubt and aversion.

It's you, my love, whom I would gladly bestow my surname with. To sign an endless contract of union in front of the divinity and your womb will serve as an engine of creation henceforth we shall bear our own offspring that will act as the yielder of our lineage. To weave an eternity together and not even the ghastly oblivion itself could scrape your name that was engraved in my hypothalamus.

Methinks no other goddess than you when my gaze was allured by your visage. Your body is a temple and I live within its testament. Decaying as I am, yet a conclusion was formed that I shall become your disciple through eons with the hopes that our tale will be immortalized,

Because I have seen it through —

The possibility of forever lies in the depths of your eyes.

## The Pawn's Prelude

*Kat Aguirre*

"Aaandd one, two, three..." Our instructor waved his hands, conducting the choir as though he could touch the quarter and eighth notes with his bare fingertips. I didn't like him. I didn't like how he treated us like babies; how he didn't push us to improve. There was no passion. I mean, we were in second grade, but still.

★ ★ ★

*Breathe in, breathe out.* We walked up the stage, right in the center. Parents crowded in front of their little ones, eager to catch every second on their phones. Then *they* started singing. And by '*they*', I mean the other kids I was with. The stage lights shone so bright it practically blinded me, and the flashes from the cameras didn't help either. It felt like countless pairs of eyes pierced right through me, like they knew I was unprepared. So, I parted my lips, mouthing the lyrics sans sound. Music filled the air, but mine was a silent act—a secret between the stage and me.

In a blink of an eye, it was all over. *It's fine*, I thought; *I can just get away with it by being adorable like all kids do.* I went over to my mother, thinking she didn't know, but *boy*, was I wrong. "You looked like a fish back there. Why weren't you singing?" She asked incredulously. I could feel heat rush to my face, and I wanted nothing but the ground to swallow me whole. From that day on, I vowed never to sing again, out of spite for my mother. I left that R.E.C. class without regret.



The following year, I enrolled in a new R.E.C. class, switching to Piano, where I spent five consecutive years honing my talents. I was one of Ms. Johnson's best students, and she was one of my best teachers. Her strict demeanor held no room for unprepared students, but she was passionate about music. She constantly challenged us to do better, to become the best pianists we could be. In other words, she cared.

Our R.E.C. classes would be hours of intense practice, and she'd make it a habit to watch each of us play the assigned pieces for the week, one by one. She'd rhythmically beat the side of her poor old keyboard over and over again until everyone followed a singular tempo, playing their parts to perfection.

But there would be days when one or two of us couldn't follow. They'd take a moment to compose themselves, cautiously bringing their hands up to their pianos, as though one wrong move would've scalded them. Then they'd start playing, and it wouldn't be long before their hands lost momentum, fingers tripping one before the other, before music no longer filled the room—only the silent, knowing glances passed around the students and the ghost of irregular, dissonant chords.

Ms. Johnson would demand that they stay at the back of the room and rehearse until they got it right. Not once has anyone completed their practice with the meager two hours of class—doing so would've defied the laws of physics. It was humiliating enough that raw tears touched the cold, hard floor before the unfortunate students could stop it. Except me. I read my pieces, studied them, practiced them till I could feel the dull ache in my fingers, knew how to sight read, do arpeggios, the scales, *everything*. I did my job diligently, so when the time came, I'd be ready for whatever she threw my way. And for





a long time, I succeeded. Everybody knew that.

★ ★ ★

We lined up at the side of the room, practicing a run-through of the talent fest. Padding to our spots, we bowed before taking a seat on the lime-colored chair. I took a moment to straighten up.

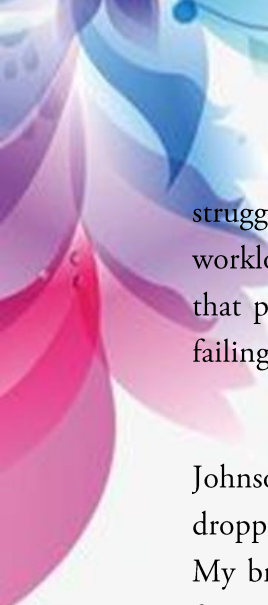
"1, 2, 3..." I count and we start uncoordinated.

"Make your voice louder, Kat. You're the class president. They have to know when to start playing," Ms. Johnson said, and I cleared my throat before counting again, making myself louder this time. We kept rehearsing until the blues in the sky became lavender, until the room became the stage, until the chatter of students became hushed prayers wishing for luck.

We gave ourselves a pat on the back, and it felt as though a weight was lifted off my shoulders. It was finally done. Months and months of practice compressed to two minutes of performance. It was rewarding, in a way. If I could've bottled the melodies we made and gotten drunk on them, I would've. That was back then. Now, it was my poison of choice, leaving a bitter taste on my tongue.

★ ★ ★


I watched as I slowly felt my footsteps grow heavier by the second, as my heart rate went miles per minute to the point where I thought I had a panic attack simply by trekking to the piano room. I had just graduated grade school, bagging three medals in academics and leadership, and I was on top of the world. But I should've been more careful; it's easy to fall from a high place. I



struggled to transition from one department to another; the change in workload insufferable, as though I was swatting a bunch of bothersome flies that permanently crowded me. I started plummeting in a downward spiral, failing to practice one piece after the other.

“I’ll listen to all of you play it one by one. We’ll start with Kat.” Ms. Johnson turned to me, and I felt like I got doused in iced water. My heart dropped to my stomach, burning itself in the acid and spreading it like wildfire. My brows furrowed in concentration, straining to catch the notes with my fingers. And then it slipped away from my grasp until I could no longer read the piece. All I saw were blank lines. My classmates exchanged looks, watching me lose a game of hide and seek with the notes. Paranoia set in. *What key was it in? A Minor? C Major? Is this A or B flat?* Unanswered questions violently swirled through my head, and the familiar silence visited the room once more, shame and humiliation whispering words of failure in my ears. I stopped before I could make it worse. Now I was the one behind the room, catching up with the others.

“How many times do I have to knock some sense into you all for you to *practice your pieces?*” Ms. Johnson berated, voice echoing throughout the room. I took comfort in the fact that I wasn’t the only one behind. As expected, we didn’t finish practicing the piece. The whole session flew by, and it was all over. “Class dismissed. Kat, stay. I’ll talk to you,” Ms. Johnson said with a firm tone, and I watched as my peers left the room, saying their farewells while I was bound to stay, legs stuck to the ground. I was already sifting through countless possibilities of what she’d tell me, dreading every outcome nonetheless. The lump in my throat only got bigger, the sight of her disappointment driving a stake through my chest.



“C’mere, sit,” Ms. Johnson gestures to the chair, and I obediently follow, avoiding eye contact by keeping my gaze on the sad beige floor. After a moment, she breaks the silence.

*“What happened to you?”*

That was all I needed to break down. Tears broke free from their constraints, streaming down my cheeks before making a dark patch on my pants. I used the sleeves of my jacket to keep wiping my nose as an excuse to cover my face. I couldn’t look at her nor show myself to her. I couldn’t even hear her; it was coming in one ear and out the other, too overwhelmed to process her words. I was drowning in tears, in shame, in *everything*. All I did was agree to whatever she said before I found myself hobbling back to my bus, sniffles and soft sighs trailing behind. That was my worst year during my time as a pianist, and it was my last.


★ ★ ★

I was walking around the mall with my dad, a little eight-year-old me brimming with curiosity, when something in the corner of my eye caught my attention. It was a music shop, with various instruments hung on display. The songs I heard made my tiny legs walk toward it like bees to nectar. Dad seemed to notice, so he turned to speak.

"What is it?"

"Nothing."

It was a piano. I didn't think we could afford it at the time, nor would he agree to buy it, so I ripped my gaze off the glass and walked right past it. The next thing I knew, the same piano was nestled snugly in our living room.



I turn to look at my father in disbelief.

"What's this?"

"A piano." He shrugged nonchalantly.

"But I don't know how to play."

"Then learn to."

Sometimes I wonder what my life would be like if I had never seen the piano on display. *Would I have chosen another class? Maybe another R.E.C. center? Would I have been just as good, or would I have been better?* I guess I'll never know.



"Merry Christmas!" My mother chirped, pushing a giant rectangular cardboard box into the living room. It was half as tall as her, the top of the box reaching just past her hips.

I already knew what it was. Even so, I still asked.

"What's this?"

"A gift from your dad," she replied.

It was a piano. He bought another to replace the old one, which was tainted yellow with age and had several white keys dislodged from constant use. It looked pretty.

But I didn't want to play anymore.



The pandemic hit, and I left school during the lockdown. Whenever I left my room, I'd avoid glancing at the brand-new piano, collecting dust as it rotted away. It never felt the same. I missed the way my fingers glided swiftly as I played, the way we'd rehearse the same thing for hours on end, the claps and cheers of the audience as I bowed with my classmates—all of it.

I took pride in the fact that I was Ms. Johnson's most loyal student, having stayed for five years when no one else did. But now I know I didn't love piano. Not anymore.

I was ready to let go.



"Alright. *Taegeuk* one, *sijak*," Coach Jose said loudly, and I immediately began doing the *poomsae* form, landing a series of low blocks and middle punches.

I transferred back to my old school for senior high, and I decided to try something new, switching from Piano to Taekwondo. It's a stark contrast, but I've grown a lot since the pandemic. I was no longer the goody two shoes; the little miss perfect. The old me was dead; I buried her myself.

Once again, I found myself dissatisfied with my new instructor. Coach Jose only did the bare minimum. He'd make us practice the same things over and over again. He often canceled training or asked his colleague to substitute, and then complained about having insufficient time. He wasn't dedicated to training me or my classmates. It felt like being stuck in quicksand, with each



movement sinking me deeper into stagnation. I couldn't make progress, and I hated it. I wasn't thriving at all.

"*Baro*." I brought my fists up to my solar plexus and then down my hips, signaling the end of my form.

★ ★ ★

The sign-ups for Intramurals finally opened, and I immediately went to the board where the papers were posted. I was a little bummed to see Taekwondo excluded, but I scribbled my name in there anyway, right under the word '*Chess*'.

I already had experience in that sport during my last Intramurals as a neophyte, so I wasn't necessarily veering too far away from my comfort zone. I knew I could guarantee a spot on the chess team considering our history from when we first started. Now, all I had to do was practice playing.

Our co-captain was adamant that we play against each other in a round-robin style for her to gauge our skills and formulate a strategy for board placement. Usually, there'd be six players and six boards. Board One, Two, and Six often housed the strongest players, usually the captains and co-captains of each team, while Board Three, Four, and Five often held what we liked to call the '*wild cards*'. It was a polite term to refer to the weaker players. Knowing the status quo, teams would sometimes arrange their placements to make it so that their strongest players would be placed somewhere in the middle, like Board Three, to guarantee a win, knowing that the middle boards were a weak spot. I won a couple of matches against my teammates, placing me in Board Two.





It was finally the first day of the chess tournament. I had slept a full eight hours the night prior to ensure I'd be in my best condition. We had just gone from the Athlete's Parade, and, to be brutally frank, the lack of time to practice our positions caused us to completely butcher our part. It wasn't the end of the world, though.


It was just the beginning.

We headed straight to Mere Maria Hall, where our tournaments would be held. Our first match started at nine. I opened the door, and a gush of cold wind hit my face. It was unbearably freezing inside, as though we were packaged meat locked in a walk-in refrigerator. Other teams had already set up camp in their corners of the room, bringing their blankets and stuffed toys, making themselves comfortable before the incoming match. We sat next to the seniors when I felt the tension in the air, increasing with every tick of the chess clock. It was as though everyone wore masks, acting a certain way to prevent others from knowing their strategies and finding a weakness in them. It thrilled me to partake in that little game of ours.

