



"The pen is mightier than the sword."

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Overseas Filipinos!

LIFE IN A RICH NATION

By: Ben Emata

While luxurious things in America are right under our fingers, cash possession is sufficient with good jobs and the things that America provides to its people, are well above expectation - yet the feeling of fulfillment or contentment in life is still far from having been achieved. There is still that feeling of emptiness in our hearts. We miss loved ones and important things back home like attending fiestas, visiting relatives, picnic in beautiful beaches and a lot others. It is in this country that we realized fully the value of being away from the country that we love so much.

We miss the countryside. The green plants, the beautiful rivers, the hills, the farms and all the scenes that usually meet your eyes. And of course we miss too the sounds of birds, the domestic animals and the sounds of darkness come nighttime. We have so much of relaxation back home while here we count the years of hard work and the wrinkles that protrude on your skin.

We don't get out from our cars when we reached home from work because we use the remote control that automatically opens the garage door. Going to work in high-rise buildings needs just a thumb to push an elevator button and in seconds we are in the desired floor. We don't climb up the stairway and grasp for air anymore. We don't use our left foot in driving a car because there is no clutch to step on. There is just a brake for the right leg and accelerator. Cars are automatically driven and are computerized too. Along the freeway, we don't even step on the accelerator permanently because there is the cruise system that does for it. All you do is set the speed and out the car zoom by itself. Disabled people who do not have legs or hands can still drive a car especially designed for human physical defects. They have car elevators to put them on the driver's seat. They have battery-operated wheel chair that precisely obey commands. No matter the defects in a person, he can move with the help of technology and desire.

We almost don't cook food because they are available in fast food restaurants. Refrigerated prepared or ready-to-eat foods are abundant in supermarkets. You just open the box, heat it out and in two minutes you have sizzling shrimps, port, beef and vegetables. We use microwave to warm leftovers or new food that are microwaveable. Kitchens here are equipped with ovens, washers, an array of utensils and tools that are readily used everyday. A laundry room is always a part of the house and like all other things, it needs just a finger to make things cleaned in minutes. There are no housemaids here or if you insist for one, you pay her almost the same rate as you are earning per hour of work. You cook your own food and clean



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utensils by yourself. You wash your clothes and iron them, vacuum the carpet, wash your cars, attend to its need like changing of oil regularly, check tires, etc. You are both the master and the servant of yourself. That is life in America away from home.

Movie houses that exhibit first class films only are plenty. Filipinos who are addicted to movies can go everyday. An array of new films every week dominate the multiple screens that are open inside malls, separate buildings or anywhere. Those who can not watch the movies during premier shows or until the films get off for the week may watch for the DVD or CDs that will come out in just two to three weeks.

It has to be luxurious in the home because everyone is always tired everyday from work. Working here is far off different than working in the Philippines. There is punctuality on the job. You are late for five minutes, you must explain why and that five minutes get adjusted on your pay. Tardiness form part of your personal record and you can get kicked when you become ripe for termination. We have to show accomplishment every end of day. We observe strictly rules at work. We don't use the telephones for personal purpose during working time. We undergo training and perform actual applications on the job. We are trained even on manners that involved in answering the telephones. We have to straighten our accent to be understood and we have to be alert on matters that refer to your line of job. One must produce things that he is expected for his 8-hour work and must not stop working until the strike of the last minute. This makes America strong and productive because the manpower is serious in its role. Lazy people have no reasons to be in the framework of organizations. We move quickly every time and our hands react so fast too.

Working in a government office needs more especial attention and care. You have in mind that you interact with the public and you must satisfy them. Maximum service that is. One must be dressed appropriately that includes well-pressed shirts, pants, an attractive necktie or coat sometimes. One must appear pleasant and very friendly. We have to be articulate and firm in our pronouncement and make sure things are put in right order and perspective. There are regular meetings you must attend, seminars, training on new software or new procedures in the office. Everybody is expected to cooperate with each other as a team and one must be able to work unsupervised in a comfortable workplace.

