

MIDDLE

NO. 1

Hope
in the Darkest of Times..

OUR NEW YEAR, OUR NEW NORMAL

— Featuring the ART, MUSIC & STORIES of YOUNG MINDANAOAN ARTISTS
during the PANDEMIC



**WELCOME
TO THE
MIDDLE
PHOENIX**

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Ramblings From The Editor

Who would have honestly thought that 2020 would be the year that will change the course of everything?

Suddenly, three months into 2020, we were left with no choice but to “stay home, save lives” due to the deadly COVID-19 pandemic. And we all knew from that exact moment on; this year isn’t going to get any better. That whether we like it or not, things will not be the way you planned them to be. Well, we couldn’t be more right.

Every day, especially in the Philippines, you wake up to bad news and distress brought not only by COVID-19 but also by the seemingly never-ending social injustices. One of which: a then police officer now promoted as police chief has been left unaccountable of a major violation, a government-funded insurance corporation has stolen billions of money from the Filipino people, a major TV network has been shut down in the middle of a pandemic where news and information is most needed, and the urgent passing of Anti-Terrorism Act that deems to tag those critical of the government as terrorists. There’s also political and social unrest all over the world. You see and hear news of how government leaders and business giants take this opportunity to advance their political agenda and milk money from the working class. Not to mention the drastic increase of recorded cases of sexual and domestic abuse during the government-imposed lockdowns as stated in a study by the Commission on Human Rights. Plus, the man-made calamities that took the lives of everyone on an impossible scale. Need we say more?

To say that 2020 is a tough year would be so much of an understatement. And to blame it solely on the year per se is not going to change things either. If there’s anything that 2020 has taught us, it’s that the decisions that we made during the past years are going to haunt us one way or another in the long run.

However, despite how shitty 2020 had been, some—if not most—of us managed to rise above these adversities and remain hopeful of what’s about to come. In our own small ways, we cling to different things that give us an immense amount of joy and happiness. Reminding us that there’s light even amidst the darkness.

In the last nine months of mostly being stuck at our homes, we sought refuge to arts and its many forms as our ultimate source of entertainment; making us forget the stress and anxiety that the pandemic has caused us. We discovered new ways to improve ourselves especially by mastering the craft we once thought was no longer there. Although there are tons of bad news on a daily basis, there are also good stories that somehow help us restore our faith back to humanity.

These types of positive energies mentioned above are what inspired us in The Middle Mag PH team to launch our debut

digital issue with the theme “hope in the darkest of times”. In this issue, we gathered stories, artworks, photographs, young musicians, and more, that encapsulate our central theme — coming straight from the voices of young Mindanaoans. All these pieces serve as a stark reminder that when everything else seems to take a halt, art is there to either comfort us or slap us with the hard truth.

To all our young creatives, if it weren’t for your bona fide talents and stories (and generosity), this issue would not have come to life. So to all of you who contributed to this first-ever digital issue, from us here in The Middle Mag PH, daghang salamat! You sharing your valuable art with us without the slightest hint of hesitation means everything to our team as a starting publication. We will stay true to our words and promise to take good care of your ARTS. You are the hope that this world needs.

To you who are reading this magazine, we hope that this compilation of stories and artworks gives you hope in a time of uncertainty (this is, after all, what we aim for). May these pieces resonate with you the way they resonate with us. And if you can, please share these stories as well with the people that need to hear it. Now more than ever, we need stories that not only understand us but also help us to become better people. You may or may not know it, you are also the hope that this world needs.

As we are entering a new era, may we be reminded of the necessary actions that we must make. We must believe in our capabilities as the generation full of knowledge and critical skills. It may seem pointless to fight the good fight for now but eventually, we will all realize how important our role is as young game-changers to be the beacon of hope for the next generations. So please, be better. Do better. Let’s be the hope that this world needs.

We may still be in an uncertain situation as of writing but know that sooner or later, you will make it out there. Then you will realize that there is still hope after all that you’ve been through. That there’s hope even in the darkest of times. We are here. In the now. In the midst of it all. We are conquerors, spectators, and adjudicators. And the history of tomorrow is now up to us. This is our chance to take our place and be the change we want to see.

We are the youth of the South. And we will be heard.

The Middle is me. It’s you. It’s all of us.

Rejh
Editor

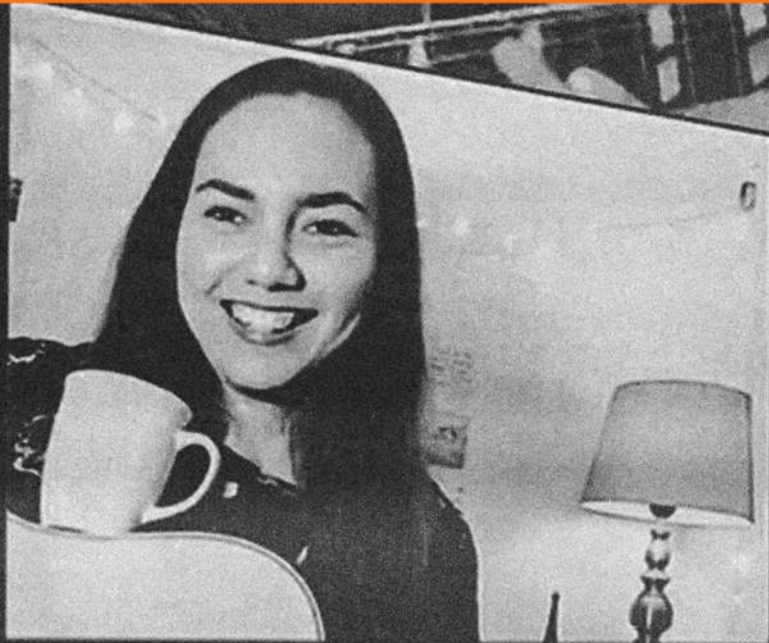
PAIN SOMETIMES BECOMES ART, AND LET'S FACE IT, THIS HAS BEEN ONE PAINFUL YEAR.

Meet these young emerging artists and see how they continue to make art despite a global pandemic. You may check out their full features at middleph.com/creativesong to get an in-depth look at what they do.

May this little compilation help introduce you to these amazing young artists and remind you to stan and support local artists especially now, during a time when they need you the most.

CREATIVES

ON Q



Sarah and Kathy or as we collectively know them, **Sarkathm**, is The Middle Mag PH's first-ever artist we wrote a full feature on during the online magazine's starting days. Sarkathm is among the local musicians who have been affected by the pandemic. Still, they braved through this unprecedented situation, showing their love for their craft and music in every way they can. Their debut EP, **Turning Points and Crossing Signs** proves how there's hope even amidst the uncertainties and challenges we face -if only we allow God to take control of everything.

OPPORTUNITIES AND THINGS JUST FELL INTO PLACE FOR US AND THIS EP [TURNING POINTS AND CROSSING SIGNS] IS THE FRUIT OF THAT.

P a ó l o
Melendez's songs give us something to be happy about and smiling at; especially when we're not feeling our true selves all because of the pandemic. **"Don't Leave It On My Lips"**, Paolo's one of latest releases, is sure to be a banger. One that you could listen and dance to over and over again despite life's incalculable mishaps. And a testament that Mindanaoan musicians have something more on their sleeves.



SO IN CREATING ANYTHING, THE ONE THING YOU SHOULD BE SURE OF IS AUTHENTICITY. THAT'S A SURE FIRE WAY TO KNOW IT'S COMING FROM A PLACE OF LOVE.



“

SUCCESS ISN'T A SUCCESS-FAILURE-SUCCESS-FAILURE PATH. IT'S MORE OF A FAILURE-FAILURE-FAILURE-SUCCESS PATH.

It's hard to imagine how this filmmaker from Davao City manages to keep a consecutive winning streak in all the film festivals he has joined. Although he never loses by far, at least as of this writing,
J o s h u a



Medroso believes that honing your craft takes a dreading amount of time. The process may be hard but that's basically life. You just have to keep on going and of course, hoping.





REDUCE THE UNNECESSARY.

You do the work and the rest will follow. This rings especially true to this photographer and multimedia artist from Philippine Women's College of Davao. His name may not sound familiar to most of us but at least let his works do the magic for you. Here's hoping that **Enzo Munar** will make it big out there someday.





FOR THE LONGEST TIME, I REALLY WANTED TO TELL QUEER STORIES FROM THE LGBTQ COMMUNITY IN MINDANAO. THESE STORIES ARE NOT USUALLY TOLD SINCE QUEER COVERAGE IS MOSTLY FOCUSED IN THE CAPITAL (METRO MANILA). I'M HOPING THAT WHEN THIS PANDEMIC IS OVER, I CAN TRAVEL, TAKE MORE PHOTOS, AND WRITE.

Despite losing his job due to pandemic, **Oni Montejo** remains to be hopeful about everything. Thanks to art – he is able to keep himself at bay and more importantly, to appreciate its importance and impact. He's currently a volunteer storyteller to a Tboli-owned social enterprise called **Sesotunawa**.



SOME OF US NEED TIME TO FIGURE OUT WHAT WE REALLY WANT TO DO OR WHAT WE ARE REALLY GOOD AT, BUT THAT'S OKAY. IT'S NOT A RACE AND EVERYTHING TAKES TIME. BUT DON'T JUST SIT THERE. DO SOMETHING!

Kim Tayona is a filmmaker and multimedia artist from Zamboanga. He is currently the founder of **Playground Films** - a bespoke video company. He produces music on his spare time and manages the publication website called plygrnd.co. He is also the voice

behind the “**The Working Creative**” podcast. His latest work on “**SINO**” by Ino Makata music video is a testament of bravery and courage in the face of political crisis that stifles your right for freedom of expression for simply speaking out the truth.



“

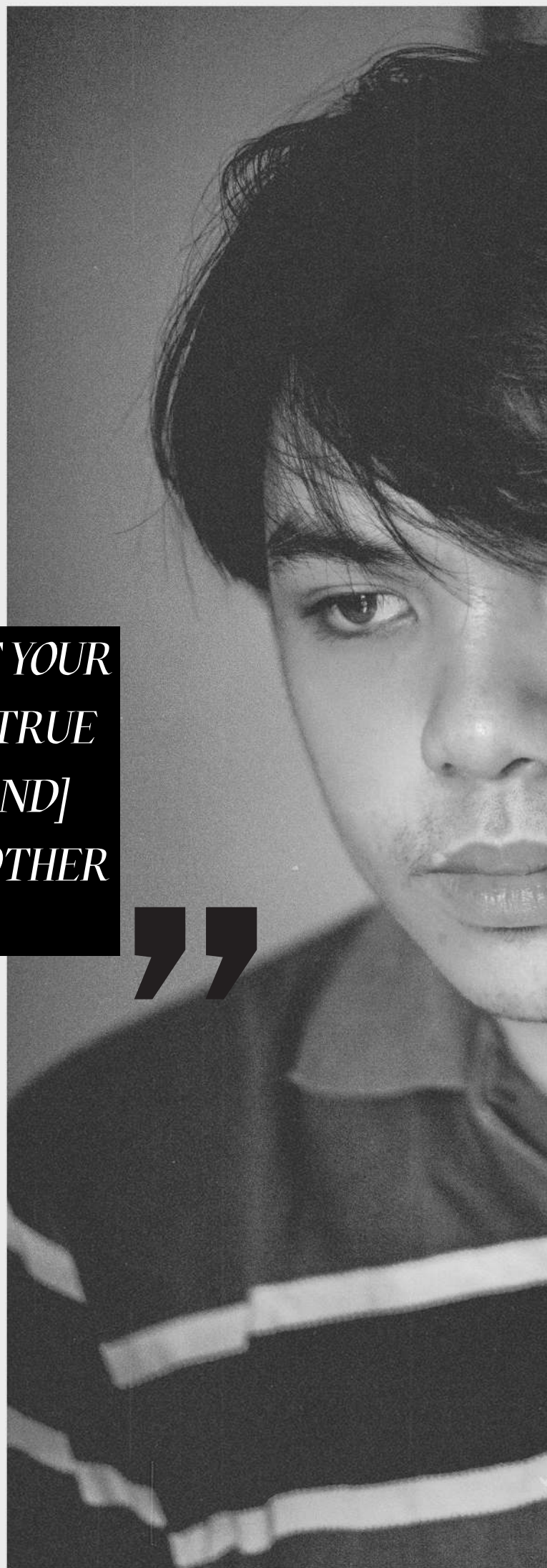
WHENEVER I WRITE AND COMPOSE MOST OF MY SONGS, I TREAT IT LIKE IT'S A MEMOIR OF THE THINGS I'VE GONE THROUGH. IT'S MY PERSONAL WAY OF EXPRESSING MY EMOTIONS AND EXPERIENCES.

