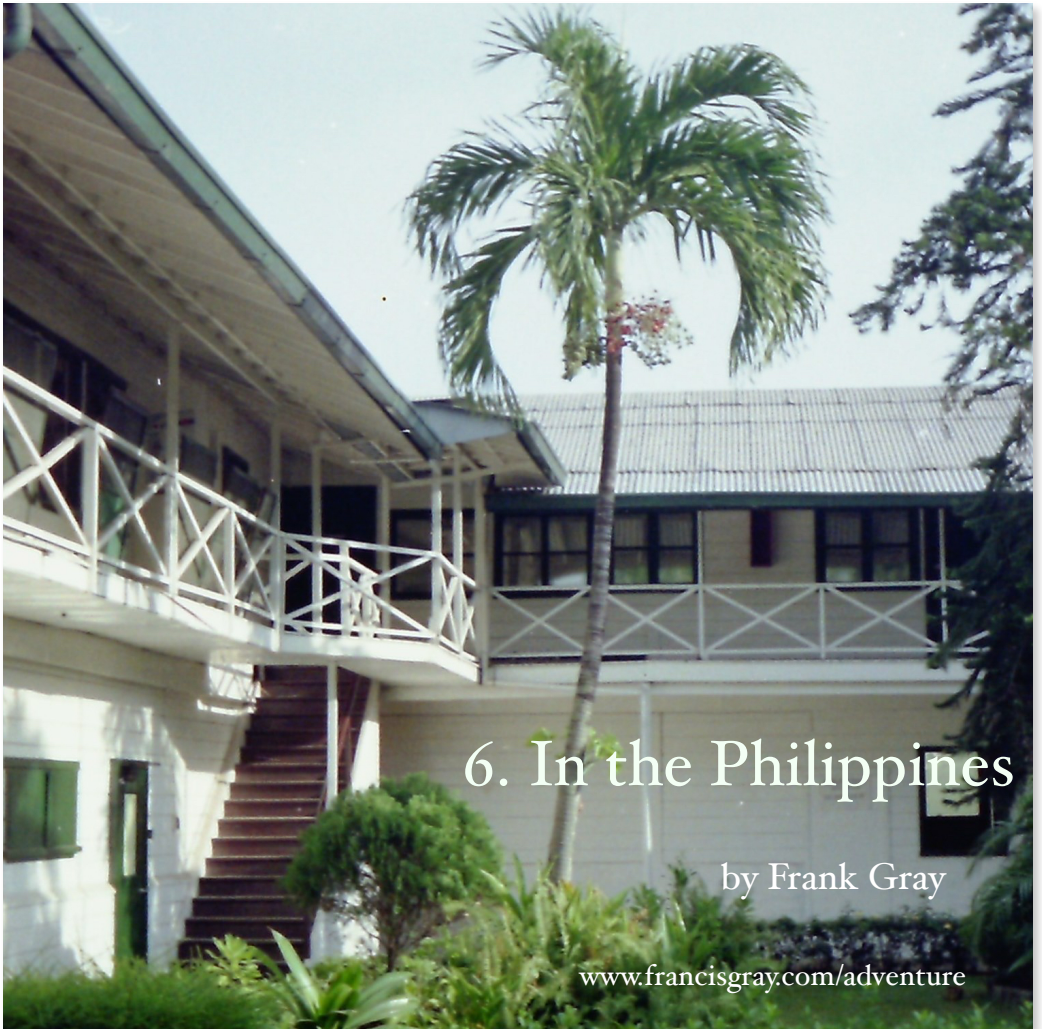


The Adventure

In the Philippines

THE ADVENTURE



6. In the Philippines

by Frank Gray

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Few details of my 1981 exploratory trip back to Asia remain. But I do remember being struck by how cold and icy it could be in Korea in March. Asia had always been a hot, tropical environment in my experience to that point in time. But this was different – and indicated that I needed to be a bit more careful in selecting my clothing before such trips – especially in the early part of the year.

After visiting studios in Taiwan I flew to Hong Kong and visited FEBC staff there under Ken Lo's leadership.

