

Important Things

by Ma. Elena L. Paulma

If you are reading this, hello. This will be the first time that I will be addressing you, dear reader. You see, when we first met, I came to you from the past, in words drawn from very personal experiences, about things and thoughts I never knew would see print. I gave them all in bulk, to help a friend who said she needed my words.

Before I knew it, my cache of articles for printing had been emptied, and I'm thinking maybe I should stop writing about pigs who can talk, and peeling oranges, or diaries of astronauts, and trees and frisbees. Maybe I should go with the flow and talk about really important things, like the two houses of the government and their infernal pork barrel, and the peace situation here in Cagayan de Oro and the bombing and how the new mayor should run the city and how President Ninoy should stop fooling the nation, and why Napoles bought 30 cars, and many other things that are, you know, really important stuff.

Meanwhile, I am home and it's a Sunday.

Perhaps it was the thought of the state of our nation that suddenly got me up from my bed, and started me going around the house wielding a duster, a broom, and a mop. It happens once in a fortunate while, this sudden burst of general cleaning energy, when I do everything I had been planning to do so that my home will once again be in order. I usually play music to take my mind off this chore. At first, I preferred the silence because I wanted to think about what to write. I weeded out what I did not need in my closets, and finally put everything in their proper places. I swept out a week's worth of dust, and laved the floor with the mop like I was going to sleep on it. All around was a silence so complete I found myself listening to it, and loving the sense of peace it gave me. I dusted the blue wall clock given by a friend who knows my favourite color, and a stitched picture of colourful fish which was a gift from another friend. I arranged a single leaf in its box, remembrance of a special trip. All the while, I was thinking about what to write. But all I could think of was the touch of smooth, cool water and rough granules of rice on my hands as I prepared my meal, the chirping of a bird or two outside and the silences in between, strips of sunshine through the screen door, the white of clouds against the blue of sky through billowing curtains, the glimpse of green-gold leaves on treetops.

Dear Reader, you must think I am writing about myself, but I feel I am writing about you and even our nation, and all of our quiet Sundays, when we get to do what we love to do, and dwell on the things that matter to us, and the housecleaning we all must do sometimes, and our longing for peace always. Sometimes I think that all the trouble we are having – the peace problem here in

Mindanao, the hullabaloo over the pork barrel which really ought to be emptied for the people already, the Senate spending so much time and the people's money debating over problems the Senate itself have created – all stem from our forgetting what really matters, from neglecting to clean up our inner houses, and from not knowing how to find the living silence of Sundays.