I drowned myself in mac n' cheese out of sheer anxiety. The coaches arrived. They'll be facilitating our games for the two whole days of the tournament. One was in his late twenties or early thirties; the other was a much older man, most likely a senior citizen, with how the wrinkles and crow's feet adorned his face. It reminded me of Master Oogway and Shifu from Kung Fu Panda. They were both laid-back and reserved, but the way they spoke told tales of experience. The younger man steps into the middle of the room.

"Everyone," he called out, "we will only be having five boards instead





of six, so adjust accordingly. Thank you.” And then he walked back to the table meant for both coaches. I turned to our co-captain.

“What was that?”

“One of the teams only has five members, I think.”

“Ah, I see.”

The younger man announced once more. “We’ll be starting in a few minutes.” I felt adrenaline coursing through my veins, my body igniting with anticipation. I had so much energy that I could run laps around the school. Instead, I ate more of the mac n’ cheese, hoping I could swallow the anxiety down with it.

And then they called us in for our first match.

Everyone collectively groaned in exasperation, unwilling to face off against their respective opponents, but it had to happen. We huddled together as a team, saying our prayers and wishing each other luck.


“If you can’t win, give them a hard time,” our co-captain reminded us.

I approached my table and sat with my opponent. I was pretty confident until I heard her say one word: *Coach*.

Then it dawned on me. He was her coach. She was in Chess Varsity.

I wasn’t.

It didn’t take long before I found out she was also the team captain for their batch. All the blood drained out of my body, but if there’s one thing I



can be good at, it's keeping a straight face. I hid my look of surprise and made small talk to size her up, much to my dislike.

“Are you in varsity?”

“Yes.” She nodded.

“How long?”

“Five years.” My heart stopped.

She grinned, and it felt like I was some piece of meat—something she could prey on.


“Get ready,” the coach announced, shaking me out of my thoughts. “Shake hands and start your clocks.”

It was all over before it even began. Still, I didn't go down without putting up a good fight. She was able to corner and checkmate me with her queen and bishops, but I at least tried to force a trade of queens with her twice. I accepted my fate with open arms.

Another match ensued right after the previous one, and this time we were against the freshmen. I've heard the batch had a pretty bad record of winning in chess, but I kept my guard up, refusing to underestimate them. I was against a timid-looking girl, and she seldom made eye contact with me. It gave me some semblance of hope. Once again, I sized her up, making small talk.

“How long have you been playing chess?”

“About a year,” she replied, voice almost a whisper, “how about you?”



“I’ve been playing since I was seven, but it was an on-and-off thing,” I replied, not giving away too much. “Good luck.” I smiled through my face mask.

“You too.”

I messed up. We were neck-to-neck, checking each other’s kings and making the same amount of illegals, but my pride got the best of me. I moved my king to a side where she was able to trap and checkmate me with her queen. I felt like an *idiot*. *Why didn’t I see that coming?* I internally screamed in my head, only looking up to notice that spectators had been crowding around us the whole time.

They saw me *lose*.

I practically limped over to my teammates, who patted me on the back with a sad smile. The familiar lump on my throat appeared again before I shoved it back down with a gulp, simultaneously blinking back tears.

“Are you okay? You look like you’re gonna cry,” my teammate said. I quickly shook my head. We huddled again, whispering words of comfort to the ones who had lost.

★ ★ ★

We ate lunch before going back to the hall again, ready for the second onslaught of matches.

We were against the sophomores now. Usually, their batch performs exceedingly well, together with the seniors. I suppose it’s because both batches will have to graduate soon, so they’re putting their all into it. I never knew how

much of a powerhouse they were until we went against them.


My opponent was a much taller, more talkative person than the previous one. I greeted her and asked the usual questions, finding out she was also in varsity. This time, I opened up a bit more, cracking jokes here and there. She seemed like a fun person to talk to.

Then we started the clock.

We pretty much had the same opening. Our pieces were in good positions, gearing towards development. And then we found ourselves staring a hole through the left half of the chessboard, where most of the tension accumulated. There were countless forks and set-up baits and pieces on the defense, all of them at a standstill, awaiting our next moves. Soon, we'd be capturing them left and right, and it felt as though a coil was slowly tightening, waiting to snap like a ticking time bomb.

I glanced at our clock. I had only two minutes left. I avoided moving anything from the left side of the board and focused on the right and center, forming a plan on the spot to checkmate her king, only to come up with nothing. Her pieces were fiercely defending each other, forming a barricade between my pieces and hers. My mind went blank, unsure what to do.

I glanced at the clock once more. *Twenty seconds left.* I'd be flagged down if my timer ran out, and that wouldn't be a good thing. *So, I thought, if I can't win, then I'll at least try to end in a draw.* And so I tried. I glanced at the clock for the third time, looking at the number of moves I had made. *Forty-six moves. Four more, and I can claim a draw.* The fifty-move rule meant a player could claim a draw if no capture or check had been made at that point. And there haven't been any.



*Ten seconds left.* I felt desperate, repeatedly moving my king to reach fifty moves, clawing at the chance of getting a draw.

I reached fifty moves, and I immediately paused the timer, raising my hand to confirm the draw. Then the coach clarified that it wasn't; it only happens in the endgame, when only one or two pieces are left with the king.

But we still had several pieces left.

My timer ran out, and we shook each other's hands, exchanging names as well as *'Good games'* and *'Thank you'*. I was happy to play with her, even though I lost. Her win was well-deserved.

We went straight to another row of tables to play with the seniors. I groan in exhaustion, mentally fatigued from the matches that seemed never-ending. I sat down again, facing my opponent. I made the usual small talk to gauge her skill.

“How long have you been in chess?”


“About two years, give or take, but I only started training seriously the year before.”

“Ah, are you in varsity?”

“No, actually.”

I chuckled softly. “That’s good to know.”

We cracked jokes and shared laughs, and I couldn't help but fall in love with chess even more, along with the community it fosters. I can't remember the last time I genuinely enjoyed something.



We prepared for the match, fixing the chessboard and our clock. She goes for a handshake. I respond with a fist bump.

“Oh, you’re left-handed?” She asked, a slight surprise evident on her face.

I laughed. “Yeah, that’s why I fist bump ‘cause otherwise, I’ll have to twist my arm,” I replied. In chess, you had to use just one hand, usually your dominant one. Using two hands is forbidden.

“Me too!” She exclaimed. I felt glad to meet a fellow lefty.

She won the match, and we congratulated each other. I didn’t feel bitter about it. It felt like exchanging a win for a new friend.

“You’re really good,” I said. “Good game.”

“Good game,” she replied. “You were on my level too, you know. I made some mistakes, and you didn’t let me get away with it.”

“Seriously?”

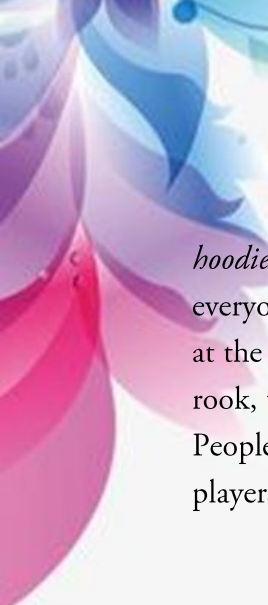
“Yeah, you noticed it right away.”

“Damn right, I did.” I laughed. “I felt intimidated at first when you started moving the pieces ‘cause you looked mad when you did it,” I admitted.

“Oh, no.” She lifted her arm. “I just have a heavy hand.”

I exchanged names with the second friend I made and watched my other teammate play, considering I finished early.





He was on the last board against *‘that one senior with the navy blue hoodie’*, as we liked to call her. They were both roughly on the same level, so everyone was curious as to how their match would play out. They were already at the endgame. My teammate had forty seconds remaining with his king and rook, while the senior only had her king left. Our team had the upper hand. People crowded in front of them, whispering strategies as though they were the players in the match.

“*Forty seconds,*” I whispered to our co-captain, panic evident in my tone.

“It’s going to be a stalemate,” she replied, dreading the outcome.

The anticipation was killing everyone. My teammate shakily lifted his rook, moving it *painfully slowly*, placing it on the square before hesitantly removing his hand like the chess piece connected to his skin. He looked like he was on the verge of tears.

As expected, it ended in a stalemate. The senior couldn’t make any legal moves, and her king wasn’t in check either. Everyone clapped, and as if on cue, my teammate broke down.

We all rushed to his side, patting his back and comforting him. It was his first time in a chess tournament, so winning a draw for the team was already a big deal. Because of the draw, both teams gained four and a half points. We were tied with the seniors.

★ ★ ★

The second day came, and again, I made sure to go to sleep early. I haven’t won my team any points yet, but this time, I know I will. Our last



match was against the neophytes, and then we'd be playing Blitz, which was the second category of the tournament. It's a chess match between two people from each team playing on a five-minute timer with a one-second increment. Usually, it was the captains and co-captains from each team, but it depended on who the strongest players were. The entire team, on the other hand, would play in the Classic category with a thirty-minute timer, but since we started late yesterday, we were forced to play for twenty minutes with a five-second increment.

We sat down to face the neophytes, anxiety now just coming down from its high. I was pretty confident I'd win this one, having spied on their practice earlier with the rookies to gauge their skill. For the last time, I engaged in conversation to make small talk.

"How long have you been in chess?"

"Oh, just this year," she replies, "how about you, *Ate*?"

"I've been playing since I was seven, but it's on and off," I replied. "Good luck to you," I said with a small smile.

"*Ate*, what's your rating po?"

I tilted my head in confusion. "You mean in chess.com? Uhm, last time I checked, it was fifteen hundred."

"Fifteen hundred?" Her eyes widened, looking at her teammates. "*Hala, ayoko na.*"

I immediately retracted my statement. "Oh, uhm, I don't really play there anymore, Lichess is better, plus it might've decreased now." I nervously



chuckled, not letting my pride get the best of me this time.

Needless to say, she put up a good fight. She had me spending three whole minutes contemplating my next move after she took her bishops out and threatened my knights, but I was able to win with the ladder mate using my rooks.

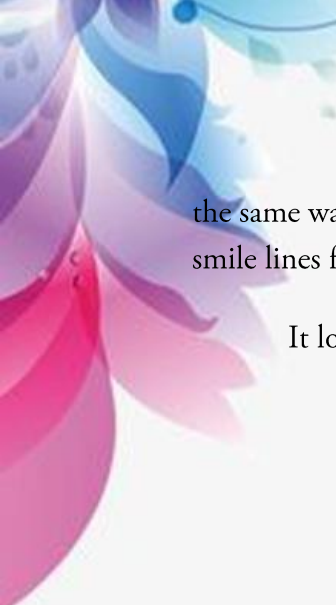
I wasn't part of the Blitz category, so I could've left by then, but I stayed in the hall to show support for my teammates. In the end, we managed to bag third place for Blitz. Everybody took pictures for remembrance, and I made sure I took some with the two new friends I made. It felt incredibly rewarding to see the triumphs and hardships of the people around me, to be in a place where people loved the same thing in the same way. I felt seen and understood.

★ ★ ★

I saw chess in a different light that day. Where your watchful eyes saw the light and dark squares and pieces in wood or plastic, mine saw an empty, barren land. Soldiers emerged from either side, marching to the front lines, while war masterminds orchestrated their victory through a battle of wits. They would kill and capture, piles of useless bones turned into mere figures, until the sands from the hourglass ran out, until one raised their flag in surrender, tasting salt on their cheeks from their fruitless labor.

And when the dust has settled, and everything has fallen into a deafening silence no louder than bombs dropping, you'll see who won and who learned.

