

Don't make your own calendar

Written by ONCE IN A WHILE By BERT CASTRO
Thursday, 18 August 2016 14:10



“THE life we live is not our own so don't make your own calendar,” so says a friend of mine.

A baffling commentary I think until I found its hidden meaning.

Back in the early days of the **Filipino Reporter**, Bert “Tukayo” Pelayo had an associate named Fel, but we all called him Mac, short for Macaraeg.

He was an unlikely victim of martial law in the early 70s.

Sent as a Fulbright scholar at Washington, D.C., he found himself homeless and jobless upon completion of his studies due to the imposition of martial law in the Philippines.

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At that time, he was a desk editor of the defunct *Manila Times*.

Since the popular newspaper was a staunch critic of the Marcos administration, it was subsequently sequestered and as a consequence, he and hundreds of its employees were disbanded.

Mac moved from Washington, D.C. to New York City where he was reunited with the late Bert "Tukayo" Pelayo, who happened to be the *Manila Times* news correspondent to New York.

With no jobs in the horizon, the two suddenly unemployed *Times* men pulled their resources and thus began the foundation of the present **Filipino Reporter**

Life at that time at the **FR** was really hard and laborious.

There were no computers, no faxes, and no instant messages except for an unreliable telex machine used to send and receive news dispatches.

I would stop by in the afternoon at the Union Square office after my work to help out in some of the mundane tasks.

After being away for a year of work assignment in Michigan, I was surprised to see that Mac had now been employed at the Fairchild Publications in NYC as desk editor.

But still he would drop by the **FR** office after his work to help out.

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Then one summer day he called me at the phone.

“Tukayo,” he said, “my wife is coming home from the Philippines with some new CD’s and I will be coming over to give you some.”

The day before our appointed date, there was a frantic message in our voice recorder.

The call was from Mac’s mother-in-law.

It said, “Mac is now in the hospital. He was picked up this morning by ambulance to the hospital.”

We rushed to the hospital the next day.

As the doctor would explain to us, Mac was in a coma.

The doctors didn’t know yet the full explanation as there will be more tests to be done by the neurologist.

We learned bits and pieces from his distraught wife Connie.

“You know, Tukayo,” she sobbed, “I didn’t know he was feeling well.”

“When I came home three days ago,” she continued.

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“He seemed to be distant. He seemed not to be happy at all to see me after my three weeks of absence. He was always sitting down complaining of a headache.”

“Naiinis ako kasi hindi ko alam kung ano ang ipinagtatampo niya. So that night, I slept in the other room.”

She woke up at 3 a.m. and saw that Mac didn't touch his supper on the table.

She quickly went inside their bedroom and saw him obviously still awake, his eyes transfixed to the ceiling.

She gently nudged him on the shoulder, “Honey, honey,” she said, “how come you didn't eat your dinner? Come, let's go, you must be very hungry.”

He was not moving at all.

He was cold to the touch.

She shook him a bit stronger.

She could feel the heartbeat but not responsive to her voice.

She was overwhelmed by fear and in a panic called the family members to call an ambulance.

When we visited him at Elmhurst Hospital in Queens, Connie chided me, “Tukayo, talk to him, please, maybe he will listen and speak to you.”

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I could hear her talking loudly to him.

“Honey, I am sorry for not keeping my promises to you that I will take some days off from work so we could go on vacations. As soon as you get well, we will go drive to Canada, to Florida, to Poconos — and to wherever else you want to go.”

“Every week-end, we will be away, be it winter or fall. I will mark in our calendar our fun schedules. OK, honey?”

Then she kissed him gently on his cheek.

Weeks had turned into months.

After a year, the Filipina neurologist from Columbia-Presbyterian Hospital who was seeing him regularly told them that he was a victim of viral encephalitis, an inflammation of the brain caused by a virus.

The risk is permanent brain damage.

And the virus could come from anywhere — from the air, or anything else.

He was laid to rest under a gloomy and cloudy sky.

I asked his 4-year old son, “Do you know where your dad is now?”

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He answered without batting an eye, "Oh my dad is in heavens now."

"And where is that?" I asked him again.

He looked up to the sky and in his innocent, childish way said, "Mommy told me that we will see him again in heavens. Is that true, *Ninong*?"

"Yes," I answered nodding my head.

"Is there McDonald in heaven?" he asked again looking at me for an answer.

A faint crack of thunder then broke the silence of the stratosphere and then a few gentle rains started to fall.

I left with a heart full of sadness.

I left with a full understanding that our life is not our own.

It is He who makes the calendar.

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