



"The pen is mightier than the sword."

Ben Emata Jr.

ben_emata@yahoo.com

KAGAY-ANONS IN USA

By: Ben Emata

No one can exactly tell when the first wave of *Kagay-anons* ever set foot on the soil of America like the astronauts who first made it on the surface of the moon. Undoubtedly, hundreds of *Kagay-anons* had moved onward in search for an identity under the sun. There were the apple growers in Hawaii, in California and other states of America even before the advent of World War II. For one thing, more than sixty years have elapsed since the end of that dreadful war and still more and more residents of Cagayan de Oro and elsewhere in Misamis Oriental are in the long line of exodus waiting for passport and visa. This is on top of Filipinos who leave everyday from all places in the country to north, south, west and east in foreign lands. The reason is not anymore that old adage to seek greener pasture but perhaps just pasture itself since there is none back home.

According to old-timers, there were already *Kagay-anons* in Louisiana, Hawaii, California and New York long before World War II. Most of them belonged to the *sacadas*, an organization in the olden days that is equivalent to the labor recruiter in the present day. These recruiters hire agricultural workers from the Philippines to be brought to Hawaii where fruit trees were abundant. While many of them found success in Honolulu and other islands in Hawaii, others have immigrated to California to become apple and cherry pickers in Delano and Stockton. They also had established their roots right there and soon scattered in many states of the vast continent.

The Philippines cannot provide jobs for its people. It imperils the future of family and children and to make both ends meet, Filipinos scamper for anywhere even if in many cases accepting jobs abroad that involve a great risk to their lives. To them it is better to die in foreign lands while earning, rather than in their own home with everyone dying in hunger. Ironically, this set up even made the government happier since these imported Filipinos can earn money for the country. The Philippines, unashamed, has been earning billions of dollars annually derived from overseas workers. To the national leaders, these workers form part of a very lucrative industry that strengthens the national economy. Our country is a high exporter of housemaids abroad.

Cagayan de Oro City which includes the residents of the whole province of Misamis Oriental is one place in the Philippines that has a good number of immigrants now in the USA. They scattered throughout the continent and many do not anymore know each other. They came with varied professions like doctors, lawyers, nurses, engineers, accountants, office professionals, embalmers, teachers, mechanic, electricians, marine workers, etc. According to



"The pen is mightier than the sword."

Ben Emata Jr.

ben_emata@yahoo.com

estimates, more than 80 percent have college degrees and all of them are working in so many places. Some of them have been successful in the business of real estates, car distributions, marketing, newspaper publishing, manufacturing, trucking, cargo and freight handling,

These people have succeeded in educating their children who now have intermarried and form part of the American population. They help one another like putting up common funds to buy a house or properties back in the Philippines for speculations and future use. Filipino families anyhow belong to close circuit of relationship just like any other Asian countries. It is in a closely-knit web.

To maintain an identity, they come up in the open and organize associations or groupings like the Kagay-anon of America, the Association of *Kagay-anons*, Cagayan de Oro Residents Association of USA, etc. Whatever the name, the members came from the City of Cagayan de Oro and all places from Misamis Oriental. By these organizations, they are able to meet with each other, exchange experience, news stories, make or renew friendships, trace family relationship and everything that even include story-telling of bygone days as well as the Filipino culture of spreading gossips or the like.

These Mindanoans came over in many ways like having non-resident visa, permanent immigrants, contract workers, students, relatives of naturalized citizens like those farm workers in the pre-war days, military servicemen, war veterans of World War II, as service men in the US Navy and everything. And being strangers in a place, everyone had to do their best to make a living and to give good future for their families. While some struck wealth by luck and hard work, others lag behind but still fighting more for survival. Nobody believes that luck can come without working for it. It is ugly to be lazy and always sleepy to live in a country as the USA. Everyone must work for a living and help build the nation become strong and powerful.

While a lot are enjoying the advantage of coming over with legal documentation such as green cards or authority to work, others, sad to say, are unfortunate enough that they have to live under the shades of darkness making sure that the U.S. Naturalization Service does not stumble upon them. *Kagay-anons* have also its share of underground workers like the rest of about 12 million or so illegal immigrants from all over the world most notably from Mexico. They are always on the run rain or shine and some of them have already been apprehended and sent to the airport for immediate departure back home. These are the undocumented immigrants who have been in the USA for many, many years but could not get proper documentation for some reasons. They jokingly referred themselves as the TNTs (Tago nang Tago or hide and hide). They usually cannot stay in one place for so long. They are outcasts to the American government in the matter of appropriate documentation but they are still regarded as good citizens because they work hard and pay their income taxes with devotion and sincerity. They still help build America and maintain its strength and power in whatever way.



"The pen is mightier than the sword."

Ben Emata Jr.

ben_emata@yahoo.com

In organizations of *Kagay-anons*, many of these TNTs do not show up because of fear they will be reported to the authorities by their own *kababayans* and deported by the Immigration and Naturalization Service. Others are just shy because they belonged to the elite and affluent families in Cagayan de Oro and made little improvement in life while in the USA after the lapse of a good number of years. Many of these TNTs also just shun social functions because of their jobs.