Finally, to the FEBC compound, known as Christian Radio City Manila (CRCM) located in Valenzuela, a northern suburb of Metro-Manila, where the Field International Strategy Conference was underway. Nearly seven years had passed since my first visit in 1974 and a lot had changed, notably the New Studio Building.

After the conference I enjoyed travelling by minibus with some field directors to see FEBC's transmitter sites at Bocaue and Iba. On my way home a few days later, going to the airport in Manila for my flight home, the headlines in the newspapers were of President Reagan being shot in an attempted assassination attempt just sixty-nine days into his presidency. It was the morning of March 31 1981 in Manila.



Arriving back in California after a long flight I found all was not well at home. 10-month-old Paul had been in hospital with pneumonia but was now home again. Before e-mail, text messaging and smartphones it was difficult to stay in touch with Hennie who found it hard without me around, but we were grateful for help from kind friends in the church, and Becky Anderson from FEBC, who came to lend a hand.

Part of the purpose of my trip was to try to assess whether we should move back to Asia. Had the time come? I had been asking that question of our Asian colleagues and our conclusion was that we needed to think seriously about such a move. Hennie agreed. We felt our time in USA was drawing to a close and we looked forward with some anticipation to the prospects of returning to Asia which we jokingly referred to it as 'the real world.'

It was another six months before Jim Bowman asked me to consider a move to Manila. We were ready – so I said 'yes' and June 1982 was set as a likely departure date. We were excited about the prospect. But what would it be like as a family?



And so began a series of medical tests, a commissioning from our church in Fullerton, application for visas and review of travel options. Our assignment was to go for two years, living at CRCM. We had

friends lined up to live in our house in Fullerton until we returned.

We were perhaps most anxious to see how our four children would adapt to a totally new environment – new friends and new school.

Looking back, perhaps the biggest sacrifice we had to make was Malcolm's piano lessons. Hennie and I had noted his fascination with the piano which we had been caring for in our home. He would sit down at the keyboard and meticulously figure out music he had heard that he carried in his head. (It was the days of Music Machine and Nathaniel the Grublet). That was when he was just three years old.

It wasn't long before we tried him out for piano lessons at Patrick's Musician in Fullerton. Mrs Patrick was a concert pianist who had played with the Leningrad Philharmonic Orchestra, but had given up performing in order to teach young pianists. She and Malcolm hit it off very well. By the time he was six he performed one of his own compositions, *Minor Reflections*, and won the Young Composers' competition for Orange County. Once in Manila we were never able to find a teacher who understood him well enough to help him develop his talent to his full potential. Today, as a missionary with WEC International in Thailand, Malcolm continues to compose and lead worship in church and mission circles.

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We had tried our best to prepare our children for the move. By the time we left California Malcolm was seven years old, Eduard five, Anita four and Paul two. We told them life was going to be different from now... What else could we say?

Finally the day came and we flew out of LAX on China Airlines. Flying was something our children took for granted. "Oh, it is so nice to be on a plane again!" Eduard was heard to exclaim. As on previous long-haul flights the greatest challenge for Hennie and me was organising

meal time. Confronted with a tray full of food all-in-one-go was not quite like the sequential approach for meals they were used to at home. We reached Taipei late one evening in June and were taken to our hotel ready for our flight the next morning to Manila.

The new day dawned and I went ahead of Hennie taking our children in tow to the restaurant for breakfast. Heads turned as our four blondies paraded in. Our kids were also duly impressed as they saw mountains of tropical fruit and food galore stacked up for our buffet breakfast. Their eyes opened wide. 'Wow, Dad, you said it was going to be different!' I imagined them thinking.

The flight to Manila was relatively short. The new International Airport had just opened the month before. Two missionaries, Dean Brubaker and Darrell Johnson, with their station wagons awaited to take us to the compound. As we stepped outside the airport two things struck us – the humidity, which you could cut with a knife - and the crowds. These would never go away right up to the time we left – nine years later.

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It took a while for us to adapt to life in Manila. The climate was hot and oppressive, the mosquitoes aggressive, people everywhere, pollution, traffic, allergies, headaches, noise – we had it all. On top of that

we had to adjust to 'compound' living – like living in a goldfish bowl. The climate also promoted an outdoor lifestyle which impacted the way we dressed. One strange custom that had developed at the FEBC compound was that while shorts were OK for men to wear they were not appropriate for missionary women - according to one senior lady missionary.

