

## Reversing the Statistic

By: Alexis Ian P. Dela Cruz

**Alexis Ian P. dela Cruz**, is a bonafide alumnus of the University of the Philippines Diliman where he took up Political Science degree and graduated Magna Cum Laude.

Alexis believes that the best way to honor the sacrifices of parent's abroad is to at least do what are expected of them – to study well and utilize the talent that they have been blessed with.

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Late last year, the University of the Philippines Population Institute (UP Pop-I) released statistics regarding the children of overseas Filipino workers (OFWs). Generally, what these statistics revealed was that for most of the children who have one or both parents working abroad, the odds of teenage pregnancy and delinquency from school were higher than those whose parents remain in the country. The Institute points primarily to the physical absence of the parents, and thus, their inability to properly guide their children as the main reason behind those trends.

Immediately upon hearing the news on a major late-night news show on television, I was a bit apprehensive to come around to the Institute's findings, in addition to the fact that the media nowadays tend to exaggerate on some aspects of news. First of all, I have a parent (my father) who works abroad. Secondly, I was then 19 years old, and thirdly, I am studying hard for a baccalaureate degree in Political Science from the University of the Philippines. I asked myself: Am I really part of that statistics?

Certainly, I have never even been in a relationship with anyone before, nor have I been in the delinquents' list of my college. In the corners of my mind I silently protested against the Institute's findings, telling myself that here I was, trying to be the best son my parents could ever have while some of the young people of my age squandered their youth and energies on things that spell out dire consequences for them. I knew I was too arrogant, even conceited to say the least, to say that but honestly, that was how I felt. Somehow, I felt unrepresented in their surveys.

But months later, when I stumbled upon a poster of the winners of the 2007 BPI Search for Ten Outstanding Expat Pinoy Children, it was like a wake up call. Suddenly, I was delighted to know that there are young people out there who are outstanding in their own endeavors, despite the findings of the Institute. They are out there, and they exist.

I come to the realization that as a child of an expatriate Filipino worker, considering the statistics of the UP Pop-I, the challenge for me to take on my role in nation-building is doubly difficult to surmount. I mean, when I hear nation-building, I recall the great Rizal and his martyrdom in

Bagumbayan; the fierce Bonifacio in mortal combat; the brilliant Plaridel writing scathing attacks of the Spanish order in the Philippines.

Again, while the findings of the Institute can be considered to pose challenges to children of expatriate Filipino workers to contribute to nation-building a child of an expat Pinoy can also be used to our advantage to help build the nation. My sister and I are lucky enough to have been able to stay in school if not for the hard work of our father abroad.

I shall have no pretensions of drawing grand plans and lofty schemes to dramatically raise the Philippines from the crises it is in at the moment. I could only do so much from what is already expected of me: simply by studying and performing well in my classes, I am doing my bit of the responsibility to help build the nation, as well as to honor our OFWs. Through education, I hope, when I graduate, to be able to utilize the knowledge I have gained in the university to contribute to the bettering of society in general. At the University of the Philippines, In particular, we are constantly reminded in various ways to always serve the people who in the first place helped put us through school through the taxes they pay.

This we do through the various activities and programs instituted by the University and by the student body. At the College of Social Sciences and Philosophy (CSSP), my home college in UP, I am currently Assistant Speaker and Academic Committee Head of an academic student organization for political science, UP POLITICAL (People-Oriented Leadership in the Interest of Community Awareness). In this student organization, we affiliate with various institutions, government and non-government, to gain additional training beyond the classroom in the fields of human rights, international humanitarian law, and the advocacy against graft and corruption. Through these additional training activities, we are further equipped with the skills with which to become, indeed, better people-oriented leaders in the interest of community awareness through the study and promotion of Political Science as an independent field of knowledge.

The talents and skills that had been endowed upon me can also be utilized to accomplish the purpose of nation-building. When I was in high school, I discovered that I took a keen interest in writing, so I decided to join my high school's official publication. When I entered college, I also decided to join *Sinag*, the official student publication of my home college, of which I am currently Associate Editor. By writing for *Sinag*, I look into various social and political issues that affect not only college life but also the Philippines in general, in the perspective of a student of the social sciences. Through my articles, I hope to inspire more awareness and encourage a critical examination of pressing and relevant social, political and university issues even just among my fellow students at the CSSP.