”



Luis Rabat's latest single "Happy Pill" is exactly what we all need. Not only does it make us dance in the four corners of our messy bedroom but it also elicits emotions we wished we had known

all along. "Happy Pill" serves as the ultimate go-to song whenever we want to feel even a slightest of hope amidst an uncertain situation. Its '80's sound and vibe brings us back to the simpler times.



“*IT IS WORTH NOTING THAT YOUR STYLE REPRESENTS YOUR TRUE IDENTITY AS AN ARTIST [AND] IT SEPARATES YOU FROM OTHER CREATIVES.*”

His works have been plastered not only in the in-between glossy pages of the magazines in Metro Manila but in Vogue Italia as well. But making it to the cut of the prestigious magazine wasn't easy. However, for **Joseph Bermúdez**, he pursued and continued to hope that someday he will make it there. And he did eventually. “Learn from experience and research. Practicing your takes time and practice.”

YOU MAY FEEL LIKE NOTHING IS HAPPENING BUT YOU JUST HAVE TO TRUST YOURSELF. TRUST THE HEART OF AN ARTIST INSIDE YOU.



The path to where this photographer and actor right now is not as linear as he wants it to be but nevertheless, he keeps going. For **Gab Doromal**, by doing so, it helps you grow as an artist and as

an individual navigating in the complex, ever-changing world. As someone who hopes to make it big in the industry someday, Gab never ceases to grab every opportunity that comes his way - whether he'll make it or break it.

I COULDN'T BELIEVE THAT ON TOP OF WHAT WOMEN FACE EVERY DAY, MEN STILL HAVE THE AUDACITY TO USE OUR CONFIDENCE AGAINST US.



Juliana Hellmuth's artworks remain to be one must look out for. They're not only rebellious but they speak volumes especially to the plight of women. Her essay "Do You Know How Tiring it is to be a Girl?" along with an artwork or painting of a woman has amassed thousands of shares on Facebook for simply echoing the collective and daily struggles of a woman. And there's no stopping her from speaking out until this society stops treating women like accessories.

NOW MORE THAN EVER, WE SHOULD #SUPPORTLOCALBUSINESSES, SAYS THIS YOUTH-LED PASSION PROJECT

Since March of 2020, the government has imposed several lockdowns around the country to address the coronavirus disease 2019 or COVID-19 pandemic. With events and mass gatherings put on hold for the time being, everyone was left with no choice but to stay at home. These cancellations of physical operations have led to a number of disproportionate downfall especially in the economy. In a latest report by the Department of Labor and Employment (DOLE), there are 3.8 million Filipino workers who are unemployed after their companies are forced to cease operations. Moreover, 30% of businesses in the country have closed due to COVID-19 as stated by the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI).

Given these devastating news, one can't help but ask, where do these people go moving forward? How will they cope in this unprecedented situation? What will happen to local micro, small, medium enterprises (MSMEs) which, by the way, make up 70% of the employment across regions according to the International Labor Organization (ILO)?

Fortunately, through the help of social media, many local businesses or aspiring entrepreneurs turned to different online platforms — Facebook and Instagram as the most used social media platforms particularly in the Philippines — as an alternative to continue their business operations or build a new one. As a matter of fact, DTI recorded a number of 73,000 businesses that have registered online from March to August of 2020 to legitimize their businesses.

With these surprising figures, it's only right that we support and buy from small businesses or local products. Now more than ever, they very much need our help especially when only a few local MSMEs are allowed to go back to their regular operations due to strict lockdown measures; making it twice as hard for them to gain profit. Or when majority of these are from newbie entrepreneurs who have been retrenched from their previous jobs and ventured into online selling to be able to put food on their tables and feed their families.

This is what drove Support Local Pinas — a citizen-led movement

based in Mindanao that aims to “empower local products and culture” — to launch this initiative amidst a global pandemic. For them, it's about high time we give due recognition to local businesses that have, one way or another, helped boost our tourism industry and more importantly, our economy.

Bianca Faye, Jerry, Khryzza, Jan Mari, Hazel, and Jemerson, the people behind the successful passion project Support Local Pinas, emphasized that they don't want to take all the credit about the “Support Local” campaign which has been in the game for so long even before the pandemic.

If anything, they just wanted to elevate the conversation on the importance of supporting local goods.

“This started off as just a project under The Fab Inside where it focused mainly on Davao's local entrepreneur scene. Bfab (Founder) is also a budding entrepreneur who aims to create a platform for fellow local business owners to not only sell but to have an environment to grow, learn and succeed. With this, Jerry Huerbana (SLP Santa Cruz) and Khryzza Pinzon (SLP Tagum) were inspired to expand the movement to their respective provinces.”

As of writing, the Support Local Pinas has five (5) active Support Local Facebook groups — Support Local Davao, Santa Cruz, Tagum, Panabo, Samal with another one coming which is in Digos — where entrepreneurs, artists, and local business owners can post about their business in hopes

MABUHAY ANG GAWA NG PINOY



to gain more profits and build more audience or loyal customers.

The Middle Mag PH caught up with the team behind Support Local Pinas to further discuss their passion project, the importance of supporting local business owners, the future plans of the said project, and more.

How did this idea come about? What inspired you to launch such a wonderful initiative?

We don't take all the credit. It's a fact that the **#SupportLocal** movement is already a pre-existing idea. However, this initiative became the push to

elevate the conversation.

This started off as just a project under The Fab Inside where it focused mainly on Davao's local entrepreneur scene. Bfab (Founder) is also a budding entrepreneur who aims to create a platform for fellow local business owners to not only sell but to have an environment to grow, learn and succeed. With this, Jerry Huerbana (SLP Santa Cruz) and Khryzza Pinzon (SLP Tagum) were inspired to expand the movement to their respective provinces.

The Support Local Pinas team mostly consists of young entrepreneurs who want to give fellow local business owners their own voice so that we all succeed together. We agreed on the need for this especially in the height of the pandemic and the need for profit doubles. Not everyone has a sufficient amount of reach so to create a group solely for businesses increases the probability of transactions and income.

A few months since you launched this initiative, what are some of the significant impacts of this

especially to the small/local business? Any positive or life-affording feedback you received so far.

There are definitely a lot of daily affirmations from business owners to which we are very grateful for. We receive messages of homemade products being sold out after one post from the Support Local groups. There are also instances that members who are not entrepreneurs become inspired to start their own business. Oftentimes, they send us gifts of gratitude and it still catches us off guard because none of us really expected it would turn into something this big. This just started as a sub project and now it actually helps people generate income from various parts of Mindanao. It truly is humbling to witness the growth of small business owners and to be able to take part of it through the use of our platforms.

How many posts do you receive on a daily basis?

It really varies on the area, so maybe on average of all support local groups, we usually get 20 - 200 daily. That's why it's especially hard on Support Local Davao as the group with the most members because oftentimes, the pending posts would reach up to 2,000 and it would be very difficult to accept everything all at once.

What are the future plans or projects?

We believe we can go beyond just being a page or a group. We can do so much more.

It has been identified by the core team that the main problem that SLP wants to address is the economic decline happening in the country due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Such an event has paralyzed local businesses, especially during its early stages, and has caused bankruptcy and closure of a considerable number of business establishments. Consequently, the unemployment rate has also increased. This event has scarred, not just the business owners, but the Filipino families at the very core. We also acknowledge that "Support Local" campaigns are already existing online; however, it lacks up-to-date strategies and have not established themselves completely to be noticed by its concerned audience.

In response to these problems mentioned above, the core group agrees to help boost the local economy by providing a strong platform, both online and offline, where small-to-medium-scale local business owners and artists can be effectively supported through various methods. These promotional methods include the creation of "Support Local" extensions in cities and regions of the country, creation of SLP YouTube account and channel, and ensuring continuous growth through business education via webinars and boot camps.

**“IT TRULY IS
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Overall, the long-term goals of the SLP include the creation of its website and mobile application, organization and establishment of local and regional “Support Local” extensions, monetization of SLP’s future endeavors, and being an accredited non-governmental organization in the future.

How has the experience in handling SLP so far?

It’s definitely tiring, seeing as we are also juggling to build our own lives and empires. We’re not handling it 24/7 as much as we’d like to. This is more of a passion project than a money-making venture. However, it’s very rewarding and overall fulfilling to see it grow, and although we might be overstating it, it’s nice to know that we made an impact, no matter how small in the lives of our fellow Filipinos. It really makes us ask ourselves “What else can we do to help”.

Why is it important to support local businesses?

It shouldn’t be something that we always have to make a big deal about. It should be a norm. Sure, buying the latest gadget or eating the fanciest food is fun once in a while but there’s also no harm in supporting your neighbor, your friend, or the stranger down the street selling homemade spread. You’re not just supporting a trend; you’re supporting someone’s livelihood. You’re supporting the effort they put into each product in order to put food on the table. Aside from this, local business owners are more focused on their local communities and they’re actually good for the environment because they have fewer carbon footprint than conglomerates.



Do you have a business that you want to promote? Join these Support Local groups now and build your customers.

1. **Support Local Davao**
2. **Support Local Santa Cruz**
3. **Support Local Tagum**
4. **Support Local Samal**
5. **Support Local Panabo**
6. **Support Local Digos (Soon)**

Follow Support Local Pinas on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram [@slpinasofficial](#) for more updates.

YES, I WAS COVID-

Jan Maverick S. Rabino

Yes, I was COVID-19 positive. I am COVID-19 positive.

No, I will not let COVID-19 dim my light and my burning desire to touch the lives of people who need it most. Now I know why I had this condition. Now I know why I had to be with other COVID-19 positive patients. The obvious answer was, well, I'm positive too. But there was another reason, a transcendental one, that revealed the purpose why I had to traverse this uphill journey with them.

A week in isolation, I already heard countless stories of patients and their journey before coming in the facility; strangers throwing stones at their houses, neighbors giving them a side-eye. Where is the humanity? Are we still human?

There were also narratives of loss, of losing, and of barely living. Others I failed to speak to, but their eyes, the only facial feature I see in most of the patients, spoke to me loudly: they speak of sadness, they cry for help. We were numerous in the facility, but you can feel the loneliness; the walls of the building was as cold as the people inside: it's as if all hopes were gone. I felt it too, and it pained me.

Saturday morning, Ma'am Elma Rafil invited me to an evening of reflection and prayer via Zoom. During the breakout session, I've shared to two of the participants my current situation in isolation (one is from Doha, and another from GenSan - I apologize, I am bad at recalling names, but I can remember vividly your faces).

I shared to them my thoughts the past few days:

**Why did all the stars align
and lead me here:
a nurse who became positive
to this virus,
but is not working in a
healthcare facility,
and whose current prowess is
teaching hopeful student-nurses?**

I think I have a purpose.

As we talked virtually, a myriad of thoughts were running in my head. I see myself making a change in this facility, but how? What can I do? I am just me, and my strength is not a hundred that time.

Days passed, and all sorts of people were admitted and discharged: elderly, yuppies, kids, the rich, and the poor; we were in the same boat; a boat floating endlessly in this vast ocean of nothingness.

At the last few legs of my stay in the facility, while I was scanning for documents in my laptop, I stumbled upon the PowerPoint presentation I used during one of my webinars when Ma'am Michelle Patani invited me as a speaker on the topic "Living a Healthy Lifestyle during a Pandemic: Self Care & Holistic Health". At that moment, I thought, this is it! This is my purpose! I am going to be that little spark of hope to all of the patients here! I'm going to share my knowledge to these people who need it most, and hopefully touch their lives. (Ironically, I've used this presentation a day before I was positive to COVID-19, and I was already exhibiting symptoms WHILE I was giving the lecture about COVID-19).

I organized a health education session to all the patients staying in the facility. I informed the nurses and midwives about my plan, and they were glad I volunteered myself. Because I was already infected with the virus, it is ideal that I will conduct the lecture: I can reach and interact to them more than the nurses behind the barriers of the station.

With the little resources I had (my laptop, a tent, a few chairs and a Bluetooth microphone), I was both overwhelmed and excited because I know THEY NEEDED THIS. WE NEEDED THIS.

My talk is about taking care of your health considering its different dimensions: physical, mental, social, emotional and spiritual. Yes, it was a simple session, but the results were astonishing. The moment I started talking in front, everybody was all ears on me. THEY NEEDED THIS.

