

# BIRTH OF FIL-AM IMAGE AND THE HONORING OF THE TWENTY OUTSTANDING FILIPINOS ABROAD (TOFA)

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WASHINGTON, D.C., - As we celebrate the annual event honoring twenty outstanding Filipino-Americans and Filipino-Canadians, and the forcoming celebrations of our our 20th years of publication, I cannot help but foremost praise the Lord for His kindness and guidance and secondly, the people who were there when the going got tough. Indeed, it has been a difficult and challenging struggle -- one that well-meaning friends had time and again declared unreachable. Impossible. Illogical. Unattainable. But again, like the Lord says, if you believe in it, it could be done. With Christ, nothing is impossible...every thing is possible.

*FIL-AM Image* and now globally known as the *FILIPINO IMAGE* has been in my mind since I first roamed around the continent, first, as a **Manila Chronicle** mediaman together with **Alex Esclamado** in the late fifties to the mid-sixties. Then, as a **Philippine Air Lines** executive whose main function was to meet Filipino community leaders and the **Filipino centers-of-influence** in North America promoting the services of the Philippine flag carrier. Then, as a travel industry executive whose main function was to convince the Filipinos to go back and see for themselves the many positive changes of the **Pearl of the Orient - the Philippines**. I was trying to encourage then our Filipino community journalists to produce a media whose main goal is to highlight the positive image of our people. My affiliation with PAL gave me the opportunity to meet the Filipino journalists of the time. **Vic Velasco, Julius Ruiz, Frank Bolima and Frank Bolusan of Seattle; Melecio H. Jacaban, Manuel Insigne and Celestino Alfafara of Sacramento and Los Angeles; Teddy de Nolasco and Luis Cecilio of New York; Carmelito Llapitan of Chicago; Alex Esclamado, Jesus Esteva, Joe Reyes, Delfin Cruz and Frank Perez of Salinas and San Francisco.** They were THE journalists of the era, and I was privy to most of their thoughts because we were all on first name basis and good friends. I represented the institution (PAL) that provided assistance and encouragement to journalists, community leaders, public relations people, influential individuals and a great cross-sections of the Filipinos in the United States and its territories plus the vast country of Canada.

The possibility of a Fil-Am image-builder publication had always dominated our discussions and my observation of the need to have one of such publication. My desire to spearhead such a project became a reality when my family and I finally made Washington, D.C. our homebase. The timing was perfect. The place is definitely the right venue -- one that

makes the "icing on the cake." There is no substitute for Washington, D.C. as a base for such a project. No other place in the world than the Nation's Capital where history takes place, and where all the powers-that-be of this great country hold office.

The first issue of *Fil-Am Image* was not too impressive. We were "computerized" but not sophisticated. Friends thought I was just playing and not taking the publications seriously. But we persisted and were consistent. And as each issue was received by friends, respect started manifesting.

With my wife, **Aida** and my **3Rs: Rochelle, Roxanne and Rhonda** giving full support, we launched the first annual event honoring of the "**Twenty Outstanding Filipino-Americans (TOFA)**". The project was designed primarily to say "**thank you**" -- an honest-to-goodness straight from our heart to show our appreciations to the Filipino community leaders across the continent whose sincere efforts to highlight positive Filipino image to the mainstream community are sometimes misunderstood and even maligned. Highlighting the enormous reservoir of talents and expertise of the Filipinos, it will inspire our youth and compatriots to excel and be achievers. To network and thus, uplifting our compatriots ---- these are our driving forces that led to the honoring of the *Twenty Outstanding Filipino-Americans*. Its birth. Its start. Its existence.

In the midst of being tired of "every thing" because of annoying factors that naturally goes with it, due to its enormity, and sometimes thinking of abandoning the project, two things revitalized me. One, is from the book of the late **E. V. "Vic" Bacho**, one of the awardees of the first batch (1990), "*The Long Road, Memories of a Filipino Pioneer.*" Vic wrote on the chapter entitled "**At Last, My Reward**" on page 67: "Honey, I think I have finally arrived. Can you believe it took them over 60 years to recognize the contribution I have made to our people in this country! **Nonoy Mendoza** deserves my everlasting gratitude for having made the first move, and **Consul General Jimmy Bautista** for having submitted my name to a list of 20 outstanding Filipino-Americans in the country."

Secondly, whenever "things" seem impossible, Our Lord Jesus reminds me: "**I am the vine. You are the branches. He who lives in Me and I in him, will produce abundantly. Without Me, you are nothing.**" Which means, of course, that with Him, one can do anything.

Welcome to the annual honoring of the Filipino achievers! Now globally with global participation from around the world. *Praise the Lord! Thank You, Lord!*

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