



*"The pen is mightier than the sword."*

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*Cagayan de Oro*

## **The City That Is Awake**

### **By: Ben Emata**

CAGAYAN DE ORO CITY - - I don't mind so much about the politics in Cagayan de Oro or anywhere else in Misamis Oriental. I am partly a Westerner now, an American boy in particular whose mind is not tied to local politics as I used to be many, many years ago in the Philippines.

Like any American, my mind is too often tied to our job and there is practically no space for daydreaming or thinking about things that are good for nothing. Talking about political parties and candidates especially at times when elections has just been held will just expose us to ridicule. In the United States of America, politics is discussed only during elections and period political campaigns. They word politics vanished hours after the election process as the losing candidates concede to their defeat. Immediately after, the winning and losing candidates become good friends once more and make plans for the success of the country and government.

My orientation, therefore, is such that I forget politics minutes after knowing who won in the race. And I don't build or maintain hatred with any of the candidates or their followers. I just forgot politics and never discuss with anyone any issues involved. That is me and nearly hundred percent of the Americans too. To us discussing politics is a waste of time and effort and only hampers our objectives towards work and earning. We mind our own business specially in raking incomes for our future and the future of our children. Americans just shun from talkative who still indulge in such business. But one thing, they are watchful and very concerned people of the movement of politics and everything around. They keep quiet but their ears are wide open to anything. After all everyone is busy working and precisely has no time to indulge in subject matter that seems moot and academic.

But Cagayan de Oro City is still the same old place that practices tradition in politics. The subject matter is a continuing topic everyday until another elections come over. I



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look at it as the best subject matter ever and everybody participates and enjoy. At times they quarrel and even engage in actual fighting. Politics is still hell in this city and perhaps will forever be a way of life.

As I go around the ever-beautiful city of Cagayan de Oro after having been away for straight eight years, I saw a lot of things that never were there before. I was startled honestly! I saw the soon-to-be inaugurated Cogon public market - - a four-story, modern public structure that is expected to change, in its entirety, the face of the city. Those small buildings around the marketplace that were grocery stores many years ago are not there anymore. In their stead are high-rise concrete structures, more modern and very impressive in appearance. One night while I go around, I saw strange and new fixtures of the city that prompted me to ask myself if I were really in the city that I love so much or somewhere else in Cebu or Manila. Around the perimeter of the market is what looks like little Hongkong with the stunning skyline that connects the bright boulevard towards Gusa highway. The land area involved in the construction of the entire market building is the same but its expansion was towards the sky thus the space created is four times against the original floor area. I could not figure out such a gigantic development could ever take place right in the heart of the city where congestion in traffic, market stalls and people are common sights everyday. This is certainly incredible and no matter what, it would give Mayor Emano some kind of praises and honors. I don't believe dirty politics can bar the general populace from accrediting Emano the huge project. What he did was actually following the lead of the late Mayor Borja who established the market in Cogon in the 50's. Emano is not only a mayor but also an architect of rapid development that catapulted the fast growing, city in the south into prominence in the world map.

J. R. Borja Street on the Westside of the market is now a beautiful five-kilometer boulevard that extends to the national highway in Gusa. The establishment thereof I supposed was to preempt the existence of a bumper-to-bumper traffic congestion that is a daily occurrence in Lapasan and the downtown areas. The road pierces those beautiful rolling hills in Gusa above the Capistrano subdivision and cut its way right in the entrance of the new market. And along the new road are houses and what seem to be new villages of city residents. There are small corner streets that lead to various places - - an entirely new neighborhood perhaps came into existence as the new road was being constructed. What used to be virgin hills that overlook the city and the



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Macajalar Bay in the area of Gusa is now a façade of advance metropolis in big Asian cities like Hongkong.

I crossed the bridge dubbed as "bridge too far" and heavily criticized for its excessive spending and uselessness. It is located after Lawndale spring and drive through the secluded area near the airport. This is going to be a major thoroughfare in a few years. I agree, as of this writing, the project is not being used so much by motorists yet but I can see in five to ten years the heavy influx of traffic derived from excesses in the two existing bridges will be diverted here. Right now travel time from Plaza Divisoria to the airport was reduced tremendously because the two points had been reduced in distance by several kilometers. I can see real estate business has been in place for the advent of plush villages that very soon will crop up like scattered seeds in the wilderness. This is another brilliant idea of the current city administration that I am sure will be judged fairly by history. I even think another bridge nearby is necessary at this juncture.

