

Till the Tears Fell

By: Rachell Araja

19 year-old Rachell C. Araja, of San Pablo City, is a third year Chemical Engineering student at the University of the Philippines in Diliman. She was awarded the Overseas Workers' Welfare Administrations Scholarship grant when she graduated as Class Valedictorian in 2006.

She knows that her mother, Mrs. Amelita Araja- a Domestic Helper in the Middle East, works very hard because she believes that giving her children the best education possible, will be the only way their lives can be better, such that none of them will have to leave this country again to survive.

How I wish and hunger for that mother's eager look at her daughter who graduated on top of her entire batch; for that look of reassurance when eyes meet eyes; for that nervous look because her daughter is delivering a speech on stage. My mother who is working in Saudi Arabia was not able to make it on my graduation day. She should have been humbly seated on that front row silently mumbling every word I say, as she would have known my speech by heart because she and I would have worked eagerly to prepare it. Would that the blowing wind has taken to my mother the intense longing I have felt for her.

I was twelve years old when my mother left to earn a little more for my family's needs. It was heartbreaking to witness the most important person in my life walk away not knowing for certain when she's going to come back. It was more than difficult to think how she's going to risk her life in such a foreign place; take care of children she doesn't even know and clean a house she can't even call a home. But the irony is: I, her beloved daughter, never cried a single tear. No, not at all.

My eyes were filled with tears but I held those tears back for I thought as though I don't have the right to cry. I was not suppose to cry because my suffering isn't worth comparing to that of my mother and what is even worse to think of is that all these time, I have done nothing. I felt so helpless...so useless.

The insufficiency of job opportunities, the nose-dive economy and the political instability in our country propel hundreds of thousands of Filipinos to seek employment overseas. Yes, even if it means living their everyday lives away from their loved ones. Apparently, an exponentially growing number of Filipino families view working abroad as the only way to survive these challenging and trying times and the only way in achieving the so-called "better life".

Undoubtedly, children are the most vulnerable to the physical separation from their migrant parents. The children left behind may not be the poorest of the poor as economic convenience is

associated with working out of the country but they do grow emotionally-deprived and they do have pent-up emotions which they opt not to verbalize because our society treats them as “privileged” children. So perhaps, the deepest cries in our country are the ones left unheard.

However, the costs of migration give nobody a valid excuse to acquire negative attitudes towards life. Children of Expat Pinoys, OFWs, must neither dare to undervalue their parents’ earning and sacrifices or act as if they do not care. WE, the Expat Pinoy children, must respond positively to the challenges of migration; for I am convinced, there is no other way!

WE must have the will and courage to rise for our nation’s sake. No one can do this for us. No one should! By faith, we must reach-up because we, Expat Pinoy Children, should be more motivated and more dedicated in making a difference in our country. The psychological and social costs of migration are not just our personal problems; instead, these are but alarming concerns of the whole nation. Have we ever realized that there should have been no “goodbyes”, if only our nation is stable enough? Aren’t our expatriates’ blood and sweat enough reasons for us to perform our role to play in nation-building? We must do so for WE Have more reasons than anybody else.

And so the questions: In what ways can Expat Pinoy children, contribute to nation-building?

STUDY AS WELL AS YOU CAN! We don’t have to rush things. Lets come to our senses that with our limited resources and power, we won’t be able to change the nation in just a glimpse. Let us be reminded that everything worth having is worth waiting and working hard for. Our Expat pinoys are working day and night, giving up their rest and sleep, sacrificing their own happiness just to send us to school. They are doing so because they believe that education is the most that they can offer as to assure that we can acquire a better life—a life wherein there is no more need to be away from family to augment one’s income; a life way happier than our lives today; a life wherein we, their children, won’t suffer as much as they did.

It is through education that we could be nurtured and thought how to cope with the challenges of the real world; to focus despite suffering; to be critical despite dispute; to have grace under pressure; to speak our minds and press on!!! We must study as well as we can, not to memorize names and formulas, but to gain the expertise that shall equip us in facing the bigger world before us. We must study so that we can earn the appropriate wisdom, develop an upright and strong character, and achieve sufficient credentials in facing the broader horizon before us. Only then, shall we be able to maximize our potentials and render the most good for our family and for our country.

Today, we are investing on education so that someday we can be in the position where we can be of greater influence to our nation. Someday, all our sleepless nights and tiring days would finally pay-off. Someday, we can be what our Expat Pinoy parents have always dreamed of us to be. Education is our best avenue towards attaining the power resources that would enable us to be the change that we have always wanted to see.

BE A LIGHT TO THE WORLD! We must feel worthy of our task and demand our share in making this nation proud of us. The magnitude of the task placed upon our shoulders are bound to lift and glorify our race. We must ignite the fuse that will send everybody to move for the better.

I do believe that the primary role of OFW children in nation-building is to continuously be a source of hope and pride. We must never cease to make our parents feel that everything that they have been working hard for all these years are worth-it. We must value every little thing that they do as we are working our way towards our dream- --a dream to send them home and then, never let them go again.

Let us give them more and more reasons to be proud of us if only to make them smile. They deserve that!!! Let our victory in contributing to the society's well-being be our token of gratitude to their unconditional love.

Through these, Expat Pinoy Children can spark a great inspiration not only to our families but to the whole nation as well. We can only fail them if we fail ourselves, WE SHALL NOT!

On my graduation day, I failed to bring my mother home. Yet, I never kept any bitterness in myself. I know for a fact that my Lord and my Savior is just up for more surprises ahead. If my mother's absence is the Lord's way in revealing the more beautiful plans he has for me, then so be it! I am more than confident that the best is yet to come.

One of the most wonderful realizations I have made is that I, along with other Expat Pinoy Children, have a crucial role to play in building a better future, a better Philippines, a better world. Since then, I have dedicated my time and effort in helping address the psychosocial costs of overseas migration through participating in the activities of Atikha Overseas and Communities Initiatives Inc., a non-government organization in San Pablo City, Laguna which initiates successful reintegration of OFWs through promoting savings consciousness to migrant workers and their families and through providing a sense of belonging and support system to other children of OFWs. Through capability-building programs, values formation seminars, theater arts and crafts workshop, I was able to be one of the key players in helping other children cope-up and move on.

After a talk in one of the events of Atikha, " Batang Atikha Saver's Club Congress" on December 24, 2006 where I shared my story as an Expat Pinoy daughter in front of OFW families, Rona, a twelve year old girl and also a daughter of an Expat Pinoy, approached me and said " Ate Rachell, gusto ko din maging katulad mo..."

My eyes were again filled with tears, I was totally moved by her words, that moment, I did realize the Lord's purpose in "temporarily" separating me from my mother; I did learn how my life has served as an inspiration to children who share the same sentiments as I. Rona's words just proved that, at last, I have accomplished something. And that moment, I have realized my worth!

Then, all of a sudden...my tears fell.