

Ernie Turla

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Mayap a bengi pu.

Muna, pasalamat cu pung quimbiran yucung maguing keynote speaker ning convention. To me, this is such an honor and I'm just glad to have been given this privilege.

First let me tell you how happy I am whenever I meet my cabalen. It's like being back in the old country! Just like when I walk on a street in some foreign land while on a tour and I overhear people speaking Filipino, oh especially Kapampangan, I just could not help stopping and introducing myself as a fellow Filipino or their cabalen. So you can see how glad I am to know of a group like this one you have here, the Circulo Capampangan! It is a sign of pride, of unity and of strength.

Five years ago I formed a Kapampangan group on Facebook and I named it Kapampangan Pride. I was then inspired by that movie, Field of Dreams, which had the theme, "If you build it, they will come." And true to my hope and expectation, that was exactly what happened. Kapampangans came in droves, and now the group has 12,000 members worldwide.

But before going any further, let us first ask ourselves, what makes one a Kapampangan? Each of us may have his own definition, but here is mine: A Kapampangan is one that speaks Kapampangan. It's just that simple. Take note in that I did not say that it is one that CAN speak Kapampangan. For look, just because I can speak English, would people already regard me as an Englishman? Of course, not! A Kapampangan is a Kapampangan-speaking person. How many of you here speak Kapampangan, let me see their hands. Now do you know that there are Kapampangans who don't speak their language with their cabalens? Right in their own home with their families, they speak another tongue! I tell you, that is the best way to kill one's own language, and forgive me if I say that that is such a shame!

There is another category of Kapampangans where ancestral connection is involved. That's why we hear of people who, although they have not learned to speak the language of their forebears, still consider themselves Kapampangan. By blood, that is. Yes, except that this has to be met by a special condition. They have to confirm first their willingness or voluntary

acceptance to be as such. And along with that is the PRIDE they should have in their hearts as red-blooded, true-blue Kapampangans. Now, speaking of one's PRIDE, where does it begin? Where else if not within oneself? It starts in you as one that is proud of himself. Having that, you may want to show the degree of pride you have in relation to various communities around. For sure you have more pride in what is closer to your heart and to your home. Which means, your immediate community - your neighborhood, your barrio. It serves as the core from where your pride can grow and spread like a wave as it travels outward. So from there your pride will start to include and embrace other areas, first the town, then the province, and then, finally, the country as a whole. Thus, you can not be proud of your country without first being proud of your own province. Likewise, you can not be proud of your province without first being proud of your hometown. Similarly, you can't be proud of your being a Filipino without first being proud as a Kapampangan. In the international scene, we are

Filipinos in general. But right in the Philippines itself, we are either Ilocanos, Cebuanos, Tagalogs, Aetas or Kapampangans. Our country has more than 160 indigenous ethnic groups. For identity, we just have to remember to look back and trace our own root.

Now, what gives the Kapampangan a sense of PRIDE? What makes him proud of himself, to the extent of sometimes being thought of as a braggart? Dr. Evangelina Lacson who lectured us when she came to Portland and appointed me as president of what is now the Academia ning Amanung Sisuan International, had this to say: "Well, because he really has got what it takes to be so." Meaning to say, because he has got so much to be proud of. (Akwa na waring magmaragul, nung ala ne mang talagang sukat ipagmaragul!)

Let's start with geography. Who won't be proud of the majestic Mt. Arayat? It is a solitary mountain "above the fruited plain" - a vast region planted to rice and sugarcane! There is the scenic Rio Grande de Pampanga with tributaries that make their way to Manila Bay! And Clark Field, which used to be the largest military base of the U.S. outside the mainland, and which is now a profitable Freeport Zone with an international airport. And Bacolor, which became the capital of the colony when Manila was occupied by the British; it has the oldest trade school in the islands. And the City of San San Fernando with its breaking record of giant parols, and thus becoming the country's Christmas capital. And the

province of Pampanga as a whole. Because of its famous "lutung Kapampangan", it is often referred to as the culinary capital of the Philippines!

And now, on culture. Back to the topic of language again, it being the center of every culture there is. We are proud of our language, because it is unique. It has words with no exact counterpart term in other languages. One good example is the word, "rugu". It is a word that expresses compassion at its deepest. Then there is the word, "Dispu" which translates to "I'm at your doorstep with God by my side." We don't just holler, "Tao po" or "Anybody home!" This is just one of the many reasons why I have the vision to save our beloved language from falling into the jaws of extinction.

We are proud of our ancestors. Before the Spanish conquest, they already had a fair degree of civilization. They had a government of their own as well as a system of writing, engaged in farming and in trade. We're proud of our customs and traditions. You may have heard of the Sinukwan festival in Angeles every first week of December when Pampanga Day is celebrated. And the Fiesta La Naval which is a victory celebration over the Dutch that wanted to take the colony and make it a part of Indonesia. And more recently, the newly organized Ibon-Ebun festival of Candaba, where birds from the Asian mainland migrate every summer. We are proud of our folk songs, such as "Atin Cu Pung Singsing". We are proud of our resiliency as a people. Proof of this is, after our land was devastated by the Pinatubo eruption, we have been able to stand back on our feet and even became more prosperous and progressive than ever before.

