

by Pee wee Villanueva

I promised Jeremy that I'd bring him to the States with me if he graduated with Honors. So, in April, a few days after his graduation, he found himself reaping the reward for his accomplishments while I fulfilled my promise to him.

Rory met us at the airport when we arrived, together with Dickie and Melissa who were with us on the same flight. In the days thereafter, Rory whisked us off to various events and places in San Francisco: the Metreon Museum, Museum of Modern Art, the Romeo and Juliet ballet (which she ushered for), an enjoyable concert at Walnut Creek entitled Piano Mania, a book sale at the Orinda Library, the Interior Designer's Showcase at Nob Hill, the House and Garden show at Orinda, the North Beach area, the Science Exploratorium, and outlet shopping malls. I also joined her in her ballet class and her Pilates class, where I joyfully discovered that my body was more flexible than I thought.

We also experienced the Holy Week "U.S. style". It all seemed a bit unholy compared to the church rituals back home. Brown bread was used instead of the sacred host, white wine instead of the red Momo wine. Instead of the priest washing the feet of the chosen volunteers during the Holy Thursday ritual, anybody who felt his feet were dirty could just go up to the altar area to have his feet washed. After the Holy Thursday mass, people all filed out of the church, which was left empty and in complete darkness as the Holy Eucharist was brought to the Adoration room. Back home, all the churches would have people milling around doing the Stations of the Cross. There was no *Bisita Iglesia* (visiting the churches--the ritual of going from church to church doing the Stations of the Cross and praying the Rosary). Suddenly, Jeremy and I missed all the lengthy, exaggerated piety of the Holy Week rituals back home that I used to complain about. Instead of the *Bisita Iglesia*, we had a *Bisita Casa*.

After Easter, Dickie and Rory drove us to Portland, Oregon where we visited Carlo (Santayana) who had just moved from Atlanta for a temporary field assignment. We had dinner with him at a small unimpressive restaurant but it had the best Thai cuisine I had ever tasted. Then, we went to his impeccably neat apartment for dessert. He served us his famous apple pie whose fame started last Christmas when he baked around a dozen of them to give to the different families during the Yuletide reunion. We also visited Cristina and Mike in Salem, Oregon in their fabulous house in the woods by the lake. An idyllic setting! We spent a night with them and their two good-looking children, Eamon and Isabel. We also spent a few nights in the University of Washington area where we visited Via and got to meet Jerry, her boyfriend, who gazed at her with such adoring eyes. Nini drove over from Morton and brought us to Gumby's house, a beautiful, waterfront house with a relaxing view of Puget Sound. Fortunately, Gumby was home with his sweet, fragile-looking daughter, Phoebe. His wife, Kathleen was getting their son, Joel, ready for afternoon class in Kindergarten--with some difficulty. We also went to Marnie's lovely house where her two handsome sons--Karim and Rahim--hospitably entertained us with Yaya Piling's help. They eagerly showed us their tree house and showed off their physical dexterity by tumbling and dancing and friskily sliding down the carpeted stairs. Unfortunately, Marnie and Salman were both at work, but we got to be with Marnie for dinner at California Pizza Kitchen where we curiously watched Via at her waitressing job.

Mitos and Randy extended their hospitality from New Jersey to New York by lending us their Manhattan apartment which she had cleaned and stocked like a five-star hotel suite. Edwin and Joedie joined us in New York. Eventually, Mitos, Randy and Jeff came, too. We got to watch a number of Broadway shows and try out new restaurants with our expert restaurant guide, Mitos.

When we got back to the Bay Area, we had dinner at a flamenco restaurant, a first for me, graciously hosted by Chicho

and Tonette. We also went out to lunch with their entire family on a separate occasion. It was delightful to see all of them with their various professions, quite content with their lives. Popoy and Carol also entertained us to a dinner with the three kids in tow. We got to see their nice and spacious house in Concord to which they had recently moved after selling their house in Pittsburg. We also met up with the newlyweds, Alfie (Flores) and Helena, whose townhouse in Vallejo is by the waterfront. Rey and Jovits also invited to their new house in Livermore, near Silicon Valley or "Boontown." Since they're such a tidy couple and their house has a lot more space than they can use, it looked almost antiseptically clean. Gina also invited to her cute townhouse in Walnut Creek, a wise investment, as real estate value has appreciated considerably. We were the first dinner guests at Arthur and Grace's very new house in San Ramon Valley. In fact, all the dinnerware had just come out of the boxes, some of which were still unpacked. Lia's new house in Concord has all the latest models in appliances and technological devices. Alex and she have come quite a long way. Malu recently sold her big house in Pittsburg and has moved to Pleasant Hill into a cozier house with a corner lot and a very pretty view of Pleasant Hill.

Jeremy was amazed with the number of relatives and cousins he has in the States. While they were amazed with how "Little Jeremy" has suddenly grown into a tall young man. We were quite impressed with how well everybody seems to be doing. I'm so happy that they're all moving forward, unlike the struggling and stagnant lives some of them might have had if they stayed back home. They are an inspiration for my sons, especially for Joedie who now has one foot here and is working at getting his bearings. Mama's *Ora et Labora* (Pray and Work) legacy seems to be paying off well. Lola Luz and Lolo Jim would have been real proud!