

## By Lolo Bobby Reyes y Mercado of Bacon-Sorsogon (Bac-Sor) City

**E very time winter passes and spring comes, I recall Rachel Carson's book, "*Silent Spring* ." Then my musing goes back to the Province of Sorsogon in the Philippines, where I spent my childhood and probably some of the happiest years of my life. Today, Sorsogon is a typical place in the Philippines and in many Third-World countries, where the springs are silent during the extremely hot summer. When it is not raining, Sorsogon's springs, streams and brooks are often silent, bereft of water that used to feed its many rivers.**

In the 1950s when I was an elementary-school student, Sorsogon Province was one of the greenest places on earth. The place had a lot of trees and wildlife. Thousands of magnificent hornbills, owls, monkeys, deer, monitor lizards and other animals and birds thrived in Sorsogon. The prized asset of the province, Sorsogon Bay, teemed with marine life from crustaceans to whale sharks.

Editor's Notes: Excerpts of this essay were published in several Filipino-American publications in the late 1990s and early 2000s. The [www.pinoyonboard.com](http://www.pinoyonboard.com) for instance published this piece on March 20, 2004.

In just 30 years or so Sorsogon Province became virtually dead from the ecological viewpoint. In 1982 I wrote about how the **layagan** (a fruitarian monitor lizard) was declared an endangered species because its habitat consisting of tree canopies was slowly disappearing. Today, the **layagan** is now found only in the remaining forested areas of Bacon town (now a district of Sorsogon City). Matnog town used to have thousands of hornbills and other wild birds. Today, people now joke that one can see a live hornbill only if former Senator Eva Estrada Kalaw comes to visit Sorsogon. (To the non-Sorsogonans that do not get the humor, **kalaw** is the local name of the hornbill.) Sorsogon Bay, with its more than 20,000 hectares of fishing grounds, has become the biggest toilet and garbage dump in the province. And coupled with the

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fertilizer and pesticide runoffs that flow to its waters, Sorsogon Bay is practically moribund, if not ecologically comatose. Now the only apes (descendants of apes?) in the province are the politicians who continue to engage in monkey business.

### ***The Example of California***

N early all the provinces of the Philippines receive rainfall that often exceeds 60 inches per year. And yet when the rainy season ends, there is virtual drought in the entire country. For the country and her people do not invest in reservoirs, dams, artificial lakes and aqueducts. (Compare the agricultural output of Philippines with that of California, which receives only an average of 13 inches per year. And some of California's earliest good farmhands, beginning in the mid-1910s, were Filipinos, who were then American nationals, as the Philippines was at that time a colony of the United States.)

For almost three decades now I have telling my fellow Sorsogonans and Bicolnons and their political leaders of the need to protect the environment in my writings and even in public rallies where I spoke in the 1980s. But it seems that the Bible is right in the matter of a prophet not being believed in his own hometown. And to use another oft-quoted cliché, while I could lead some of the people to the river, I could not persuade or even force them to drink the water of reality. And worse, some politicians in Sorsogon have been tolerating, if not masterminding, illegal logging and mining operations in several towns of the province.

### ***Hope for the Ecosystem***

**Is there hope for Sorsogon's, the Bicol's and the Philippines' ecological systems?** Yes, there is redemption because of the advances in communications. Up to the mid-1990s I used to slow-mail to some friends copies of my essays on Filipino socioeconomic topics. Sometimes my friends or kin would photocopy them and pass them on in turn to their circle of friends in Sorsogon and in their new domiciles. But the Internet has changed the arena and method of discussion. Now I communicate by e-mail often with Sorsogonans not only in Sorsogon but also in the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom, New Zealand and other cities in the Philippines. And with three clicks on the computer, I can send BCCs in three separate e-mails to more than 800 recipients in my mailing lists and e-newsgroup. Then I can publish in the [www.mabuhayradio.com](http://www.mabuhayradio.com) and other online publications some of my essays and articles.

