

Pinoy Pilgrim: OFW Passport, ID Card, Reference Manual, and Bible in One.

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Last Updated Friday, 31 August 2007

Renowned Hong Kong journalist Rene Q. Bas writes in his review of Pinoy Pilgrim and how OFWs can BENEFIT from reading the book. This review by an OFW of a book written by an OFW is a must-read for all OFWs. (This article first appeared at The Manila Times, Saturday, August 18, 2007)

Memoirs of a model Pinoy international achiever

By Rene Q. Bas

Rarely does a happy book like Pinoy Pilgrim: In Search of Filipino Identity see print.

Manoling de Leon, 76 in November, is legendary in marketing circles for originality and the success of his projects. He had been one of the top men of J. Walter Thompson and Unilever (in the Philippines and then in Europe). His stellar work for Procter & Gamble, Shell Philippines and, later, on his own, with clients in the native catsup, vinegar and food-retailing sector are discussed in marketing courses.

He became a bank director. He is one of the Filipinos who pioneered in doing business with China just as its leaders were opening it to the world. He has been a consultant to Philippine presidents. His father—his and his 13 siblings' beloved "Papang"—was close to a President, Manuel L. Quezon, after whom he was named. He is proud to have been one of the first Filipino overseas contract workers in Guam.

Together with Tony Mercado, Chuchie Escudero and a group of experts brought in from the United States, he helped counteract the growing influence of Maoism and its activists by an effective media campaign which helped pave the way for the proclamation of martial law.

One of our past presidents, for whom he never worked as a consultant but to whom he remains a loyal friend, was his San Juan childhood kabarkada.

After amassing a wealth of experiences, knowledge and information during his years with transnationals (here and abroad), he became a professional consultant.

His first client was the late Geny Lopez. Manoling became Geny's man at the Manila Chronicle. Under his direction, it made money for the first time. It was part of his job to give Geny fresh and strategic ideas. He gave Geny—and the Meralco board—a step-by-step plan to prevent the not-yet dictator Ferdinand Marcos from taking over the Lopez companies. But Geny and the others could—or would—not take it up with the strong-willed leader of the Lopez conglomerate, Geny's father. Philippine history might have changed if they had carried out Manoling's plan.

You must read this book if your curiosity prods you to analyze, seek to divine the meaning of the strange contradictions in Philippine society. Why do our leaders behave the way they do? Why do we have these sordid weaknesses and these angelic strengths? You will find the answers you seek in this book, without the jargon of social scientists but with the concrete vocabulary of a man who knows the Filipinos very well as consumers of products and also as lovable human beings each blessed with a God-given soul.

You will, in addition, enjoy Manoling's writing style—which is that of a happy and precocious child's funny, frank and impish manner.

Manoling wrote this book for six reasons, or goals. Each is effectively met.

The last reason is to help Filipinos admit that we are really good and find pride in being Pinoy.

Abiding Christmas spirit

From cover to back cover, this book radiates cheer and an abiding Christmas spirit. Only when you pause to read between the lines, or reread a paragraph to weigh the implications of the action or event narrated, will you realize that the cheerful storytelling perhaps conceals a deep emotional undercurrent. His tales about those he loves most—his wife, Chatina, and their children, his Papang and his Nanay—are poignant without being humorless.

His narration of the travails of his parents' large family is always happy and funny. You have to be a careful reader to imagine the anguish of an eight-year-old boy maruya hawker who has failed to sell any of the bananas his mother had fried and whose consolation is that he and siblings had a lot of maruya to feast on. This failure—like so many that Manoling views positively as a source of wisdom and knowledge that served him well on later stages of his life—brought about his first success as a marketing-science expert. He made deals with his rich neighbors to buy merienda fare from him wholesale instead of calling the itinerant peddlers.

Always, Manoling makes us see events in his life as if they were scenes happening at random to a man journeying through life. But he also reminds us that each event in our own journey is a treasury of lessons—and reasons for thanksgiving.

Down-to-earth intellectual

The title is "Pinoy Pilgrim" because all human beings, whether they realize it or not are in status viatoris, in the state of being enroute, on a journey to reach a higher state or to some destination. Every Pinoy—perhaps more so every Pinoy OFW (whom Manoling addresses directly in this book)—is in a state of becoming.

Now, how on earth would the high school dropout Manoling de Leon come up with a title whose philosophical source is the same as Nick Joaquin's *Culture and History: Occasional Notes in the Process of Philippine Becoming*. Those who don't know Manoling well would never think of him as a lover of books because his conversation is as down-to-earth as his view of the world around him. The fact is, and one finds this out in this book, he is a serious intellectual.

He read all the good books in an elder brother's large library. He earned a self-awarded MBA by reading the books of an in-law, the respected Jose Dalupan, founder of the University of the East, and by visiting Dalupan to ask him questions and listen to the answers. He also went to the USIS library (when he was not enjoying gudtaym with his barkada). Whenever he needed to have a piece of knowledge about anything, he read up thoroughly on the subject.

The tales of his adventures—as a church-choir member, a Mass server, a Tabacalera shipping clerk, a gasoline station manager, an overseas contract worker in an American military base, a crooner, an almost-victim of a feared underworld character whom he crossed over a girl—are so funny, they made me think of the picaresque Spanish classic *Lazarillo de Tormes*.

Spiritual journey

The cheerfulness never wanes, even when Manoling talks about stages in his spiritual journey, which began when he was a child in a family with 14 children. His spiritual life became more intense after Chuchie Escudero brought him to an Opus Dei recollection. From then on he has had "a "spiritual coach." The years after he met Opus Dei have been the happiest in his life.

He offers readers, especially OFWs like him, "Pinoy-pilgrim rules." These are both practical and enjoyable: Mix seriousness with fun. Enjoy life: Make it a pilgrimage with friends. Be smart: Learn a new thing daily. Be happy: Look at the bright side. Sleep well: Clear up your conscience. Feel good: Be open to other cultures. Be good and realize the true source of Pinoy goodness.

If you're an OFW, this book is a must for you.

This article was taken from <http://www.manilatimes.net/national/2007/aug/18/yehey/opinion/20070818opi6.html>