

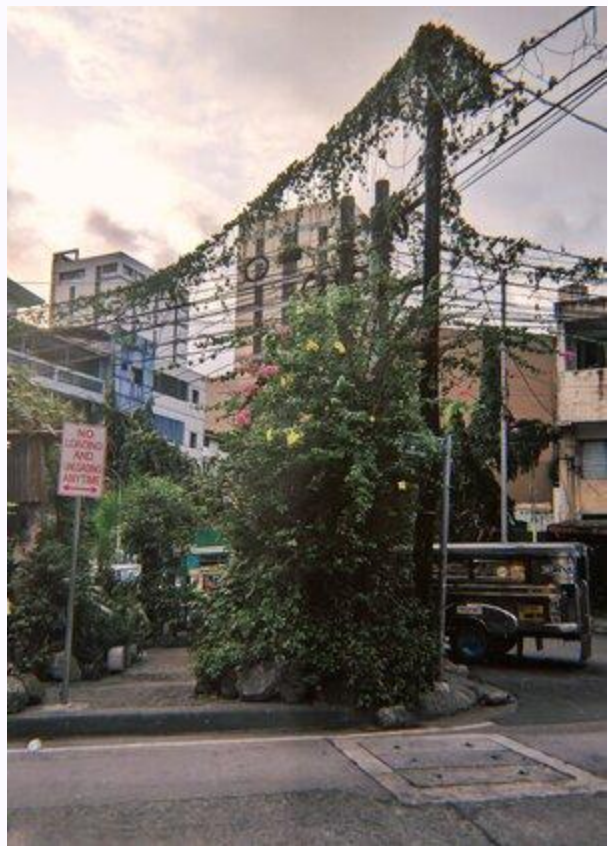
# See You in 15 Years

**READING TIME: 6 minutes**

**[05.28.2020]**

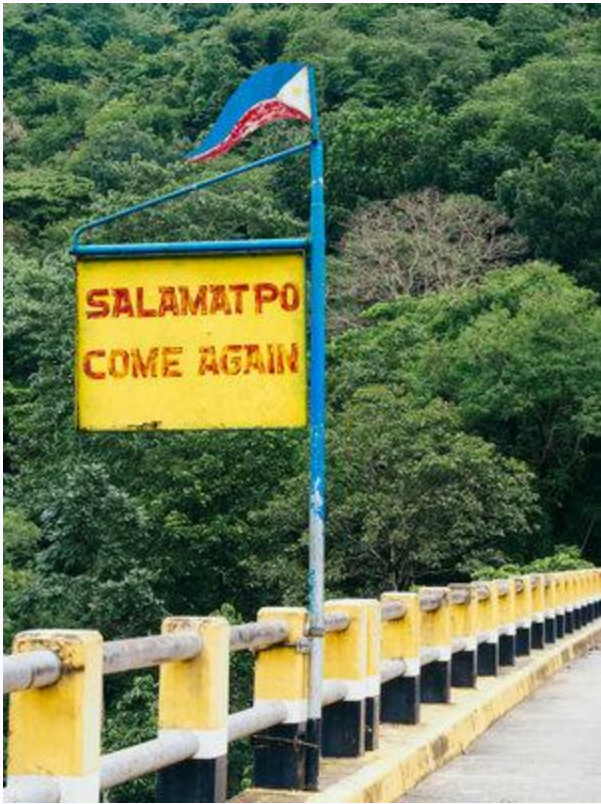
The last time I was in the Philippines was 2006. I was with my mom, dad, and two sisters. Last August, our family flew back to the Philippines for two weeks; this time with my *kuya* (older brother) and younger brother (who wasn't yet born during the previous trip). I'd been looking forward to the trip ever since I knew we were going. It had been so long since I'd seen most of our cousins, titos and titas, and our beloved *ama* (grandpa). I didn't know what to expect of the trip. Even with social media helping us keep tabs on relatives, 15 years is more than half my life. I knew it would be a memorable trip.

We stepped out of the plane and the humidity welcomed us at Ninoy Aquino International airport in Manila. It was the early morning, but the pick-up area was bustling with traffic. Titas, a tito, and a few other cousins hugged and greeted us. We entered two big vans and drove off to Bulacan, after dropping off my cousin to work in the city. Our first meal of the day was at Jollibee (a staple) and we laughed at the fact that we were eating chicken at 7:30 AM.