Both the environment and the culture were very different from what we had experienced in Laos, which had a very special place in the hearts of us both. There, the prevailing cultural traits were 'bo pen yang' (never mind) and losing face. While the latter was also a strong part of Filipino culture there were also other traits that we had to come to grips with. "What's yours is mine..." was one of them (which impacted us when we lent things or money to local people), while another was a strong sense of "keeping in with the powers." This meant that there was often a secondary motivation for establishing friendships. "Tayo tayo" (togetherness) was also a strong value in



Filipino communities. We had seen this among ex-pat Filipinos in Laos and now saw it again in the national context.

We were assigned one of the two houses

in the “Russian Embassy” duplex, so named because the semi-detached houses had been built by the Slavic Gospel Association for two of their missionary families who did much of the Russian broadcasting. Originally the Koziols and Koznetzes lived there but now only one family still remained – the Kulakoffs. They occupied the left-hand house while we moved into the right-hand one.

Opposite us lived John and Merilyn James with their two children. John built low-cost A-frame churches while his wife Merilyn, originally from Australia, worked in preparing music programmes. There were other missionary families from a variety of countries living on

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the 12-acre compound as well as many Filipino nationals. More houses were also being built for other staff and the helpers who worked in our homes, cooking and cleaning. It was a popular place to live and to have a home ‘on the compound’ was highly desirable for the nationals. It also provided a sense of community – and was blissfully peaceful compared with the world outside.

The number of FEBC staff working at CRCM was around 200 at that time. Head of the community was Fred Magbanua, a long-time employee of FEBC who had started out as a technician but was now the managing director of FEBC-Philippines as well as a respected statesman and pastor in Philippines evangelical circles.

Other 'oldies' like Processo Marcelo, and Mr Feliciano also lived there and had staff positions. Some used to commute by jeepney and a few by private car, but travelling to CRCM became increasingly challenging as the traffic outside became more and more congested. Chaos often ensued during the rainy season when flooding was so common. The distance in time from central Manila had increased dramatically.



CRCM was quite idyllic compared with the congested roads outside, loaded with jeepneys jostling for space and stopping at whim to put down or pick up passengers. Each

jeepney could carry around ten passengers at a squeeze but typically 'there was always room for one more.' We tried jeepneys a few times but had a difficult time fitting in... But they were, in the absence of buses, a very affordable and practical form of transport.

Inside was a perimeter road lined by delightful flame trees but there were also mango trees, tamarinds, chico fruit trees, a cashew nut tree and others that each bore their fruits in season. Those arriving at the compound were suddenly embraced by a lush green-ness, a sense of peace and tranquility, as they came through the gates. No

doubt this climate of well-being that prevailed did much to draw friends and supporters of FEBC to the annual anniversary celebrations each June.

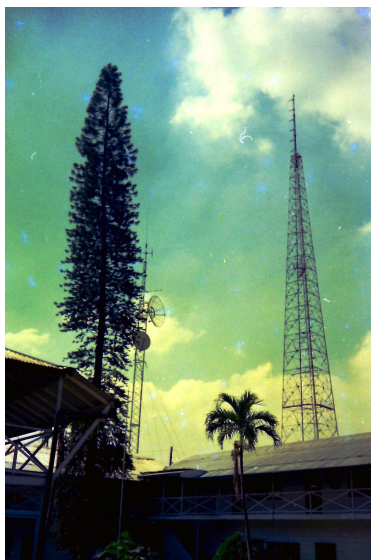


The perimeter road was around 400 metres which proved good for morning and evening exercising. It also lent itself to 'track' events in the annual SportsFest which

became a feature of

compound life in the 1980s. In the Sportsfest all FEBC staff were assigned to one of four teams and there were a number of events – both individual events and team. Volleyball, which was among the most popular, went on till late evening with the help of floodlights. There was also a tug-of-war, obstacle races and track events for both runners and walkers (Hennie ran while I walked!).