## The Filipino Sorsogon "Silent Springs" (With Apologies to Rachel Carson) - MabuhayRadio

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The Internet has changed the arena and method of discussion among the more-than 11-million Overseas Filipinos (as of 2013) and their kin and friends in the homeland.

I find that almost all Overseas Sorsogonans and many individuals in Sorsogon Province want to help change the environment in their back yards. Because many of them – who now live in the country of Rachel Carson – are alarmed that there are virtually very few birds and wildlife left in Sorsogon. Part of living for instance in the United States is falling in love with the American way of protecting the environment and helping Mother Nature in improving the parks, the wildlife preserves and the ecological oases.

Many of the Overseas Filipinos, especially the grandparents among them, like to remember the hometowns they have left behind in the Philippines. When they tell their ABER Filipino grandchildren of what the Philippines is like, they tell of the Philippines of old.

(Editor's Note: ABER Filipinos, as Bobby Reyes coined, means "American-Born, Educated or Raised" Filipinos.)

The grandparents tell of the time when wild ducks and other migratory birds arrived – on a regular schedule like the swallows of Capistrano, California – from the Asian mainland to the marshes in their hometowns. Those birds and many of those marshes are gone in the Philippines but they are still alive in the collective memories of these Filipino expatriates. I have met many aged Filipino Americans and Filipinos of the olden homeland who refuse to go back even to visit their hometowns; they would rather reminisce – visit in their minds – the places of their births. Because they refuse to see now the bald and barren mountains on their hometowns, the filth and dying marine life in the bay of their province . . . etceteras and etc.

Telling of the Philippines of old is like riding a time machine of the reel world and reminiscing – and visiting in the mind – the place of birth that was then an ecological paradise.

**Perhaps it is now time for the Americanized scions of these grandfatherly or grandmotherly immigrants to help them come home to their dreams. Perhaps if all the Overseas Filipinos start to bankroll their parents' or grandparents' dreams, the**

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**Philippine environment will change for the better. Perhaps when spring comes again in 2015 and beyond, the water in Sorsogon's, nay the Philippines', springs, streams, brooks and rivers shall not only be cleaner but also more abundant and roaring with the people's concern and commitment for the environment.**

To be or not to be guardians of the ecology is the question. And hopefully the tens of thousands of Overseas Sorsoganons and Bicolnons and the millions of other Filipino expatriates and emigrants will answer, "Yes," resoundingly and without hesitation. And perhaps start to prove to the world that among Filipinos and Overseas Filipinos, talk is not cheap. For people have to invest in their dreams for an ecologically-sounder and better world to live in. # # #

(Editor's Notes: To the readers who have not read Ms. Carson's celebrated book, we are reproducing an editorial review about it by Amazon.com, where the book is available. Please just click on the hyperlink to Amazon.com found in the editorial review.)

**Editorial Review**

www.Amazon.com

Rachel Carson's ***Silent Spring*** is now 47-years old. Written over the years 1958 to 1962, it took a hard look at the effects of insecticides and pesticides on songbird populations throughout the United States, whose declining numbers yielded the silence to which her title attests. "What happens in nature is not allowed to happen in the modern, chemical-drenched world," she writes, "where spraying destroys not only the insects but also their principal enemy, the birds. When later there is a resurgence of the insect population, as almost always happens, the birds are not there to keep their numbers in check." The publication of her impeccably reported text helped change that trend by setting off a wave of environmental legislation and galvanizing the nascent ecological movement. It is justly considered a classic, and it is well worth rereading today. -- This text refers to the [Paperback edition](#) .

***Silent Spring***, released in 1962, offered the first shattering look at widespread ecological degradation and touched off an environmental awareness that still exists. Rachel Carson's book focused on the poisons from insecticides, weed killers, and other common products as well as the use of sprays in agriculture, a practice that led to dangerous chemicals to the food source. Carson argued that those chemicals were more dangerous than radiation . . . )

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