Images of the older coach flashed across my mind again, and it made me think of a life where I'd spend my time playing with people who saw chess



the same way I did, and I'd keep playing until my dark hair turned white, and smile lines formed on my face. My heart swells at the thought.

It looked like a life worth living.

# Play Ball

*Monty E. Bautista*

I realise I'm in the best place when I'm far away from it.

I'm yards away when I look back and get to watch them all come together near home, no doubt exchanging unserious trash-talk with barely hidden amusement. It is truly an honour and privilege.


The fourth floor of the sports complex is a wide open space made of four sides, a high ceiling, huge windows, and four teams of four different sports: cheer, track and field, football, and softball.

Cheer is always the loudest, either because of their warm-up music or their actual cheering. Track and field is always practising two other sports besides the regular running: javelin and discus throwing. Football's one main piece of equipment always finds its way to other areas. Softball is where I always go.

It was never meant to become so weighty on my shoulders and immovable from my life. But it did, the sneaky thing. Now, it's never leaving and I have to haul a heavy bag almost every day.

But where this is actually supposed to start is in our area, our little slice of the fourth floor.

When one is in the softball team, one must dump their things either on the floor or on the three-level pink bleachers, with very little ceremony and a significant amount of fatigue, whether because of the tiring academics that held court just ten minutes ago or the fact that it's barely 8 AM on a rest day.



Then, one will have an entire menu of actions at one's disposal.

One may change into training clothes in the small bathrooms to our left and right, and gamble with your bladder on whether the doorknob will turn or not.

One may start eating a pre-training snack. (Don't. You and your abdomen will die during warm-up. It's not worth it. Turn back.)

One may lay down on the never swept floor and sleep, while one's teammates lay down beside one and talk.

One may start horsing around with one's teammates, blowing bubbles or shooting Nerf guns that the adorable rookie brought in as that day's plaything.

Whatever one decides, one will always be surrounded by a teammate, coaxing one into joining them in playing games, fiddling with toys, sharing gossip, promoting a student event, or even just eating. This is the thing separating us from the others; the ineffable bond of the softball team. Get used to it, get into it (you might as well while you're there).

A few feet away, Coach calls us over to him. He's a man taller and stronger than all of us, but he's nice and taught us everything we know. Granted, he can be too nice when he needs to be stricter and vice versa, but he also joins in on whatever joke we've decided to repeat for the rest of the day, so it's not that big a deal.

"Team, JV game, next week Monday, the 15th. Just like last year, *kayo*—" Coach looks and gestures at us, the varsity team, occupying majority of the circle—" *sasali kayo para makapaglaro tayo ng totoong game.*"

Cheering is automatic. When you're in a team enough to fill the positions but not enough to fill them twice without repetition, getting any chance to compete, whether it's an actual game or just a tune-up one, is more exciting than a homerun. I crane my neck left and right, glancing at my teammates and letting my smile get wider as I listen to their playfully innocuous banter.

“Hey, *wag mo 'kong i-tag out*, ha?”

“Oh, *ikaw lang i-ta-tag ko*. Watch me.”

“Bunt *kaya ako?*”

“*Wag na!* You can't bunt worth a damn— *'di ka manlang marunong!*”

“*Ikaw rin naman eh!*”

“Guys, *galingan n'yo*, ha! This is your opportunity to show off.” Our captain, Hallie, grins at us. She's a well-built catcher that's both cute and absolutely vicious whenever we fumble the play.


Coach laughs. “*Mamaya na yung teams kapag magba-batting na tayo, pero ngayon*, five laps!”

Groaning is automatic.

Stretching, five laps—we're doing them while trash talking each other. I'm still laughing at their antics when we finish suicides.

When it's time to get started with catching and throwing, I'm waving to the only Sophomore on the team. “Lia, you're with me.”





She nods from where she leans on the threshold to the fire exit, still catching her breath along with a few others while small gusts of wind whip their way through. (We will end up closing the doors later, but only after we've risked another ball to the gaps between the railings, still catching our breaths once it's back in a glove.)

I run over to the equipment and rummage around in our battered red crate for a good ball; one that feels nice on the hand but doesn't slip around in a glove; one that doesn't give if you dig your fingernail in.

Not many of our balls are like that anymore, but I still find one. It's big in my hand but sits well enough in my palm. There's a couple of nicks here and there, some rough patches and a lot of dark areas. Carlos is written on it, a faded permanent marker name. I used to think that was the brand, that whoever owned and left it wanted the brand to be remembered. I've asked Coach, though, and he said Carlos was a pitcher and captain, one of the best that the team ever had. This was hers. It's had a lot of players come and go.

It's the softball team, and I'm part of it.


I toss it up, waiting for my thoughts to finish their own five laps. *The ball is just a ball, not a metaphor.*

I call Lia over and she comes running, somehow always with a lot of energy during drills and seemingly none in between.

Throwing and catching is usually done right in front of our bleachers, spacing according to the large rectangle on the ground. Two long lines and four shorter lines in between them, making three smaller rectangles.

I stand on the edge of the first line and Lia's a foot away from the second.





We start with under handing. It stretches your arm and warms up your joints, but it doesn't last very long because soon, Coach is yelling to start overhand. This is where the true fun of throwing and catching begins.


You see, because I'm on the edge and Lia's not, she's the one that's gotta move back and back until the last line, the edge of the larger rectangle. You can't throw that hard but you can't throw that soft. There's a balance; a line to toe. Along with that, you have to target your throw. Look where you want it to go. Then, when you have to catch, it's a game of moving backward or forward. How much do you move? Where's your glove supposed to be? What's the angle of the one-bounce ball? Move closer to the ground or keep still?

If you're not used to catching, you'd be asking all those questions. After a year for me, though, catching is almost second nature; throwing, not so much.

In training, it's easy. The ground is even and stable. You can plant your feet pretty well. There isn't a point on the line. Nobody's really judging you. It doesn't mean much if you miss either catch or throw. It's a non-problem.

In a game, it's worse. I can't speak for the rest of my team, but even after I call out the play, I still forget where to throw. I feel like a jerk for hoping that it'll be over before it gets to me, that someone else is screwing up, that I'm not the reason we just let two batters run home. It's such a big problem that your captain is yelling at you and all you want to do is get off the field.

The thing is that everyone is essentially backing up two people: the pitcher and the catcher. Whatever mistake it is, we're there to make sure it doesn't end with a wider point gap



I'm there for you, cheering you on, covering behind you, until I have to take responsibility. Did I say that's the fun of throwing and catching? I meant that it's the beauty and the beast of throwing and catching.

Lia's all the way to the fourth line.

My arm winds itself automatically, and when the ball is finally released, I feel a twinge right above my elbow. A familiar pain, fixable with a line of muscle tape wrapped around. I've never really known if the placement's right, but it seems to work for my other teammate, so I tell myself it will work. Otherwise... it hurts.

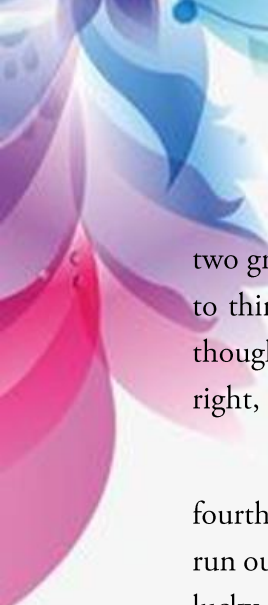
It veers off the left and I've overshot it.

"Sorry!" I yell while she runs to get it, with a smile and a small laugh. It's a non-problem.

I catch it when Lia throws it back, even though it does become a ground ball. Her form isn't all that correct—not that I'd correct her with any information other than "*paabutin mo!*"—but ground balls are easy balls at this point, right?

Fielding. I used to be good at it, back when teenagers two years above me were watching. I'd put extra effort in, not that they would say anything about it.

Now that they're gone, I don't know if I'm good at it anymore. While the other infielders—almost all of which are newer players—receive their grounders like it just gravitates to them and throw it back with seemingly no effort, I'm constantly pushing my thighs and lungs to their limit, raising my leg in time with my throw because I can't even balance without it.



Remember the two long lines and four shorter lines? We're split into two groups, according to our positions in-game. Infield is made up of the first to third basemen, shortstop, catcher, and, you'd think, pitcher. For fielding, though, pitchers go to the outfield group, which has the rest of outfield: left, right, and centre.


Infielders start on the second shorter line, outfielders beyond the fourth, all of us on the further long line. Infielders *have* to start on the side, run out as soon as Coach hits a ball with a bat. Outfielders don't get that very lucky honour. As second base, guess where I get to start.

I get the first ball. It's not the correct form but I get it anyway so it's alright. When I throw it to Hallie, it hits the wall behind her instead of her glove. Someone yells at me to target. Doesn't matter who, I know what to correct before they say it.

Next one, I don't. It passes right under my glove because it's not flat on the ground. I laugh about it but I can feel my head getting hotter and my jaw tightening. Is it the drill or embarrassment? No time to think because Julia, our centre outfielder, covers for me. From her, the ball cuts to me and I throw it back to Hallie. Reset.

The rest of the grounders are mine due to what I can safely say is a sheer stubbornness to stop missing them, with a fifty-fifty ratio of perfect and imperfect targets. My thighs are burning up and my lungs could fall out of my chest but it's outfield's turn now. I have to stay where I am, watch the ball as it flies up and past me, and catch it when Julia throws it back.

I catch two, on account of one being head-level and the other pop-fly. We have to make up for it with two more outfield balls but I'm grinning inside



because hell, I caught two balls meant for outfield, all the better for an actual game. Look at me go, guys! Now stop yelling “target!”.

*The ball is just a ball, not a metaphor.*

When Julia and I finish up, we run left to the long inner line, then towards each other, high-fiving with the backside of our gloves.


All’s said and done when Coach calls, “Water break! *Tapos batting tayo!*”

Today, Coach is pitching and we’re running bases after each hit. First hit, run to first, walk to dugout. Next hit, run to second, walk to dugout. On and on until the last hit where you pretend you hit a homerun.

Batting’s a fun time. I’ve gone from not even a batter in my first year, to second batter this year. The sound of the head of the bat connecting with a ball is one of the best things a person could hear. Knowing someone couldn’t field my grounder rocks this giddy feeling through my nervous system.

Batting’s a good time. I can see clearly where and how I’ve improved, and where and how else I need to improve. Whether I should swing harder, upwards, or stop trying to be like Mora, our pitcher and captain last year, who always hit flying homeruns.

Batting’s an okay time. It’s kind of hard to translate training to game, even more so than throwing and catching. Pitchers have their own styles, the sun is blasting your eyes even though you’ve got a cap *and* helmet on, the ground is a sandy dirt you’re not used to, and the umpires have the tendency to make bad calls.



Batting's a bad time. Hand-eye coordination is a specific, difficult to develop thing. When it's game time, you've got two coaches and your entire team screaming chants and advice at you when you just want them to shut up, yelling "*kung strike, labas, kung ball, iwan*" when they never even clarified what the hell that means.

Batting feels like a whole different ball game. There's such a thing as a strike zone. It encompasses the space from your elbows to your knees when you're in position.


As soon as the ball is released, it's either a ball or a strike. Strikes are within the strike zone (obviously) and balls are outside it.

If it's a ball, you're not meant to swing. You're lucky if it's a ball and you don't swing. You're lucky if you get four balls and you never swung. That means walking to first base. You're slightly less lucky if you get hit by the ball. That's also a walk.

If it's a strike, well... If it's fast, you have to let your bat out quicker. If it's slow, it's harder to tell. You have to hit it hard so it goes far and fast, and if you can do that, you better hope it's in a blind spot the infielders are too slow to get to and outfielders are too far apart for. If you hit it upwards, it better be a homerun, or, again, in a blind spot that'll confuse the players about your pop-fly.