People shared their thoughts and experiences to the group. Some shared ways to position yourself that'll relieve your shortness of breath. Others shared their prayers and plans once they will be discharged. I shared techniques on relieving anxiety and coping with the sleepless nights which was commonly encountered by most patients there. Everyone was listening. EVERYONE needed this.



When we moved to self-care for spiritual health, I also shared the story of St. Marcellin and "the Memorare in the Snow", a story that is absolutely relevant to our situation in the facility: In the midst of a blizzard, a prayer is the most powerful tool when all hope is lost, and a light, no matter how far or small it is, will always be there to guide us to safety. that they were not alone in this fight. The nurses and midwives expressed their gratitude as well.

The afternoon after the lecture, I see people talking, some people exercising, some were up and about. I felt the warmth of the facility that time. It wasn't the most perfect warmth, but it was warm and cozy. People thanked me and were glad that they really got something from my talk. They can all relate with what I was saying, and after the talk they now felt.

**I now know my purpose
why I am COVID-19 positive.
I am an instrument that has brought
change to the lives of these people
through my passion of teaching
and touching lives.**

They gave me a token after my talk, (a box of gloves and mask, and a pack of vitamin C). However, the token that they gave me was actually larger than life: me finding my purpose.

Room 36: Discharged.



THE FUTURE IS

Featuring:

Marckenny Bohol

Don Flores

Abdul Khairul of Bluehome\$



Text by: Real Jhon O. Castillon
Photos: Creatives and Musicians
Themselves

The Middle Mag PH sat down with Marckenny, Don Flores, and Abdul Khairel — three Mindanaoan acts who had released single after single amidst a chaotic and unprecedented year to talk about Mindanaoan music, their upcoming projects, and what the future holds for the music industry of Mindanao.

The year 2020 has seen a lot of undiscovered gems finally being unearthed by netizens through incessant usage of social media; for one, we have the sudden rise of BL (Boys' Love) series in mainstream media — most of it being streamed on several YouTube channels; local businesses that we haven't heard of before suddenly just went viral because of how they're stepping up the game by simply offering products worthy of praise and hype. Then there's music. Although not much of a surprise on this aspect since we discover a lot of great, underrated music on a daily basis but it's a different story when you discover not only a song but an artist from your hometown, Mindanao.

For almost a year of being stuck at home due to government-imposed lockdowns in an effort or the lack thereof to mitigate the spread of COVID-19, we listened to a lot of songs in all available streaming platforms to relieve the stress brought by the pandemic. Your Spotify Wrapped can attest to how many times you listened to a particular artist and song for the year 2020 alone. However, if you're from Mindanao and if there's no Mindanaoan artist or song in your Spotify wrapped then we're clearly judging you. Just kidding. Our Spotify wrapped is no different than yours though. But it is not too late for you to stan and start streaming songs and artists from Mindanao this 2021.

Take for example, the first ever Mindanao Pop (MinPop) 2020 last

February. An original songwriting competition for all the Mindanaoan musicians who aspire to write songs in the local and global music scene. The album of the same competition name, which comprise of 10 original Mindanaoan songs, had successfully cracked on several charts in the Philippines including Deezer Top 300 Releases at number 37. We also have the Ilonggo Pop from South Cotabato which accumulated a total streams of 200,000 in Spotify alone as of writing. And if you think that the diverse music genre of Mindanao only stops there, then you haven't heard artists like BlueHome\$, PinkBarney, Ino Makata from Zamboanga who are currently setting up the bar for Chavacano music. There are still a lot that we have yet to unravel about the

beauty and culture of the Mindanao music industry, yes. Yet somehow these different sub-genres are enough proof that Mindanaoan music will really go a long way in the future.

If 2020 halted the music gigs of our local musicians due to COVID-19, with mass gatherings currently prohibited, they also took this opportunity to showcase what they have been hiding under their sleeves and finally muster up the courage to release music — one that will change the game in the music scene. And further amplifying that Mindanaoan music is here to stay. Not only during a global pandemic but forever.

With Mindanaoan Pop slowly making noise online, we asked three Mindanaoan musicians — Marckenny, Don Flores, Abdul Khairel— to discuss more about the importance of supporting your local musicians, ways and opportunities to sustain the local music scene, how streaming platforms like Spotify and Apple Music are helping the budding musicians like them, their upcoming projects, and more.

Marckenny is a finalist of MinPop 2020. His song "Tethered", one of the two English songs in the titular album, won 2nd runner-up. This song also marks his debut in the local music scene.

Don Flores is a musician from South Cotabato and one of the regular singer-songwriters of the compilation album Ilonggo Pop. His song "Padayon Lang" serves as the lead single of Ilonggo Pop's sophomore album.

Abdul Khairel is one of the producers of Bluehome\$. Their song "Ole Ole" recently won the Best Music Video for the Chavacano Video Music Festival 2020.

How was the experience so far after you released the song when you joined the Ilonggo Pop/Mindanao Pop/Chavacano Video Music Festival? What are the significant changes after?

Don Flores: For Ilonggo Pop as a whole, I think one of the significant changes was that nagkaroon ng cultural integration. Maraming nasurprise na marami palang Ilonggo dito sa Mindanao. Kasi nga they thought na pag Ilonggo doon lang sa Visayas like Iloilo and Bacolod. And when they found out na mayroong Ilonggo Pop movement dito sa South, many were surprised. So far, we're very happy for the warm reception for the music. Ang nakakaganda lang kasi dito sa Mindanao is nagtutulungan ang mga musicians. As a musician or artist, it motivated me more to write this kind of music

MINDANAO MUSIC

in our own language. Kasi if you're going to listen to Ilonggo songs of the past, karamihan sa kanila novelty. This time I want to write Ilonggo songs in different genres kasi we have seen how warm their reception is sa ganitong language.

Marckenny: Mindanao Pop was life changing. But before Mindanao Pop, the dream of being into music was so far away. For us na andito sa Mindanao, I guess there's that initial idea of "kung gusto mong sumikat sa music, kailangan mong mag Maynila" — and that mindset kept me thinking na I'm just not gonna pursue music because it feels too far away. But for me, Mindanao Pop paved the way. It became a gateway, platform for many Mindanao musicians. [Mindanao Pop] started a fire in the Mindanao music. I could see musicians that I knew are much more inspired to release music because of Mindanao Pop— that through this platform, their dreams of making into the music scene is much achievable. Mindanao music is really moving forward. And from what I've heard from the people of Manila especially those who got to hear our songs in Philippine Pop Music Festival, iba talaga ang music ng Mindanao. Ano raw pinapakain sa atin bakit daw ang gagaling natin? Ever since ang dami naman nating magagaling sa Mindanao kaso wala lang talaga tayong platform tapos hindi rin tayo nailawan. I feel so lucky to have been part of the first Mindanao Pop movement and I'm excited for the next MinPop movement. Mindanao music is exciting as it is. Kahit na COVID-19 pandemic we have not quieted down maingay pa rin tayo dito sa Mindanao and pandemic na nga yan. How much more if normal ang situation? It's not about shining alone, it's about shining together.

Abdul Khairrel of Bluehome\$: Kilala na kasi yung Chavacano as a language. Ginagamit na rin sya na lyrics sa isang kanta. Pero wala kasing takot yung mga tao na gamitin

sya sa iba't ibang genre. Sa Bluehome\$, mas nabigyan kami ng ingay kasi di kami nag-sti-stick sa isang level or genre. Wide yung imagination namin and mas gusto namin i-explore yung mga bagay-bagay.

Where do you see Mindanaoan music moving forward?

Abdul Khairrel of Bluehome\$: Kung kaya natin i-preserve, dapat i-preserve natin para mas mag move forward tayo. Yung music, hilig kasi yan eh. Kung ipagpapatuloy natin yung hilig natin sa paggawa ng kanta, pag adopt natin ng iba't ibang language, at ginawa natin nang maayos, makikita natin yung



THE
FUTURE
IS
MINDANAO
MUSIC

THE FUTURE IS MINDANAO MUSIC



Mindanao music as a superior or top music. Kasi kung quality music lang, hindi tayo nalalayo.

Marckenny: From the people I've known or met in a short span of time while I was in MinPop, I think na it will only take us a few years before we finally "break the borders" and make Mindanaoan music known nationwide. Tayo kasi mismo na yung umiilaw sa sarili natin. We don't need the help of the capital region. I think we need to stop asking help from the capital region

because we need to help ourselves na rin eh and I think that is bearing fruit now. The way I see it now, kahit na maliwanag doon sa Manila, from what I've heard sa kanila don sa kanila, they're starting to look for music somewhere in the Philippines other than in Manila kasi sawang-sawa na sila. Hindi sa pagmamayabang pero Mindanao is shining the brightest ngayon. And as long as we consistently make genuine, authentic music na galing talaga sa puso natin, Mindanao music will really thrive and on fire for sure in the future.

Don Flores: I'm very optimistic and at the same time I'm excited for Mindanao music kung paano ba sya iingay in the next few years. I think our music has something to be equated with the international songs we listen to recently. It reminds me of K-Pop. Most of us do not understand their language pero bakit ganun yung reception ng mga tao sa music nila like sa America and Europe? If international listeners can feel our sincerity and authenticity in our songs just like what they feel in K-Pop and may ibubuga talaga tayo, then I think na they will accept our music.

After the competition, where do all your songs go? Do they get a radio play in your local radio stations?

Abdul Khairrel of Bluehome\$: Right now, wala pa kaming narinig. Kami-kami lang mismo. Kami lang mismo nag publish sa Spotify namin, kanya-kanyang upload sa mga sariling YouTube channels. Pero kapag sa mga radio stations dito sa amin, wala pa. Kailangan mo munang mag ask ng permission sa kanila na i-play yung kanta mo.

Marckenny: Sa mga radio stations kasi, it's business after all — that's the harsh reality. Gusto nila yung nakakaalam lahat palagi yung i-pi-play na mga kanta. Doon tayo nahihirapan, di ba? Paano na lang tayo na wala pang masyadong nakakakilala? Sariling sikap talaga. Kaya napalaking tulong ng mga friends mo every time you release music kasi mismong friends mo napaka supportive and malaking tulong na yun.

In the digital age, how helpful is the Spotify, Apple Music, YouTube, in promoting your music?

Abdul Khairrel of Bluehome\$: Nakakatulong

sya in a sense na kapag nakita ng mga tao na may kanta ka na out na sa Spotify, mas ma-i-intrigue yung mga tao kasi nga kapag Spotify, astig or sosyal kumbaga. Tapos kung sasabihin mong YouTube or Sound Cloud, iilang tao lang ang mag-pi-play. Hindi ko alam sa [MinPop or Ilonggo Pop] pero ganun kasi dito sa amin eh. Pag hindi ka sikat or hindi talaga matunog ang pangalan mo, hindi nila pini-play ang kanta mo sa radyo.

Marckenny: After MinPop, yes, madaming nakikinig sa Spotify, Apple Music, and Facebook since they uploaded the lyric videos there. Every now and then, I check if there's an increase to the views and number of streams and I'm glad na may steady increase naman

THE FUTURE IS MINDANAO MUSIC



so far. But for me as a solo artist, pansin ko na mas malakas making ang mga tao sa akin sa Spotify and YouTube. For radio, fortunately with MinPop, may kasunduan sila dati pa with M.O.R. Davao and I heard even other M.O.R. stations in Mindanao, pinatugtog yung MinPop songs eh. May talagang designated timeslot. Also sa mga local malls sa Davao, I know pinatugtog nila sa mga grocery areas. I heard it one time. Anyway, after MinPop, I think I was able to build an audience naman. I think importante ngayon sa digital age na to find your market and build a pool of listeners. These streaming platforms really help a lot to us as musicians kasi whenever you release music, pag hahanapin ng tao, nahahanap nila kaagad. One click, andun na agad. For radio, like how I see it, I don't need to have radio plays kasi wala doon ang audience ko.

Don Flores: Dito sa amin, grateful kami kasi supportive yung local community. Dito rin sa amin, pini-play yung songs namin sa mga radio stations. Tapos napansin din namin na kahit hindi namin sinasabihan ang mga restaurants, pini-play talaga nila yung Ilonggo Pop na playlist sa Spotify eh. 'Yon yung nakakataba ng puso kasi nagtutulungan lahat dito. Ang support dito locally enough na rin sya para mapromote yung music namin. At saka sobrang laking tulong din talaga ng digital platforms. Kasi like nung nangyari sa akin four months ago, I was interviewed by M.O.R. Bacolod kasi hindi naman ako nag expect na aabot sa Visayas ang songs namin. Siguro narecognize sya kasi Ilonggo tsaka lahat sa kanila di makapaniwala na taga Koronadal yung mga ganung mga music kasi akala nila from Iloilo. So, it's really a big help.

