

By Jesse Jose

A fter twenty-five years, I paid a visit to the Motherland. And what I saw is an extremely poor ... backward, third-world country.

My trek there, with my wife, Maribel and my son, Jonathan, began with a greeting of “welcome aboard” in heavy-accented English by a very pretty and petite and smart-looking Korean stewardess, in a brown form-fitting uniform, of Asiana Airlines.

Right on schedule, we were airborne

It was a long flight ...

It took 11 hours to fly from Seattle, Washington to Incheon, Korea, where we had a lay-over and

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a change of plane.

I had a

book with me, a thriller, so I read that intermittently during the flight.

But most of the time, I amused myself by watching the crew of petite flight stewardesses walked up and down the twin aisle of the plane. They walked like models on a ramp.

They giggled and smiled as they served the food and drinks.

We were fed three times during the flight and plied with drinks in between.

It was a very pleasant flight, I think.

The international airport at Incheon was sparkling clean and very modern and their staffs of workers were all very efficient. At one of the many fast-food restaurants in the airport, we had huge bowl of vegetable noodle soup ... and it was super delicious.

After a two-hour lay-over, we were airborne again, on a smaller plane this time, but the service or the prettiness of the crew of stewardesses didn't lessen.

It was five-hour flight from Korea to the Philippines.

Then FINALLY, we landed at Ninoy Aquino International Airport ...

The arrival area teemed with uniformed airport workers standing around, gawking at us stupidly.

Nobody directed or guided us where to go for Customs and for Immigration and where to pick up our suitcases and luggage ... unlike in Korea

, where, as soon as we, the newly-arrived passengers entered the terminal, the airport staff shepherded us courteously to the “where-tos” of the airport.

One thing VERY surprising though at Ninoy airport: We cleared through Customs and Immigration with ease, without the usual *LAGAY* that this Philippine airport was so well-known for. We were outside of the airport in no time.

Then ... the heat immediately assaulted me.

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Then ... the noise.

Then ... the pollution.

The narrow two-lane street just outside the exit door was a picture of total chaos. Honking vehicles of all sorts and sizes and screaming people clogged the sidewalk and the street.

I looked across the narrow two-lane street and saw hundreds of gawking faces, behind a steel fence, who were perhaps, relatives of those newly-arrived passengers, making *sundo*

.

Or maybe, they were just onlookers.

It was madness ...

But it was the noise, the cacophony of noises, that overwhelmed and deafened me so. After about an hour, we saw our

sundo

, waving a huge placard with my wife's name written on it.

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THE POVERTY AND THE FILTH: We were in the Philippines for two weeks. We stayed in a condo in Cainta, Rizal, that my wife “rented” through the Internet.

It was called the Mayfield Park Residences.

Though it was described in the Internet as a “condo,” it was really like a tenement kind of housings.

But it was quiet and clean within the property limits and there was a swimming pool that you can dip in if you want. There were two security gates to pass through, and the area is patrolled 24 hours by armed security guards.

From that place to Manila is only about 30 miles or so.

But to get to Manila takes about three to five hours!

Because you have to wade and crawl through the thick, crazy-like traffic, through the fumes and pollution, through all sorts of obstacles on the road, people walking and crossing the streets, cigarette vendors, chitcharon vendors, street urchins hawking sampaguitas, beggars, jeepneys and cars and tricycles and motorcycles and what have you, cutting you off or blocking your way.

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There were no traffic rules. There were road lanes, but nobody paid attention to them. There were no stop signs or stop lights.

There were traffic enforcers in every street intersection, but they just wave everybody through. And I don't know how they survive each day breathing in the poisonous black smoke belching from every vehicle on the road.

It was mad, mad, mad.

It was a good thing our hired driver was as deft and as crazy as those other crazy drivers on the road, so we managed each time to arrive safe and sound to wherever we were going.

Our driver was also street smart for he knew all the side streets and alleys and “short cuts,” so to speak, of the streets of Manila. And this gave me the opportunity to see the Manila that the tourists and fellow

balik-bayans

don't really see ... or will never see.

Poverty reigns supreme in the heart of Metro Manila!!!

And the filth is unbelievable!!!

I saw shacks after shacks, made of rusted *yero* as homes for many people.

I saw creeks and canals used as garbage dumps ... and the stench was suffocating.

One time, while passing through an alley, I saw a kid defecate on the sidewalk, while his parents and elders squat nearby, gossiping ...

And I saw a wake being held on the sidewalk and a feast, liquor and all, a couple of blocks away.

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And while passing through a narrow street next to the Pasig River, not too far from the Post Office building in the heart of

Manila

, I saw a woman washing clothes, using the filthy, water of

Pasig

River

as rinsing water for her

labada

.

And then not too far from there, I saw a young woman taking a bath from a faucet right on the sidewalk, where everybody can see her. She was fully clothed though, so that wasn't too bad

...

I saw a lot of things, ugly and bad and not too bad. I saw beautiful things, too, of course. But this column is getting too long now.

So, continued

na

lang

next week.

I have a lot more I wanna tell.

O, sige na muna

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ngarud

.

JJ

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