There is pride in your job. You don't get in for nothing. You must first pass the eligibility written examination that usually calls for only five percent of the candidates passing. When one gets only say 89% in the written examination, he should not expect to be called for an interview. Priority interview will for the first top five only. When you passed, you encounter a series of oral interview by different panels of interviewers to be followed by actual use of office equipment. If you are lucky enough to pass through the hole of the needle, you undergo a year of probation before you are actually hired permanently. Being in the probation period is not a guarantee that you will be hired. It is only nearest to being hired permanently but that is the



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final and most difficult of all the steps that one undertakes. The job usually is juicy with lots of nice benefits; good pay, paid leaves and so on.

If you get a job in the assembly areas of some electronic industries, most likely you stand for eight hours while performing your job. For young people this is no big deal. But for workers more than 50 years old and a little overweight, the chance of having a backache is almost always certain. Nurses and doctors are more affected because of the volume of works they meet everyday. One has to be alert. One must walk fast and achieve a good job everyday or you will be given your walking paper next day. Honesty in the job is a must. Every end of day you will feel proud in your achievement. You are certain you have performed the tasks assigned to you for the money you are paid for that day.

Notwithstanding all these comforts and luxuries, Filipinos in the United States are lonely people. There is not much friendship in this country. You have few friends and you just don't see with each other as much as you like it. The reason is everybody is busy working and if he is at rest, he does not want to be disturbed. One who is tired always needs so much sleep. Your neighbors here are just your neighbors but they are not your friends. When sometimes your eyes meet, most often you just say hello and nothing follows. Your co-workers are your friends but friendship is limited while you are at work. You don't go out together after work or talk so much often. Chances are both of you are having second jobs that you must go in a hurry or you just want to be home to rest or get some entertainment on televisions. Unlike in the Philippines, we don't drink alcohol after work even if beers are cheap and abundant everywhere because we have to drive and the law on drunken driving is quite strict. There is those dreaded handcuffing, court appearances, staying behind bars, fines that run to thousands and suspensions of driving privileges.

The only time Filipinos in the USA find some enjoyments on weekends when there are birthday parties or whatever and they get invited. Without the social activity, they spend Saturdays doing household works, clean their cars, going to groceries, shopping, barbershops and elsewhere. Of course, Sunday is Church day and most likely the whole family take a lunch in restaurants. In the afternoon, they just watch TV shows or listen to music and prepare again for the work the next Monday.

By comparison, there is so much dishonesty among workers in the Philippines especially those in government agencies and they seemed tolerated. Tardiness is one ordinary thing that workers just ignore as if it is normal. In many cases, mothers take with them to work their school-going kids, sign in the logbook or Bundy clock and get out to take the kids to school. In nearly an hour they are back and begin the normal job only to get out again for a break. It is irritating to see employees doing text work on their cell phones in short intervals. Lunchtime is terrible because everyone goes home for lunch and takes a nap. Being late in going to work in the morning and likewise being late in the afternoon is just nothing to them. In the afternoon another break time is abused and the 15 minutes is dragged to an hour. After just few minutes,



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one readies to go home and while waiting, reads newspaper or whatever. Of course, this is highly ridiculous and scandalous but in a job site where politics play a very important role, higher ranks office staff sometimes fear proteges of the influential and powerful. And to add insult to injury, these workers exercise their rights over higher pay and other benefits - - thus the government system is near collapse and the country is weak and poor. The manpower is abusive.

Our greatest joy in life is when we visit the Philippines and see our loved ones, real friends and relatives. It is the time to rejoice seeing the tourist's spots that we never visited when we were there. Abundance of fruits that we missed for years, the cemetery to visit dead relatives, old church, the real home, and many things. We have a chance to eat those Filipino foods that we never had even a glimpse in America like the malunggay soup with chicken, local variety of fish, vegetable salads and others. We got to enjoy the sunny beaches, the warm water and the picnickers by the hundreds. Above all we feel the strength of our currency against the local peso. We buy so many things for so little amount of green bucks. And it makes our life more complete by way of giving relatives whatever little cash assistance for all the years that you missed them.