Message to all aspiring musicians out there who are trying to have a big break in the music scene.

Don Flores: Just keep on writing music. Hindi lahat nabibigyan ng instant break sa music. Hindi sya magsusulat ka ngayon then irelease mo sya the next day then it will become a hit. No. Pero kapag marami ka ng naisulat and when the opportunity comes, ang dali na lang.

Marckenny: If you wanna go for the long term sa music, do it for the love. Hindi yung maghahabol ka ng fame. It's never a guarantee na sisikat ka. It's also not a guarantee na magiging successful ka sa music. But if you're doing it for the love, kahit hindi ka successful, at least naeenjoy mo kahit konti lang ang nakikinig. Also, like what Don said, just keep on writing music. And of course, embrace your language.

Adbul Khairil of Bluehome\$: Wag mong icompare yung sarili mo sa ibang artists. Meron kang quality na wala yung ibang artists and vice versa. Wag kayong tumigil. May oras talaga para magpahinga and siguro kailangan mo lang ng inspiration.



At the end of the interview, the three musicians emphasized that they will be releasing more music soon.

Follow them on all social media sites for more updates:

Marckenny

Facebook: Marckenny

Twitter and Instagram: _marckenny

Don Flores

Facebook: Don Flores

Instagram: adonium_chloride

Bluehome\$

Facebook: Bluehome\$

plants seeds for the our vision of the future.
But it will not sustain. Not while our generation
There is immense darkness in the world.



Photography by GAB DOROMAL
Featuring MICHAEL VINCENT WOLDE & DAPHNIE JANE PAGUE

Hope in the Darkest of Times



***"The youth is the hope of our future."
Dr. Jose P. Rizal***

Never has our National Hero's words rung more true than in our current situation. As the world evolves from its old ways, and the world as we know it ends, what part will our generation play in this change? Will we stay silent? Or will we be active participants in carving out a future for our nation and the world?



The

Grace

That

Carries

Us

Through

A

Poem

by

CHRISTINE

GRACE

RUTA

How do you hope when hope is always dead?
What is the purpose when you know
That bad is always
After the good?
You build and you build
And then you break and you break
Never knowing whether a curse is a curse
Or the curse is a grace

Started this with hearts wide open
Eyes full of hope
Wishing for a chance
Praying to be better
And what for?

To hope
Just to be broken down
To breathe
Just to smother
To plan
Just to cease
To be forced to stay put
To sit down
To stop your restless dreaming heart
From dreaming and dreaming
To put a lid on your hopes
And see it all wash away
While you can't do anything
But watch
Your life
Your loved ones
Fall apart

And the worst part is
No one is there to carry you over while you crawl
Relying upon technology for physical assurance
Phones over hugs
Texts over conversations
Less over more

As children
We were taught to hope
As adults
We learn to silence it





But hope
Hope is all we need
Hope is the grace
That carries us through
The purr of your pet cat
The sun rays through your living room window
The ceramics you just bought on instagram
The virtual parties
The video calls to your best friend
And the laugh you make while watching your
favorite show
Are all the love that carries you through

The song you covered on youtube
The poem you just made
The painting you thought should never see the
light of day
Your heart on its pages
Carrying you through

Art is the hope that keeps us alive
Art is what saves us
Art is the digested pain
Art is the suffering you swallowed
Art is the dream you chose to forgot
Art is your heart
Your love
And that love is what saves us
Art is what saved me

Art is the hope that is always alive
No matter where you are
No matter the darkness that tries to kill it
Art is always alive
Keep dreaming
Keep hoping
Keep making the art that saves you

You never know
In times I need it
It might save me too



Laban lang

By: **Lynsie Joy Zombrano**

Heto ka nanaman,
Nakakulong sa isang madilim na silid-tulugan,
Nakabaon ang mukha sapagitan ng mga paa,
Habang umiiyak,
Dahil hindi alam ang dapat na gawin,
kung lalaban pa ba o susuko na.

Hayan ka nanaman,
Nasa isang sulok at umiiyak mag isa,
Habang tahimik na tinititigan,
Mga blankong papel sa iyong harapan,
Tilay hindi alam,
Ang isasagot sa mga katanungan,
Na tanging sa online classes mo lang matututunan,

Nakikita ko kaibigan,
Nakikita kong mga takot sa iyong mga mata,
Habang iniisip mo kung papaano kang papasa,
Sa korsong iyong patuloy na tinatahak,
Naririnig ko kaibigan,
Naririnig ko ang mga hikbi ng iyong pighati,
Sa tuwing kinukwento mo,
Kung papaanong sa terminong ito,
Nabigo mo nanaman ang Pamilya mo,

Ramdam ko kaibigan,
Ramdam ko ang mga lumbay sa tinig mo,
Habang kinu-kuwento mo,
Kung gaano kang nahihirapan sa ating online classes,
Ramdam ko lahat ng iyan,
Dahil Katulad mo,
Ganyan din ang nararamdaman ko ngayon,

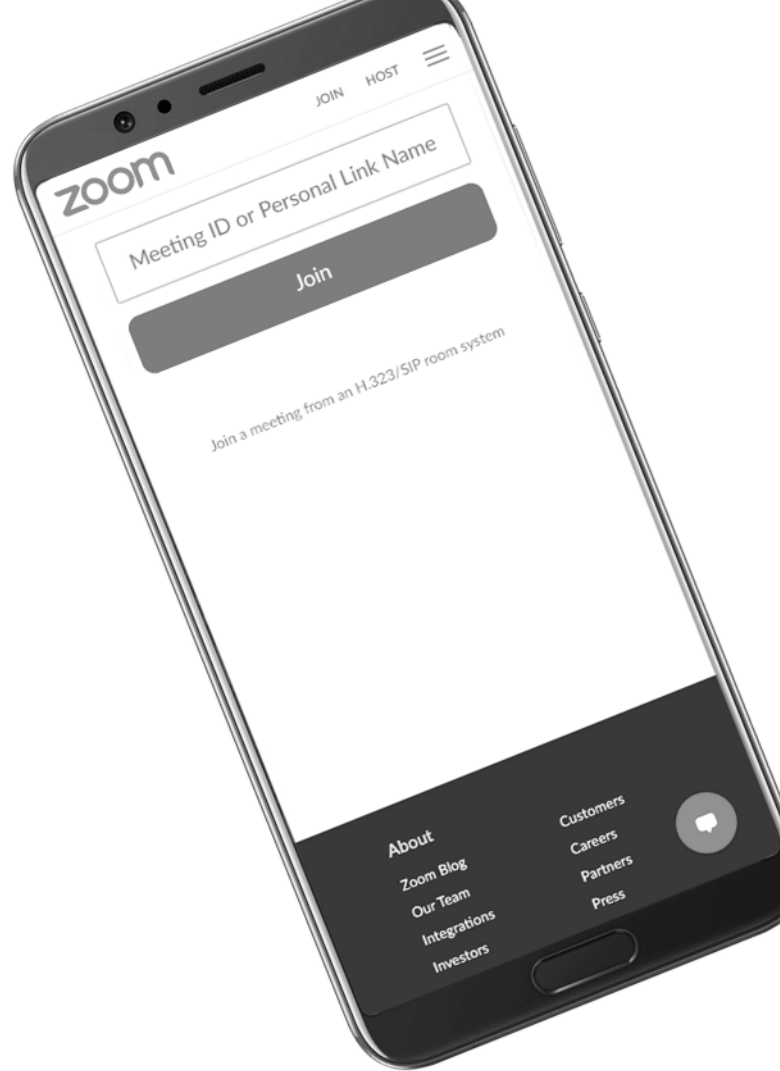
Pero Kaibigan,
Nais kong sabihin sayo,
Na kahit gaano man kahaba ang daan,
patungo sa tagumpay na inaasam-asam,
Na gaano man kadaming pagsubok ang dumaan,
Pilitin mong wag sumuko sa laban,
Dahil alam mong sa lahat ng pagdadaan,
May Diyos na hindi ka kailanman pababayaang,

Kaya't umiyak ka kung nais mong umiyak,
At magalit kung nais mong magalit,
Ilabas mo lang lahat ng nag papabigat sa iyong nararamdaman
Nandito lang ako na handang maging sandalan mo,
At hindi ka iiwan sa kahit na anong laban,

Kaya sana ay mangako ka sa sarili mo,
Na pagkatapos ng pagluha mo,
Tatayo kang muli at kailanmay hindi na magpapatalo,
Sa kahit na anong pagsubok na sasalubong sa iyo,

At lagi mong iisipin,
Na ang pagbitaw sa buhay na ibinigay ng maykapal,
kailanmay hindi naging sagot,
Sa kahit na anong problema ng buhay,

At Hindi ka nag iisa!
Nandito kami na nag mamahal at sumu-suporta sayo!
Kaya Kapit lang,
Laban lang,
At Wag na wag kang susuko,
Sabay tayo, Magkasama,
Sa laban na to.



Will you look at this mess
All this lockdown business
Our economy's down
Even as we think about business
And we think it's nobody's business
Where our politics leans
But now we have to be smart
Because the system is mean
And it forces us to be mean
But what it really means
Is now we have a chance to change
So many things
Now the spotlight's on the issues that
Were once unseen
Caught a glimpse of the world before
Suddenly I wonder even more
About this rebirth
Is covid the enemy or
Somebody that we root for?
I see how you exposed our leaders like that
Our systems cheating like that
Departments breaching like that
Real heroes preaching like that
We saw ourselves bleeding like that
Frontliners' arms are aching
From carrying the weight of our country like that
Are you proud of the mess that we're in?
I don't know what to say to you
Thank you, you fucking prick
You put us in jail, you let us all fail
But you opened our eyes
To the bigger picture

Where not everyone fits
So they get the kick
Through a cough and a fever
Fuck you, corona, you prick
We're not numbers on a table
We're not lines on a graph
We are not a statistic
We are real people who cry
Real people who laugh
And we breathe through a mask
Everyone wearing masks
Like a masquerade
Basking in the lies of
Leaders who act like they care
By the way, where's our health-
thcare?
This is the plight of our people
Now put on a pedestal
Where we can't ignore
Them anymore



MIDDLE RICKS

Everyone say a massive “Thank you!” to these young and emerging Mindanaoan artists for their feel-good content released during the idle days of quarantine—and simply, for existing. Thank you for keeping us company during the days when we feel not like our true selves. Your art simply reminds us that life must go on despite almost everything that’s been halted.

Check out these cool stuff from our submissions that might help you learn and appreciate more of the Mindanaoan art community. You’ll be surprised at the amount of talent and passion imbued in each of this masterpiece.



“Kapoy” Single by Maric Gavino

“Naa koy classmates tas barkada jud nako sila. Nagkau-yab sila and halos all the time mag group study mi kay mag away or mag lalis jud sila pero at the end of the day, magka ok na dayun. So na inspire ko to write from their situation na bisag kapoy mag sigeg lalis, wa japuy buhiay.”

The title itself is a whole ass mood. However, the song—written by Maric Gavino himself and produced by Pao LoFranco—with its negative connotation to most of us, is a juxtaposition about not wanting to find someone else to be in a relationship with because doing so takes time and yes, tiring. That despite the endless fights with your significant other, you’d still want to be with that person at the end of the day. Hence, the song title “Kapoy”. In an interview, Maric shared that he wanted to put a different meaning to a word that is closely associated with giving up. Instead of singing songs about giving up on a relationship, why not put a smart twist on it and make it a little more positive? In this case, Maric does an excellent job.



“Light” EP by Owen Vilches

“I wrote songs about empowerment and self-love because I want to feel good and get my confidence back. I wanna see my light again.”

Owen Vilches’ first EP “Light” takes pride in its title. Every track in this EP never falters to make a testament about what this body of work is all about—hope and light in the darkest of times. The amount of hard work and passion Owen put into this project is noteworthy and as clear as day. Vilches manages to weave a whole new narrative in each song backed with cohesive and polished production but still never letting the entire message of the whole EP taking a back seat. If you’re looking for an album by a Mindanaoan artist that’s anything but underwhelming, this is probably it. With over 500,000 combined streams on Spotify, Owen Vilches will no doubt reach new heights. And rest assured that we’ll be there when that day comes.



SLEEVEHEART
RJ MANULID

“Sleeveheart” Single by RJ Manulid

“I wanted Sleeveheart to be as honest as possible. Rapping allows me to be more direct with my thoughts, while singing can help emphasize a song’s mood. By combining the two styles over a sad beat, Sleeveheart has a varying range and intensity of emotions.”