Standing over the compound like a sentinel (and direction-finder) stood the 360 foot DZAS tower, which originally had a flat 'hat' but this was later removed to add a further 60 ft for the FM antenna (for DZFE). For those of us with families CRCM provided a safe haven for our children to play. They could roam at their leisure, experiment with the wildlife – of which there was plenty



– and socialise and play together. It was their home, and quite a unique one at that, and has given them many good memories as well as a number of international friends.

There were about ten missionary families when we first arrived – Americans, Australian, British, Canadian, Dutch - together with a number of Asian families, from Cambodia, Taiwan, Burma, and Indonesia.

For two summers Hennie and Merilyn organised a Vacation Bible School for the children on the compound. It seemed to be a big hit and kept the children occupied during the school holidays at the end of the hot season. Sunday was our day off-compound. For church we originally tried the local Sambahan Sa Nayon (Community Church) but found that when we attended the pastor would switch from speaking Tagalog to English to accommodate us. We did not have much choice until we got our own car, a rather dilapidated Toyota Corona station-wagon that had seen better days. We were to have some quite hairy adventures in that car when we went on holiday, not least when all the family had to get

out and push while we negotiated a steep hill on the way into Baguio.

Once mobile we finally decided to attend Union Church of Manila (UCM) – a largely ex-pat church with air-conditioning and a good Sunday School for all ages. It also had



home groups, one of which we attended during the early years. The preaching was excellent – first with Rev Alex Aronis (who could ‘preach’ the Sermon on the Mount from memory) and later Rev Darrell Johnson. We are forever grateful to him for bringing alive to us Jesus’ Gospel of the Kingdom. It was especially poignant at the time of the People Power Revolution of 1986.

I also appreciated UCM for the number of key mission thinkers that went there. One whom I am honoured to call my mentor was Mac Bradshaw. He and his colleague Gene Daniels had done much to unpack holistic ministry from their own involvement with World Vision International. I would engage with

Suppose the kingdom of God were lived out through the people of Manila, what kind of society would it be?

them after church and get into some deep discussions. Mac once asked me what I saw as our overall objective for our local radio ministry. I waffled a bit, then he came to the rescue with a suggestion: “Suppose the kingdom of God were lived out through the people of Manila, what kind of society would it be? What changes would take place? (pause) That is what you should be aiming for!” Very illuminating. Knowing Mac was one of the gifts God had given me in my missionary career. His insights were invaluable in shaping my thinking and developing FEBC’s philosophy of ministry.

Happy to be off-compound together our family was not in a hurry to get home after church. We enjoyed having lunch on the way (sometimes at Burger Machine – a chain of mobile hamburger stalls on wheels that were parked on the forecourts of filling stations). Sometimes we would shop in large superstores like ShoeMart. The ShoeMart City mall was at that time identified as one of the largest in the world. Quite apart from shopping it also provided a wonderfully clean and cool environment to ‘chill out’ – and many Filipinos also flocked there for the same reason.

Finally, we would get home by around four – in time for a few games, then tea and an early night for the children. Within a few short years of being in Manila all



four children were attending Faith Academy, located on a hill in Antipolo on the east side of Manila. But getting there for the 7.30am start each weekday was a huge challenge that called for a change in lifestyle.... The school bus left the compound at five to six in the morning. About a dozen to twenty children would get on at CRCM and then the bus would pick up others along the way.

One thing we had not realised about this journey was that they sometimes passed dead bodies lying by the road side. It transpired that these were ones that had been killed overnight in some of the bloody 'salvaging' that took place during the Marcos years especially. We once asked Malcolm how many he had seen.... He reckoned around thirty-five – but they had stopped counting after that!

Faith Academy played a large part in the life of the mission community. It served missionaries working in the Philippines and many missionary kids (MKs) who came from countries nearby. The academic standard was high but it also provided a wide range of extra-curricular activities for the children. Their sports program was very good and their music to a high standard. In many ways the school provided much of the social life of the mission community, especially those who had children there. Musical concerts and the annual Talent Night were among their popular activities. The Cub Scouts also sponsored an annual Pinewood Derby which our boys enjoyed. 'Outdoor Ed' was an annual activity for the

older pupils. There were three venues for this, one each year in a three-year cycle: Taal volcano just south of Manila, Corregidor island in Manila Bay, and Baguio in the mountains to the north.

