



"The pen is mightier than the sword."

Ben Emata Jr.

ben_emata@yahoo.com

ON FAMILY REUNION

By: Ben Emata

HOUSTON, TEXAS - - Family reunion is one of the most important things of our culture as Filipinos. This is because our race has a very strong web and closely-knit of family relationship and that we belonged to an ethnic group that keeps a home a place for family gatherings, love, understanding, friendship, care and the like.

In contrast to Western culture, we Filipinos keep our children in the home even after they got married and have already children of their own. While eventually the kids leave the home with their respective families to establish their own place they also can call home, deep in our heart, is pain that we don't see them everyday. The heart maybe heavier but the desire to seeing them exist and manage their own with responsibility is greater. Following the normal development in life, the children who have scattered elsewhere also keep their parents when the latter go mature and could hardly take care of them. In other words, from childbirth to deathbed, Filipinos find it necessary to have unity in the family always where love can flow freely during the years. It is a part of growing for the kids and it drags to the point of aging.

In the Philippines, the best time to hold family reunions is in the month of December. The reason is grandchildren from far away places have time off from school and their respective parents can decide on anything. It is a month of gift giving, merrymaking, joy, Church obligations, and fair weather. This is because they come in-group or the grandparents who usually hold the venue of such grouping, would not be so pleased if someone was left behind. After all, reunion is oneness or unity for the entire family, which means every member, must be present. Sometimes reunions are held on off-season when someone in the family gets married or the grand patriarch and matriarch celebrate the golden jubilee of their marriage or whatever. This is precisely the reason why this affair calls for a big celebration like parties everyday that includes dancing, group picnics and games for the small kids. Bigger families in the province install tents in the open air where everybody can move freely and enjoy more. It is always the talk of the town when big reunions are held.



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This is true to my own family - - and we had a great reunion just recently in this lovely city of Houston, Texas. It was purely Filipino style except that some of the participants were White people from Europe and Canada who are also members of my family. I call this an international family because three of my daughters were married to a German, a Canadian, and a British while my first son got married to a half-breed German. It is not surprising, therefore, that I have half-breed Filipinos for grandchildren sporting straight noses, blue eyes, extra white complexion, quite blond hair and speak bilingual Germans and English. My children are like me, every inch a Filipino, in structure, with brown eyes, brown complexion, and ordinary appearance, shorter than average human beings and also proud of our race.

As I said there usually is better reason to hold a reunion aside in the month of December when kids are off from school. In my case, my youngest daughter, whom I described as the last jewel in my collection for ladies division was getting married. I mean I still have one in the men's division. Oh yeah they are now living in their own house and working as executives in different oil companies. So of the five kids we have, three girls and two boys, the three girls were sold like hotcakes and married to a Canadian, a German and Englishman. They all got married almost after graduation from college. My first boy too followed the example of his sisters and got married to a Filipino-German, except the other who still enjoys the beauty of love, travel and music and still prefer to be in the home with his Mom. He too is ripe for the picking, very much single, got a beautiful job as bank manager. He is a pet of the family because of his extreme love for his nephews and nieces.

My strict instruction when they were young was to never marry until they are done in college. I told them without doubt that each of them would have college degrees no matter how I sacrifice for them provided they study hard. They all kept that vow to stay single. I don't want to repeat the mistake when I took a bride while both of us were only third year in college.

The wedding was announced officially to the family as early as February, 2005 and set for a Sunday, November 13 and believe me, my daughters who now lives in Canada with her family and the other in Kolbermoor, Germany, got excited into coming home for the reunion. E-mail messages and telephone calls dominate whatever little time available on the subject of the wedding and reunion. Everybody felt the excitement especially so the family had not seen with each other for a good number of



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years - - 5 or 6 years. Distance and oceans have separated them well enough plus the chores in their respective family more on the matter of raising their own kids. The last reunion we had was during the college graduation of my youngest daughter. So countdown for the reunion began right away even if it was months away.