If you listen closely to the lyrics of RJ Manulid’s “Sleeveheart”, it’s relatively about being put in a pedestal by so many people they don’t realize that sometimes, it’s slowly eating you up in the inside. “Sleeveheart” bemoans the collective sentiments of the people that are spent of feigning perfection or are simply burned out. RJ’s genuine, overall delivery of the song shows his versatility as a musician. Though the song could’ve been polished especially with the production, it’s still nothing short of relatable and stream-worthy. We highly recommend you listen to this when life just doesn’t seem to make a shortstop.



Visual art by Winston Abapo
(@winsty on instagram)

“Come Alive” Single by Paólo Melendez

“A song about isolation and falling in love on the internet that I wrote, recorded and released in the middle of lockdown with the help of collaborators that I worked with online.”

He made us feel young as if we’re in the best era which is obviously the ‘80’s with his retro-pop single “Don’t Leave It On My Lips” (a certified bop by the way). In his latest single “Come Alive”—another ‘80’s inspired single—he made us want to take a long drive heading nowhere and forget just about everything while blasting this song on repeat. The ‘80’s melody and vibe of this song reminiscent of the artists our parents grew up listening to makes you enamored of Paolo’s prolific songwriting skills and abilities, and root for his future success. Not to mention he has not released an album yet which makes it all the more exciting as to what he’s hiding underneath his sleeve. With these two singles from Melendez worthy of a radio play in major stations, he’s building a name for himself in the local music industry as the name to watch out for. Where do we sign up as members of his fan base though?



“Officially Missing You” Dance Video by the Kaalam Dance Company

“Amidst the struggles and challenges brought about by the pandemic, nothing will stop us from growth and passion for sharing our talent with the world in any way we can.”

Albeit done virtually due to COVID-19 pandemic, Kaalam Dance Company’s dance cover of “Officially Missing You” will show you how they’re more in sync compared to your priorities (just kidding). Proudly representing San Pedro College from Davao City, Kaalam Dance Company does not only show us what real talent is—they also embody passion and discipline. If a pandemic did not stop them from doing exactly what they want, then there’s no excuse for you to do exactly the same as well. You just need a little push, that’s it. Great job by the way, KDC. We’re hoping to see more of your stuff in the future. *winks*



M



**.mad
oven**

"baking madness"

look closely at the photo

below and you'll find

something interesting

**GLOBAL
WARMING
IS REAL
AND TIME
IS RUNNING
OUT.**





Experience the Best Coffee Trail of the South

S
LA
BO

A graphic element of the Silabo logo, featuring a stylized coffee branch with three leaves and three coffee cherries, positioned between the letters 'S' and 'LA'.

@silabo.ph



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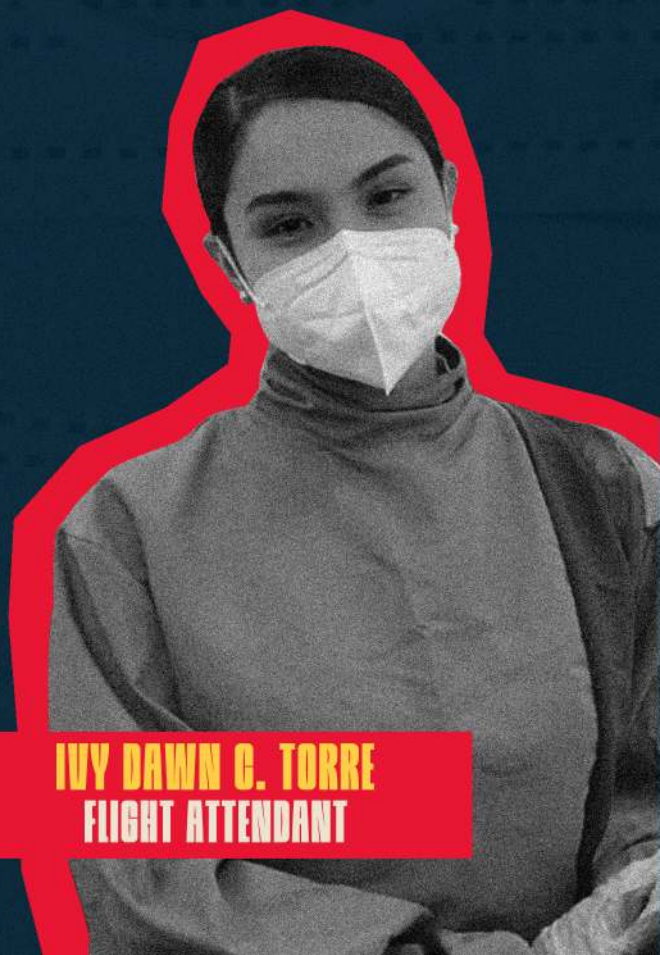
AT THE FRONTLINES

The moment we were asked to stay in our homes to help curb the rapid increase of patients who have been infected with the deadly COVID-19, the whole world turned to our frontliners for help. These frontliners, without a single doubt, heed to their calling. Going as far as taking insurmountable risks for someone else's lives—many of those are far related from them.

In this special digital issue of The Middle Mag PH, we seize the chance to sit down with two frontliners who have been gravely affected by the COVID-19 pandemic and talk about things such as their job and their special message to their younger self. However, despite of how things took a different turn for each of them, they still never lose sight of their identity, their dreams, and of the future. Just like the rest of us, they too hope that all these will soon be over. And that there's hope even in the darkest of times.



MARY KEZIAH B. GALAY, DDM
DENTIST



IVY DAWN C. TORRE
FLIGHT ATTENDANT

1

As a frontliner, how has these past months changed your outlook in life?

MK: Before COVID-19, I was so driven to work in order to save money and pay my debts and monthly bills. Work for me is a way to save some money and be able to travel and do the things I wanted to do. But now I began to see it as a calling. It made me realize that my purpose as a dentist is not only to earn income but most especially to serve the people and cater to their dental needs. For me, it's no longer about how much I can save or earn, whether I have money or not, whether there's the threat of pandemic or not – I needed to go to work because people have dental needs to be catered upon, and that's what drives me to work amidst the fear and anxiety this pandemic cause.

ID: When we started to fly during the pandemic, to be honest, I did not really consider myself as a frontliner. I realized how important our industry was when I started flying sweeper flights. These are flights mounted in partnership with the government to bring home stranded Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs). My job has already become a routine. Aside from keeping my passengers safe, I am only tasked to serve food during our inflight service. But I have a newfound respect to my chosen career and to my co-workers for being brave enough to fly, risking their own health just to send off our kababayans back home.

I realized in this pandemic that we can actually lose the people and the things we love the most in just a blink of an eye. I never really thought the aviation industry would go through this since we had high hopes due to the growing tourism of the country. These days, every time I get upgraded to a flight, I get a little excited, always looking forward to seeing my passengers, and going the extra mile for them.

2

Do you have specific memories or moments that really caught you by surprise and showed you the bravery and compassion your colleagues have?

MK: There was a time that my co-worker, a dentist also, talk passionately to an elderly patient who was dissatisfied by the denture she had. I am amazed how the dentist passionately and patiently handled the situation without allowing the situation to get even worse and it really put an impact on me. That there will be times that people will not be satisfied, but it's okay. It's normal. We are not required to please people. We only do excellent work that's why they are pleased. But during this kind of situation, I learn how to manage it calmly and just talk it out to the patient until she gets to understand the reasons why and how we can propose for a solution to the problem making everything well and being taken care of.

ID: This is such a simple gesture but I was surprised to see how many cabin crew were willing to fly sweeper flights mounted just one hour before departure. Our scheduling would call any cabin crew available to work past 10 in the evening with only 30 minutes to prepare just so we can fly home our stranded OFWs and keep the company floating. I have seen my co-crew in their Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) assisting passengers who have a hard time moving. Those who are still willing to assist the old ones with their baggage (sometimes we don't know how they carry everything) and then reminding them to wash their hands with soap and water or alcohol because we were exposed to a lot of people. I have witnessed a co-crew who accompanied a passenger to the arrival area. She was endorsed as someone with a mental health condition and was uncomfortable with the person who was assigned to assist her at the ground, so my co crew decided to accompany her up to the arrival area and reassured her that the person who assisted her was someone working for the company. Indeed, you see the smallest things during difficult times.

3

Do you have regrets in your chosen profession?

MK: I don't have any regrets of choosing dentistry. Though I admit it was really difficult during my stay at the dental school. I even planned on changing my course back then but God brought me into this profession not only to achieve the status quo it provides, but most importantly the privilege to help out people in the community. The impact you can give to those people who see you helping others. It's a noble profession and I wouldn't change it any other way given the chance to go back and choose another different path.

ID: This has been my dream job since I was in high school. I disciplined myself to lose weight. I had Lasik treatment, and went through a rigorous training for this. Even if our future in this industry is uncertain, the only thing I'm sure of is that I don't have any regrets in pursuing my dream.

4

What do you love most about what you do?

MK: What I love is the part where the smiles of my patient turns into a confident one. They come into the clinic having problems about their smile, about their teeth. They worry a lot because they no longer have the guts to face their peers and people around them because their smile is somewhat asymmetrical or awkward. The fact that they came into the clinic and gave me their full trust to correct their bites and smiles; the fact that they entrusted to me their confidence is something fulfilling, especially when the treatment gets done and you see them smiling brightly and excited to share their

enthusiastic grins to their loved ones. For me, that's priceless!

ID: I love it the most when our passengers approve of our service. My heart is always full whenever a passenger appreciates our job. Because to be honest, not everyone does. We get shouted at for things that are out of our control. One appreciative comment erases all the bad ones, even just a simple thank you warms our hearts.

5

What advice would you like to share to anyone who is reading this?

MK: My encouragement for you dear ones is that if you found your passion on something don't hesitate to pursue it. Don't let any discouragements stop you from soaring high with wings like eagle reaching your dream. Never doubt yourself. Unleash that potential and master your craft because that is how people will know you and will get inspired by how passionate you are. If you happen to be in a state of still looking for that calling or purpose, don't rush. Be patient. And ask God for guidance. His wonderful presence alone will guide you, speak to you and lead you to where you should be - to know your direction in life is to know your Heavenly Father first. The more you seek His guidance, the more you'll find peace in pursuing that one thing that God is impressing for you to do with.

ID: I know most of us started 2020 hoping that it will be the best year of our lives. I, myself, created a timeline for my goals and what I have to achieve this year. I did not even accomplish one of them. It took a while to comfort myself for my broken timeline. So if you haven't met your goals, if you lost your dream job, if you can't figure things out anymore, if you feel your anxiety for the future sinking in, take a deep breath and take things one step at a time. Remember that a dream delayed is not a dream denied. Keep going. And for those in the aviation industry who lost their wings, keep your heads high. Everything has an end and our industry will rise up again. This, too, shall pass.

6

If you could send a message to your younger self, what would you like to say to yourself?

MK: Hi younger me! I am so grateful for all the hard work you have done before. The fact that you instilled in your mind the courage and the boldness to pursue dentistry is already a blessing. Thank you for not giving up on it and thank you for obeying mom (because I remember trying to change my course but my mom told me I need to finish dentistry first before pursuing what course I wanted to pursue). Later on, this is where God use me effectively to be fruitful in the ministry. So to you my younger self, I'm so grateful and proud of your commitment to God. You chose the right path even though you know it was hard.

You never gave up and you always consider your future self in every decision you make and that's where we are right now.

ID: Young one, I know you have always been a planner, you like writing down a timeline of everything - from your college graduation to your first job down to the age you're getting married and when you'll have children. But things won't always go your way. You won't get your dream job right away. But you'll explore other career path first and you will travel more, in the process you will realize what you really want from this life. You won't get married at 25 as you originally planned, but you will meet a lot of people, you will see how many real friends you have, they're all ready to catch you in every heartbreak you will face. Don't let the pressure from unimportant people affect the way you think. Be adventurous. Be smart. But always be careful with the people you trust. You will get there, I promise you.

7

Being amidst it all, do you think there's hope for it all to get better?

MK: YES! There is so much hope to see things get better. The kind of normal that we have been so used to before may no longer come back as soon as possible but that doesn't stop us from doing what we are called to do. The situation will not stop our hearts from dreaming, from pursuing and from doing the passion that God granted us. God is so much bigger than this pandemic, and I believe He has His purpose why He allowed this thing to happen to us. For now, may we focus on growing on our faith, may we focus on the things that God wanted us to do, and may we continue to live a life in wellness and health.