Needless to say, the expansion of Cagayan de Oro is in the upper part of the city and not towards the Macajalar Bay or elsewhere. There was no reclamation project in the shorelines of Lapasan, Gusa, or in the west in the vicinities of Bonbon and Bayabas. The barangay of Lumbia will become an urban uptown shopping center of the city with the advent of more investors and giant malls from Manila. It is easy to predict that the part of Imbatug and Talakag in the province of Bukidnon will become suburbs of Cagayan de Oro. Agriculture ventures currently existing in this area, therefore, will be imperiled but nothing can bar the growth of population and the need to sustain program in life.

There is no other place in the world where the living and the dead are as closed to each other, as in the area near the Cagayan de Oro airport. Yeah, they are strange bed pillows and they exist side by side as such. Beautiful cemeteries have been developed in the place adjacent to equally beautiful, plushy villages and subdivisions in the same vicinity. Only trimmed shrubs of gardens partition them. So the dead enjoy fresh flowers each day from its neighbors - - the living, while the later enjoys the thought of being very near to their loves ones - - the dead. Some jokes would say it is more convenient for the dead to be buried because he can just walk into his grave nearby. And both the living and the dead, whose domain overlooks the Cagayan River, enjoy the cold air and the green mountain nearby.



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High rise buildings have mushroomed in the downtown Cagayan de Oro and believe it or not I got lost many times especially when I drive home in the wee hours of the night. Plaza Divisoria, which is now known as the Golden Friendship Park, is now even friendlier than ever. It now offers a comfort room, so streamlined, that I don't notice any foul odor. Nearby are Hongkong style fast food, beerhouses, Internet café, newsstand communication offices and many more. City streets remained narrow but the growth of the city is obvious in the size and height of the buildings.

Barangay Carmen, Bulua, Lapasan, Gusa and Bugo have become what look like smaller cities within the big metropolis. I would suggest Carmen becomes first as another city within. It has its own appearance to become as such and need just a backing of a formal legislation and this place would become a beautiful city bigger than some cities in Mindanao.

I have been here two weeks already and I really stumbled to many good things that impressed me. As a media practitioner, I admire Mayor Emano for these things. It is true this guy got irritated with me for the many criticisms I attributed to him. Two times in the past this guy nearly filed libel suits against me for the same reason but our relationship were strictly between government official and newspaperman. At times we are good friends, at times we faced the battleground. He exercised, though, maximum tolerance and never allowed himself to be an onion-skinned politician. You criticize him and he just smile. He leaves you the privilege of free speech and communication because he knows fully well there is a borderline that spells freedom and lapses.

Speaking of our senator, how can we be so ungrateful to the good, fighting Senator Nene Pimentel? I heard from some irresponsible tongues that Nene's image is now in history in the city. If you can get a good view of Nene in a very near distance, try to look at him from a far, far distance and I am sure you will admire the man. As our city mayor before, I respected him so well. Until now I have a high respect of this man for being hardworking and a fighting senator in the senate that really fights for the interest of the Filipinos. Whether you like it or not, Nene is still the biggest name in local politics. He is next to the province legend, the late Vice Pres. Maning Pelaez. And Nene is still active in politics as a current member of the Philippine Senate.



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I covered the the activities of Pimentel when he was city mayor from 1980 until he rose to bigger power. I interview him almost every other day as well as then Gov. Bono Adaza. For a fact, I knew him to be a very hardworking fellow. He was always in his office everyday unless he goes for a trip to the barangays or to the leadership in Manila. He displayed his hot temper sometimes that makes city hall employees more careful in their jobs. To me Nene is kind, honest and a man of high integrity and honor.

I look at Nene, Dongcoy, Gov. Oski Moreno, Congresssmen Jun Baculio, Jaraula and Lagbas as people who made our city and province as pleasant as possible to live in. I admire them for their efforts and I look forward for a more beautiful city and province in the coming years. I saw them work hard and I saw the things they had done for our place.

At a flashback, I remember our great leaders: Pedro Baculio, Artadi, Titing De Lara, Dadole, Ysalina, Dongallo, Totong Dugenio, Bono Adaza, Reuben Canoy, Calingin, Tata Pacana, and others whose work never were in vain because everything emanated from their brilliant minds.