I was already in high school when I learned to play the piano. So when I finally mustered all the courage I can get, I finally decided to audition for the parish choir. When the parish pianist got busy with work, I gradually took over his post and until now, I serve the parish as the choir pianist, and I occasionally teach my fellow members of the choir new songs to sing in Mass.

Months back, I had wanted to join a major professional choral group in the University, and with it, I had to make a difficult choice between the parish choir and the professional choral group. In the end, I chose to remain with the parish choir. I am certainly not the best parish pianist there is, but with

the parish choir, if feel that I am more able to serve my community even with such a humble offering of amateur talent.

To further serve the ecclesiastical community, I heeded the parish priest's invitation for me to become one of the parish's new Lay Ministers. I had doubts at first, contemplating if I really deserved to become one of them. Later on, I was commissioned last December as one of the new batch of Lay Ministers; I was also the youngest among them – I was 19. By joining the lay service, I feel able to more substantially contribute to the spiritual development of my fellow parishioners, particularly those who are peers. During the last senatorial elections of May 2007, I was contemplating about how I, a student of Political Science, could be able to participate in making the elections a more credible practice. It was also my first time to vote. With this in mind, I volunteered to work as an encoder and poll watcher for the Parish Pastoral Council for Responsible Voting (PPCRV) and the National Movement for Free Elections (NAMFREL). On the night of May 14, when the polls were closed and Operation Quick Count had begun, I was responsible for receiving the precinct-level tally sheets and certificates of canvass, painstakingly peering through the obscure handwriting on the sheets and encoding them into the computer that tallied the votes cast. It was quite an experience, and I was introduced to a side of the electoral process that was really new to me.

With what had already been given to me, I can make, small as they may be, my contributions to the ambitious task of nation-building. But through the efforts of my expat Pinoy father, I hope to become more capable to make bigger and more significant contributions to this task, and indeed be able to, cliché as it may sound, make a difference.

Of course there are times that I just feel so tired. I am just Alexis, and certainly, I will not save the day, much less the Republic of the Philippines by myself. Mundane as it may sound, but at times, I just want to graduate from college, after all. But when I recall that news report on the findings of the UP Pop-I, the very same feeling of apprehension I felt when I first heard it come back to me, and I remind myself: That is certainly not the way I am going to repay and honor my father for all that he has done for me. Most certainly, that is not the way I am going to build my nation. In a way, my refusal to become part of that particular statistic became my quiet personal crusade against it. To refuse to become the statistic is already an issue. To reverse the statistic, however, is quite another.

As a generation, I think the best contribution we expat Pinoy children can give for nation-building is not to become expat Pinoy ourselves. But I would like to clarify that this is NOT to make a mockery or a sham of the valor and the industry of our expat Pinoys who constantly brave thousands of miles into unknown waters and uncharted territory just to earn a decent living for their families in the Philippines. Rather, I believe that the best way we can honor them as well as this nation is to be able to be outstanding in our own right in our own country, and be of actual use to the people who are really deserving of our talents and skills: our fellow Filipino countrymen. This is not only the best way we can repay our parents' efforts overseas, but also a legacy that we can proudly leave the generations to come. Through our parents' endeavors abroad, I hope to be able to help build the nation, without actually leaving the nation.

To build a nation is such a grand task, and is incomprehensible to the person who finds himself in that most unfortunate circumstance of having to work on it alone. Our generation's expat Pinoy parents may have left the nation physically, but still they are able to contribute their share of building the nation through the continued and proper development of their children – in school, in the community, and in society in general. Our contributions may not be as dramatic and as moving as that of Rizal's martyrdom, of Bonifacio's bravery and of Plaridel's eloquence, but at the end of the day, the drive to reverse the statistic, a task they and all our heroes (our expat Pinoy parents included) have embarked on, has been passed on to our hand.