

Headline: A fine day for science

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Last Earth Day saw thousands of people from various countries, including the Philippines, marching in protest. This protest was slightly unusual, a bit different from those mass actions that we often see featured on the evening news.

Perhaps it was the laboratory coats.

All over the world, people gathered to march for science.

For specifics, the march was done to protest budget cuts in science programs, to call for support and regular jobs in the STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) industries and the academe, to shine light on the importance of fact-checking and review in science journals and other publications, and to draw attention to multiple related issues such as food security, climate change, and environmental protection, among others.

No doubt there will be various outcries on how there are many more problems that need our attention, claims that science is an elitist money-making industry reserved only for those who can comprehend its highfalutin' language and long equations, arguments on how there is sufficient focus on science and not enough on the liberal arts, or brush-offs saying that science is too far a concern when we are currently troubling over the increase in jeepney fare and how to put food on the table.

But the march for science was an opportunity for us to open our minds to the fact that science is in all of us and necessary. It is science that guides our farmers and fishers on the peak seasons for harvesting, science that searches for more efficient fuels for our jeepney and bus drivers, science that ensures the food we put on the table is safe and healthy. Science also works hand-in-hand with the arts, in improving publishing technologies and media equipment, in the architecture that houses their galleries and displays, and even just as a source of inspiration: In the vast expanse of the night sky or in the tiniest structures seen under a microscope, we find that science can also be beautiful. This is why there is a march for science: We all inhabit one planet, and we must take care of it and one another if we are, not only to survive, but to live.

Our nation is not lacking in, is in fact brimming with, scientific talent and creativity. We have launched microsatellites into space, found many more unique and rare plants and animals in our forests and oceans, and programmed and developed all sorts of technology to make the lives of Filipinos more comfortable. Banana ketchup, rudimentary medical incubators, leprosy control programs, 16-bit computer microchips, hardier strains of rice, quick-drying ink: These are all discoveries contributed by Filipino scientists and engineers. There are so many more scientific possibilities that can be found in this country, if only scientific interest were nurtured in the youth and sustained throughout adulthood. This is why there is a march for science: Filipinos are making discoveries that they often cannot continue, for lack of support or education, or just the ignorance of those around them.

Nor is science limited to scientists who bear PhDs or MDs after their names. Any person who has made decisions based on trial and error, testing, and review—better commuting options during road closures, the amount of water to add in order to get that just slightly sticky kind of cooked rice, evenly distributing the weight of items on shelves to make sure nothing tips over, discerning if those

sniffles are caused by a mere allergy or something that warrants a trip to the hospital—has applied the principles of science in their decision-making. If the choices are especially the kind that will have great repercussions to others, such as decisions in the court of law, or in the operating theaters of hospitals, all the more is it necessary that the information gathered in the making of these decisions is factual and reputable. This is why there is a march for science: Our daily lives and the lives of others are hugely affected by its applications.

Indeed, our very bodies are borne of science: We are biology, chemistry, physics, engineering, mathematics, medicine—from birth and until death. In between, we tend to do what we can to forget, but this should not be so. Every child has noticed raindrops clinging together as they slide down the walls, or the wheels of a bicycle spinning by the push of a pedal, or even the delicate throbbing of their own heart. And no doubt, every child has asked why and how: Bakit? Paano? Those who did not let up in their questions until they found answers, and made sure that these answers were backed with reputable proof—they are people of science, be they young or old, no matter what lifestyle, creed, or color.

This is why there is a march for science. Ultimately, a march for science is also a march for humanity, because one of the most human characteristics is curiosity, the thirst for knowledge and for truth. Science is intertwined in industry, economics, politics, ethics, business, culture; it affects them all. In this age of global connections and information at our fingertips, and with so much hanging in the balance, it is our duty to be discerning, to be people of science, because ignorance is a luxury that we can no longer afford.

Anna Margarita P. Tongco, 25, is a product development scientist at Universal Robina Corp. She describes herself as “a scientist who indulges in creative writing when the laboratory is empty or colleagues aren’t looking.”

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