

**IMMIGRANT LIVING:  
101 AND BEYOND**



**MONETTE ADEVA MAGLAYA**

(Part 2 of 7)

TRY not to wince every time the exchange rate dips against the dollar. On the upside, it is good for the Philippine peso. If only the prices of commodities were going down ... but NOT! Sigh ... You map out the daily schedule from Day One to the end date and get all the advance information you need. Why? Because unlike in the US where information is like water available on tap, the flow of information in the Philippines, unless you are wired with a laptop and always in a place with wi-fi access, may be spotty and information, inaccessible. That's a real bummer. A better way is to get a cellphone with local access and be good at texting. Filipinos are champion texters and they will leave you in the dust, if you aren't. Even the magtataho owns a cellphone.

Why go to the Philippines when there are a lot of choices out there at far less cost? Ask any emigre. A trip to the native country is in a class by itself when it comes to travel choices. For many first generation expatriates, the Philippines holds a special place in one's heart. It's a place you've seen before but would like to look at again with fresh eyes—notwithstanding the negatives: the withering value of the dollar against most world currency, the seemingly endless spate of negative news, disconcerting tales of horrific traffic congestion, the heat, the pollution, extremes in poverty and wealth and vicious politics. Okay then, it's not perfect but no place in the world is. Nonetheless, it's still a special place. Period. No ifs and buts about it. Warts and all, there are a million and one reasons a Philippine trip is all worth it—particularly during Christmas.

With few exceptions, there can be no happier group of people come Christmastime than Filipinos. It's a perplexing phenomenon that the world has taken notice of with somewhat of a jaundiced eye. Christmas begins in September and ends with a

## A case for coming home ...

*“The world is a book, and those who do not travel read only a page.”*  
— St. Augustine

bang in January of the New Year, the longest season of merrymaking anywhere in the world. It is as commercial and profit-driven as anywhere else, with cavernous shopping malls and a slew of holiday activities that can give other international shopping malls a run for their money. Dining out in restaurants can have you wearing clothes 2 sizes bigger in no time at all, if you don't watch it. There's just something about the Philippines during Christmas. Despite crass commercialism, Christmas joy among the multitudes seems genuine. The churches still get filled to the rafters with the faithful, unlike some churches in Europe that are more like empty, tomblike museums than churches with just a handful in attendance. In a largely cynical, jaded world as we have today, JOY as pure, unfettered, unfeigned and childlike as all that, cutting across all social strata in a poor country, is a phenomenon as rare as the appearance of Halley's comet.

Why do we come home? Part of the reason is the people—a complex combination of goodness and wickedness, of intelligence and ineptitude and of humility and pride. In the world stage, the Filipino has become the unofficial poster child of what an imported model worker is—and for good reason. Our best export is our overseas foreign workers, whose remittances, put together, from everywhere in the world, have been propping the Philippine economy, for decades now, in a big way. There are large numbers of OFWs that come home for Christmas just to be with their loved ones. The Filipino is an amazing worker. Whether we like it or not, the work we do has become our sense of worth. To be sure, we have our fair share of scumbags and scallawags whose shenanigans make us cringe and cover in collective shame. We have a disproportionate share of character flaws we laugh off self-deprecatingly with jokes we use in spades as we poke fun at ourselves. We don't take ourselves too seriously and maybe it's time

we did, so the world will sit up, take notice and render to us the respect that we deserve. All told and for the most part, we are a God-loving and God-fearing mass of people—80 million plus strong with about 3 million Fil-Ams and several millions more scattered about the globe—who, in droves, contribute to the general good of humanity in an increasing number of places in the world in myriad capacities.

Edith Wharton was right when she said of travel, “... you find out how many good, kind people there are.” This is true of a Philippine trip. With fresh eyes, you find out that your native land is worth coming home to again and again.