Meeting cousins was never ending our entire vacation. When we came back to tita's home, our home for the two weeks, I only just found out that the man who owned and drove the jeepney for our day trip to see the Ipo Dam (photos in the carousel below) was actually our uncle. At another uncle's funeral, we met more cousins on my mom's side. At a birthday party after the funeral, we met more cousins and titas. Overall, there was lots of hugging and people looking at us in awe either to see our growth, as they spoke too loudly about our looks (that's another story) or wondering "Who are these people who can only speak English and find everything I say funny?"

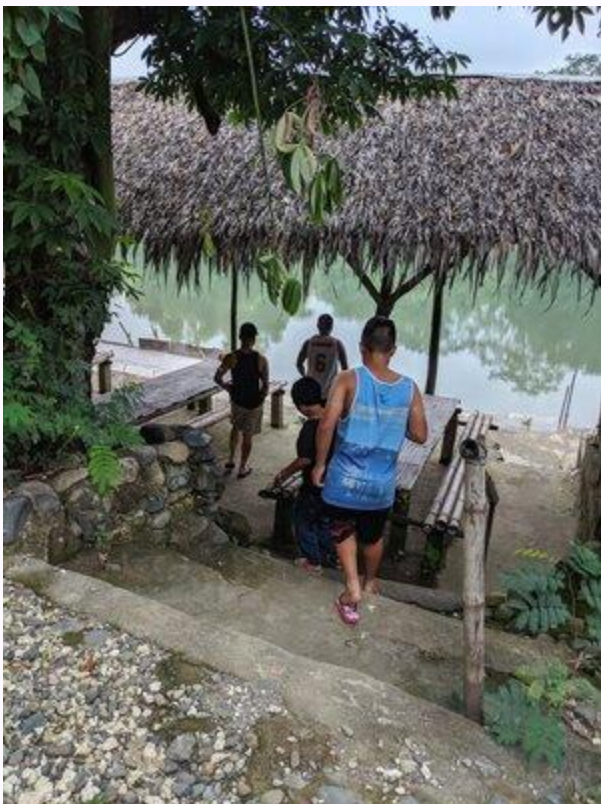




This trip was about seeing family and not in any way did any of us underrate that. I loved seeing all of my cousins. I loved feeling supported like I never have before. I loved all the food we had. The food there just tastes better. I miss the *palabok*, pineapple juice, and *espasols* the most. Even the Jollibee chicken tasted more real there than when we went to the one in Seattle years ago.

Our first day, we took the tricycle across the river to see ama. He started crying when he saw all of us, especially our dad of course - my dad being the youngest of 10 children and who probably saw ama the least.

Growing up, I wished I had a close relationship with my grandparents, just like the mainly white kids in school, and I was envious that I never had that and I might not ever, being that ama is the only grandparent left and we live hours away from the Philippines. Just thinking about him makes me cry. While I was there, I would observe his facial expressions, his strength he still has, but I mostly wondered what stories he has hidden in his mind. I wish I was able to talk to him. I wish I was able to speak with all of my grandparents and relatives. When I heard that ama frequently gets bad headaches, I thought that I may get that from him and whether it was just a side effect of being over 90-years-old, it made me feel closer to him, as my mom didn't know anyone on her side of the family who carried a history of headaches. While spending time with him again after 15 years, my eyes, as well as my little sister's, started stinging (apparently due to tears mixing with sweat). Even though I wasn't able to have a close relationship with my grandparents, it still makes me happy knowing he's surrounded by so much love and family in the Philippines and I know that my love can extend to wherever loved ones are in the world.

