

The News UpFront: (TOP STORY) as of Thursday, July 4, 2013

Putting up a high-profile beer company to market its beer seems to be an easy task for this Philippine-born businessman. He sidesteps allied costs and other expenses by relying on prayers and friends who naively obliged him until it became apparent that he was taking advantage of their kindness and generosity. Bamboo beer is set to launch on July 13 at Yonge-Dundas Square with promises of fanfare and some hoopla. Little would the people know that the bluster is being had at practically no expense from the beer makers. It's a free-for-all, meaning the beer is being introduced in a free public event almost without cost to the trumpeting owner and his investors. What a freebie!

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PREROGATIVE

The Bamboo Beer Bust in Toronto

- Part 1

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Facile est inventis addere.

TORONTO - That's the Latin phrase meaning "it is easy to add to things already invented". I find it relevant to quote here, mainly because of an experience I will never forget.

My impecunious self notwithstanding, I feel richer and better-off in having contributed a lot more than the combined efforts of some people to create awareness about a product, the so-called bamboo beer, the brew allegedly concocted from the woody grass by unidentified brewers on the prodding of a divine believer named Vincent Villanis.

It didn't take wealthy friends and affluent backers - of which I have none - to write articles and create videos, five of them at least, for my The Filipino Web Channel, Currents & Breaking News and Eats & Restos Channel, which had been out there since November 2012 but had to be put on private pending verification of some claims.

The 29-year-old Villanis, born of a caregiver mother, is a sweet-talker originally from Sta. Rita, Pampanga, Philippines. He speaks with a seemingly knowledgeable aura and preaches at the same time, and laces his conversations with interminable references to the Lord, which could mean that he's God-fearing.

When he expresses gratitude, he does so profusely with ounces upon ounces

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Written by

Thursday, 04 July 2013 10:30 - Last Updated Thursday, 04 July 2013 10:37

of "God bless you". One feels a certain blessedness hearing him like a priest exhorting the gospel of truth.

He looks ordinary despite a mild display of affluence in a gold necklace dangling from his neck. For sometime during our first meeting I had the impression that he was effeminate. The thought soon vanished, however, upon seeing his wife and children.

I first encountered this guy in mid-November at his home in Stoney Creek, Ontario, through the couple Mon Torralba and Teresa Torralba who had taken an interest to help him in his business venture - the manufacture of bamboo beer and its distribution wherever it may be allowed.

Bringing me to meet with him was obviously intended to size up the man and his claim to have "invented" what he had proclaimed as Canada's, or the world's, first bamboo beer. And from there, write paeans of prose and videos about how good he was, or how fortunate Filipinos are for having such a creative person in their midst.

I did all those actually, having been convinced about the soundness of his claims and the integrity of his person. That was my big mistake.

The journalist in me had seized my curiosity. I set aside some doubts, favoring the Torralba couple who I believed would not put me in a situation where my commitment to journalism would be jeopardized. So I acquiesced on their say-so, and conducted the interview.

Our conversation was confined to bamboo beer and occasionally drifted to personal stories about his family, his background and professional business.

I soon learned that he's into house construction - buying dilapidated houses, remodelling them and putting them on the market once done. (In California, they're called slum lord). That was how he acquired his two-storey house in Stoney Creek, a few minutes drive from his bamboo farm in Grimsby, he told me.

Bamboo was one of the tools of his business, using it for landscaping and in some instances, exploiting it for wood. How he came up with the idea of squeezing beer from bamboo was not really his original. The Chinese have been manufacturing beer from the grass since they have an abundance of bamboo.

In a real sense, Villanis' bamboo beer is not really a first; it's been produced in China many years before he even thought of taking credit for what already existed. So the assertion that he invented bamboo beer is not entirely accurate.

The likelihood is that he took a fancy to the brew upon learning from a San Diego, California, beer dealer that it's not being distributed in Canada - or so it seems - unless the contrary is proved.

This dealer told me by phone that he could not remember Villanis by name since his inquiry was made in 2011. However, in June 2012, the two again exchanged emails wherein Villanis was already boasting that he was "launching North America's discovered and inspired bamboo beer".

Had I not stayed for almost three months in London, England and Germany starting in July 2012, my introduction to him would have been sooner than our November meeting. I knew he was aching to announce his alleged breakthrough.

On Saturday, July 13 at Yonge-Dundas Square, Villanis will launch his bamboo

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beer during the Torralbas' annual Filipinos Making Waves Festival. The effort is largely a freebie by the Torralbas for what is billed as a company with topnotch investors.

Villanis is positioning himself and his beer as bigger than life. In reality he's pressed for money - that's what I'm told. He has evaded the question of paying for the first initial foray that I undertook on behalf of his bamboo beer though I do not have millions to speak of in the first place.

"The beer industry is a Goliath," he says, "and I wished I had millions I could spend on advertising and marketing. I have exerted all efforts to endure this," he writes in an email response.

That's plain admission, in other words, that he does not have the wherewithal to market his product, let alone produce it, except to rely on the good graces of friends. He should connect with some Toronto couples who are expert in raising money from the public, if I may suggest that.

So, after so much talk about his sacrifices, etcetera, he's impliedly suggesting that such work as the one I did also be another freebie. He leaves the rest to prayers. "I always include you in my prayers and always always brag about you," he states, since "you (who) wrote the first story about my journey."

In the meantime, his company has put out a full-page ad in the Waves newspaper, with the art work done by what appears to be a Canadian media outfit. Could this possibly be another freebie? If not, he's discriminating against Filipinos.

Social media, particularly Facebook, is also littered with adlibs and pictures in praise of bamboo beer, including my comments and photos. Villanis is also pictured with a group of young boys wearing white shirts emblazoned with the words bamboo beer. That is definitely a free advert.

My YouTube outlets - The Filipino Web Channel, Currents & Breaking News and Eats & Restos Channel - also carry videos of my interview with him in November - those are certainly without charge even if I spent some amount for the high bandwidth connection to upload the videos.

Then there's a story I wrote for *Balita*, Toronto's largest Filipino newspaper, also detailing the interview. That is almost like an advertorial except that it was another freebie that penetrated multicultural households in Greater Toronto area.

That same story in *Balita* also went online, first in my online blog and second, in Balita's website. That's quite a major freebie considering the present trend towards the internet.

The first issue of the *Waves* newspaper likewise published my story about the beer and uploaded too in its website. That is a freebie.

And the idea for bamboo beer? Well, it's another freebie accessible by online search engines. The scientific extracts to manufacture bamboo beer are also there for everyone.

Many people had been had. I'm not exactly exultant to admit that I am one of them.

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(Copyright by Romeo P. Marquez, Editor, *Philippine Village Voice*, Toronto, Ontario, Canada. Volume 7, Issue no. 44, July 4, 2013. E mail at: romeo@pvm.ca)

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Background videos of my You Tube channels:

1. Romar Media Canada: Redefining Community News at The Gotcha Journalist Channel's Currents & Breaking News: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=42YXRLqaQYA&feature=channel&list=UL>

2. The Filipino Web Channel: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wQD8macEjAM>

3. In Service of the Community: <http://animoto.com/play/Zt02JnetbCSlqEqNqlobgg>

PHILIPPINE VILLAGE VOICE/The Filipino Web Channel - **Redefining Community News**

Currents & Breaking News

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