Majority of these TNTs have families to support back home and some have gone astray maintaining love affairs to fill the emptiness in the heart and the gap between work and rest. Enjoyment in love in the midst of a long absence from home is one painful problem so difficult to handle. Some even resorted to divorce to end the cruelty in life and get another partner. Others opted to the so-called "fixed marriage" where they spend some amounts to pay the groom or bride to be legalized. The effect in most cases is extremely bad especially in the side of the female since the "fixed husband" make use of the loneliness lingering in her mind and force her into submission for sex under threat of deportation. In short she lost both money and chastity.

These illegal *Kagay-anons*, men and women, handle dirty jobs of giving health care to the elderly some are dying and surely they are ashamed about it. It is a well-known fact that TNTs here get no other jobs but as caregivers since they work even without authority to work. This matter is highly illegal and can cause immediate deportation but at least it can maintain body and soul together for as long as they remained undetected. Others have legal document but still prefer to work with the elderly since it is easy and the pay is quite acceptable. Care-giving here includes the job of cleaning the patients everyday meaning you assist the patients in his toilet personal needs, cook food for him or her, clean the house, give the prescription drugs at proper interval, drive him to and from a doctor's appointment and others. One normally touches every dirty matters from his body. These are nursing jobs but many patients prefer the TNTs obviously for financial reasons. They can easily be exploited with a much lesser amount in pay compared to professional nurses and other medical workers. And in many cases, payment of wages and salaries are made underground, which means no taxes go to the government. This is highly illegal and stiff penalties are due to the patients and the workers.

The plight of the TNTs is just the dark side of many *Kagay-anons* who still find success notwithstanding the hindrance. They still afford to buy Lexus SUVs, Mercedes Bens, expensive cars and others have purchased nice homes. Their predicaments do not disturb them in any way and still maintain a good family with their children in private schools. It is in the handling of cash that count much.

In some instances, many professionals from our city found discomfort in life because of reckless management of their financial resources. Some *Kagay-anons* who made good in this



"The pen is mightier than the sword."

Ben Emata Jr.

ben_emata@yahoo.com

land of milk and honey could hardly compete with those undocumented counterparts who know how to handle their cash.

As usual extra curricular activities attract many of these people like going frequently to casinos to try their luck in gambling. Almost always they lost and naturally poorer by hundreds or thousands of dollars in just one visit. Other prefers to take travels as a way of enjoying and making their lives a little bit livelier. I know of several friends who have traveled to Europe several times already as well as major cities in Asia. Other visit the pilgrimage places in France, Israel, Egypt and many other in the MiddleEast. They love to travel as one best alternative to ease the monotony of life.

Kagay-anons have also its share of culture in this country like getting into divorces when love starts jumping out of the windows. A lot of them have found themselves better being alone as parents than with their spouses who take for granted the sanctity of marriage. After the divorces, they parties go West while others go East and remarry while their kids are still young and crying foul to the acts of their parents. Many have gone wild after the divorce like frequenting night spots, dancing, sing-along and other form of entertainment even drinking. As a result they failed to send to college their kids and end up working in low pay employment. Of course, many good *Kagay-anons* who have kids in the Philippines were successful in educating them in college. They are faithful and loving and has kept burning the heat of love of their families.

One irreversible disadvantage of working underground is there is no light to give way towards retirement. One is unknown to the Internal Revenue Service and therefore, there is no retirement package for her when she reaches the ripe age to stop working. The beauty is when one is young because she gets the entire pay every end of week.

In general, however, *Kagay-anons* are united in this country whether one is in New York, Texas, California or anywhere else. They meet sometimes and say hello and talk about the yesteryears of their city that has grown a lot. Nearly all regions have a formal organization of former residents of the city. They elect officers, hold induction dinner and ball, celebrate the annual fiesta of their patron saints and organize big parties and merrymaking. Every three years these various organizations from the regions meet in a certain city to socialize. They call the event "Tapok" which means meeting and here they put up a much bigger celebration.



"The pen is mightier than the sword."

Ben Emata Jr.

ben_emata@yahoo.com

Since many of the residents are attending in this ultimate reunion, there is a wider area of renewing friendship and relationship.

They help their city by way of sending boxes of goodies, medicines, donations of needed items in the far-flung barrios, as well as medical and hospital supplies. Various projects are initiated there by these people who even if they are thousands of miles away maintained a soft heart and love for the city and people that to them has no equal.

Elected officials like Sen. Nene Pimentel, Pablo Magtajas, Bono Adaza, Rep. Tennex Jaraula, and others from the city often visit the residents. Kagay-anons are solid and when they ask their relatives back home to vote for a certain candidate, the latter obey. So it is not so much for any leader or prospective leaders to visit these folks in the name of camaraderie.