

My Simara Of Long Ago

Written by Eleazar Mirasol Famorcan

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Even if my college economics teacher just mentioned it in passing, the matter-of-fact statement stuck to my mind like velcro. More like epoxy, I would now say.

She claimed we invent our needs.

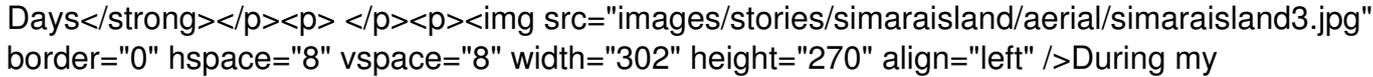
Yes, *invent* was the word she used.

In other words, she said that we create our own necessities. We ourselves.

For instance, we used to get along without refrigerators. Then somebody salestalked us into believing we need them. Now millions of people buy refrigerators so that General Electric, among other manufacturers, can boast that if all the fridge units they are able to sell in a year were placed side by side, they would cover the span that connects Manila to Baguio. Hah!

Consider cars. It used to be that our two feet were our primary means of conveyance. And cars, well, they were regarded as luxury. Nowadays cars have metamorphosed into a necessity, no thanks to our super mobile society. Many of us can't live a decent life without them.

Those Were the Days

During my growing-up years, I lived in a small Visayan island called [Simara](index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=54:simara-pictures-2002&catid=47:photo-gallery&Itemid=69). Though naturally beautiful, it was a primitive place, even by standards of the time.

We didn't have refrigerators. And really there was no need for them. Water fetched from an artesian well a kilometer away was stored and cooled in earthen jars. Vegetables plunged straight from garden plots into kitchen pots. Fish took their last breath as they dived into the frying pan or live coal.

We didn't have cars either. Everybody traveled by banca in the glistening sea, or on foot or bicycle along narrow, unpaved streets.

Not only that. In Simara, there was no telephone. No plumbing. No electricity.

And there, people ate mostly rice and fish until they rest in peace.

However you look at it, life in Simara was shaped by inadequacies of modern living. But there I enjoyed innocence and found contentment. All year round.

On rainy days, my friends and I would construct paper boats and hold races in a nearby canal. Dirt and colds and germs didn't bother me then.

During a storm we children would be herded into our leaking house. We would huddle in bed and stare at the water stains that had formed in the ceiling. The stains looked like animals, an overhead zoo that would help us pass time. We had many funny-looking animals in our ceiling; rich kids didn't have any.

In summer, vacant lots around the *poblacion* (town) metamorphose into baseball diamonds. Spurned socks are manufactured into balls. Any piece of wood or tree branch was good enough as baseball bat. And I didn't mind playing with underdog teams then.

As we got tired playing several innings, we would lie in the grass and make out funny cloud-formed objects in the sky. Time and again a jet would roar overhead and we'd see a stream of thick white plume in its wake.

Around midmorning the beach would become a large swimming pool teeming with people—mostly naked children squealing with innocent delight—atop buoys made out of driftwood, cut banana trunks, and aged coconuts. I was not afraid of sharks then.

Most afternoons, we'd while away our time just sitting on the seawall, watching ocean

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liners pass through the Romblon channel. And I'd often wonder where the ships were going and whether their passengers were in pursuit of something.

Yes, something better, a friend said one time.

What? I asked.

Maybe, they wish for a better life, my friend suggested.

I didn't know what that meant. During my childhood days in the Simara of long ago years before I heard my first economics lecture in college I didn't have anything to wish for.

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