

Part One of a Series, “From Bulusan to Bulosan”

By Lolo Bobby M. Reyes of Sorsogon City

Introduction.

The Municipality of Bulusan is the one of the oldest towns, if not the first pre-Hispanic settlement, in the Province of Sorsogon. It is also the ancestral home of the Reyes Clan. While it is one of the smallest towns in Sorsogon, it became like a Sorsoganon provincial version of Camelot because one of its sons, Jose S. Reyes, chose to go back to Bulusan in 1946 – after his boss, Sergio Osmeña lost the Philippine presidency.

Dr. Reyes’ house in Bulusan became a Camelot-like “castle” as provincial, regional and national leaders and politicians – like then-Vice President Diosdado Macapagal and his opponent in the 1961 presidential election, President Carlos Garcia – made it a point to visit him at his home. (It was called locally as the “Dako na Balay” or “Big House,” which was built during the Spanish

From Bulusan to Bulosan: Reviving the “Pensionado” Tradition - MabuhayRadio

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regime). Many important Filipino leaders visited, and often played chess, with Dr. Reyes, as they sought his advice on many political and socioeconomic issues – whenever they set foot in Sorsogon

Province

. I, as a growing lad, was fortunate enough to witness some of the important leaders' visits with Dr. Jose Reyes.

“Dean Reyes,” as he was called fondly by his peers, was the Executive Secretary of President Osmeña after Liberation and he was actually said to have been the country’s “Little President,” as there was no Vice President at that time. After Mr. Osmeña lost to Manuel A. Roxas in the first postwar presidential election, Dean Reyes preferred to live in Bulusan than in Manila or Ce

bu

City

or even in

New York City

, where he earned his Ph. D. from the city’s oldest learning institution, Columbia

University

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Editor’s Note: For Facebook members that want to view beautiful images of the town of Bulusan

, please see Reynaldo Fulleros page at this link,

<http://www.facebook.com/#!/notes/reynaldo-fulleros/wonders-of-bulusan/205778799452256>

Our plan to revive the “Pensionado Tradition,” is a tribute to Dean Reyes, from whom I have learned many things in life – from baseball to the history of the United States (especially of the Big Apple) and so-many other facts and figures. I learned equally from “Papa Peping,” as we,

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his nephews and nieces called him, as I did from my father, Dominador S. Reyes, and their siblings, who were also brilliant in their own ways. Many Sorsoganons and Bicolnons probably considered Dean Reyes the Bicol Region’s most-intelligent son (or at least of his generation). He gave to me the first copies of the *Reader’s Digest* and the *National Geographic Magazine* that I read as a young boy.

A Short History of the “Pensionado” Tradition

David Barrows, the then-director of education in the Philippines from 1902 to 1908, stressed academic curriculum. He inaugurated also a program for young talented Filipinos to study in the United States. The Filipino students were called *pensionados*, the first 100 of them sailing for the United States in October 1903. Every year thereafter more and more Filipino high-school valedictorians and salutatorians were sent to the United States for college education, and for those who managed to excel, an additional opportunity to earn master and even doctorate, degrees.

Jose S. Reyes (1899-1973), who was a high-school valedictorian, became a *pensionado*. He ended up being sent to the Columbia University, where he took up college and eventually earned his doctorate in Philosophy in 1922.

While a *pensionado*, Jose Reyes wrote "The Legislative History of America's Economic Policy Toward the

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Philippines.” The Columbia University Press published it.

When Dr. Reyes returned to the Philippines in 1923 he authored jointly with Jose Melencio a book on Philippine Civics. It became a textbook in the Philippine intermediate schools. Dr. Reyes – while in the United States on a mission for the then-Commonwealth Government – was elected as a delegate of the Province of Sorsogon to the 1934-1935 Constitutional Convention. He was a member of the committee of seven delegates that wrote in English the first draft of the 1935 Philippine Constitution. The other members of the committee were Claro M. Recto, Jose P. Laurel and Eusebio Orense of Batangas, Miguel Cuaderno of Bataan, Jose M. Aruego of Pangasinan and Camilo Osias of La Union. The press called them the “Seven Wise Men” of the constitutional convention.

Dr. Reyes became also the youngest dean of the University of the Philippines, Cebu Campus (now called the University of Southern Philippines). It was in Cebu where he befriended a then-emerging national leader, Sergio Osmeña. Dean Reyes became probably Mr. Osmeña’s closest adviser and an unofficial tutor in the United States-Philippines Relations and American history. Dr. Reyes eventually became the first Bicolano member of a President’s Cabinet: as Secretary of Education under Presidents Manuel L. Quezon and Sergio Osmeña. Later President Osmeña named him Executive Secretary and concurrent Chairman of the Board of the Philippine National Bank. Cebu City and some towns in Sorsogon

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Province

have named streets after Dean Reyes.

Why Dean Jose Reyes Should Be the *Pensionados*' Model

Jose S. Reyes is the ultimate model of a *pensionado*. Not only did he excel in the American educational institution but also he went back to the Philippines to serve exemplarily-well the Filipino people as an honest public servant. And more importantly, he chose to go back to his rural hometown to devote some of the best years of his life (27 summers in all) to the common folks. Yes, some *pensionados* (and many graduates of Philippine state universities where education was subsidized by the public) did not emulate Dean Reyes. While many of them went back to the Philippine homeland to serve for a few years, ultimately many migrated to the United States to practice the profession or specialty that they learned from their American alma mater or at a Philippine state university.

Dr. Reyes and his third wife, Virginia Lumanlan-Reyes, M.D., of Porac, Pampanga, served Bulusan well. (He was widowed twice.) She practiced medicine while he set up a high school (now known as Jose S. Reyes Memorial High School), as there was then no public high school in the town. He organized too the Gubat Rural Bank, so as to help the small business people, farmers and fishermen. The Reyes Couple continued to serve Bulusan and maintained very-simple lives until they passed away. They actually shunned the limelight and refused to receive the usual awards and commendations given to politicians and other social climbers.

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In Part II of this series, we will discuss how our Los Angeles-based group of writers and our friends in the American Midwest have been planning to revive the “Pensionado” tradition as an honor to Dean Reyes. And how we will secure the funding for the 21st-century *pensionados*. The series will discuss also a proposed Writers’ Camp near Bulusan Lake that we would name after Carlos Bulosan, the immigrant from Pangasinan, who taught himself how to write in Los Angeles, California. And Mr. Bulosan indeed wrote well in the English language. But Carlos Bulosan could have done better had he been a *pensionado* too and earned for instance a journalism degree at Columbia University

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(To be continued . . .)

E ditor’s Notes: Readers may like to revisit some articles that this writer has penned partly about the town of Bulusan and her people:

[A Bigger Danger than an Eruption Lurks in Bulusan Volcano](#)

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[My Father Was the Birdman and Butcher of Bulusan during the War and a Don Quixote Later in Life](#)

[Illegal Logging Causes Landslides and Lahar Flow in Bulusan Volcano](#)

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