

FROGS AND FIREFLIES

by Bambi Juarez-Omandam

The whole family was invited for a Holy Week family reunion to the ancestral land of Bicol. This was going to be my third time, Bingo's second, and the first for Rolly and my kids. The children were very excited with the idea of travelling in a van. So we headed off at around 10:00PM to meet Jim, Maryann, Mike & the remaining Davids at the South Super Highway, for a 13 hour drive to Bicol. We decided to travel by night, thinking there would be fewer cars on the road, but we were surprised by the volume of travelers. I guess everyone had the same idea—it's common knowledge that there's always traffic during Holy Week. Why not? It's your only chance to go on a vacation and go out of town, and a lot go back to the provinces to practice their Holy Week traditions.

The trip was a learning experience for Nico and Patrice. They were amazed at the sight of rice fields and actually seeing a *kalabaw* (carabao, a water buffalo), which they'd only seen on TV and in books, and the infamous Mt. Makiling, which Nico had learned about in his classes. Bingo, on the other hand, felt like a professional driver after the trip, since he drove half of the way, even through the *Bituka ng Manok* (chicken's intestines) as it is called, since it is such a winding road. The curves were so sharp that anyone with vertigo, which I had, would feel nauseated after passing through that. Lucky for me, I was sleeping.

Upon arrival to the Bicol region, I was surprised with certain areas that had

developed, with more buildings and establishments than most provinces. But still a far cry from Manila. Then we saw the Mayon volcano, with its scenic view, and not so perfect cone, due to a recent eruption (just 1 month prior to the trip). We saw a little bit of smoke coming from its mouth. Nico was thrilled to actually see a volcano, but at the same time anxious that it might erupt anytime again. He then saw big boulders which were said to have come from the volcano, and a river that seemed to have black sand, only it was cooled lava and he thought that was really cool.

Finally we reached our destination. We met Tita Liddy & family at the old house in Daraga, with its classic architecture, and full of family history. We had a sumptuous meal there. Then we went to our resort, which had cottages and cute nipa huts for our rooms, a sprawling lawn where my kids could run for hours without worrying about cars, and coconut trees with hammocks which the kids loved. There were even horses that the others were able to ride on. The place was so peaceful & quiet, it was a perfect place to unwind and relax. Biggest surprise for me, no mosquitoes! I was so used to having them around, and here's a place with no mosquitoes to bug you. Also no TV, which my son looked for first. In the background was the Mayon Volcano, and when night came, we witnessed the volcano with burning lava at its peak, a beautiful sight to see, with a full moon to complete the picture. Another highlight of the vacation for my kids was seeing a bullfrog. It may seem odd to you, but frogs are rare in our area. Nico heard the croaking sound and followed it. Later he & Patrice were running after it,

wanting to bring it home. Then they saw a tree with fireflies around it like Christmas lights twinkling. Then Tito Gene gave Nico a scare saying that there's a *kapre* (a cigar-smoking night monster) on the tree—that was funny. My kids were so thrilled that they were able to stay up late and run around for hours on the grounds. We were surprised that Patrice didn't even get an asthma attack, which she usually would after too much running. I guess that says a lot about the quality of air in Manila. So the vacation became a nature trip for my kids, who are used to TV, Gameboy, electronic games, and videos—it made them aware and appreciative of nature. But on the third day, they were looking for the mall, and Jollibee or McDonalds.

Bingo was surprised to meet nephews and nieces his age, and that he had so many relatives. The activities gave him a chance to get to know them more, and learn about the family's background. One of the activities we had was a kayak relay. I never tried kayaking, so this was a first for me. It looked like a man's sport. Sarah, Joy, Maryann and I never thought it was going to be a lot of fun. We really enjoyed it, even if we finished third.

A lot of family bonding was going on, and we got a taste of that. Jim and the rest of us were saying that we hope there will be a repeat in the future. Aside from a chance to get away from work, it was a chance to rekindle family ties and to educate the younger generations about their family's roots and background, which we may have forgotten with our busy and active lives. So if there will be another family reunion, hope there will be more relatives to see next time.

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THE LOS BANOS REUNION IN BICOL, APRIL 2000.

ON THE GRASS: Gene Abes.

SEATED: Gigi Monponbanua, Nonette Moraleda, Chinchin, Liddy Abes, Wito Los Banos, Menchu Jalandoni, Linda Cajucom, Jimjam Monponbanua.

STANDING: Joy w/baby Joshua David, Jimboy & Maryann Laico, Ambo Moraleda w/son, Michael David, Joben Jalandoni, Eric Los Banos, Jerry Boy Los Banos.

THE MEAGER LAICO REPRESENTATION INCLUDED: Eddie, Bing and Bingo Juarez, Roly and Bambi Omandam with kids Niko and Patrice, Jim and MaryAnn Laico and Justin, Mike David, Paul and Joy David with Lizzie and Joshua, Ed and Sarah Fortez.

