

## From Firebrand to Torchbearer: A Tribute to Ka Bel - MabuhayRadio

Written by Senator Nene Pimentel

Friday, 23 May 2008 04:18 - Last Updated Friday, 23 May 2008 04:40

---

As a young man growing up in Cagayan de Oro in the 1950s and the 1960s, I hardly knew Crispin Beltran. I did read of him now and then in a Manila daily that we got in Cagayan de Oro, which at the time was at least three hours by propeller planes and at least three days by boat from Manila.

Trouble maker By the standards of a community that did not want its comfort zone disturbed, Ka Bel was made to look like a born trouble maker who, the capitalists in Manila, would have wanted eliminated.

I was, even, then, amazed that such a man could keep on doing what he believed was the right thing to do and that was to fight for the rights of underprivileged no matter what the cost.

Paths crossing In the early '70s when I was doing my duties as a delegate to the Constitutional Convention representing my province of Misamis Oriental, now then and then our paths would cross in forums and in demonstrations against the inequalities of Philippine society. But even then I hardly knew Ka Bel. He was already a veteran of street marches and I was a neophyte trudging along with marchers now and then without knowing fully what it was we were marching for.

Then in 1972, Marcos declared martial law. I did not know what happened to Ka Bel. I learned later that a few years after the declaration, he arrested upon complaint of big business whose cozy relationship with Marcos was being upset by his labor activism. Apparently, he escaped a year or two after his arrest and continued the fight against the Marcos dictatorship underground.

I had my own troubles with the martial law regime and bouts with illegal arrests and detentions. Thus, I lost track of the whereabouts of Ka Bel.

In limelight again But after we finally succeeded in ousting Marcos in 1986 in the wake of People Power I that Cory Aquino and Cardinal Sin led, Ka Bel was again in the limelight of the struggle against oppression of the laboring masses and sometimes he tangled physically with the police and military officers who, more often than not, sided with the capitalists who invariably wanted to suppress even their peaceful demonstrations for the redress of their grievances.

Bayan Muna Then when the party list system was finally implemented, Ka Bel was one of those who ran for and got elected in 2001 to the House of Representatives representing Bayan Muna.

At the House, Ka Bel fiercely demonstrated his independence by espousing causes like

## From Firebrand to Torchbearer: A Tribute to Ka Bel - MabuhayRadio

Written by Senator Nene Pimentel

Friday, 23 May 2008 04:18 - Last Updated Friday, 23 May 2008 04:40

---

anti-globalization positions that were not exactly to the liking of the coalition of traditional parties that governed the House.

Anak PawisAt the next elections, Ka Bel ran again as a party list representative but this time under the banner of the Party List group, Anak Pawis. Once more, the people voted him to the House.

As an Anak Pawis representative to the House, Ka Bel was a source of embarrassment to those who trudged the easy path to power, pelf and fame. For instance, it was he who exposed bribery attempts by administration partisans to abort the impeachment resolutions against Gloria Macapagal Arroyo.

It was in this capacity as a no-nonsense leader of Anak Pawis in the House that fate decreed that Ka Bel would now leave us and go to his everlasting rest.

Deserved restHe deserves that rest. In his life, Ka Bel had apparently never been at rest.

In his youth he had to scrap the bottom of the barrel as it were to keep alive. He worked as janitor, a messenger, a taxi driver and many other odds jobs.

In his manhood, he had to fight for his rights and the rights of his fellow workers, to keep his dignity. He is credited with having organized the Confederation of Labor of the Philippines and helped found the Philippine Workers Congress. During the martial law years, he was associated with the KMU, a militant labor organization.

TransitionAnd in the twilight of his life, he made that smooth transition from being a firebrand – who in the minds of the conservators of the status quo meant being an arsonist who would burn anything which stood on the way to liberating his fellow workers to a torch bearer who in the minds of all well meaning citizens meant illuminating the path of those who search for the better life in a democratic and peaceful manner.

That is a most difficult thing to do. Not too many men could do it but Ka Bel certainly did it.

Not only that. He did it with finesse and with verve and vigor unmatched by ordinary mortals. And he kept his nose clean even as he fought his parliamentary battles in the putrid environment of transactional politics.

Sui generisKa Bel could have been bought by the interests of the rich and the establishment. He could have succumbed to threats of the mighty and the powerful.

But he resisted all that. And that by itself is sufficient to say that Ka Bel was a sui generis kind of man. A man alone. A man in the mold of heroes.

His life puts to shame many of our brethren in politics and in religion who claim to love and serve the poor.

## From Firebrand to Torchbearer: A Tribute to Ka Bel - MabuhayRadio

Written by Senator Nene Pimentel

Friday, 23 May 2008 04:18 - Last Updated Friday, 23 May 2008 04:40

---

His word, his bond Even his widow with whom he had 11 children says that Ka Bel was a man worthy of his word as a married man and as a father. Not too many politicians deserve that accolade from their spouses.

Of Ka Bel, it can truly be said that he was of the poor, stood by the poor and was for the poor.

I can say a thousand more words about Ka Bel but they won't add any thing substantial to our tribute to him. Let me, then, just address these few last lines to Ka Bel: You are a martyr to the cause of the poor. You belong to them and only they can rightfully claim you as their very own.

God speed, Ka Bel, and may you enjoy the rest that you never had in this world but may the example of your life now as torchbearer give faith to our people that all is not lost in this country and that there is hope for the better as your life has shown. # # #

[Joomla SEO powered by JoomSEF](#)