

Reflections On Our Washington DC Trip

by
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HONOLULU, HI, Oct. 9 (Special to PinoyGlobal) - The awards ceremonies for the *Twenty Outstanding Filipinos Abroad – TOFA* - held on Sept 11-13 at the JW Marriott in Washington DC gave me the occasion to reflect on my being a Filipino American at the same time. The event reaffirmed my -and developed in me- a deeper appreciation of the inalienable rights and privileges that my adoptive country, The United States of America, offers to its naturalized citizens and immigrants. Just being in the hub of our country is enough to give me chills and ‘chicken skin’ and rekindle my patriotic loyalty and pride of being an “*American.*”

From the moment we landed at the world famous *Ronald Reagan International*, it gave me the feeling that this is the thread of America that keeps our nation and economy intact.

I could not help but reflect on the once in a lifetime opportunity I had in high school when I was invited to attend the ‘*Presidential Classrooms*’ in Washington, D.C. The PC was offered to deserving high school students who showed interest in the field of law or politics. To my disappointment, I could not fulfill the invitation due to the shortage of financial resources



V.I.P. Guests from Hawaii

From left to right: Paul Taong, Senior Executive of 1st-2nd Mortgage of Hawaii, Inc.; Dr. Estrella Pada Taong, Ph. D., a decorated community activist; Annie Corpuz, Master General Agent Pacific Guardian Life, one of the oldest community leader of Hawaii; Nonoy Mendoza of Pinoy Global and Filipino Image Magazine; Dolores "Dolly" Ortal, 2008 TOFA Awardee; Emmie Anderson, feature writer/reporter of *FIL-AM OBSERVER* of Hawaii; Hawaii State Licensed Engineer Simeon Ortal, Dolly's high school boyfriend.

(PinoyGlobal Photo by MANNY LOPEZ)

2008 TOFA AWARDEES • Gala Banquet and Ball Awarding Ceremony
J.W. Marriott Hotel - Grand Ballroom • Washington, D.C. - Sept. 13, 2008



Seated from left: Minister Carlos "King" D. Sorreta, Philippine Deputy Ambassador to the United States, Nena M. Nera, Dr. Eusebio C. Kho, Bob Dacanay, Rozita Villanueva Lee, Dr. Jun Anthony Quion, Lev Mendoza Paler, Will Picache Grant, Carmencita "Menchee" Quesada Fulgado, Ph.D.; Dr. Victor G. Lorica and Nonoy Mendoza of *FILIM & PGON*. Standing from left: Dr. Manny Hipol, Master of Ceremonies; Gloria T. Caoile, Mistress of Ceremonies; Debra Aguinaldo Nakama, Ph.D., Dr. Edmund F. Relucio, Dr. Francis Talangbayan, Dolores "Dolly" Ortal, Dante Raul (DR) Q. Teodoro, Dr. Mark Asperilla, Zenaida "Zeny" Kharroubi, Sonny Ungco, Elvira Phelps, Dr. Peter Yu, Dalisay "Dely" Villalon, and Aida J. Mendoza of *FILIM & PGON/RAM Foundation*. (Photo by PinoyGlobal Manny Lopez)

available to my family in those times. My family depended on the backbreaking task of 'picking pineapple' for a living. We were making both ends meet literally, and funding my Washington D.C. was not possible at all. Back then I did not have the knowledge or privilege of asking someone to sponsor me.

So this trip to witness the *TOFA* awards and in Washington D.C. at that was a fulfillment of a dream nurtured when I was in high school and has gone on a spark to see me through and appreciate my being an American citizen.

Our Hawaii entourage included special friends and like **Annie Corpuz, Romana Cabus, Paul & Dr. Estrella Pada-Taong** and **Father Steve Nguyen**.

We were in D.C. for a couple of reasons, a little R & R, explore our nation's capital and to witness the *TOFA Awards Ceremony* and share in the glory of a dear friend, **Dolly Mangati Ortal**, one of the wardees. Nana Dolly is one of the five women in my life that I admire the most.

She was my teacher in elementary school, back in the Philippines when youth was in its earnest and my teacher Nana Dolly was just there, simply there for me and for my dreams. Even then in the place in the place where I came from, I have known Nana Dolly as she is now and never changed a bit, as a philanthropist sharing her earthly blessings whenever possible. Now, *TOFA* has taken cognizance of that selfless act and now she is being honored for her overwhelming desire to help people in need from

all walks of life. They generously share their blessings with gifted students with burning desire to achieve higher education. With “*Dreams Come True Foundation*”, the Ortals have been able to help numerous students worldwide make their dreams come true with the grant and scholarships.

Our short but very memorable visit in to the nation’s capital included an educational and historic tour of the landmarks and memorials that our very charming and hospitable host, *Rochelle Mendoza-McGee*, kindly walked us through. Seeing the Vietnam Wall Memorial gave me a deeper appreciation of the countless men and women who bravely fought to defend all the rights, freedom and privileges that we all enjoy as Americans. I couldn’t help but echo in my head the declaration in our national Anthem about this country being “the land of the free and the home of the brave.”

The celebration was highlighted with a Gala Dinner & Banquet Ball to honor the *Twenty Outstanding Filipinos Abroad (TOFA)*. It was truly a remarkable evening complete with a superb dinner fit for a king, wonderful entertainment and joyful dancing. The memorable event was capped off with a traditional & delicious Filipino breakfast that Madam Aida Mendoza lovingly prepared. It was a perfect ending for a worthy cause filled with distinguished “*Circle of Leaders*.”

The awardees have a lot in common. They all had a long list of credentials that an average person would deem impossible to fulfill. They all shared these important virtues and critical key ingredients that make them truly exemplary. These virtues include humility, compassion, gratitude, and the pleasure of doing things just for the sake and satisfaction of making a difference. Some of them just simply want to inspire someone to do better by following their examples without the thought of expecting anything in return. One by one, they reflected on their journey to success coupled with their stories of struggles and triumphs that makes them worthy of receiving their *TOFA* distinction and recognition.

Listening to their success stories, I couldn’t help but reflect on my humble beginnings, a very simple life growing up in the Barrio of Mangato while attending Apaya Elementary School. A life filled with simple pleasures but very fulfilling. I was in the fourth grade when I had my first encounter with a caring



*Dolores "Dolly" Ortal
2008 TOFA Awardee
Honolulu, Hawaii*

teacher, named Mrs. Ortal. It was evident then that she had a generous heart. She just had a way of making you feel special. I remember her simple gestures of sharing her especial merienda to her students—an act you don’t often witness between a teacher and her students. Or her taking her time to choose a special Christmas gift specially suited for each student. Today, these simple but meaningful gestures is what truly makes Nana Dolly Ortal outstanding and deserving.

Seeing all these—and thinking thoughts about what we could become as a people of this adoptive country – this is what I can say with conviction that if we want to take a stand and make a difference in the world, we need to realign ourselves by pooling our efforts and resources in building a firmer and stronger foundations for our communities. We can do this by supporting one another, hands locked, “Hawak kamay, walang iwanan!”

Vhen Bautista in Ilocano sum this as: “Ti pakaidayawan ti maysa, pakaidayawantay koma amin a sangapada.”

With grateful heart, I want to take this opportunity to thank all of you and my Heavenly Father for all of his blessings. Remember to never give up. The seeds of discouragement cannot take root in a grateful heart. Pinoy power! #