Three strikes and you're out. Two strikes and a third strike dropped or missed by the catcher, and you can run to first. Two fouls and that's two strikes. It's a lot of rules nobody tells you until after the commotion dies down.

None of that matters once you've actually hit it though. You're filled with enough nervous energy that all you care about is batting the ball inwards then running to first base. Here's the thing; the ball is always faster than the



player. Hopefully, the throw isn't strong enough or not targeted perfectly and you make it. Otherwise, you're devastated to be faced with and only with the sight of the first baseman catching the ball before you get past even halfway the distance between home plate and first base.

Fun time.

I have it easier in training. Nerves aren't as bad in training. I'm hell in sneakers when I'm batting in training, hitting Coach's pitches hard and first time. But only because I know his pitches. They're fast and accurate. If I let my bat out as soon as he lets the ball fly, I'm likely to hit it. I know I've got some muscle in me so it'll hit the ground and run pretty far on a smooth ground.


It's the same case with the good pitchers. The strike zone is a fairly big area, so major league pitchers know they can put their ball anywhere in it and *they do*. High school level pitchers, not so much. If they're *that* great, they can pitch over and over, and it'll be a strike, but for the most part, they don't deviate from the invisible line going straight to the catcher's glove. The part that separates them from the rest with good accuracy is the speed and strength. Just like with Coach, you just have to get out before them. That's why I like the good pitchers with fast strikes, and why I hate the bad ones with both balls and strikes.

I'm not worried about batting for the JV v. V game. For the most part, I know all our pitchers and I can bat against them. Instead, I worry about running faster, get faster, *go faster, make it there, don't slip and don't overstep*.

After the last batter, Coach makes us gather around him. Team time.

My team has four of the six JV players. I also have the catcher in my year, the two pitchers and an outfit elder from the year above, and Lia.





The other team has both our captain catcher and co-captain pitcher, another pitcher who's naturally good, two infielder/outfielders from my year, a player that's been on the team since last year, and another who's not so good, plus the other two JVs.

I resign myself to the fact that we're definitely not going to win as we walk back to our area. This is not something I'm upset about. At the very least, I feel it an honour and a privilege to play against your own team, see them put their efforts to good use against you.

The fact of the matter is that the team is split up. Them winning means the team won. Maybe not to the same effect as winning against another team from another school, but a win is a win.

I'm happy to see you hit a homerun! Yes, catch the pop-fly! Fine, tag me out!

Just tag out the other team from the other school. Catch their pop-fly. Hit a homerun against their pitcher, one that makes all the outfielders run far away from their regular positions, one that raises your Runs-Batted-In by four.


So, I square my shoulders and puff up "against" Reese, one of the pitchers in my year.

"*O, ano? Ano?* What'chu got?" I laugh out with fake intimidation, still laughing when she does it right back.

Quickly, cooldown is over and we're cleaning ourselves up.

"Bye! *Ingat!*" I yell behind me, feeling a smile form at the chorus of byes I hear as I walk towards the elevator. Fourth floor of the sports complex, no way am I taking the stairs.





Nobody else is in the elevator so I get time to contemplate, to remember the first. JV v. V, circa March 2023. That one was something else—my first year of softball was something else.

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Tryouts for Varsity were in the beginning of the year, but I missed it. My mother and sister contracted something and brought it home for me, like a terrible present. I decided a week later that it wasn't that big of a deal, that I didn't really care about Varsity, but the whole forgive and forget never made sense to me, so to this day they're banned from our games.

When I got back to school and attended training (for the very first time, mind you), Coach defaulted me into Varsity.

I wished for time to stop and the world to slow down so I could consider my options. Yes, I wanted to try out for the team, but that was because I had a very excitable acquaintance—now best friend in the team—who texted me. Yes, I wanted to try out for the team, but I didn't expect to pass.

No, time didn't stop and the world didn't slow down. Instead, I nodded jerkily and stuttered out a “sure”, eyes wide and mouth probably gaping like a fish. Do I know what everyone else who was actually, truly, genuinely Varsity was thinking or even reacted like? Could I tell if they wanted me there? Absolutely not, I practically blacked out when Coach started talking to me.

*Can I even do this? Do I deserve a Varsity position? Am I good enough to play this sport?*



It ended up going okay. The undergrads were a pretty cool couple of people and the graduates were... less than fine, equaling an incredibly mediocre experience.

And then came the day of my first JV game, as a part of Varsity. There was one issue; JV only had two members, which totaled to nowhere near enough for two full teams. Coach's solution? Invite the old guard, former players.

They were so awesome.


They dumped their stuff not on the bleachers they once had, but on the floor an entire washroom away. They didn't get much time to practise, but were somehow still on our level.

Their pitcher? Carlos.

The only other time I was that nervous was when I had to give a speech in a language I wasn't familiar with, when I had to perform in front of the entire school. The thing is that they were the ones doing this before me. They know what I'm supposed to be doing, what my form should look like, how fast I should be, etc.

I didn't hit a single pitch. This thing that's bright and kind of big and not even going that fast; I couldn't hit it. A swing and a miss. I hadn't learnt yet that not believing in yourself makes you a bad player and we were coming off a couple of actual game losses in a row. To say I was not in the right headspace to aim the heavy end of the bat would be an understatement.

Thankfully, I got to walk and steal a couple bases. I put effort into that to make up for the fact my batting had crapped the bed. Still didn't feel enough.



I don't remember winning or losing; you'd think for such an important game, I'd remember the feeling of winning against those that were so good and are still so good, or losing with the satisfaction of having played against them at all.

What I do remember is huddling up with everyone—both former and current. Hands in, face down or away, and yell, “Softball... team!”

Yeah, we have no official name. To this day, we don't have one.

But we're still a team. A team now pitted against each other once more.

— — —

It's the day of my very second JV game so I go through the motions of the stretching, the five laps, the catching and throwing, the fielding, the batting. Go get the ball that went too far and no one's willing to get while Coach calls everyone over to start the game.

I realise I'm in the best place when I'm far away from it.


*Cover your bases.*

I'm smiling to myself when I hear them yell their playful threats and predictions. I pick up the ball, the nicks and dark areas, the slightly too big for my hand.

*The ball is maybe more than just a ball, maybe a metaphor.*

*Step up to the plate.*

I wind up my arm and feel that twinge. Feel the heart start to race and the palms start to sweat. All the better for gripping the ball, maybe. Feel the



smile start to widen and the laugh reach its way out of a pit of anxiety Feel the bundle of nerves the size of my strike zone.

*Let me show you that I can do what I want you to do. Let me show you I can make good plays against another team from another school. I can hit a homerun. I can catch a pop-fly. I'm just as good as you, damn it, you'll see. I'm on this team for a reason, I wasn't just let in.*

*It ain't over 'til it's over. I can do this.*

“Hey!” I yell. With the ready form of a ball about to be thrown, almost all gloves go up, ready to catch.

The ball flies, making the distance. Someone catches it. Something that physically weighs so little yet emotionally weighs tons is so easily put back into the crate of other weighty balls.

We line up on either side of the tape forming a home plate shape on the ground, high-fiving as we walk past each other with an obligatory “good luck”.

“Play ball!” Coach yells out.

Catch it, throw it, field it, bat it. Get the ball and prove yourself.

# Chapter 3



**Non-Fiction** is a literature genre based on fact and real events. This includes *essay*, a concise piece of writing to inform and convince the reader about a topic, *personal narrative*, a prose narrative related to personal experiences, and *anecdote*, entertaining stories about real people and incidents.

## **Developing Skills and Talents under an Extra-Curricular Program**


*Beatrice Siena*

Throughout our lives, we're given the chance to develop ourselves in different ways. One such way is by developing our talents and skills. Though similar and, at times, interchanged, the two are very different. Talents are often defined as an ability that is natural to us and something that doesn't take much effort to perform, though that is not to say that it doesn't require practice. Certain talents are also only possessed by a small portion of the population, and some even consider them unteachable. On the other hand, skills are defined as the ability to perform a task efficiently. These can be possessed by anyone and, just like talents, need development (Surbhi, 2016, & The Upwork Team, 2023).

Our school offers many opportunities to hone our talents and skills, from academic performance tasks to production teams. One of the most prominent ways, however, is through an extra-curricular program where students can pick any class of their interest and, for the year, learn, practice, and showcase the skills in that class. It's a required class and in my case, I've only ever been in two types of classes: Culinary Arts for two years and Chorale (or Choir) for 6 years. But within those classes, I've managed to gather many experiences which have helped me along the way.

While the program is marketed as a way to hone talents, it can also develop skills that are useful to the students, should they be open-minded enough to learn from it. This is proof that learning talents and skills can go hand in hand. To further prove this, I shall be using my own experiences in



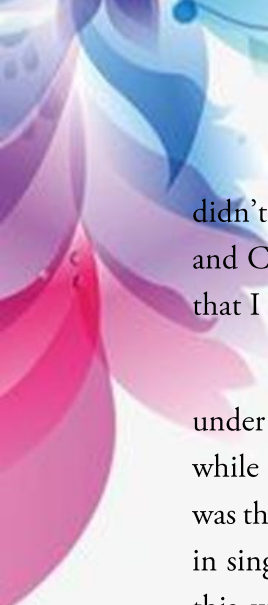


the different extra-curricular classes I've been in: (Grade School) Culinary, (Grade School) Chorale Intermediate, Grade School Chorale Varsity, (High School) Chorale Beginner, (High School) Chorale Intermediate, and High School Chorale Varsity.

For this essay, I will be categorizing all the classes I've been in into three categories: developing skills, developing talents, and developing both skills and talents. Given the fine line between the terms, aside from the aforementioned definitions, I will be defining skills based on things that I can use outside of the given class and in a more general setting and talents as something specific to that innate ability. As for those that can develop both, these will include classes wherein I managed to learn or improve both skills and talents.

First, I can categorize my Culinary and High School Chorale Beginner and Intermediate years under classes that develop skills. Culinary taught me how to listen more attentively, as we had to be able to follow discussions to know what to do, as well as how to be more courageous in trying new things, as it was my first time cooking in a kitchen with people I did not know, which would be the first step in learning to socialize. At the same time, Chorale Beginner and Intermediate boosted my confidence and taught me to be organized, responsible, and communicative, a skill which helped me in my academics when it came to submitting quality work on time and reciting in class. Furthermore, perhaps one of the most important things I got to develop in these classes was my leadership skills. Though I wasn't an official leader in Culinary, I was present enough to be selected to receive an award for it. Additionally, during my Chorale years, I was class president and had to lead the class through talent fests and recitals. This would specifically help me during the following year when I became a Homeroom officer. For me, these classes were very specific in developing skills as Culinary (in Grade School)






didn't teach much on hands-on cooking and focused more on demonstrations and Chorale (in High School) focused more on the basics, which were things that I already knew.

Second, I can categorize my (Grade School) Chorale Intermediate year under classes that develop talents. This was my very first year in Chorale and while I knew how to sing (in the sense that I could sing notes correctly), this was the first time I learned the basics of singing. I learned the proper techniques in singing, how to breathe well, and how to work with a choir. Additionally, this was when I was first classified as an Alto, which would be my voice classification for the rest of my time in the Center and something that would develop my voice. During my time in this class, I didn't focus too much on developing skills and whatnot, partially because I was caught up in my love for singing, and partially because I didn't care much about developing skills. While one could argue that I did develop confidence, I don't believe the change was significant enough as it didn't help me in the following year. It took me years to gain it and was mainly through other means.

