

Jurgenne Primavera: Letters to a Mentor

JO PARADERO BALLENA

VAN LEEAH ALIBO

J. H. PRIMAVERA



Dear Ma'am Jurgenne,

It is not fair for me to just read about your achievements without dropping a note of congratulations! I have admired you as my professor for your vast knowledge and mastery of Biology. In fact, my only daughter is named Jurgenne. She was one of the flower girls during Crevi Erigbuagas and your brod's wedding in Butuan. I introduced myself to you and you mentioned that you noticed the girl's name to be same as yours. I told you it was not just coincidence.

I remember that field trip to Naawan for the Ecology class. Verna Belo Lagare, Boy Lagare, Merlinda Esteban, Samson Morohombsar, Blas Tabaranza were among those who came. We had the permit to use two brand new Toyota Land Cruisers for the trip. Then surprise, an old dilapidated Weapons Carrier was substituted because some school officials needed the Land Cruisers to tour some visitors. We loaded our supplies; food, pieces of equipments and of course, flashlights. We passed by Iligan to buy a few more supplies then proceeded to Naawan. It was getting dark and we found out that the headlights were not working. Samson have to stay upfront and use his flashlights as headlights. The travel was so slow we arrived in Naawan late. The mayor waited for us, invited us to his home for dinner and offered the Municipal hall as our sleeping quarters. We chose the rooms, court room, municipal secretaries office, mayor's office, and the balcony.

Early morning we proceeded to Dr. Rabors camp (didto sa kabukiran). We set up our net across the river to catch fruit bats at night. We climbed the majestic waterfall. Didto kita nag agi sa kilid sa falls, it was very steep climb, holding on rocks and bushes. I was

so scared looking down and so tired that I almost gave up half way through. Naulaw lang ko mo give up. So bisan kon my knees were shaking and I was catching my breath, I made it to the top. We met a natibo with a sackful of corn on his shoulders, he was going down fast morag wala naglisod...tsk...tsk.... The view up there was breathtaking. We walked some more, collecting specimen and learning more about rainforest ecology. On our way back to the camp, we took a dip in the clear waters of the pool.

In the evening we visited our nets across the river. We gathered the bats caught in the net. I don't remember what I learned about the fruit bats, but I do remember we dissected them and made bat adobo for dinner. Even if I was so tired and hungry I think I declined tasting the exotic adobo. I'm trying to recall who cooked it. We had pictures included in the 1973 Darangan to help us recall those years.

This field trip was just one of those we made in that class, it left a lasting impression in me and I patterned the field trips of my biology classes years after. I clearly remember the advice you gave me about teaching biology: "Be dynamic." I think it applied not only to teaching but also in living our lives. Thanks so much.

You have come a long, long way since you were our biology professor and I am very proud of you not only because of the awards you received but also for your solid and happy family. Extend my regards to Sir Nick.

God Bless.

Your student

Jo Paradero Ballena



Dear Jo:

If there is any one field trip that I remember from my MSU days, it has to be Naawan. From the old weapons carrier whose lights went off, so that Romulo (Samson) had to use his flashlights as we maneuvered the winding road to Naawan where we were caught between (the devil of) a mountain and the deep blue sea below. And our 5-star accomodations at the municipio, sleeping inside the various offices of local officials. The bakilid (mountain slope) where some of us had

to crawl on hands and knees to make it to the top. And the waterfall with its pristine waters – check the attached foto (my old favourite) for the look that refreshes. I also remember the bat adobo which was so malangsa I declined to eat, like you.

Sorry, pildi pa sa atong mga field trip ang ROTC exercises, but thank you for your long letter. It turns out that the Naawan trip remains in your memory and there was no need for the Darangan adviser (me) to include some pictures in the Yearbook! Anyway, I hope you don't mind my sharing your letter in this space, for a number of reasons – as a reminder that teaching is a NOBLE profession because we teachers help to mold the youth, the hope of our mother/fatherland. Never mind that many Filipino teachers have now joined the Diaspora to foreign places. Also to show that our country is beautiful with its lush green forests and verdant seas (wherever they still remain) and that exposing young people to Nature is their first step towards environmentalism.

Lastly, the blessing of a family I am always thankful for, although it is not perfect but it is solid (as you perrceive it) mainly because of the father of the house. I pray the same is true for your family. Your daughter, my tocaya I remember at Crevi and brother Jerry's wedding. But somehow the (short) memory has faded away, it is the pictures of your group in the old WW II weapons carrier and perched on the big rock that are indelible in my (long, long) memory.

Perhaps, the very same field trip remains in the hearts and minds of Vern, Boy, the other Jo, Merlinda, Nanding S. et al. But for you and me at least, it has enriched our lives so much...

God bless you, too

J. H. Primavera



This is Van Leeah B. Alibo, taking up my graduate studies here in UPLB and currently connected with NORMISIST. I am very pleased to know from my adviser that we are in the same line of research interest. Please know that I am a fruit of the inspirational message that you gave during the 1st Agusan Marsh Scientific Conference in Balanghai Hotel where I was part of the secretariat.

Of the seven vegetation types in Agusan Marsh, I have chosen the

peat swamp forest, specifically the Caimpugan peatland. The rationale behind this choice is that peatland studies in the country are in their infancy. Little is known about the ecological dynamics and services that eventually lead to rapid degradation, such as the case of the Leyte Sab-a Basin peat area and our very own Bunawan peat area. I am interested in peatlands and their role in mitigating climate change. By acknowledging some of their numerous ecological functions such as being a significant C sink, I hope that their worth is realized for the furtherance of conservation. According to literature, the Caimpugan peatland may be the last peatland frontier in the country – now this is something that a researcher like me cannot afford to lose.

Thank you, Dr. Primavera, for reaching out to young researchers like me. Knowing that a respected scientist is with me in this interest, I am more than encouraged to go on with this research. It is not a lonely plight after all.

Respectfully yours,
Van Leeah Alibo



Prof. Primavera has Zoology and Marine Science degrees from the U.P. and Indiana University, and for her work in the field of mangrove-penaeid shrimp connection and mangrove-friendly aquaculture, she was conferred a Ph.D. in Science honoris causa by Stockholm University.

She taught at the Mindanao State University and moved to SEAFDEC Aquaculture Department in Iloilo. She has numerous scientific papers, manuals, books and other publications on her field of expertise, was elected to the Swedish Royal Academy on Agriculture and Forestry, Royal Belgian Academy for Overseas Sciences, Phi Kappa Phi, and other honor societies and awarded the Dr. Elvira Tan Memorial Award (PCAMRD), a Pew Fellowship for Mangrove Conservation (2004), Scientist Emerita of SEAFDEC/AQD (2007), Time Magazine Hero of the Environment (2008), and the U.P. Distinguished Alumni Award in Environmental Conservation (2009). She heads the Philippine office of the Community-Based Mangrove Rehabilitation Project (CMRP) of the Zoological Society of London.