ID: It will always get better. Whenever I wake up and things seem to fall apart, I pray. And I know through prayers, through hardwork and the support of the people around us, we will all get through these hard times. It's expected that things might get worse but it always does before it gets better. Let us pray for better governance, and for individuals to be more responsible, so we all get past through this without sacrificing a lot from our lives.

FILM REVIEWS



LIVING DEAD: TO HELL AND BACK

Directed by
CONRAD DELA CRUZ

Genre
EXPERIMENTAL, SHORT FILM

Released
2020

Film Review by
Christine Grace D. Ruta

This short film by Conrad dela Cruz depicts, albeit (excuse my French) mind-fuckingly, how messed up and weird this year has been. However, the film lacks clarity on what exactly the metaphor it's trying to portray, but one thing was clear—it's fucked up. And yes, we'll ride this boat because even us don't understand what the hell is going on with 2020 and why it wanted to mess us up to hell and back, so who are we to judge the confusion really. Even so, I like how the shots and classic score of this film compliments its surrealism. It was eccentric and different. To fans of decoding films, this one's for you. To be honest, we need all the help we could get with this one. Nevertheless, I enjoyed the confusion for the whole of 14 minutes trying to figure out what it all means, though to be honest, I can't say the same with 2020.



ALAMPAT GXALUNGTAD, KINABUHI LUMALABAY

Directed by
JANE ALFEREZ
FRANK LLOYD DE LA CRUZ
JEFFERSON LAGUA

Genre
EXPERIMENTAL, SHORT FILM

Released
2020

Film Review by
Maya Angelou N. Nievares

Derived from the proverb *Ars Longa Vita Brevis* which translates to "art is long, life is short", Alampat Galungtad, Kinabuhi Lumalabay is an honest introspection on art and the brevity of life. It offers an unapologetic retort to the stigma of starving artists and the struggle between practicality vs passion. Technical wise, the film is a little rough around the edges and could use more polishing but considering that it was produced through a 24-hr shootout with certain limitations and rules to follow, the lapses are forgivable.

The heart of this film is in its promising narrative and I commend the filmmakers for their bravery in tackling this kind of subject and choosing to tell it in a way that proves that art is lasting. I applaud them for not compromising their creativity to the expense of the viewers, kudos to them for not underestimating the viewers's ability to grasp and understand the film as well as offering the freedom to interpret their work.

Ang Pangaliya

But, Lord, why do you intend to show yourself to us and not to the world?

— **St. Jude the Apostle**

Sa sugod, gaduda pa si Tomas sa iyang nakita. Pero bisan dili siya mutuo anang mga ginoo-ginoo, nakabalo na dayon siya nga kamatuoran ning isulti sa iya sa usa ka tawo nga nag-ayo sa ilang gate.

“Tomas,” ingon sa tawo nga kaila dayon niya. “Gitabang na imong tatay karon sa SPMC.”

Naluya ang mga tuhod ni Tomas nga maoy hinungdan nganong hapit siya matumba. Kon dili lamang sa huot niyang kapyot sa ilang screen nga pultahan basin natumba na siya ug nahulog sa ilang gawas. Nitan-aw siyag balik sa tawo ug nakita niya ang kainit sa adlaw sa udto. Gibatokan niya ang kaluya ug ninaog bisan nagkurok-kurog iyang tuhod. “Sulod sa, Kol . . .”

Nidiretso ang tawo sa payag apan dinha na siya nilingkod sa dihang nakalingkod na pod si Tomas. Wa pa gihapon sa maayong panimbuot si Tomas. Naglutaw pa kini. Anang tungura, nabati na dayon ni Tomas ang mabati sa usa ka anak nga nakabalo na nga namatay na iyang tatay: kaguol, kalagot, kaluya, kasakit, ug labaw sa tanan pagmahay—bisan wa pa niya makit-i iyang tatay sukad atong nag-uliay silag kandila. Wa siya nibisita o nagpadalag prutas man lang bisan kaisa.

“Kaila ka na ba nako?” Pangutana sa tawo samtang ginatanggal iyang face mask ug face shield.

“Wala pero pagkita nako nimo, murag kabalo na dayon ko nga magdala kag . . . subo nga balita—” Kalit nga nigawas ang kasubo sa baba ni Tomas, sabay sa iyang luha nga kalit rang nibunok. “. . . Piste—”

“Lima ka tuig ming wa nagtingog!” Ningtiyabaw na kini og hilak sa abaga sa tawo. Huot na kaayo iyang pagkomkom sa iyang kumo ug gisumbag-sumbag na niya ang kahoy nga gilingkoran. “Wa ko kapangayog pasaylo sa akong tatay. Wa ko kasulti nga mahal nako siya . . .”



Ningguot pa ang paghangkop sa tawo. Gisabayan na niya kini og tapik-tapik ug kuso-kuso sa likod ni Tomas.

Nibuhi si Tomas ug nangagho. Gisaka niya ang sidsid sa iyang uran ug gitrapo sa iyang nawng nga daw sama nas busay.

"Muapas na ka didto?"

Gilantaw niya ang langit apan niduko pod siya dayon. Siga kaayo ang langit. Mura siyag nakatawa nga naglagot sa iyang nahinumdoman. "Akong mga igsoon," sibyat niya. "Basulon gyod ko nila. Magsinumbagay gyod mis akong magulang didto. Musamok ra. Gitratar na man sad ko nilang patay. Unsa pay pulos."

"Inig maghaya na, di sad diay ka mubisita? Naa man gyod nang mga anak."

Aw. Mubisita man pero way tingganay." Kompyansado niyang tubag.

Pero klaro kaayo sa tawo nga huyang kini nga kumpyansa kay giduot man niya iyang dila sa iyang ngipon.

Taodtaod, nabati ni Tomas nga dayag kaayo iyang kapungot sa iyang mga igsoon nga mura na siyag bata.

Gitarong niya iyang hunahuna, dayon niginhawa na pod siyag lawom.

Kon dili siya muadto karon, labaw nang wa siyay nawng ikapakita kon mubista siya sa lamay. Di na gyod siya makakita sa iyang tatay bisan man sa lungon.

"Ubanan tikas SPMC, Tomas."

Bug-at ug huot kaayo ang dughan ni Tomas sa dihang nalantaw na niya ang "Emergency." Pero nagdali gihapon siya. Hapit pa siya madam-ag paggawas sa taxi. Naa gihapoy pintol sa paglaom nga basin buhi pa gyod diay iyang tatay bisan god tuod nga kabalo na siya wala na gyod. Ug nasayod sad siya nga way timaan sa bakak kining balita sa kamatayon sa iyang tatay, bisan og anang adlaw pa niya makit-i ning tawhana nga nagbalita niya. Mura bag kabalo siyas tanan.

Wa gyod siya gi-text-san o gitawagan bisan sa isa man lang sa iyang tulo ka mga igsoon. Hinuon wa man silay numero niya. Bisin sa Facebook, gipang-block niya iyang mga igsoon, o dili ba kaha sila nag-block niya. Wa na siya makahinumdom.

Pinakasuko siya sa iyang magulang. Gunit niya ang titulo sa luna kung asa siya nagpuyo karon. Tapad ra silag balay pero wa na pod didto nagpuyo ang kanahan. Bulag na siya sa iyang asawa, ug ang asawa na lang nagpuyo didto. Magbukal iyang dugo inig makabantay siyang nagdala og batan-ong lalake ang asawa sa iyang magulang sa mismong balay nila nga tapad ra sa iya. Kana man gung ilang mga balay, usa ra na ka lote sa unaha. Unya ang maong lote, gipaningkamotan nga mabayran intawon sa iyang mama sa una gikan sa iyang pagsuroy-suroy og isda. Ug karon nga bulag na iyang magulang ug iyang asawa, gipili pa sa kanahan niyang magulang nga ihatag ang maong balay sa potang maldita niyang asawa.

Na-stroke na ni iyang tatay. Maglisod nag lakaw. Katong sa unaha nga bag-o pa ni na-stroke, gidala sa iyang kanahang magulang iyang tatay sa Tagum aron mupirma og deed of sales sa lote. Gidala gyod niya sa Tagum ang tigulang aron papirmahon bisan naglisod na nig gunit og bolpen. May untag ang halin kay sa iyang tatay. Dili man. Gi-iyaha man nuon. Kawatan gyod. Pulis man unta. O ingon ani gyod ang mga pulis? Yawa kaayong piste.

Mao pong naa siyay aligogot sa iyang tatay kay nganong nisugot ni nga byeheon siya sa iyang magulang but-an padulong sa Tagum—bisan pang nanghiwi na iyang panga tungod sa stroke—aron lang papirmahon sa kasulatan nga way maiya.

Maayo na lang gianhian siya aning tawo nga gitawag ra niyag Kol. Unsa gane niya ni? Silingan? Layo nga parente? Wa na siya kahinumdom.

Karon, nabalaka na siya pag-ayo kay kabalo siyang kon dili man sila magpinatyanay sa iyang magulang, siguradong magsinumbagay sila.

Nakit-an dayon sad niya ilang kinamagulangang igsuon nga nagsandig lang sa gawas. Giandam na niya iyang kaugalingon sa mga posibleng mahitabo. Wa lang niya gipahalata pero gipagahi na niya iyang kumo.

Asa man niya sumbagon iyang magulang? Sa panga? Sa ulo? Asa siya dapita mutindog aron kusgan iyang sumbag? Di tingali siya dapat muduol pag-ayo aron puydi pa siya makalikay inig mubalos. Tanggalon ba ang face shield inig magsinumbagay? Pota namayat iyang magulang. Kaya kaayo ni pakan-og yuta. Ay puros semento man diay diring dapita. Magkadugo gyod ni ron.

Gisugat siya sa iyang magulang ug gihangkop. Wa siya makalihok dayon.

Nanghilak silang duha sa landong nga pathway gawas sa SPMC. Mura siyag naibtan og tunok. Nahigugma diay gihapon iyang magulang niya. Ug siya pod diay sa iyang magulang. Wa siya nagdahom.

“Tangina asa man ka gikan . . .” Gikusokuso niini ang buhok ni Tomas unya gihangkop og balik.

Lisod kaayo kini litokon alang kang Tomas apan gitapok niya iyang tanang kusog aron kaloton gikan sa kinailawman sa iyang kasingkasing ang katakos aron masulti kining pulonga ngadto sa iyang magulang: “Pasayloa ko, Manong.”

Nisamot pag hinilakay ang duha, “Ako maoy dapat mangayog pasaylo nimo, Tomas.” Gitrapohan niya iyang luha ug gisuyop iyang sip-on. “Gibiyaan na ta sa atong tatay.” Nibuhi na siya taodtaod. Nagtrapo og tiwas sa mga luha, unya giubanan ang manghod pasulod sa ospital.

Ang tawo nga nagbalita kang Tomas sa panghitabo, nagbaktas sa padulong sa highway pa-Bajada ug nilingkod sa usa sa mga naglaray na mga gagmayng tindahan gawas sa ospital. Gitaparan siya sa usa ka nars nga nag-ingkit og saging.

"Kapoy kaayo ma-assign kang Azriel, Ser." Butyag sa nars nga murag nagtanga sa suok.

"Lage." Gilantaw niya ang uban pang mga nakaputi nga gipanghatod ang mga minatay sa Pikas. "Busy kaayo mo, oh! Sigeg gabas-gabas sa Pikas." Human nakasilip sa sulod ug nakita ang mga nars nga ginapangtabok sa Pikas ang mga bagohay lang nangamatay, nakapangutana siya sa nars sa iyang tupad. "Break nimo ron?"

"O, Ser." Nisuyop sa kinig juice human mausap ang saging. "Subo lage ka, Ser? Wa ko kasabot."

Nitan-aw ang tawo niya. "Unsa?—Wa sad ko kasabot nimo."

"Ikaw ang patron sa mga way paglaom ug mga imposibleng pangaliya; ang usa sa Dose. Dili ba naa kay gitabangan karon nga masumpayan ang kinabuhi? Dili ba dapat lipay ka? Or basin naanad na ka, no, maong usual na lang sa imo?"

"Nalipay ko oy." Nagpanghupaw niyang tubag. "Apan sa karon, dili man pagpangaliya sa pagsumpay sa kinabuhi akong giasikaso. Lahi. Gidawat atong pangaliya sa Langit ug nalipay kaayo ko ani. Apan way pagsumpay sa kinabuhi karon. Namatay gyod ang tigulang."

Nilingi ang nars sa ospital kay murag gitawag na siya. "Excuse sa ko, Ser Jude. Naa na poy ihatod sa Pikas." Gisuyop niya ang nahibiling juice sa selopin unya gilabay sa basurahan. "Kining akong ihataray ron, mao tingali ning imong gi-asikaso ganiha, no?"