Lastly, I can categorize my Grade School and High School Chorale Varsity years under classes that develop both skills and talents. In both scenarios, I further developed my talent for singing through learning new techniques and continuous practice (especially given varsity has multiple training sessions per week). It's especially more significant now, as I'm able to detect the changes in my voice. My ability to sight-read and hear when a note is off has also grown. In addition to this, these experiences taught me self-discipline, diligence, humility, patience, and perseverance, all skills that have proven useful over the years, whether that be getting through a week filled with academic deadlines or simply going through the day when I'm not feeling at my 100%.



This extra-curricular program is the perfect example of how learning a talent and learning a skill can go hand in hand. Next time we develop or practice a talent of ours, no matter what kind, as long as we are aware and conscious of how we are learning, then it won't be for nothing. Even if it's something a person chooses not to pursue in the future, it doesn't mean that everything we learn gets wasted. It simply takes another form. All we must do is be open-minded to the possibilities.

# Life is a Journey, Not a Destination

*Ruel F. Ancheta*

## Reminiscing Childhood

When I opened my eyes the very first time, I found living in the sleepy town. The place is quite far from the town proper where my parents used to live with their farming activities as the main source of living. Although my father came from a middle-class family, he was unfortunate to have decent job compared to the rest of his siblings who were all professionals. Despite being a farmer as my father's source of income, we were still sent to public school during elementary years and in private schools during high school. I spent most of my childhood days in the barrio, mingling with my childhood friends and classmates in school.

During my grade school days, I was taught by my mother to be obedient and low profile. However, my father was so strict. I was not even allowed to play with my playmates of the same age. He used to call me every time he saw me playing from children of my age. He wanted that at 6:00 o'clock all of us should be inside the house. That upbringing made me timid in school and deprived to join and play with children of my age.

Despite that training, I excelled in school. I was a consistent honors pupil from grade 1 to grade 6 where my mother was so proud of me. I remembered, during recognition, I went up on stage to receive an academic award without anything new like shirts, pants or even shoes as other awardees had. But I understood because my parents can't afford them.

During my high school, I was sent to a private school as an academic scholar. I was a recipient of the COCFED scholarship all throughout my high school years. I was so lucky enough to be one of those students in the private

school and able to maintain my scholarship up to my graduation in high school and graduated with flying colors.

### **On my College Days**

After graduation from high school, I took a one-year clerical course in the belief that I can look for a job and help my family. My one-year college days were worth remembering as I was able to mingle with a new circle of friends. When I graduated from 1-year program, I worked in the local government office for a while. But since I was not eligible then, my job did not last for long. I went to Manila to look for a job but unfortunately there was no right job for me. I was forced to work with my cousin in a handicraft store as a salesman. After a year, I decided to go back home and convinced my parents to continue my schooling again even though I knew that it was hard for my parents to sustain my studies due to lack of resources.

With the grit and determination of my parents, I was able to go back to school and took a four-year degree program. The first two years of my study were smooth sailing and I survived despite difficulty in meeting my daily needs as a college student. I really appreciated the hardship that my late mother did for me to survive on my day-to-day expenses in school. I can't really forget it all and I owe all what I have now to my mother who used to sell "kakanin", make "pawid" for sale, and raise hogs for sale just to make both ends meet. Unfortunately, when I was in my 3rd year of my BSE program, my mother was diagnosed to have stage 3 cancer of the throat. I was then taking summer classes when she passed away that made me feel almost the end of the world.

The passing away of my mother made me become more independent and stronger. I learned to be responsible for myself and decide everything for myself. Through God's help, I was able to solve my personal problems without asking any help from other people except from my immediate family. I gained

a sense of responsibility and the value of love and the importance of strong family ties. With grit and determination, perseverance and the support of my father, I was able to survive the remaining years of my schooling and graduated a BSE course in 1991 despite difficulties that came along my way.


My four years of stay in the college has never been so exciting and interesting, I never had a happy moment even going out with friends. I used to have routine activities such as school, house, and vice-versa. But then, it was a great memory to treasure that can never be forgotten as I learned to become more independent.

### **My Career Journey**

In 1991, after graduating from college, I went back to Manila to look for my future and better opportunities. At first, it was too difficult for me to adjust since I have to stay with my cousin and relatives just to survive. I need to be more cooperative so that my relatives have nothing to say against me. Looking for a job needs one to be competitive. To compete with those jobs available, knowledge and skills are not only a mere factor. It needs to have guts and perseverance. At first, I became a waiter for some time, marketing clerk, and finally found a stable job in the government service at the National Statistics Office (NSO) after passing the Professional Board Examination for Teachers (PBET) in 1992.

### ***... Government service Journey***

November 1991 when I entered the Philippines National Statistics Office as an emergency employee. Not in my wildest dream to work in a statistical organization totally irrelevant to my profession. What came into my mind that day was just to have job whatever available just to make ends meet. When I passed the Professional Board Examination for Teachers in 1993, I




was promoted and rose from the ranks. With dedication and hard work, promotion came my way every 2 years.

Working in the government service is a prestige since you cannot be counted if you do not have an eligibility. Throughout 16 years, my career rose from the ranks from an Emergency Employee, Statistician Aide, Assistant Statistician, Human Resource Management Officer I, II, and an Administrative Officer IV up to my early retirement in 2007 due to job opportunity overseas.

As a government employee, my time was spent in the office from 8-5pm doing daily routine work that made me bored and stagnant. However, it was very challenging as I mingled with a lot of people from all walks of life. NSO and its statistical activities became a part of my life's journey for so many years. My job at NSO was considered interesting and challenging. I was able to go around the Philippines free of charge to supervise major activities of NSO on its censuses and surveys. It was a great experience to be sent in a place where remote areas of Muslim Mindanao, where most people are afraid to go with.

In 1993, while working at NSO, I enrolled in master's program at the Philippine Normal University. I went back to school and took up Master of Arts in Teaching after two years. Attending master's program made my skills and knowledge in the field of teaching enhanced and updated. Being a teacher by profession, teaching as a career is what I am longing for. I tried teaching in the college as a part time English instructor in 1995 at Access Computer College. My teaching career was able to utilize during those years and continued teaching up to 2007 at the Technological Institute of the Philippines and Manila Central University respectively as an Associate Professor 3. In 1997, I finished MAT in 4 years' time. It was the greatest accomplishment on my part.






In 2005, I was lucky to be selected for foreign scholarship in New Delhi, India to further my skills in human resource development. At the National Statistics Office (NSO), career development is functional as part of the HR functions. October 8, 2005 was my first foreign trip in the incredible country India. It was a professional trip where I took a one-year diploma program on “Manpower Research” at the Institute of Applied Manpower Research, an attached agency of the Planning Commission sponsored by the Technical Cooperation Scheme of the Colombo Plan. The program was leading to Master’s in applied Manpower Research, a 2-year graduate program, offered by the same institute under the Indrapathra University.

After my foreign training, I went back to school for my PhD program in 2000. Since teaching career is utilized as my part time career, I decided to continue the peak of my profession which was stopped in 2<sup>nd</sup> semester of 2005 due to my foreign trip.

*“If you think education is expensive, try ignorance”*. This saying served as my guiding principle in my quest for life-long learning. Everyone is aiming to finish a high-level degree, as this will serve as his/her weapon to compete in the global community in seeking better opportunities. Many are satisfied with attaining a bachelor’s degree. For them earning such is already considered an accomplishment. Some of them are just content in hanging his/her diploma on the wall.

For a career-oriented individual, a bachelor’s degree is not enough. If one has an aim to rise from the ranks, he must continue learning and educate himself in preparation for a greater responsibility. Going to graduate school takes much of your time. It needs prioritization of your time in the workplace, family, studies and even personal life. When I finished my bachelor’s degree, I thought that I still need to learn more. The knowledge and skills that I earned are not enough to be competent in some other way. This notion prompted





me to enroll in the graduate program. I took a master's degree aligned to my undergraduate course although the field of work I had does not perfectly match my profession.

Master's degree gave light on my career. It counts a lot in terms of my promotion. It was also an added factor in my teaching job as I used to be a part time lecturer. When I finished my masters, I thought education would end there. Since I was used to the Saturday habit of going to school, I was again convinced to continue schooling and took the peak of my profession, the Doctor of Education (Ed.D.). Taking a doctoral program was not an easy task. It needs much attention and concentration as well as money to finance the school-related expenses. After finishing the major subjects for years, here comes the terminal course: the comprehensive examination, and the dissertation writing. Many doctoral students do not continue up to this stage because of financial reasons and time constraint.

There came a closed preparation on my paper, doing research work, encoding, and some preparation that consumed much attention and time. To have a prefix Dr. to your name is a status symbol. This is one of the accomplishments that one must be proud of. A feeling of tears and joy was felt while marching on the aisle with my wife along with me. Being watched by the audience during the hood and cap ceremony and receiving a diploma was something worth remembering. This can only happen once in a lifetime.

I want to thank those who have been part of this accomplishment: My office mates who have been understanding while doing my paper during office hours, the NSO for my easy access on office equipment, a friend who helped me financially, my wife, and my family who has been there for their moral support.

### *...A lifelong Commitment*

After being bored of my daily routine, I decided to get married in 1999. Being a married man changed my whole routine. Going out with selected friends was no longer done as I had a home to park on. Adjustment period being a married man has never been a problem. We became so close and able to adjust to each other when it comes to our likes and dislikes. I believe that successful marriage is difficult to attain for many. On our part, we talked about the consequences before the problem arises. We never let the day pass without talking to each other, especially if we have misunderstanding. This is one of the practices that we learned from joining the Couples for Christ in 2002.

Like other couples, we dreamed to build a family...a family with a child that will complete the whole picture. It took years before I was able to build my own family. At this point, the center of my life's purpose is for my family. I am very thankful because we have grown him to be loving and kind-hearted and low profile. To be away to my family as an OFW is a big factor during the time that my son needs a father figure at home. But God knows how I miss him during my absence. He knew that later, he would come to realize that I did this just because I wanted them feel the comfort of life which I never experienced during my childhood days.

### *...A Journey of Sacrifice*

After 16 long years of continuous service in the government, I never thought that I will be one of the thousands of Filipinos to work in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia in Jeddah. Due to burn out and tired of the daily routines plus the fact that the income earned was not enough to support the growing needs of my family, I decided to work abroad. After several applications sent to various employment agencies through e-mails, Al Assal was the one that lined me up into Human Resources position. After passing the interview with

the employer. medical examinations took place with the assurance from the agency that I can leave the country within a month after complying with all the needed requirements. Three months later, I never expected that I could leave because there was no information or feedback from the agency after the series of interviews.

November 6, 2007 when the agency informed me that my flight was already confirmed the following day bound to Jeddah, KSA. Without any hesitations, I prepared for the said flight. My family was surprised because I never informed them that I had an application overseas. Within that day, I filed an early retirement at the National Statistics Office. A resignation was also filed at the Technological Institute of the Philippines and Manila Central University where I was then a part-time University professor.

November 7, 2007, when I and my colleagues arrived late in the evening at the city of Jeddah, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia via Brunei. My first day at the HR Department was not even challenging. I was expecting that the HR department that I must join is a department that is fully functional and has a direction but it's beyond what I am expecting. The HR department was a newly put-up department where the newly appointed staff should be the one to assist the HR manager in implementing the HR functions.

At first working at AIC is pressure free. Since it must be attuned with the existing practices, all its plans must be aligned to the present practice where the Admin Department is the one doing the function prior to the HR existence. But as time goes by, working with AIC is getting easier.

The AIC is a multi-national steel structures company. It has a large project dealing with structural steel products where its major clients are found outside the kingdom. It was composed of more than 2,000 employees from a mixed race: Jordanian, Palestinian, Indians, Pakistani, Bangladeshi, Filipino,

Sudanese, Nigerian, Egyptian, and of course Saudis in both Jeddah, Dubai, and Egypt branches.