The biggest challenge for those students attending extra-curricular activities was that it required them leaving school later (after 2pm) and being dropped off by the Activity Bus in Cubao, which, for us at CRCM, was only halfway home. Hennie would often be the only one available with transport, to pick them up. At one point she estimated that she drove about fifteen hours each week just picking up our children and others from the compound.

Manila was loaded with political intrigue as we discovered from the day we arrived.

Manila was loaded with political intrigue as we discovered from the day we arrived. Corruption in government was a hot topic coupled with the wealth and influence of the Marcos family. President Ferdinand Marcos was seen as a benevolent dictator who had done a lot of good for the country. But there were also many stories of injustice, killings and imprisonment for those who opposed him. Because of his fear of opposition and the potential for mass violence he had imposed Martial Law in 1972. His wife Imelda, while quite controversial too, was also a source of inspiration to the average Filipino. Hers had been a meteoric rags-to-riches rise, from the provincial city of Tacloban to the presidential

Malacanang Palace by the Pasig River in Manila. Radio DZIM was named after her – its strapline: 'Beautiful Sounds from the City of Man – DZIM-FM'. The Folk Arts theatre was one of her cultural projects. Another was the CCP.

The Philippines International Conference Centre (PICC) in 1989 hosted the second Lausanne Congress. It had also hosted the Miss Republic of the Philippines Contest – and as the only international broadcaster at the time FEBC was required to broadcast it, one year, in the Overseas Service. Our Anita performed in Swan Lake there when she was taking ballet lessons – one redhead standing out among her Filipina dance partners.

One politician who had stood up against Marcos was Ninoy Aquino who was first imprisoned then allowed to go into exile in the USA at the invitation of President Carter. There he gathered support for his political ambitions. He was seen as a champion of the people and planned his return despite being personally warned by Imelda Marcos of the risks. 'The Filipino is Worth Dying For' was his most memorable statement and also the title of a book in his memory. It proved to be prophetic. In August 1983 he boarded China Airlines flights to return to Manila via Taipei. His supporters had been informed of his return and swarmed to the airport in droves armed with yellow

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ribbons.

It so happened that Hennie and I were heading to the airport with our children to meet the same flight unaware of the coincidence. Friends of ours, Craig and Linda Throop from the Fullerton church, with SIL/Wycliffe, were on their way back to Papua New Guinea with their two small girls and stopped over in Manila to spend a few days with us. A Ninoy supporter asked us if we wanted a yellow ribbon to fly from our radio antenna. Of course! Let's join the celebration!

There were so many people milling around that Hennie felt it best to stay in the hot car in the airport car park with the children, and I should go in alone to meet our friends. I went inside the Arrivals area. It was packed with people, but most alarming was that the military wired shut the exit doors so that, once inside, no one could go out. It began to feel claustrophobic. We waited. Finally the mood changed and there was a buzz of

subdued chattering – all in Tagalog which I did not understand. Finally the doors were opened and we were allowed out. People were running around. In the confusion I found Craig and Linda and their two girls and



DNDS after the shootings, this photo was taken by a Japanese photographer. Galman's body is red by the head of someone at the top to the stairs.

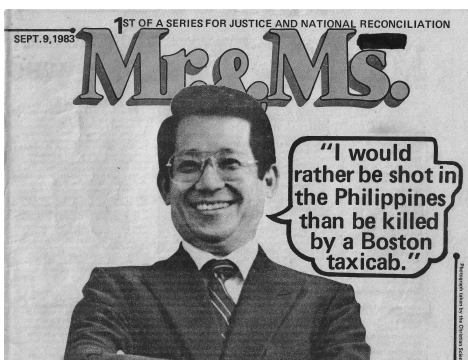
greeted them. They were in a state of shock.

As we got back to our car Hennie greeted me with the words “He’s been shot!” The horror sunk in. Ninoy Aquino dead? Could it be true? Craig gave his account of what it was like inside the plane. Their seats were on the left side of the 737 and they could see Ninoy escorted off the plane and down the steps. It was thought that their small girls seated by the window had seen the shooting and were traumatised.

