



“The pen is mightier than the sword.”

Ben Emata Jr.

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AN EVENING WITH A SENATOR

By: Ben Emata

MANILA - - I have been writing through the Internet articles, comments, observations and even feature articles of human interest for quite a good number of years. I sent them to various websites and friends and even newspapers. It must have reached to a lot of people because I received many acknowledgments from as far as Kuala Lumpur in Malaysia, Singapore, Canada, and Philippines and from many states in the USA. I am proud about it because the replies from people were very encouraging and invigorating. I just write in the Internet for a hobby but actually writing is really my profession and I derived most of my income in this kind of business. This is the source of income that made my family intact for years until my kids have gone to college and now manage their own affairs independently as professionals too.

Sometimes I sent copies of my articles to Sen. Aquilino “Nene” Pimentel who happens to be my good friend back in our city - - the City of Cagayan de Oro when he was then city mayor. One thing sure with him is he reads my articles and return to me with comments and/or observations. I thought he would be very busy to even open his inbox but then it became very clear to me that he really is one friend who communicates no matter how pressing other important matters to him. Always he writes something about the article I sent him thus giving me encouragement and inspiration.

I maintain a very good media-politician relationship with the senator. But our friendship does not mean I don't fire shots at him whenever there is an issue that I can put up against him. Many times he felt aggrieved of my articles and threatened me of a libel suit but maybe he realized the matters were not worth the sensational case in court that would only favor my stand. It is not easy to crucify a newspaperman in court because the likelihood is public opinion will rush behind him. One time I criticized him on a certain issue over my radio program and right there and then, the Senator called me by phone and angrily explained his side. His explanation was aired as he was talking and whatever came out remained in the minds of the listeners.

Sen. Pimentel learned that I was in town when I was in Cagayan de Oro because of the messages I fired in the Internet. He sent me a message to see him in the Senate when I get back to Manila. Indeed I was deeply elated and honored to get such an invitation besides that the last time we met was in Hayward, California, in 1996 when I interviewed him on many important issues involving the country's troubled economy. And Nene that time was being groomed by many groups of politicians for the presidency. After our interview, the senator rode in my dilapidated vehicle on our way to a nearby hotel where his compatriots from Cagayan de Oro were waiting. He preferred riding in my car rather than the car of Atty. Romy Alvidera, which was a late model Mercedes Benz.

One time I nearly got entangled with what could be a deadly incident that would have endangered my own life. I went to Ororama Superstore to buy personal needs when someone was shouting at me



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while I park my motorcycle in a vacant parking space in front of the store. I looked at the source of the voice and saw a man sitting in the driver's seat of an owner type jeep. He told me to remove my motorcycle because he was going to park his jeep on the space. I told him the space is vacant and I am getting it. The man threw insults and invectives that surprised me so much. I saw his waistline bulging with a .45 caliber pistol and must be the reason why he was so bold and proud of himself and seemed to be the king of the jungle. I was also armed with a .38 cal. Paltik revolver that I knew sometimes misfires. Just the same I tried to cool off myself because I can feel I was no match in a gunplay - - what if my gun misfired and he took me between the eyes. I said there was not enough reason to fight. I am not defending my honor, or that of my family and children that I had to oblige to go battle. I removed my motorbike and the man took my parking space still angry.

I called then Mayor Pimentel and told him about the incident. Nene got angry and called the police right away. In a few minutes three police officers were around me inside the Ororama Superstore asking me where to find the man. We went around and saw the man with his wife buying things around. They accosted the man, disarmed him and brought to the headquarters for investigation. It turned out he was a PMA graduate class '79 and a first lieutenant in the army. He could not defend himself why he was carrying a firearm while in civilian clothes in public, which was then a violation of sorts of military rules. The police readied several cases against him including threats to me until the soldier asked forgiveness. I let him go and told him never to underestimate anyone just because he had the gun and being in the military.

I went to the Senate on the day he designated and saw him busy with paperworks while a lady senator was at the podium talking about vaccines against hepatitis and still other senators were just talking, laughing and not paying attention to their jobs. When I asked a staff member to give to the senator my business card, the latter stood up right away and looked for me nearby. Nene signaled me to walk through the VIP area just at the back of the senators' seats. He sat beside me and we talked shortly. He introduced me to Sen. Gordon, Sen. Lacson, Sen. Jinggoy Estrada and Sen. Ejercito (wife of Erap) and a lot other. I was delighted and exceedingly flattered by the acts of Nene in giving me such special attention before the eyes of a large audience and listeners in the gallery as well as the legislators while session was in progress. I feel such an honor is fit only for kings or chiefs of state.

After the session, we boarded his van and headed to Hilton Hotel along Roxas Boulevard. A long time friend, Atty. Lando Galimpin, joined us. He called for his lady, Bing Pimentel, to tell her that we were going to have dinner at the hotel. Madam Bing asked Nene that she be fetched as she wanted to have dinner with us too. Bing was another newsmaker in those days when her husband was city mayor. She was very active in civic and religious groups that made her always visible to the public. I used to cover by TV her activities with the projects she and her groups had undertaken.

Pimentel told me he is preparing a book about his adventure and escapade during martial law, his arrest and many moments of despairs, anguish and hatred. He continued to say that the book would contain some of our interviews prior to his stockade days. I remember I used to interview the former



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mayor in his office almost everyday. He was one of the top newsmakers aside from Bono Adaza who was provincial governor and also bound for the stockade when martial law was in place.

Each of us got steaks and some beers for the night while we were discussing local and national politics. I could sense Nene’s eagerness and enthusiasm to try his luck in the presidential election has diminished tremendously. His reactions to my inquiries whether he still have plan as he used to have many years earlier, seems lukewarm. He is not very interested anymore to touch the subject matter like in the previous years when he would enjoy the subject. I thought his chance of becoming president of the country had been outgrown and that he could no muster anymore enough support for some reasons like not having enough financial resources.

Senator Pimentel is a just a victim of political tradition in the Philippines. You see brilliant people who could surely make good presidents cannot win because he lacks the money to buy votes and all other incidental expenses. These people had to vow down to inept but popular candidates, billionaires, influential, power and gamblers. Mindanao has a lot of presidential timbers ever since but would not dare where the corrupt and the thieves dance their way. We have Bono Adaza too who is willing to try his luck at Malacanang but did not have enough bolt and nut to finance the entire proceeding. We had Manning Pelaez, Landring Almendras, Elli Pamatong, Eddie Tamondong, Cesar Climaco, Joe Zubiri and others but could not make it. And this is precisely the reason why Mindanao could not produce a president. And Mindanao has been a neglected island ever since.

Nene presented to me the many resolutions, bills, and laws that he had passed in the senate and quietly I was impressed because they were legislations that really are needed by the general citizenry. I saw Nene as one public servant who really served. Every penny that he got from the government was due for his good services. He had served the public with willingness, diligence and devotion.

It was a pleasant evening I would say having been with a long time friend in a special dinner that was wrapped with so much hospitality and friendship. I was so thankful for a rare moment especially his lady Bing was around to grace the dinner.