There were about 300 Filipinos like engineers, fabricators, welders, erectors, and those in the corporate office. Their salaries vary depending upon the position.

Life at AIC was sorrowful. Roaming around Jeddah is not safe. You need to have your resident card (iqama) every time you go out of the workplace to avoid being caught by the religious police (mutawa). Although Jeddah is a semi-open city, there were still many restrictions then.

But still despite of that restriction, life must go on...otherwise you will always feel homesick and depressed. Hearing the word “kabayan” from a Filipino overseas served as a bridge to connect the hearts of all Filipino OFWs anywhere in the world. It sounds fine to hear this word from our fellow OFWs because it made you feel that you belong to one race.

Working away from home is a sacrifice. I struggled a lot with the feeling of homesickness. I had no choice but to move on just because I wanted to see my family living in their own comfort. There are only 2 reasons for OFWs to be happy. One is knowing that their family is away from any harm and dangers and seeing them happy living life comfortably out of the remittances they receive.

Working as an expatriate in Saudi Arabia was really a great experience and a challenge. I can never forget the days I spent there that made me stronger on whatever life ahead.

The biggest hurdle facing an expatriate working in Saudi Arabia is the position title stated in the iqama. It is rare to find people having aligned profession on the position stated their iqama. What is good about working in Gulf countries is the tax-free salaries and wages. If you want to earn money, work in Saudi Arabia, where everything is free and provided like food and

accommodation. In November 2009, my career with AIC ended as a Training Specialist as I decided to have my final exit.

### *... APICORP Journey*

After AIC, I got an offer from one of the prestigious petroleum companies in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia located in Dammam, KSA. I was offered a Senior Training and Development Specialist post to assist the HR Director in planning and implementing the company's training and development programs. It was a great opportunity as the position is next in rank with the HR Director.

My job requires assisting the HR Director in planning and implementation of the department's training plans and coordinating with the training institutions and industries where APICORP staff need to attend outside the kingdom. Part of my duties is to assist those On-the-job trainees as to where they will be assigned for the actual immersion in the company.

It was a great experience to work with the prestigious company wherein its employees receive a competitive remuneration with all the benefits including: housing, transportation, and educational and medical assistance for the immediate family members. However, my career with APICORP did not last for long. My one year contract was not even finish due to administrative issue of my line manager. Since I was hired directly by the HR director, my position was politicized and abolished which need me to leave the post. The company paid my unfinished contract and led me to go for final exit.

My short stay with APICORP was also impressive but it was not so easy in terms of personal adjustment as I was living alone in the fully furnished accomodation provided by the company. However, it was a great experience as once in my life time, I was given an oppurtunity to work in a prestigious oil company.



### *... TIP Journey*

Working for almost two years, in Saudi Arabia, as OFW has never been so easy. Coming back for good to my home country was always a desire of an OFW. When I came back in 2009, TIP still opened its door for me to be one of its staff in the College of Arts. It was so fruitful to be part of the TIP family wherein all policies are laid down and implemented transparently. Among all the private sectors where I joined, this is the organization that I found to have a well-organized structure and provides intrinsic and extrinsic motivation to its employees both teaching and non-teaching. After Saudi Arabia, I fortunately worked in this prestigious ABET accredited engineering college that offers engineering, IT, business, and arts programs. I worked in this institution for almost seven years from 2009- 2010 and from 2010- 2014 as a full-time faculty member with Associate Professor 2 rank including 3 years as a part-time faculty since 2004- 2007. My stay with TIP was very fruitful and meaningful. I gained a lot of experiences and explored my knowledge and skills in teaching various courses apart from my specialization. It also helped me a lot in terms of financial aspects as the remuneration was also competitive.

As faculty member in the College of Arts, I was tasked to teach language courses. Teaching diverse courses to engineering, IT and business students was very challenging as most students were intelligent, especially in the engineering and business programs. You can find a lot of university scholars in these programs that made me read a lot to be ready all the time. Working with TIP doesn't only limit to pure teaching. It provides you an opportunity to work outside of your cup of tea, like academic advising and working with students on their co-curricular activities.

TIP provides professional development to its staff. During my stay, I was able to have an opportunity to attend in-house training and workshops that enhanced my teaching know-how. The College of Arts where I belong



conducts professional development at every end of the semester to help improve our current skills and keep us updated. This professional development helped me build my academic profile.

When the full implementation of the K-12, my teaching career with TIP turned grey. All those who were about to be regularized were converted into part-time. There were only two options for those who were affected: one was to stay as a part-timer or leave the institution and get all the benefits accrued as per TIP policy. I opted to leave TIP a year before the K-12 implementation. In November 2014, my career with TIP ended and made me thought of working overseas again.

Luckily, I was given an offer as an English lecturer overseas and immediately in the same year, I decided to grab the opportunity, though it was so sad to leave TIP where I found as the most organized and fair institution I ever had.

### *... MCU Journey*

Side by side, while working at TIP, I managed to work part-time in the Manila Central University (MCU) graduate school in 2007 to 2009 with the rank of Associate Professor 3. I was given an opportunity to teach on its graduate program teaching educational management, Financial Administration in educational institution and Test and Measurement for PhD students. It was a great experience and my first time to handle graduate students and found it relaxing as teacher was just a facilitator of learning. Due to overseas work opportunity, I decided to end my career in 2010.

### *... My Leadership Journey*

St. Vincent Learning Center of Manila (SVLCM) opened its door for me to become a school pinicpal. This opportunity did not come right away. I

started as the school's consultant in the preparation of various documents required by the Department of Education (DepEd) in acquiring permit to operate and recognition of curricular programs.

From then on, my service as a consultant was called as needed. When the school grew and offered grade school curriculum, one of the requirements was to have a school principal to manage its academic activities. The school owner, didn't have the hesitation to offer me the principalship despite the fact that I was connected in other institution. For the sake of friendship, I accepted the offer with internal arrangement as to number of hours I need to spent per week to perform my duties without sacrificing my primary job. This agreement had been in full force from 2006 to 2007, 2010 to 2014. From 2014 onwards, I served again as a consultant advising the school administrator in terms of academic matters.

Working as pinicipal in this institution gave me opportunity to widen my horizon in educational management and tested my leadership skill. Managing people is not that easy as the staff you are line managing have diverse personality, skills, and attitudes. For several years to be with this institution, I learned a lot from the school's stakeholders. I came to realise that a school doesn't only cater students who want quality education butl also it caters parents whose behaviour and attitudes towards teaching and learning is away from the teachers' perspective.

Truly, being a school principal was not an easy responsibility. As school head, you need to be responsible for teachers and students. You have to ensure that students will receive the quality education they deserve and teachers need to deliver the subject matter in accordance with the learning outcomes.

A school which is supervised and recognised by DepEd has a lot of paper works to be done. From the beginning to the end of the school year,

the school has to submit accurate data and information. The needed information has to be in accordance with the school's activities conducted for the whole school year. All these are under the school principal's shoulder.

### ... *My Ongoing Journey*

After my TIP career in 2014, Gulf College's door opened me a teaching opportunity overseas. During my job hunting overseas, fortunately, I received three great offers namely: English lecturer at Jubail University College in Jubail, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, Senior Coordinator for Career Development & Succession Planning at Weatherford (Precision Energy Services) Company in Dahrán, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, and English Lecturer at Gulf Collge (GC) in the Sultante of Oman in Muscat.

Of all the offers, I decided to grab the opportunity offered by Gulf College as Saudi Arabia was no longer my priority place to work overseas. IREKRUT was the one facilitated all the requirements for my entry to Oman. At first, I was not given a working visa . Instead, I was instructed to go through an express visa which lasted for 30 days. There were so many formalities in the airport that need to answer. Fortunately, I was able to fly via Gulf Air and landed the Sultanate of Oman in November 2014.

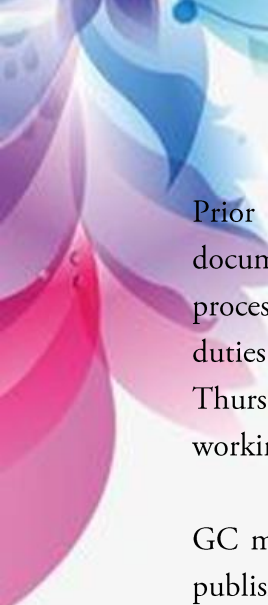
Currently, GC is affiliated with Cardif Metropolitan University in United Kingdom (UK). It offers Business Management, and Computing Science programmes qaulity assured by CardifMet except its GFP programe which is monitored by the Ministry of Higher Education. At first, life in GC was not so easy. On my first day, there was no proper orientation as I used to expeirence in joining the new company. On the first day, I was given a teaching load and instructed to proceed to my room assignment and started teaching. It was really disgusting and an unforgetablle experience as I had to face my arabic students whose level of English is zero and yet you are teaching

them general English language. It took time for me to internalise the practices of the college to adapt the system day by day.

The worst experience is to handle the students' engagement in the class. Only few are participating as most of them have low level of English language proficiency. Teaching English for speakers of other language is so challenging. You have to teach them the basics in such a way that they will master the skills in listening, reading, writing, and speaking. Students' proficiency in English language is assessed on an IELTS-based type of test. At the end of the semester, the students are expected to get a mark of 40% equivalent to IELTS 5.0. Around 20% of the class can speak using the target language with some grammar errors. However, almost 95% of them failed in listening, reading and writing. This gap remains the main problem of GC students even pushing them to go to the undergraduate program.

Working at Faculty of Foundation Studies (FFS) was so amazing. I learned a lot of things and explored my knowledge and skills not only in the field of teaching but also in the field of research. I also able to work with people from all walks of life with different personalities. This department had the most number of Filipinos coming from different colleges and universities in the Philippines as seasoned English teachers. My greatest contribution in the faculty was when given an opportunity to create and facilitate the English Club. I conceptualized the FFS English Club to help the students of GFP and those who are in the undergraduate programs to develop their skills in English Language. The FFS English Club was designed to provide students opportunity to use English language as a medium of communication to competently develop their English language skills. Several plans and activities were facilitated through its officers and members.

Another major contribution was being a committee member in a technical working group (TWG) on GFP and GC institutional accreditations.



Prior to the date of visit, there were major preparations of necessary documents. Being part of the committee is not so easy as you must design processes and policies relevant to quality assurance over and above your major duties and responsibilities without any additional compensation at all. Thursday is allotted for the TWG meetings to ensure that all members are working hands-on on the assigned task.

Apart from teaching and facilitating the English Club, working with GC motivated me to conduct research. At GC, the lecturer is required to publish at least one research per year. It also gave me an opportunity to present research papers in both local and foreign conferences.

In 2018, a full implementation of the organization was in full swing. There was a major restructuring and rebranding of the college. Many expats were laid off and contracts were not renewed due to Omanization. FFS was one of the departments where lot of lecturers were omanized. Later of the same year, I received a reassignment to be transferred in the Faculty of Business and Management Studies (FBMS) to handle English modules in L3 of the undergraduate program of Cardiff Met University.

Life is a journey that must be travelled no matter how bad the roads and accommodations. It is not a destination. We never really arrive at our destination. It is a continuous travel. We need to enjoy every moment of the day instead of trying to arrive.



# The Redemption

*Jayben Matiang*

In this world where everything on it has fallen into the abyss of despair, contrarily my intellect has developed the creed that the terrifying death itself is now a refuge for acquiring peace and tranquility. Upon asserting my own testament, the previously poignant cemetery became a realm of harbor and sanctuary. The coffin is now a serene nirvana for keeping our cold bodies warm and dry. This supposedly glamorous existence made us prisoners in its actual hellish vortex, and death is what now serves as the kind hearted saint that will unshackle us from the chains of life's inhuman treatments. Principally, any form of agony will no longer be an inhabitant of our flesh once our symphonic heartbeat loses its synchrony.