More importantly perhaps, a trip such as this forms part of a lifelong journey of self-discovery. This trip and others I have taken over the years in different other places, reveals to me those secret places about myself that I would not otherwise have known. I have brought back with me thousands of digital images as a future, foreseeable crutch to my memory, to help me remember over time. I have brought back spare change and worthless trinkets and a string of pearls from the Philippine deep, some burnay pottery and some Ilocano cotton blankets from Vigan. But the intangibles I've taken home with me are the best by far—shared experiences of grief, tears and laughter, rekindled friendships, a heartfelt appreciation of people I have met and will probably never meet again, a sense of genuine gratitude for life on both sides of the globe and above all, a deeper, newer and fresh understanding of our tiny, yet brilliant and beautiful place in the universe.

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## Mary J. Cochran

Council Member, County of Kauai, State of Hawaii

by CYNTHIA DE CASTRO  
AJPress

MARY Cochran is the seventh of 12 children born to Guillermo and Maxima Ribucan who migrated to Hawaii from the Philippines in 1926. This fact of migration is important to Mary as it speaks volumes of the values imparted to her and her siblings by their parents: the willingness of parents to take risks for a better life for their children.

Cochran graduated from Chamade University of Honolulu. She became a licensed attorney following graduation from the Richardson School of Law at the University of Hawaii. She was first elected to the Hawaii State Board of Education in November, 2002 and re-elected in November, 2006. Her term as a council member of the Maui District expires on 2010. She is Vice Chair of the Committee on Curriculum, Instruction & Student Support and a Member of the Committees on Administrative Services; Budget & Fiscal Accountability.



The Hawaii State Board of Education consists of 14 members, who were elected according to geographic region or at-large. As a member of the BOE, Cochran has the following roles: (1) to set education policies for the public school system, adopt student performance standards and the means to assess them, and monitor school success in order to enable all public school students to acquire the knowledge, skills, respect for learning and attributes necessary for life-long learning and productive and responsible citizenship, and (2) to set policies and standards for the public library system and monitor progress toward their attainment in order to enable the public libraries to provide all people with the products and services necessary for literacy and life-long learning.

Mary has two children and five grandchildren and one great-grand child. ■

## 'George and Cecil' is a viewer-pleaser

by NESTOR TORRE  
Inquirer.net



QUITE a number of TV series have been launched this month, indicating the continuing popularity of the format. Topping the list is the Judy Ann Santos-Ryan Agoncillo sitcom, *George and Cecil*, which is clicking with viewers due to its “role-reversal” twist: Judy Ann plays a no-nonsense cop, while Ryan is cast as a mild-mannered teacher.

Despite their unconventional pairing, the guy still wears the pants in this household, and there's no doubt that they love each other to bits. So, what's their problem? Their respective families simply can't get along, and their endless game of one-upmanship periodically threatens to wreck the couple's otherwise happy union.

**'So Pinoy'**  
That's “so Pinoy,” of course, and in the hands of writer-director Joey Reyes, the two families' “giyera-patani” can be depended on for some humorous broadsides.

The last time we looked in on the show, the big to-do was over George's upcoming birthday, which was being upstaged by the bigger celebration for Cecil's mom. Naturally, George's parents were appalled: Why should their beloved daughter pinch pennies just so her mother-in-law can splurge on her own bash, with Cecil footing half of the bill? Why, indeed.

Judy Ann and Ryan's believable and comfortable portrayals add to the show's likability. Since their characters love each other, they don't resort to the usual screaming and mugging that passes for sitcom acting in these parts, and that's such a relief.

On the debit side, the sitcom sometimes feels “overpopulated,” with some regular characters doing little to rationalize their presence in the show. And the “problem-solution” format can get to feel dated after a while.

On the whole, however, “George and Cecil” is a viewer-pleaser. But, let's hope that, sooner rather than later, it touches more often on gender issues, rather than the usual “family-feud” stuff. That, after all, is its unique edge over the competition.

For its part, *Tayong Dalawa* is about to wrap up its action-drama story about feuding half-siblings. Just before the show peaks, let's evaluate its effectiveness as a star-making vehicle for its young leads, Kim Chui, Jake Cuenca and Gerald Anderson.

All told, despite Kim's best  
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