We drove back to the FEBC compound – about an hour’s drive on a Sunday afternoon. I went to see Hann Browne, a C&MA-seconded missionary who had spent many years with FEBC in Manila. He had been part of the Marcos press corps and travelled around with his entourage. He was also a Marcos fan...

When I shared the awful news with him, he laughed! I was shocked. It appeared that because of his close alliance with Marcos he had little room for Ninoy. Together we went to see what the wire services were reporting – a bit slow being the weekend. Yes, it was confirmed. Ninoy Aquino had been shot dead, and the

nation was in total shock as news spread. There was also a deep-seated anger. Aquino was to be their hero and the solution to many



of their problems. Hope for a better future for the nation had also died with him.

National newspapers were soon full of pictures of Ninoy, shot from behind and with a gaping hole in his forehead. There were stories and speculation in abundance. One news magazine in particular, Mr&Ms, devoted itself to covering this story and the lengthy enquiries that followed. Who the actual assassin was as Ninoy was led down the steps off the plane was immaterial. Everyone knew that Marcos was behind it. The enquiry would rumble on for months. We even heard later that investigators had visited Craig and Linda in PNG to get their story and to interview their children.

This news confirmed what many suspected and paved the way for the People Power Revolution

As months went by, opposition to Marcos became more unified in the run-up to national elections in February 1986. Ninoy's widow, Mrs Aquino, had been encouraged to stand against him. Namfrel and Comelec were established to monitor the election process but their conflicting reports indicated without doubt that the democratic process was seriously flawed, and weighted in favour of a Marcos win.

This news confirmed what many suspected and paved the way for the People Power Revolution that was soon to follow...

Moving back to Asia had helped me to get connected to a new set of networks. It felt right to be there. It was not

only the heartland of FEBC, loaded with historic memories, but it was strategically placed geographically, right at the hub of FEBC's main area of ministry. Most important to me, now, was my proximity to many of FEBC's major fields of ministry. In 1982 letters, phone, fax and telex were still the main channels of communication.

My time in California – first in Whittier and then in La Mirada – had been invaluable. With the arrival of refugees Southeast Asia had come to California. With six years of background in Laos behind me I was well adapted to working with them, understanding much of their language and culture. I also shared their passion – to have ministry through radio. Their countries were being closed to missionaries and missions, but radio still provided an open door.

Radio offered an economy of people and resources. God had made it possible for key people to escape from Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos. Now we were able to provide a platform for them to have ministry back to their own people.

Missions generally were getting a new energy boost as we saw the end of the millennium fast approaching and the year 2000 set as a common goal for getting things accomplished. 'Completion' was a popular word. It

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proved to be a huge motivator and gave us a sense of urgency and hope.

Working from a base in Manila meant I had to make some compromises, too, balancing my international role as GPD with that of being part of the FEBC-Philippines staff. Director Magbanua co-opted me onto the Management



Council that used to meet every Friday morning. It oversaw the entire work of FEBC-Philippines which was quite extensive, reaching outside of Manila and Luzon into the islands. There were two local stations for Manila and eight regional stations around the country.

All this was in addition to the two shortwave transmitter sites in Bocaue, just north of Manila, and Iba, Zambales on the northwest coast of Luzon. These two sites served the rest of FEBC's Asian network with broadcasts in around sixty languages every week – including major language services like Mandarin and Russian. They also served the minority peoples of Southeast Asia scattered across national boundaries in Vietnam, China, Myanmar (Burma), Laos and Thailand.

We had some



amazing holidays in the Philippines. The main difficulty was that if we wanted to go to a decent beach it always required an extended journey or four hours at least to get there. We much enjoyed Punta Baluarte where we stayed in a hotel that comprised various bungalows. It had a beautiful pool surrounded by palm trees with their fronds waving in the breeze. The driveway was lined with gorgeous frangipani trees, and in the sea we could watch sea horses and our children could explore the mangrove swamps. Puerto Galera required a ferry ride to the island of Mindoro. There we stayed in Cathy's Inn right on the water front. We would take rides around the bay in a *banka*, a narrow boat with outriggers for stability, and gaze down into the azure sea at the tropical fish below. Walking into the sea called for some caution as there were sea urchins lurking with their long spines that would easily penetrate our feet. We could take lessons in windsurfing – but also enjoyed having our own inflatable.