Pessimistic might it sound, but I was actually once its devotee. Yet it is now funny whenever I think of how the change of tides took place unexpectedly when the constellation of our eyes aligned and out of impossibility you became a peace that I began to wish for in this chaotic world.

Forget about wars, melancholia, famine, extinction, and even death that I once chose to admire. In this specific time of human history where the world is on the verge of collapse, let us seize this fleeting time that we have and rather choose to fall in love.





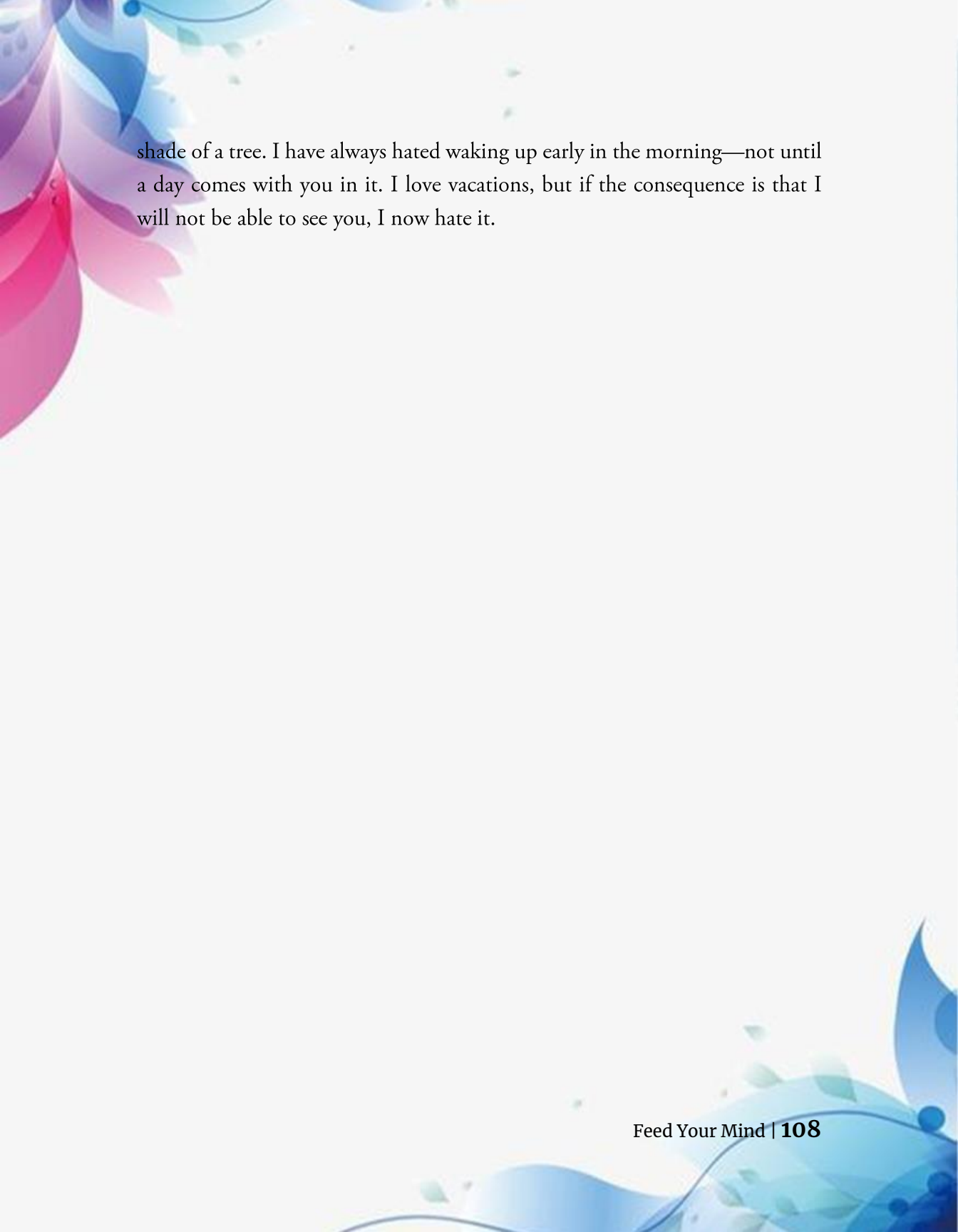
## Vacation

*Jayben Matiang*

A rainy summer. A pouring May. The weather's ever-changing course. Supposedly, I would be dwelling in the gray atmosphere right now, and I could have allowed myself to be painted blue by this poignant ambiance. Indeed, it is quite disappointing to think that we should be enjoying every sunset this summer, but the huge gray clouds always steal the show. But our misfortune turned out to be a paradox. This might be a dismaying May, but it is not cruel. A thoroughly bright and different season compared to the tormenting April we had. No sighs and deep breaths, but only intoxication with the reddish haze. No heavy feelings, but only peace and lightness. No shedding tears, but only bearing witness to a smile and melting on it. No farewells, only a covenant.

However, this tender yet fleeting summer will come in haste. It's not like we have much time left before distance will thrust us into our solitariness. In light of this, though, we will be able to take a break from everything that prompts our weariness, which not even sleep can mend. But we can't deny the truth that we will be longing for each other, and there will be days when not seeing you will be agonizing. It's funny that we never truly had freedom; every occurrence has opposite and negative effects.

You see, I have always hated rain, but not until we had a chance to share the same umbrella. I have always hated the fiery and arid breeze of a vehement summer until we had the chance to lay down together under the

The page features decorative floral and leaf motifs. In the top-left corner, there are stylized flowers in shades of pink, purple, and blue. In the bottom-right corner, there are blue and green leaf-like shapes. The background is a light, soft gradient.

shade of a tree. I have always hated waking up early in the morning—not until a day comes with you in it. I love vacations, but if the consequence is that I will not be able to see you, I now hate it.

## Voices of Development


*Azriela Den N. Perez*

When others think about music, they might be thinking of their favorite songs, a thing that makes them happy, and much more. However, music gave me a feeling of ease and a sense of home. Chorale is vital to my personal growth and improvement as a person. Since the beginning, the entire family has been my source of support.

I will always be thankful that I was given a chance to lead and guide along the shared journey of our family. As the expressive strength of music merges with someone's interpretation of the lyrics and melody, profound feelings are aroused. Just like how the thin page of a book flips, my heart feels like jumping softly whenever.

Four months ago, they trusted me with this role. To my full knowledge, I know that this comes with great and big responsibilities. I was placed in a position not only to provide and share important and adequate information but marking as one of the eldest, it has also instilled in me the responsibility of setting a positive example for my team.

Regardless of how long or short it has been since I joined Chorale 1 as my first organization and was lucky enough to be chosen and trusted as their team representative this year, it has always left me in a state of awe. I was able to express myself better and connect profoundly with the lyrics, notes, melodies, sounding harmonies, and knowledge of many viewpoints because of the emotional growth that chorus fosters. The nature that we have in Chorale



that affects how we build our relationship as a whole made me a better and an improving individual.

I've constantly been glad of my ability to lead, and I'll always seize the chance to develop and advance in this domain. All I have ever been thinking about since day one is that I want my team to remember me as a big sister and an effective and efficient leader. I found home with Chorale 1. However, it's not always about affection. Being able to guide them taught me how to make decisions that are appropriate while being fair. I improved my communication skills, became more receptive to feedback and ideas, and gained the ability to face my fears in order to grow as a person. I was able to make the unknown, known to me.



# My Notes to Life


*Amada G. Banaag*

## On Dreams and Aspirations

...one of the worst things that can happen to any man is to have a sense of sight but do not have any vision at all. There is no direction, only groping in the dark while the sun shines and whining when the chance is ripe and waiting. What a kind of wastefulness and futility this is!

...after all that has been said and done, these questions still hang and needed to be answered: Have I lived my life to the fullest? Was it the life I wanted all along? Did I become satisfied? is there anything more to expect? And because of these questions life takes on new and more exciting meaning even for somebody like me who is the middle of an earthly journey. It gives me reasons to wake up with great expectations of fresh anecdotes to tell and God's graces to savor; to share of His amazing love. What a joy!

...carpe diem. Seize the day. Live the moment. Yes, live it... Grab every sparkling moment of excitement and delirium as such may not come again. Do not assume too much nor overthink of what is to be, it is enough that you are truly and fantastically happy though for a fleeting second...as such may never occur once more. Breathe the air of tantalizing breeze of summer



blossoms that promise unadulterated jubilation. Savor the sweetness of every chance by which you are enthralled and bewitched or it may not be the same again... Seize the day!


## On Sadness and Sorrows

...the songs we sing express our deepest longings and sighing of the soul too complex and manifold just to plainly utter. So they need music and melody to find its truest meaning and become in harmony with your heartbeat and mine.

...no matter how the world may blemish and twist the true reason of the season; still there must be that lucid stance of truth and enlightenment on this occasion of joy and cheer. It is through this that the blessing flows and pour without ceasing so that it becomes a fountain, a river and an ocean of peace, delight and faith.

...like wars can turn even saintly beings into beasts and extreme hardships can mold steel hearts out of even the softest of characters. How sad that people can be so unfeeling and blind to the echoes of the soul; so calloused to hear the sighs of the spirit and too consumed with proud pretense of strength when in truth is crying in secret on account of burdens too heavy to bear. But I choose to rise and claim my rightful battle cry- I am not just a survivor; I am a brave warrior. I refuse to succumb to any destiny of fate for I believe that the battles I fight are so ordained to make me even stronger and mightier!





...it is in the broken pieces that we find the solace of being mended and molded into a unique masterpiece created out of the ashes of grief. Though many of human pain is due to self-inflicted suffering on account of pride, bitterness and unforgiveness; still we find another person or circumstance to blame for our every misery which only makes us sink deeper in the mire of loneliness and emotional devastation. It is only in the act of humility, positivity and forgiveness that we complete ourselves and feel purposeful once more.

...when life becomes dreary and dull on account of life's many woes; then your comfort o GOD becomes the pretty rainbow in my dark horizon.

...there is wisdom in silence because it is in quietness that God speaks and reveals His unfailing love and faithfulness. Hail to silent whispers and mute sighs of the soul so eager to be filled with the beauty and splendor hidden from the naked eye and the barren senses of men.

...grieving is temporal as there is life eternal. It is upon these reflections that the chronicler finds solace and strength to be still and stalwart in the midst of irreparable losses in life. Even she is like a ship tossed in the raging sea, her anchor remains steadfast and firm aiming to find the lighthouse and tower that is her refuge.


...I refuse to let my joy to be stolen nor my calm to be disturbed as these are the only gifts that I can cling to when dear people are gone or have forgotten. Cheers to life! Hail to my la doce vita, saluti la vida bellissima!

## On My Purpose as a Human

...motherhood? It's joy and pain. Tears and laughter; fear and hope and all the emotions that a human being is capable of. Their pain is my pain; their tears my own; their fears become mine. But when they are happy, I am delighted too and when they succeed it is counted as my triumph too. Such is the affinity of a mother to her children; unwavering, unconditional and everlasting... such love, such sacrifice... always for them before my own.

...travelling is such a pleasure and a refresher. It titillates the mind to no end as to the things it offers and invigorates the bones as to the physical challenges it gives. To travel is to confirm what one has speculated or heard or read, it negates wrong impressions and misinformation about certain people and places. Most of all, it reveals the greatness of the Creator who in His splendor and majesty laid the foundations of the earth to showcase the amazing tapestry of HIS handiwork.