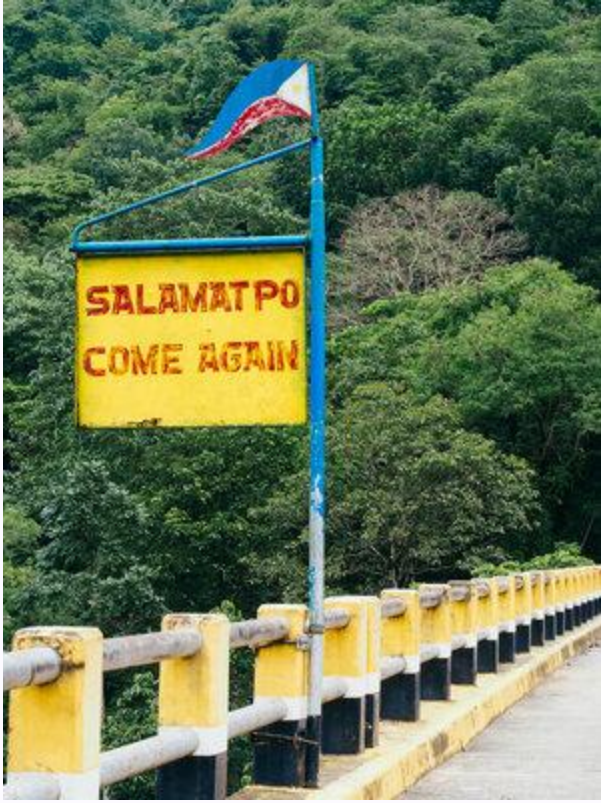


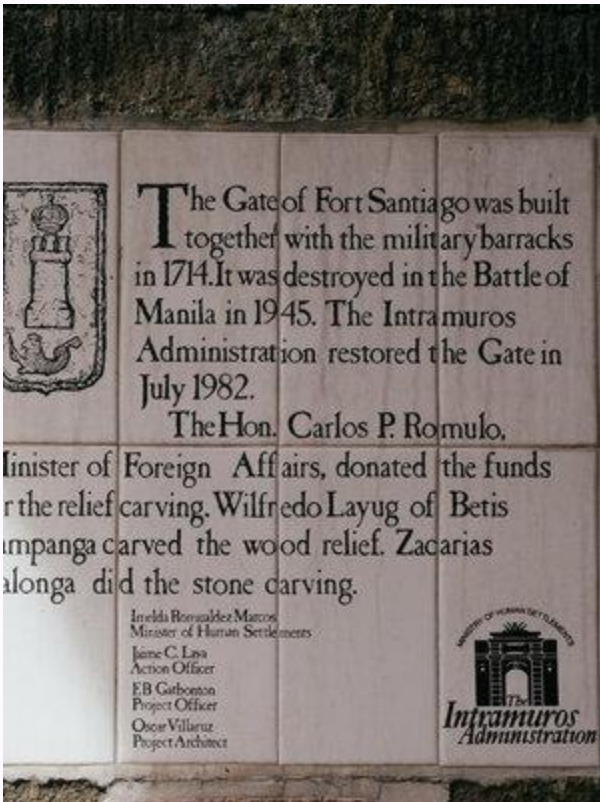




While we were in the Philippines for two weeks, my favourite parts of the trip other than being with family and eating food were exploring Intramuros (where you can find Spanish-era landmarks), going to Amana Waterpark and swimming in the big wave pool, watching Filipino movies while we were tucked inside from the thunderstorm outside, playing uno with harsh losing consequences (like putting lipstick all over your face), getting bubble tea while realizing that T&T is a bubble tea shop place and not an Asian supermarket, and using the lingo there (CR means washroom!).













My favourite memory of the Philippines was sitting in my tita's living room. Ama was sitting on a chair, watching baby Audrey dancing. Everyone else was dispersed in the room. My smaller cousins who I've never met kept their eyes on us, trying to analyze the strangers in front of them. While I was there, I felt connected not only to people around me but to everyone who came before them - the reasons why we could all be together at this moment.

I used to only consider family as people who lived in our house and close friends, but sometimes I'd feel alone and that's normal if the people living in your house get on your nerves from time to time. My family in the Philippines is so big, it's a community. We didn't even meet all of our cousins just on my dad's side. I didn't know what I was missing before our two-week trip. I wonder if my titas, titos and cousins feel how connected I feel to them and that I now think of them often. I'm sure they do.

This trip made me think about how different my life could've been if my parents stayed in the Philippines and they would've spent more time with their families; how lonely they might've been for not being a 10 minute tricycle ride away; how being so far from their parents might've made them sad on days they needed them or vice-versa. It brought in deep thought about one day leaving the homebase myself and living far from family. *Could I do that too? Do I want to do that?* Or maybe they didn't feel lonely because technology had evolved enough for them to call one another and my parents still had one another and eventually the family they created.

Drives back home in an air-conditioned van while listening to Moira Dela Torre were my favourite. Then, I could reflect and enamor this feeling of connectedness in my heart, wishing it would stay there forever as a



reminder that this life is a gift. I'm grateful for big family love. I'm grateful for our trip to the Philippines and spending time with family. I'm so loved, because I am full of love.



- Norzagaray, Bulacan -