"O, mao na siya. Pero iyang pangaliya akong gi-asikaso. Dili siya."

Bag-o pa man nakalayo ang nars, gilingi niya balik si Jude. "Ser, unsay imposible nga pangaliya ang giampo aning namatay?"

Bionote

Si **Frank Lloyd** kay natawo ug nagpuyo sa Lungsod sa Davao. Kasamtangan siyang gatudlo og English 7 sa usa ka public high school sa Tibungco. Moderator sad siya sa usa ka performing, visual, ug language arts org nga ginganlag Talaria.



christine grace ruta's

DAY 366

I have been racking my brain for something to write about that would be able to depict and give justice to the wreckage that this global pandemic has brought the world. To find words for the perpetual halt this illness has bestowed upon us.

How do you even begin to describe history? How do you begin to unravel feelings within this seemingly never-ending doom? Because right now, we are still in the middle, and when you're right in the middle of something, how do you know?

I guess that has been the continuous thought that has been running through my mind these past few months. Almost a year and I still can't find the purpose. Why are we here? Why is this happening? What's the bigger picture?

So here I am, seemingly forever baffled, having written, journaled almost nothing by the end of the year. And believe me, I have tried. But words, this time, have failed me.

However, surprise, surprise. Here's me trying. Again. To disentangle this mesh of intertwined thoughts.

Over the past few months, friends & family have been encouraging me to "write something, this is the perfect time to do it" and indeed it is. We had nothing but time to kill during all these months of quarantine. But for the life of me, I don't even know where to start. What can I write about this surreal, madness of a time? Something that could end in some magical lesson that would be worthy to impart?

My answer, and still is, nothing. The only thing that I have been holding on to for the whole 2020 was this personal truth: I am not obligated to do anything, be anything this year. The only thing I needed to do for myself was survive. And go through the motions. Not writing. Not even reading. Not making sense. Not explaining. Never ever meant to make sense.

We are in a crisis. And in a crisis, survival is the most important thing. Whatever that means for you. However you want to survive, you go be you.

But just for the record, if there ever was a lesson a grand big reveal, a bigger picture... Here's my take: You don't owe anybody anything, but kindness.

That's it.

A normal year would be full of normal personal struggles and challenges... And usually, that seemingly normal struggles are already never easy. What more this year? Everything was out of this world. The normal that we knew became a never-ending roller coaster of suffering. And this suffering might look different to each of us. So all we can do really is to be kind. To others. And most importantly to ourselves.

I cannot even begin to describe how dark and difficult 2020 was for me.

The first few days of the year, I was forced to face a reality that I have never even considered that could ever be mine. And the most difficult thing about it was, nobody even knew. Here I was, my life falling apart and yet, I had to act like everything was normal—life must go on.

It was the darkest time of my life. I never even thought I could make it through that time.

And yet, here I am.
Surprise, surprise.

Ending the worst of worst years and looking forward in hope to the new things this new year could bring.

But to be honest, the hard truth is, 2021 doesn't guarantee a better situation for all of us and COVID-19 looks far from over. But isn't the hope of new beginnings enough to fuel us to push through?

Well, I hope to God it is.

Because hope is the only thing that could get us through.

Here's to the saving grace, the impenetrable beauty of new beginnings, of new years. It might not always save us, but it is guaranteed to give us a chance. To begin again. To push through in spite and despite of whatever baggage we can't help to bring with us. As we lose hope. Again and again. However, just like a seed, it can't help but grow, again and again, even in the darkest of times...

And as we see the light ever so slightly at the end of the tunnel, may we learn to trust that hope is indeed alive. Again. That maybe hope, really, was never dead to begin with at all.

Hope is alive.

And so are you.



THE SHORTCUT

JENNY MAE SALDANA

People ask me why I've changed. They say I'm too quiet, too withdrawn. Some even say I've become a little strange.

Well, it's true.

I've changed - ever since that night.

It had been a perfect summer day.

I had gone swimming in the beach, a few miles away from my grandmother's house in the province. A group of kids who lived in the next barrio were there, too. We swam, we ran, we laughed, and even bought some food to satiate our thirst and hunger.

Before I realized how late it was, the sky had started to grow dim with the twilight. We said our goodbyes. Some of the kids started heading back home while I was packing up.

I was the only one who had to ride to my Lola's house.

I didn't mind.

I raced my bike hard up the big hill towards the direction of my gran's house; as I reached the crest, I stopped.

I got off my bike.

I stood still on the top of the hill, alone on the road, with my bike against me and too tired to do anything but to watch the setting sun. It had sunk so low that it looked like a huge, burning ball in the dark blue sky, shooting blood-red streaks across the horizon.

As I saw the last flicker of sunlight, I shuddered and felt a chill pass through my body - as I realized that I was the only one alive in this remote part of the province I wasn't even that familiar with. Looking down the hill, I saw the road split into two.

I looked at the forked roads and imagined what my grandmother have said earlier. She said that I should just use the one on the right since it was "familiar". "How about the one on the left, la?" I asked her. I faintly heard her say it's a shortcut - mumbled something about people never taking it.

All around me, the color of the sky deepened to a purplish black. I knew I had to be home. I had to make a decision. So, I pointed my bike in front of me, swung my leg over the bike, pushed down the hill, and took a left turn, onto the shortcut. My bike shot down the old dirt road and even in the dim light I could see that there were no other tracks on the ground.

I looked up the sky and noticed that something must be wrong. I was right. As I continued down the shortcut, I noticed the road to my right slowly vanishing - leaving only grassy plains. Regretting my decision, I



Even the large cross, with the image of the crucified Christ, wasn't able to pacify me. I started to pump harder, afraid to think anything in the company of the dead – or are they? I don't exactly know.

Cold sweat evaporating away from my body, as I felt them whisper horror from their icy lips on my back.

My bike – squeaking.

My knees – burning.

My heart – hammering away. After a few more rolls, finally, I caught sight of the first sign of a house that seems normal to me. Gran's house. I sped up, one last time, and I was back in the familiar road.

pushed hard on the pedals.

I sped the bike – like I was running away from someone – or something. I kept bumping on the unlevelled and muddy road. My legs started to burn, muscle exerting too much effort onto the pedals, as I pushed harder on the pedals. My heart didn't stop drumming so loud I could hear it.

I raced the bike as the darkness slowly enveloped everything before me. Slowly it swallowed the sky – the clouds – the trees – the road – and me. I kept my eyes open.

I kept my focus as I raced my bike in the dark.

Then, like that of a cat, my eyes grew used to seeing in the dark.

There were no houses in sight; just tall grasses and trees. The mere sight prompted my brain that something bad might happen to me. I could be raped, or murdered – or even both – any minute and nobody would even hear me scream; for there was no one alive – no one that I know of – but me.

I raced the bike in the darkness that enveloped everything – even me. I kept my focus. My legs – my heart – my body – burning. Still I sped down the road.

Just as I was about to give up, the clouds over the moon parted.

Before me, bathed in eerie moonlight, was an old graveyard. White tombstones illuminated by the moon flashed in my eyes – mocking me. They were lined up like soldiers in the dark; seemingly staring back at me with curious, sinister eyes.

Lola's outside.

She saw me – waving her hand to me.

I rode my bike up to where she stood, crashed it to the Bermuda, and jumped off, breathing so desperately that I couldn't speak.

I hugged her and in return, she whispered.

“Kaligo og tubig na naay asin kay gisundan ka.”

As she said those words – I looked at her, in frightened confusion, and nodded. I never bothered to look back and just did what I was told. That night, after supper, I slept with my mom and dad after praying the rosary.

People ask me why I've changed. They say I'm too quiet. I'm too withdrawn. Some even say I've become a little strange.

Well, it's true.

I've changed – ever since that night. Ever since that time, I never stepped in a cemetery without reciting a prayer or two.

LIMBO

By Juanito "Yuan" Paulo M. Deita III

It was 3 in the morning.

Everything was dark.

I've woken up from a bad dream.

A bad dream I couldn't even remember. Every time I wake up, it felt like I woke up from a dream to another dream. Like, I knew, I was in my room - and yet, it didn't feel like I was in my room. Like I was trapped inside something. A shell? Or that even when I was awake, I felt like I was asleep. I don't really know. I was having a hard time figuring it out myself and explaining it to my doctor. I just told him, I had been experiencing weird things - like hallucinations. I stopped drinking coffee. I stopped drinking cold milk every single night. Heck! I even stopped taking my meds. They don't work. It had been going on for a week now. All I want to do is close my eyes - and sleep, you know? A nice, deep fuckin' sleep.

"Are you high?" Michelle asked - as the sound of party music phased in and polluted the surroundings. Lights weltered around the place. Dancing 18-year-olds around metal poles. Professionals partying with minors.

Puddle of sin.

"Well... wait... what? No. I'm not. I - I didn't... were you listening to me while I was talking?" Ben exclaimed as he was trying to cut his voice through the noise.

"Of course. I was just asking, you know? I mean, Ben, I would totally understand if you were high and not being able to sleep at all." Michelle answered as she poured herself a glass of vodka and chugged it down her throat. "Ugh! I mean, I'm not a doctor, Benjamin. I can't just tell you what I think you're having, based on everything that you said."

Ben reached for his cigarettes in his jacket pocket. Took one, lit it, and placed the pack on the glass table in front of him. Blew a little smoke in the air, as Michelle collected Ben's glass.

"Hey," Michelle called out, as she poured Ben another shot of vodka. "I'm sorry. Alright?" Michelle said as she licked her thumb of the spilled vodka. "Here, I think you should stop smoking. It doesn't help. The nicotine actually gets you up for hours - maybe even for days. Maybe that's what's causing the problem." She continued, as she handed Ben his shot.

Ben puffed a smoke to Michelle's face. "Oh, suddenly, you're a physician now? Thanks, doc!" mocked Ben, as he shoved the vodka down his gullet and threw a cloud of nicotine above him.

"I'm just saying Ben. You're not high. No meds. No bullshit. But you've been smoking a shit ton of cigarettes lately. You got this insomnia thing going on, and you're frustrated about it, and you respond to this by making it worse. I mean, I shouldn't care, but since we're here. How many cigarettes did you burn today? What number is that?" Michelle asked, and directed her stare towards Ben's glowing roll of tobacco.

Ben's eyebrows curled in. "I don't know, 10? 25? This is my second pack." Ben answered with a loud voice, as he lifted the pack from the glass table to Michelle's face. His voice almost faded through the wall of upbeat music.

Michelle leaned back to look at the pack of cigarettes. "Give me that," Michelle demanded as she stole the pack of cigarettes from his hand.

"Hey!" Ben cried out, as he stood up and tried to take the pack back, from Michelle's hand.

Michelle stretched out her arm the other way. "That's enough smoking for today, Ben." Michelle continued as she threw the pack in the dark. "What you need to do..." Michelle calmly explained as she poured Ben a glass of vodka. "...is to get yourself drunk and go to sleep. Okay? From a friend to a friend." Michelle said, as she smiled and stretched out her hand with a glass of vodka.

Pissed, Ben took the glass of vodka down his throat. Inhaled another hit of the cigarette and puffed out a cloud of smoke in nothing. "Last one for today," Ben answered, as he lifted the stick up in front of Michelle.

Fumes danced in the air. Every step illuminated by pulsating lights. The air became thick as the sweat of party people and nicotine filled the air. Claustrophobic. 10:30 PM.

Closing time.

3:30 AM.

Still dark.

"Call me when you get home, alright? If you can't sleep, listen to some calming spa music or something. I don't know. Whatever you're into." Michelle instructed Ben as she hailed a cab from the corner. Tipsy and Shaky.

"Okay?" Michelle confirmed. Ben answered her with a nod. "You're a grown man, do some grown man shit. Watch porn, fuck your neighbor or something." Michelle added as she went in the cab.

"Anyways, Goodnight!" Michelle added as she closed the door and threw a flying kiss. "Goodnight. Take care. Don't fuck the driver, alright?" Ben replied as the cab sped up as Michelle lifted her middle finger out the window.

Ben smiled and started walking down the street to his apartment.

A few steps from the club, he stopped at a convenience store. He looked behind him - to check if Michelle's cab had gone - then back to the convenience store. He checked his watch - 3:45 AM.

Sighed.

"Fuck it." He told himself, as he went in.

He went straight to the cashier. "A pack of reds." He told the clerk, as he pointed at the red Marlboros behind the clerk. Pearl Jam's last kiss in the background.

"That'll be 60 bucks, sir." The clerk said in a very monotonous voice as she reached for the pack. Ben reached for a few bills in his pocket.

