



JO-ANNE LEGASPI
Lawyer

Trees and forests as luxuries

Jo-anne is a young lawyer who works in Makati City, the country's primary financial hub, and lives in one of the city's numerous condominiums with her dog, a Maltese. The reality of forests for her is the pocket of trees in the university campus that she knew daily when she was doing her undergraduate studies. Beyond that, a natural environment is woven into her life as a luxury to be enjoyed when she can, during trips to Boracay, a popular tourist destination in central Philippines with its powder-white sand and clear waters. She views Boracay as the most beautiful place in the Philippines, although she also sees the place as half-natural (where one faces the sea) and half-fake (where one faces the resorts and planted trees).

But where she lives and works, trees, forests, natural environments do not configure into the scheme of everyday life. Jo-anne sees this in a pragmatic give-and-take situation: you give up the natural environment if you take up urbanization and development. In her view, cutting down trees will always be done to create more buildings that will create the wealth needed to lift the economic slump. Her experience is that the environment needs to give way to pursue economic growth. The environment is a low priority when compared with economics. Between preserving a landmark tree versus a building, the building will always win. The environment will





be faced when we are out of the economic slump and government will always go first to what will produce more wealth. While global warming is being talked about, we are living out its causes and extracting the benefits; we will think about the problem when it is inevitable. Even the option now to switch to biofuels is done on the basis of biofuels being cheaper, not on being environmentally aware.

Jo-anne also sees that cutting will never stop, but if trees are replanted where they were cut before, the possibility of regaining the balance can occur. Therefore, she sees the La Mesa Ecopark effort (a private sector-led initiative to rehabilitate the La Mesa watershed, a main source of water for Metro Manila) as a worthwhile endeavor that needs to be supported. And this is where she views NGO activities as a more forceful dynamic when government becomes a problem.

“There are no such things as forests in Makati. I think in the provinces forests can be found, but are facing the usual problems of deforestation, illegal mines, etc. The Ateneo university campus has the most amount of trees in any one spot.”

“I can’t even get my dog to walk in any natural environment, as there is no natural surface to walk my dog. The first time my dog walked on soil was an unfamiliar experience, having been used to condominium flooring or asphalt and concrete. A natural environment is a luxury (in Puerto Galera, Camiguin, Bohol), *otherwise there are practically none in the Philippines.*”

“Since my childhood, there have been a lot of changes. I graduated in Ateneo in 2000. Since 1996, windows have received less light due to new buildings blocking the sun. There was a very beautiful corn plantation and sunflower area, which is now a big road. There are more cars now, so the trees were cut down for more parking spaces. Manila Bay still has a beautiful sunset, but they covered a whole portion (*for the reclamation area*). Manila is a lost case, a lost hope.”

“The development of Philippines is seen in urbanization, but perhaps I will try to join the NGOs and get involved in the trash problem and educating people in as simple a task as dealing with candy wrappers.”





UNDONG and FATIMA MAPAYAG Wood Gatherers



We met at the bridge where the Kabacan River joins the Pulangi River, where the *barangay* of Lumayong has taken advantage of the meeting point. Haran is Maguindanao, the dominant culture of Muslim Filipinos in central Mindanao and he lives here with his parents and children. He learned to talk Tagalog through his Christian neighbor.

They earn a living gathering driftwood that comes from the Arakan Mountains. The floods bring a large supply of tree trunks, which they capture and haul onto the banks, as many as they can. Their neighbors have the same livelihood and the children help in gathering wood.

Undong, his father, saws up the logs under a loose frame that provides shade while he splits the logs, and his mother Fatima packs them into tight bundles for sale. They sell the wood mostly to bakeries and restaurants, but logs of quality can be sliced, so these they bring to the “banso” or sawmill. By early afternoon, Akmid is home from school to see what is happening while they ask what he has learned.

The family maintains a *gulayan* (vegetable garden) on the bank where they grow eggplant, okra, and *ampalaya* (bitter gourd) that allows them buy one to two kilos of rice daily. When there is a flood, their *gulayan* gets washed out, but it is good while it lasts. The river provides a limited supply of fish.

For now, they continue to be dependent upon the river and whatever it brings by way of opportunity.

Drift wood from Arakan

