

February 12, 2010

It was still dim and dark when the Naldos picked us up from our hotel to catch the earliest flight to Legazpi. Carl and I, Jose “ Biboy” Naldo along with his very enthusiastic 90 year old mom in her most reliable wheelchair/ walker gizmo were so ready for this trip of a lifetime that would change the lives of a lot of people.



Our destination...Donsol...the Blessing and Turn over Ceremonies of the two classrooms donated through the goodness and generosity of Mr. Biboy and Dr. Juliet Naldo and family. They also provided the students with lunch and bags of schools supplies.

Dozing on and off the whole flight, I didn't realize that we just breezed in Legazpi. What a short flight! Yes, there is the magnificent yet fierce Mayon Volcano. Beckoning it's glory... the great monument of Legazpi.

Our entourage was already there. Mrs. Theresa Ocmer, teacher in charge of Donsol National High School and Mrs. Masanque, the former principal was there to meet us. After having a big

Filipino and Americanish breakfast at the much acclaimed breakfast haven called Biggs, I positioned and settled myself at the back of the van for an hour ride to Donsol. The cup of coffee that I had at Biggs made my mind so wide awake yet so disconnected to the talkfest and laughter of Carl and Biboy and the conversation of the teachers and Mrs. Naldo. I was in my own little world as I usually do, thinking about the gigantic Butandings that is waiting for us in Donsol. Two years ago, we, Carl, Pablito Tita Tess and Pepito were there to see these famous whale sharks. I still clearly remember my first whale shark interaction experience. Hanging on for dear life, said my prayers and trusted my guide as I took a deep breath and made the plunge for one of the greatest adventures of my life. Butanding interaction was indeed a great adrenaline booster!



“WELCOME , MR AND MRS. NALDO AND THE FEED THE HUNGRY GROUP!” says the streamer at the entrance of the school. A huge group of students and teachers were already waiting for us outside the newly built red classroom, they incidentally called the Little Red School House Classroom. They all welcomed us with their hospitable smiles and garlands of fresh orchids. The Ribbon Cutting Ceremony was headed by Biboy Naldo and assisted by His mom Mrs. Gregoria Naldo and Carl Abella. They prepared a program for us with the blessing and a talk of inspiration from their local priest. There were also speeches from school officials of

their gratitude, their aspirations and wishes that we would be able to help again. I said, I heard it many times before, done this many times before and I thought it would make me callous to the reality that my native land is poverty-stricken and there is a tremendous and boundless need for anything. Classrooms, shelter, food, medicines...etc...etc. Their contrite thank you's, sheepish smiles and bashful hugs still breaks my heart. And that is why Carl always wears dark glasses.







After the blessing and the speeches, we were entertained by the songs and dances from the students. Needless to say, Carl and Biboy went to the middle of the classroom and showed off their dancing skills. And they started a dance off! It was fun and hilarious! Almost a hundred students are using the classrooms and they were all there, along with their teachers and other guests. This is indeed a blessed and happy day not only for the students and the teachers but also for the Naldo's. Carl in his usual playful mood started a jeopardy type game for the students and gave them chocolates and money as prizes when they can answer trivia questions. The kids were all happy. They all got gifts from their Tito Carl.





The program ended with a gift giving of school supplies to the students. They were also treated to a lunch pack consisted of chicken, rice vegetables fruits and soda. All of these were gifts from the Naldos. Biboy was choked up seeing these kids but managed to make a speech. His message to them was to study hard and dream big. Carl also said in his speech, that they should study hard and aim to help their kababayans later on. And that they should help each other and always try to make a difference in the lives of those around them, especially those in need.

Our lunch which was prepared by the teachers was finally served. The steamed fish and other vegetables prepared Bicol style was spicy hot and delectable.

It was 1:30 pm when we left DNHS. All the ceremonies and formalities were over. Feeling a little accomplished that we made a lot of kids smile, we moved on to meeting the Governor Sally A. Lee. She has become our acquaintance after our frequent visit to the Bicol Region.

She is still the same Sally Lee that we met before, very down to earth and simple. She was already waiting for us outside her house with our snacks of Vigan sausage and other delicacies from Ilocos. The Governor hails from Ilocos Sur.



She hasn't changed at all. Her conviction remains the same. Her collection of religious statues and paintings are still there. In fact she gave me one during our last visit. We left her house after an hour and thanked her for entertaining us personally like she usually does despite her busy schedule. As always, she extended her regards to all the Feed the Hungry volunteers.

It's been a long day. We were all quite exhausted from the early flight. But the 90 year old Mrs. Naldo kept us all going with her anecdotes and stories about her life in Donsol way back the 60's. I just learned that they use to own almost half of Donsol! I wish I could be as enthusiastic and quick-witted as Mrs. Naldo when I grow old. It made me realize that even at 90, I could still pull off a Feed the Hungry Implementation like this. I swear there is something in the coconut, "gabi and sili" that made Mrs. Naldo so healthy and energetic.

"One last stop!" Carl announced. We have to visit Buhatan National High School. Their teacher in charge has been calling us to revisit their place. I was quite excited to see the place again. The last time we went there was during the ground breaking ceremonies of their classrooms.

Buhatan National High school has around 260 students in all. The school was a recipient of classrooms, computers, desks, electric fans books and bookshelves from Feed the Hungry.



Mrs. Thelma Santiago, the Head Teacher of the school showed us everything that the group had donated. They are all well taken cared of and it feels good that they showed us how much they appreciate the things that we have given them.

She also showed us the new water system of the school. It supplies potable water to the school. She told us that it is adequate and is functioning properly. They also have a new electric power generator. She mentioned that the light bulb is stolen almost every night and that it has to have a better enclosure.

After our tour of the school, the students and teachers were gathered to listen to Carl's brief speech of enlightenment and inspiration.



The water system.



The power generator.

It was almost 5 pm when we left the school. We drove back to Legazpi to finally take a cold shower and get ready for my Bicolandia dinner. We rested a little bit after unloading our luggage and off we went to a local restaurant. After eating a huge order of pinangat and rice, we were given a much needed late night walk and tour of Legazpi.

Legazpi has changed. Or maybe our guide Roy (Biboy's nephew) was just good enough to show us around and took us to cool and beautiful places.



February 13, 2010.

After a restful night at the newly renovated Ellis Hotel, a good breakfast and bumping into Edu Manzano who happened to be at our hotel for his Vice Presidential campaign, we got ready to go back to Manila at 2 pm. But not after buying souvenirs at a local market. Mrs. Naldo got a big bunch of fresh gabi leaves. She said she will cook it for us when we get back to Manila.



Checking in at the airport at 12 noon, we can't help but think about lunch so we have to leave the airport and head back to the same place we went the night before. We can't let the opportunity of eating the authentic Bicolano cooking just pass us by. Our taxi driver patiently waited for us. We wanted to make sure that we didn't miss our flight.

The Magnificent Mayon Volcano didn't show up to say goodbye to me this time. I had a heavy and somber heart when I walked towards the plane. I tried to get a last minute picture, but all I got was clouds. It made me feel sad. That's why I am going back to Legazpi again. Chances are...