Now, on history where we made a big dent, having really played a humongous role. Do you know that without help from the natives, the Spaniards wouldn't have been able to colonize the Philippine archipelago? There were just few in number since most of them were stationed in what is now Latin America. They had to use the strong influence of "the sword and the cross" and the strategy of "divide and conquer". And it was the brave Macabebes that they mostly depended on. Do you know that when 4 Spaniards were referred to, it was actually just one Spaniard and 3 Macabebes? Which was why, the King of Spain and the governors-general proudly called them "the Castilians of the Indios". For they were the ones that fought for the colony against other invaders, notably, the Chinese pirates, the Portuguese, the Dutch and the British. They were the ones that helped in uniting all the islands under one flag and in keeping the

Spanish colony intact. Without them, there wouldn't have been a colony, and without such a colony, there wouldn't have been a republic such as the one we have now. We would have remained as small independent barangays, each with a "datu" of its own. For almost 3 and a half centuries, they served Spain with the kind of loyalty only a dog would give to its master. So much so that, with the rising tide of nationalism in the late 19th century, they were taunted and branded as "Dugong Aso". It was a ploy the revolutionists used to make them defect from the Spanish army. Ridiculed again and again for their canine devotion to Spain, they finally yielded to their call and joined the revolution, never mind if they became traitors to the Spanish army they had been friends with for so long a time. In just less than two weeks, they were able to liberate their own province and then later continued to help in other places the struggle for independence. On account of that, look at our flag now. Our provinces, Pampanga and Tarlac are represented by two of the eight rays of the sun in our flag!

Our forefathers helped in shaping the course of our history. Early on, in 1571 when Manila had been captured by Legaspi, forces from the Kapampangan region under the command of Bamba "Tarik" Soliman tried to come to the aid of Rajah Soliman but unfortunately lost to the enemies in the Battle at Bankusay. Panday Pira of Apalit was a famous cannon-maker at that time. Francisco Maniago of Mexico led a revolt against the Spaniards in 1660 on account of enforced labor. On the other side of the fence, Francisco Laxamana was able to suppress a Chinese uprising and was given the highest military honor a Filipino ever got from the Spanish authorities. We had quite a few generals during the revolution, and among them were Mamerto Natividad of Bacolor, Jose Alejandrino of Arayat, Francisco Macabulos of Lubao, and Servillano Aquino of Tarlac. During World War II, Huk Supremo, Luis Taruc led his guerilla units in fighting the Japanese invaders. When the war ended this man who dubbed himself as "born of the people" continued to fight for social justice and agrarian reform, By the way, there were also female Huk commanders that figured prominently in our province, the most famous of whom was Felipa Culala, alias Kumander Dayang-Dayang.

But what really make us proud as a people are the achievements of our cabalens in various fields of endeavor. Foremost of such famous Kapampangans are the father and daughter that have become Presidents of our country: Diosdado Macapagal and Gloria Arroyo. (How many

Presidents have we had since our independence in 1946? Eleven. And our province has produced two! So, isn't that something?) Our people have also produced two martyrs: Jose Abad Santos who said, "Do not cry my son. Show these people you are brave. Not everybody is given this chance to die for his country". He could have escaped death just by collaborating with the enemy. The other martyr was Benigno "Ninoy" Aquino Jr., who said. "The Filipino is worth dying for." So, as you see, it is our cabalens that make us proud as a people!

Ngeni, pamilis cu nong taladtaran deti: Gil Puyat of Guagua became a Senate President. Reynato Puno and Artemio Panganiban became Chief Justices of the Supreme Court. Pelagio Cruz became an AFP chief of staff. Archbishop Rufino Santos of Guagua was the first Filipino Cardinal. In the field of art, we have painters Vicente Alvarez Dizon and Vicente Manansala, a national artist. In literary writing, we have Bienvenido Santos & C. V. Pedroche. In vernacular writing, we have Aurelio Tolentino, Soto and Gallardo. In basketball, the Hall of Famers Gabby and Fely Fajardo. In billiards, "the magician" Efren "Bata" Reyes. In beauty pageants, actress Melanie Marquez, the former Miss International. Then in music, we have world-famous pianist Cecile Licad, singers Fred Panopio, Rico Puno, Helen Gamboa, Lea Salonga, Appl d Ap. In the film industry: Directors Gregorio Fernandez & Brillante Mendoza. Comedians: Chiquito, Patsy, Tugak and Pugak. Action stars: Tony Ferrer, Jess and Lito Lapid. Villain: Paquito Diaz. Drama: Rosa Rosal. Rosemarie Gil, Gilda Coronel, Vilma Santos, Luis Gonzales, Eddie del Mar, Liza Lorena, Alma Moreno, Lorna Tolentino, Barbara Perez, Rogelio dela Rosa....

For all these, may there be KAPAMPANGAN PRIDE, now and for always!!!!
Dakal pung salamat (thank you).

Delivered by Ernesto C. Turla as keynote speaker at the first Kapampangan Convention held at the Hyatt Regency Hotel in Chicago on Aug. 21 - 23, 2015. The landmark event was sponsored by the Circulo Capampangan of Chicago led by its indefatigable founder and event over-all chairman, Conrado Manankil, who had invited all Pampangueno organizations in the U.S. and Canada. More than 400 people attended it. Its highlights included the book launching of the revised Classic Kapampangan Dictionary (by E.C. Turla), Kule Yang Daya Ing Banwa (by R.B. Alzadon) and the sale of books published by the Center For Kapampangan Studies of the Holy Angel University, as well as the presentation of 22 town muses.