One day we had some added excitement with our dinghy. I had made a wooden attachment that not only gave the dinghy steerage, but also had a mast and a sail. Malcolm and I rigged it up, hoisted the sail – and went straight out

to sea on a stiff breeze. It worked so well that we got

alarmed and wondered how we would get back if we didn't act quickly. Otherwise we might eventually end up in Vietnam! Happily there was a promontory to starboard, so we pulled the sail down quickly and used our paddles – and eventually made it to land before it was too late. Hennie had watched us disappear from sight and was quite relieved when we finally arrived walking back through the palm trees carrying our deflated dinghy and all the gear.



My fear was that we might take these tropical holidays for granted. We were able to enjoy these exotic locations for relatively low cost, but people at home would give a fortune to enjoy these things – just to sit by a pool

under the palm trees.

Baguio was to the north in the mountains and at an altitude of 5000 feet was a great place to cool off. It was also fun to go there for Christmas and enjoy the warmth of a log fire.

Living in the Philippines meant coming to grips with a predominantly Roman Catholic culture, inherited in large part from the Spanish who first came to the islands under

explorer Magellan in 1521. He was responsible for naming the country in honour of his Spanish King Philip. Instead of cleansing the old religious beliefs and practices the Church chose to accommodate them within Catholicism. Thus, what we saw was a strange fusion of Christian belief combined with much superstition, idolatry and folk religion.

We saw how God was bringing renewal to the Roman Catholic Church. It was my privilege to meet monthly with a small group of Catholic believers in the Jesuit tradition, led by Father Schneider. Efren Pallorina and I would go each month to the John 17:11 breakfast which they hosted. Their vocabulary interested me as they gave their testimonies; they talked about 'coming under the Lordship of Christ' rather than being 'converted.' But there were also strong elements of the Catholic Church, under the leadership of Cardinal Sin, that were far removed from this and were perceived as being in opposition to the growing evangelical movement.

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Tensions came to a head following the 1986 People Power Revolution. Many Catholics sought to give all the credit to the Virgin Mary, and erected a statue at the junction of Ortigas Avenue and EDSA. This act alone

served to put greater distance between the Catholic mainline churches and the Protestant movement. In many respects the Philippines was odd-man-out in Southeast Asia because of its religious background - the only Christian country in (Southeast) Asia.. Filipinos are a delightfully creative collection of peoples speaking a number of languages but with the national language of Pilipino – or Tagalog. Many also speak English – or ‘Taglish’, a mixture of English and Tagalog all thrown together. In the Middle East where they comprise a large part of labour force, many of them are construction workers and technicians. (It has also served as God’s way of getting the Gospel into the homes of many sheikhs as Filipinas became nannies to their children.). Nurses and carers find work in European health services where there is often a shortage of trained staff (as in UK).

Today millions of Filipinos work overseas and remit large parts of their income back to their families left behind in the Philippines. Their manpower is said to provide their largest source of foreign income.

Growing up in Manila made a great impact on our children. The international environment impacted them at school, particularly, but also as part of the international community at CRCM. In a predominantly American culture it was no surprise that they all sounded like Americans when they spoke – something they worked hard to shake off when we eventually returned to live in UK. Schooling at Faith Academy was to a high standard. Hennie and I were also extremely thankful that

we did not have to send them away to boarding school. We were haunted by memories of missionary kids in Laos going away by train to Dalat School in Malaysia, away from their parents for weeks at a time and only coming 'home' for holidays.

Eduard who now runs his own design company from his home in Sweden gives much credit to what he learned growing up in the Philippines. He was greatly inspired by seeing their creativity and courage in the face of adversity.

We often wondered how our children felt about being in the Philippines. Were they growing resentful about living in a foreign country? We were gratified to hear them say they were enjoying it and didn't really want to be anywhere else...