By November 10, everyone in the family was busy renewing friendship right at the arrival area of the Houston International Airport, exchanging matters of interests in their respective lives, introducing small kids to one another, hugging, kissing and welcome home feeling from their parents. It was human nature now working regardless of race and belief. The White men described as sons-in-law were presented well to the growing family that began with just two in Misamis Oriental some 44 years ago. They are all very polite, respectful, all professionals, hardworking guys and embracing my culture and even the food that we eat.

So on the day of the wedding, everyone in the family had a role. The youngest of the grandchildren were the flower girls; the youngest boy was one of the coin bearers; others became matron, bridesmaids and groomsmen. Of course, I walk down the aisle with the bride to give her up in the formal wedding rite. I remember vividly I was smiling in the outside but crying hard in the inside. And everybody was a photographer to record personally the event as future memories were on the making, on top of the hired photo studio staff. The wedding was quite lavish I should say belonging to the above average affair. There is nothing I can do the bridegroom holds a doctorates degree in Engineering and Chemistry while my daughter, the bride is a computer-electrical engineer. Both are department managers from two different oil companies. Funding the wedding, therefore, was not so difficult. It took them a long time to prepare for this big affair.

A Rolls Royce fetched the bride from her dressing room with her Mom and me to the chapel of her Alma Matter, the University of Houston, where she exchanged sacred vows with her husband. After the solemn ceremony, the new couple went straight to the wedding reception at the plushy Sugarland Creek Golf Club where more than a hundred guests and well-wishers awaited enjoying a pre-dinner cocktail held at the entrance lobby. In an hour or so, the guests were invited to enter the big hall of the golf club for the formal reception. There was the combination of European and Oriental food served amidst thunders of applause and music from relatives, co-workers and everyone. The money dance was introduced to the European culture and



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it was a hit with them participating, the new couple became an instant Christmas tree with dollar bills hanging through and through on their attires while they dance.

Relatives of the grooms from as far as England, friends and co-workers turned up and enjoyed the dancing and food. Likewise, relatives, friends and guests of the bride from as far as the Philippines, Canada, Germany, New York, Virginia, Las Vegas, San Francisco, Los Angeles, Seattle and Louisiana, came to wish good luck to the new couple. From the reception area, the newly-weds and parents were fetched in a black Limousine to a night stay in the world famous tourist city of Galveston, the coastal city spared by God from the furious hurricane Katrina just months earlier.

The day after was a day of sadness and smile in my heart. My daughters living in Canada and Germany had to leave because their kids should be in school in 24 hours. Their systems of education were not like in the Philippines where we can ask for a week absence to attend an important family activity. That German boy who was the ring bearer had to face the burden of getting through with what he left in his school while in the mainland USA. His school principal would not allow him more days absent than what is in the policy. The same thing with the Canadian boy and girl who also had to move faster to catch up with the things they missed while enjoying the family reunion. My kids comforted me with more reunions soon but how long and when are things that remain hazy and cloudy. They also asked me to visit them in their respective home or stay with them for as long as I like.

Reunions are like a flash of light that appear and disappear. Participants are like jellyfish that swim in and swim out as swiftly as possible. Eyes dance with joys on the first few days and get misty on the day of parting. We parents explode with pleasures, excitements and joy only to cry in darkness as they leave. The kids leave a shadow of affections and heartache seeing their parents in sadness. The memories linger on and the only thing perhaps time cannot change. Even the strong winds that blow hard cannot cause destruction to the memories that developed in such an affair. Memories are in the heart and mind and only when one dies that thing are ended in him.

But life is like that. Reunions are still the best stopover of sadness, as we grow older. Renewing memories and love with another is a very important ingredient in aging. Whatever it is, I should say I enjoyed so much the games and caresses with my grandchildren. Several times I looked at every face of my children and they all



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displayed a sort of joy and happiness in their married life. I observed them with their spouses and they appear nice and loving to each other, a great consolation in my heart that I can take with into my final days in life.

My love strikes like lightning and am keeping it warm for their return. I look forward in the very near future I will be able to touch them each, feel their love for their respective families and once more feel the sense of pride and success in my family. I try my best to keep the flame of love burning and ask the Almighty to give us all good health to enable us to meet again.