...home is truly where the heart is. But what is a home?! Is it a safe haven, a comfort zone, our own place of peace and quiet? Where there is love without conditions, understanding that goes beyond limits and forgiveness that exceeds expectations? Or is it a piece of paradise, maybe a xanadu or shangrila... It may be dream for many but for those whose God's redemption has been revealed, it is so much more than these. As it is to be with people who truly care for our spiritual and physical wellbeing; whose ultimate goal is to bring us closer to our Creator and give Him the highest glory. This is where we find the true meaning of home, where every moment is living a life that



reflects the goodness and faithfulness of God; where every gathering is a feast of HIS love no matter what the circumstances maybe.

...a happy heart does good like a medicine. It keeps one bubbly, sprightly and unbelievably healthy. It pastes a smile on the lips and puts sparkle in the eyes which everybody can't help but notice. It also makes one to glow and radiates only goodness, serenity and bliss. Such is the effect of delighting oneself in the simple joys of life like being near the one genuine person whose heartbeat joins in the harmony of every breath you take. Such lovely feeling of calm and acute passion rolled into one!

...life is certainly lovely and sweet. Not that I have everything I want, but because in all these years, I have traversed the deepest of valleys and have climbed the height of mountains.

...I know how to wade in the bottom of the sea and to ride the peak of the tides, both with grace and serenity I never knew I have!

...how can I never be grateful to my CREATOR that at this point in my life, I have so many reasons to be glad and to celebrate though in the midst of turbulent times and ebbing peace.

## Fertile Crescent

*Jayben Matiang*

I have lost it once. The power to build domains out of nothing by mere thought and to move kingdoms from their corrupted pillars, and the flair of those poets wielding a pen, aspired to pierce a soul with no remorse and yield an elation even to the coldest heart.

It was a lengthy drought. The ocean of my imagination has run dry, and brilliant thoughts are no longer raining down from above. My inability to weave poetry culminated in frustration as I was floating aimlessly in the infinite abyss, and the words themselves had turned archaic in a flash.

Until I met thee. Such an encounter that dawned a fertile crescent. Fountains of words had once again begun to cradle and blossom roses in my world that were once ravaged by drought. A gift of creation had rejuvenated while the void and melancholia fled to the past. Gone are those days when I used to dwell in darkness and despair, and today is the threshold of revolution, where I will start to forge verses and lie beside the hearth as I feel thy warmth amid the glacial days. No more exodus of thoughts and eyeing at the blank sheets as the passion and diction desert my own body; only the genesis of weaving au courant novels and sonnets that the tip of my pen solely devotes to thee. The birth of my myriad literary compositions shall be mounded in the libraries, and thou wilt be the happiness in every single one of them.

Love,

Now that thou art here,

The drought is finally over.

# Eternal

*Jayben Matiang*

The cardinal of time freezes when you don't wield it, for there were some abysmal nights that felt like an eternity and made it tough to aspire to the dawn. But, it's quite a paradox that time also freezes when I'm with you.

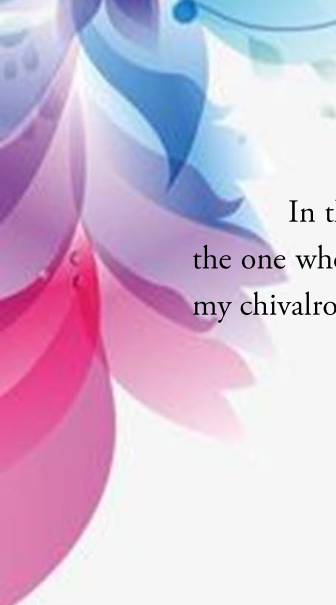
Regardless of what we're into—a trip on the bus's subway as I lean my head on your cottony shoulder, a walk in our school's corridor, a queue in the street food stands as we buy your favorite fries, a panorama of every sunset, either in a deep or nonsense conversation that we always engaged ourselves into or simply dwelling in a sphere of silence where only the sound that strings are the threads of our hearts—time seems to freeze.

Albeit those moments having an end, they actually gave us a glimpse of what forever is. To live in those tales and seize every occurrence defined us as having a little infinity, which we could keep for the rest of our lives.

Though the endless march of time will eventually blur those moments that were once vivid and the sensation brought by elation that solaced our hearts will eventually become archaic, I want you to know that it's fine. It's okay, my love.

But I want you to know that I will never rub you out of my vocabulary. You are indeed a person who splashed colors in my gray world, someone who extended her hands for me to hold when the world was in its cruelest state, someone who dispersed my coldness, and someone with whom I would like to form a constellation only if the universe would allow.

Love, you will always be a part of me.



In the depths of my cerebral cortex, your name was engraved. You are the one who resurrected the romance from the realm of Hades and triggered my chivalrous aptitude within me, thus in you, I'm forever grateful.



## The Creed

*Jayben Matiang*

As every man that ever existed has transpired, I have also been in pursuit of unraveling the fabric of this intricate reality. I had plunged myself into the abyss of moral enterprise to seek virtue and valor, to embark on a profound quest, and not to be a lost soul in the obscurity of nihilistic philosophy and doctrines.

I have been searching for it: a testament to live by, a temple to devote my life to, a notion that is worth dying for, an arena to exercise my chivalry, and a setting and juncture to execute my final act, which is to die with honor rather than by merely living a life filled with mediocrity and humiliation. It is with great desire and reverence that I paint my very existence and conceive my creation using the hue of my own blood.

I am stunned by the way kings jeopardize the lives of their soldiers and legionaries for the sake of conquest. I am astonished that myriads have died with courage and pride for freedom by defending the fortresses of their countries. I am captivated by men who glorified their faith in exchange for their heads and martyrdom—I am fascinated by it.

I fascinate no more.

I could be martyred for my religion—love is my religion—and I could die for that.

I could die for you.


## Connecting Through the Music

*Kaitlin Maria Apuhin*

I've always been more of an introvert when it comes to dealing with other people, and I find solace in quiet places where I can think about things by myself. Not too long ago, the thought of making relationships with the members and teachers of my guitar Required Extra Curriculars (REC) at school seemed pointless, an aspect of life that I deemed unimportant. I never realized the good that can come out of initiating connections with my recmates.

As I reflect on it, my REC classes were filled with dull silence and awkwardness. Outside the classroom, seeing them in hallways became a labyrinth of uncertainty—should I offer a greeting, or would looking the other way be the safer option? I definitely felt a lack of clarity surrounding my standing from the perspective of my peers.

Maybe it was the pivotal moment of the Talent Fest that sparked change. Finally learning the names of my fellow performers, sharing the stage, and feeling the joy of a good performance as a group set the stage for a change in my outlook. Being fully immersed in the warm and jazzy music showed me how connecting through music can feel idyllic. I felt further bonded to them when I realized we were all working toward the same goal, practicing and worrying until the performance together, playing the same song over and over again, and hitting all the notes at the same time. Feeling the guitar's vibrations and fingers stinging from hours of practice added to the vivid experience. High adrenaline fueled our synchronized performance under the bright, glaring lights, with the audience watching our every move. It was all beautiful. I enjoyed every second of the performance. It was just that vibrant, growing



feeling about the melody and accompaniment coming all together that made me want to continue this bond with them even after.

I realized that if I wanted to make connections, that would mean stepping out of my comfort zone. I started initiating short, casual conversations with my recmates whenever the opportunity came up. Being in the same center provided a natural starting point for connection. It helped that we had the same goal of learning the songs for the performance because it created an environment that encouraged a lot of communication and collaboration. These small interactions, albeit that will be all it will be, I know I was able to establish a connection where we could go to each other if we were in a room full of unknown people.

## Catching Yellow Tulips amidst the Storm

*Ranil Pio D. Uedan*

Would you become better today instead of looking back at your past self-regrets and feeling unwanted?

A lot of choices have been rough during the pursuit. Lately you've been chasing yellow tulips, yet harsh winds drag both of us apart. You tried to think the best of you was enough. Well, life gives a bitter sour lemon ride you cannot imagine. It was tragic.

Imagine yourself, doing what you love then suddenly burning out because some things matter aside from what you wanted to do. Beyond what's been a path of passion and success, comes with ferocious cloud of haze carrying a dark cumulonimbus cloud

Signs of a thunderstorm? More like struggles will be brewing mad.


Question yourself.

“Would it be great to fight back? “

Muster all that courage and take the first step to rekindle what's been lighted before. However, you never chase yellow tulips in the first place.

You tend to chase blindly, overlooking the situations and decisions that you should've made. The shell still sparkles yet you're still inside. Too risky to come out? Aside from drowning in fear, the smoke from your burnout suffocates your lungs, halting your movement to act in succession.

Nevertheless, you have the determination to retaliate. What better action than to face those challenges head on?



To come out of oneself is to create an opening. Everybody has their waves of battle, and you're also one of them. Your decision matters; you are the captain of your own boat.

Get out of that shell and unleash your potential with confidence and elegance. Show the real you that has been quite caged in the shackles of your own mind. Let your heart beat the way it did and keep the burning passion alive. Walk proudly and get a grip on the things you hold today. Tell the people, that this is not how your story ends, but this is how you are reborn to be better.

Take the leap with courage; from there you will catch my yellow tulip

Ultimately, you realized that you grow best when you face struggles. You've been tenacious in your actions. Remember, struggles are surprising, but happiness also comes with time, as we become less expecting.

## Sunset

*Jayben Matiang*

5:30 pm, it was Thursday afternoon. On our way back home after a tiring day, we tried to catch up with the captivating view of the sky as the sun set to the west. Barefooted, we ran through the shore and laid down to the sands.

Upon resting your head on my shoulder, you uttered something in a serious tone.

“Love, what did you see

To love me this way?”

For the very first time, you asked me.

After hearing it, I took a deep breath.

The deafening silence thundered in that particular moment,

And I could hear nothing except our heartbeats and the sound of the breeze and waves as it slapped to the shore.

I broke the silence as I answered: “You see; we don’t watch the sunset just because it’s cute. We also discern it because of the peace, comfort, and tranquility that it brings to our soul. I think it is shallow to only look at the appearance of something, but rather appreciating the beauty within is what matters the most.

So yes, my love, your beautiful smile alone is enough to melt my entire being

But,





Love is broad and it is beyond what eyes can see”.

As I uttered the last syllable,

For a thousand times, my eyes perceived your smile.

And it was yet the brightest one that I’ve ever seen.

# Live

*Jayben Matiang*

Life is like an eclipse. Enigmatic, yet rare and exceptional. We're like a sojourning comet lost adrift in the cosmos with no assurance of what domain to fall into. Our existence was probably the fruit of a roulette game of nature without crystal-clear objectives. We're aimless travelers in this vast universe, caught in the arcane matrix hastening towards the end of time.

We're not destined to live forever, nor was our intellect biologically programmed to fully perceive the obscurity of our existence. Besides, that's the beauty of it. To leave us wonders to behold. For us to set out on a quest to find answers for our curiosity. For us to decipher the poetry of this life. To belittle those triumphant rulers of the empire, knowing how infinitesimal they are compared to ethereality. To teach us how to grasp even the smallest things and seize the moment before death knocks on our doors.

Paradoxically, life exists, as does identity. There's you and I, folding the same calendars every month and breathing the same air at this certain point in human history. We have a chance to experience what a life is: to feel euphoria, to see beauty and read poetry, to hear stories, to caress the skin of someone we love, to meet new people, to sip a cup of coffee and taste its bitterness, to feel the warmth of an embrace, to feel the spark of nexus as we fill the spaces between someone's fingers, and to feel the breeze of night as we awe upon the sparkling fireballs of the sky.

It is inevitable that we'll meet our fate at some point. But before we vanish like a beautiful sunset, don't just exist.

Live.

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