"Tough night?" The clerk asked Ben, as she operated the cash register - glancing at him occasionally.

Ben looked up to her.

"I see. Can't sleep, right?" The clerk asked a second time, as she prepared Ben's change.

"Not exactly. Just things in my head." Ben answered her.

Silence.

"My friends told me, that.. uhmmm.. if a person can't sleep during the night, it's either: that person is mentally unstable, or that someone else is dreaming about that person."

Her thoughts reverberated in Ben's head, as the music continued to play - Lucy in the sky with diamonds.

"It's those or you're thinking of something really important. I don't know. That's what I usually experience, whenever I try to think about, uhmm, things... Probably, that's the same with your case." The clerk added as she handed Ben's change as she directed her eyes towards Ben.

Ben's eyebrows met in the middle as he stood there and just gazed at the clerk. The clerk noticed Ben's gaze and felt nervous. Then, she shook her hand, as if telling Ben to get his change.

Ben turned his eyes to the clerk's hand. "Keep the change," Ben told the clerk, as he immediately walked out.

"The hell was that about?" Ben thought to himself, shocked and confused, as he got out of the convenience store with a pack of red Marlboros. He held the pack up. It was new. Opened it and bit a stick out. Lit it and blew a cloud of mist, like a vacuum on reverse, as he walked down the ghost street to his apartment.

He passed by an alley. Turned his head to check what was in it as he drove a veil of smoke before him.

He noticed something.

A black cat.



A black cat, with a green jumper and bright blood-crimson eyes that sat in the middle of the alley. The cat was staring blankly at him.

"What the hell?" He said to himself - as he walked up to the cat slowly. Walked into the alley. "I've seen this cat before," he thought to himself, as he followed the path of light towards the cat. "Mrs. Steven's cat?" He thought to himself. His landlady's cat.

The cat noticed Ben nearing. Ben stopped and just stared at the cat. The cat stood up. Backed away slowly as it gave a defensive hiss. Then, it turned and ran towards the other side of the alley.

Confused, Ben ran after the cat, as it ran towards the other side of the alley. Street lights alternated as Ben strode down the alley. Near the end. Then, the cat turned left to the street as a bright light hit Ben's eyes and then, Ben got out of the convenience store with a pack of red Marlboros.

Looked left and right, down a ghost street.

"The fuck?" Ben whispered in the air, confused and drunk. He looked left and right.

Same lights. Same street.

He walked up the convenience store and peeked inside. Same lights. Same clerk. Same-store.

He looked at the pack of Marlboros. Opened them. They were new. "The fuck is going on?!" he asked himself, as he threw the pack on the street. Sticks scattered on the pavement.

When he looked up, a few meters away, he saw a cat. Running back the alley. Confused, he rushed to the alley. Held the corner with his right hand and drifted in.

Then, he saw the cat. It was a different cat.



A black-and-white, spotted cat, with a pointed hat. It had yellow and green eyes that shone like emerald who sat in the middle of the alley.

The cat stared at Ben. A blank stare.

In utter disbelief, Ben walked slowly towards the cat. Crouching, as he stretched out his arm to guide him. Walked along the path of lights. As he got nearer the cat, he stepped on an empty can of soda.

"Shit." He murmured to himself.

The cat sprang up to its feet. Backed up slowly. Gave a defensive hiss. Turned its back and bolted towards the opposite side of the alley.

"No, wait!" He yelled at the cat, as he dashed towards the cat. "Wait!" he continued to yell. Street lights alternated as Ben continued down the alley. Nearing the end of the lane. The cat turned left to the street, as a bright light struck Ben's eyes. Ben looked away as he held the corner of the alley, and got out of the convenience store with a pack of red Marlboros.

Flickering street lights. Cold wind. Eerie silence. He looked behind him. Glass paneled walls. He saw the clerk. His body, frozen.

Same-store.

Then, he looked down. He looked at the pack of Marlboros in his hand. His hands, cold.

Loud, uneven heartbeats.

He opened the pack. It was new. His hands, shaking. He dropped the pack on the street, his thoughts scattered, like a mesh.

"What the fuck is going on here?!" He exclaimed. "This... This can't be real."

He looked left and right, down the ghost street. Then, a few meters away, he saw a cat. Running back to the alley. Nearing. It was a different cat. An orange cat.



"Hey! Wait!" He yelled at the cat. "Hey!" He yelled again as he ran towards the alley - towards the cat. "Stop, please!" He yelled a third time as he was nearing the cat.

Then, the cat stopped. Turned to him with its blue eyes, and said: "His finger twitched. I think he is going to wake up. I need to wake him up. He needs to wake up."

Ben's sweat hugged him. His feet nailed to the pavement. Only a few meters away from the cat. The air became thin. It was difficult to breathe.

"Wake up? Who? What the fuck is going on?" Ben asked the cat with a very shaky voice.

The cat stared at him - confused. Walked to and fro, as if trying to assess the area. "Benjamin", the cat answered as it sat and licked its paws leisurely - not minding the nervous person in front of him. "Benjamin needs to wake up." The cat added as it purred right after.

Cat caught his tongue. Heavy breathing. "Me?" Asked Ben, as he sat on the pavement. His knees betrayed him. "What are you talking about? I couldn't even sleep. How am I supposed to not wake up when I'm not even..." Then Ben felt an acute pain in his chest. It was as if a wooden stake struck his heart. Unbearable.

The lights slowly closed in on him. Slowly fading. Until everything was dark and non-existent. Only a spotlight remains over Ben and the cat.

The cat looked at Ben. Suddenly, Ben heard a voice. A very familiar voice, in front of him. From the cat. The cat with blue eyes, staring at him blankly.

"Daddy? Daddy, please wake up." The cat said. Warm and intimate.

The voice of a young girl.

"Daddy, please, will you please wake up?!" The cat said, repeating it again and again and again.

Ben shook his head. "No. No, who are you?! Why are you calling me daddy? Is this a dream? This is a dream, a most terrible dream! I don't know you. I don't have anybody. I'm not even..."

Then, he stopped as tears, slowly licked his face like rain on window panes. The pain deepened. His chest, an open wound.

He looked at the cat, and whispered: "Jonnie."

"Daddy, please wake up!" the cat said again, for the sixth time. The young girl's voice, distorted. Phased out to a low woman tone. "Daddy, please wake up. Please?" the cat said as the voice distorted to white noise.

Ben, overburdened, knelt down with tears gushing out of his eyes. Flashbacks of Jonnie, his daughter, to and fro in his head - in front of him. Like a black and white cinema - barely with sound - barely with color.

Murmuring.

Flickering lights.

Good memories.

The cat looked at him, with a confused look. Stood up. Walked slowly towards Ben. Rubbed its head on his leg and purred.

Then, the cat said: "His fingers are twitching. I think he is going to wake up... purr, I think Benjamin's going to wake up." As the cat turned and looked towards the end of the alley, then back at Ben.

Ben glanced at the cat, hopeful.

Loud, uneven heartbeats.

Fast ones.

Excited ones.

"I think he is going to wake up. We must call the doctor! The nurses! Benjamin's going to wake up!" as the cat stopped talking, turned to the alley and ran in it.

"Wait!" Ben yelled as he crawled to stand and ran after the cat. Ran into the alley. Hopeful. Noisy heartbeats.

"Jonnie, I'm coming sweetie. Daddy's coming home." His thoughts whispered in the air.

"Wait! Cat!" He continued to yell as he dashed towards the cat - arms stretched out. Street lights alternated. A straight and narrow path.

As the cat was nearing the opposite end of the alley, Ben reached for the cat. Reached for the cat to catch it. The cat then turned left to the street, as the glare of street lamps struck Ben's eyes. He looked away. Closed his eyes.

The next thing Ben knew, he was out of the convenience store with a pack of red Marlboro's. Flickering street lamps. Looked left and right, down a ghost street. A ghost street to his apartment.

He glanced at the glass windowed store.

Same sign.

Same clerk.

Same-store.

He looked left and right. There was no cat. No alley. Just a continuous winding street. His feet nailed on the cold concrete pavement.

Eerie silence.

Tears surged out from the blackened sky. He turned his gaze to the quiet street. He smiled.

A bitter smile.

Hope left him.

Saturday afternoon. A week earlier. A church service held. A dead man. Motorcycle accident. Asleep for ten years. A cemetery. A tombstone, twenty-four steps away from the main entrance:

Benjamin R. Greenway
(Jan. 12, 1974 - May 15, 2017)
A loving father, husband, and friend.
We will always dream of you.
Goodnight, dream catcher.



A
guy
who
is
hoping
not to be
forgotten
until his death
like a saint.

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Until Death

Loel C. Balangauan

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Before this pandemic, rarely did people acknowledge their need to show emotion physically towards another loved one. These days, the saying, "masked emotion/s" has taken a literal meaning. Our fear that we could lose our loved ones has driven us to show more affection despite the inconvenience of wearing masks and face shields.

Masked Emotion



Karen

Cua-Medina



MMK

Karin

Mother Earth

Manlalakbay



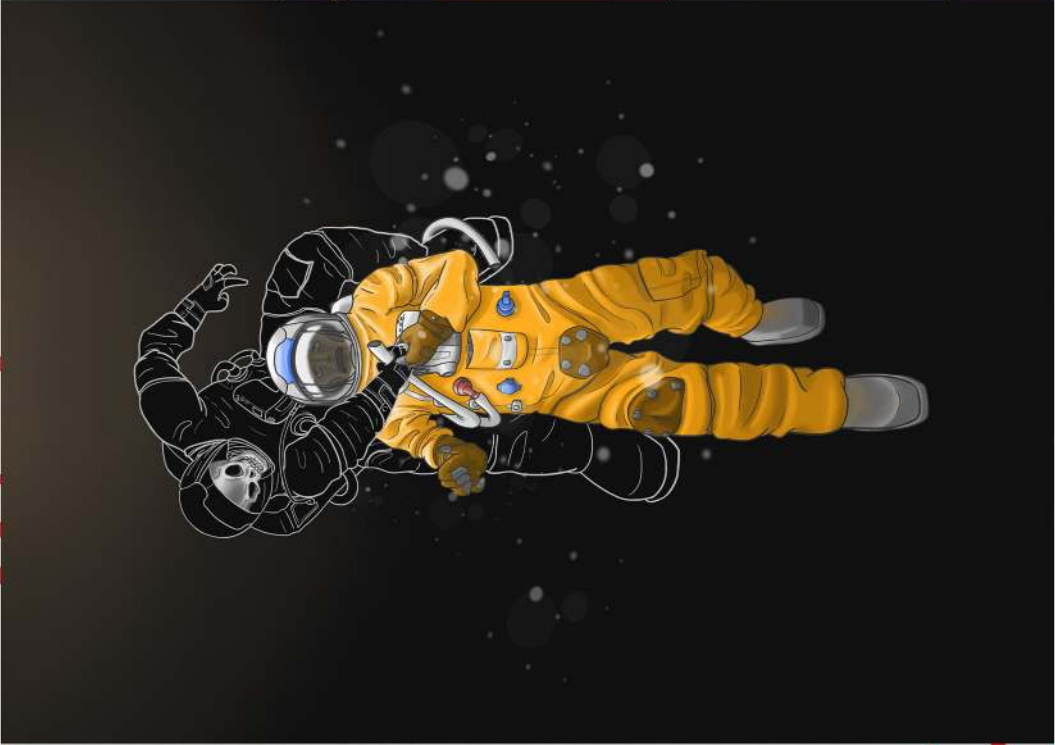


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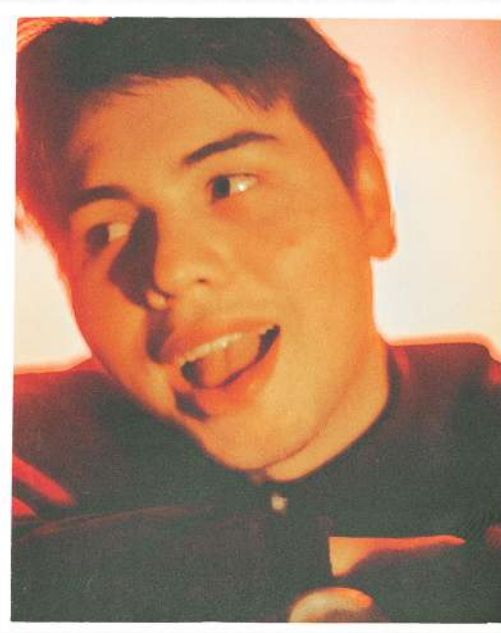
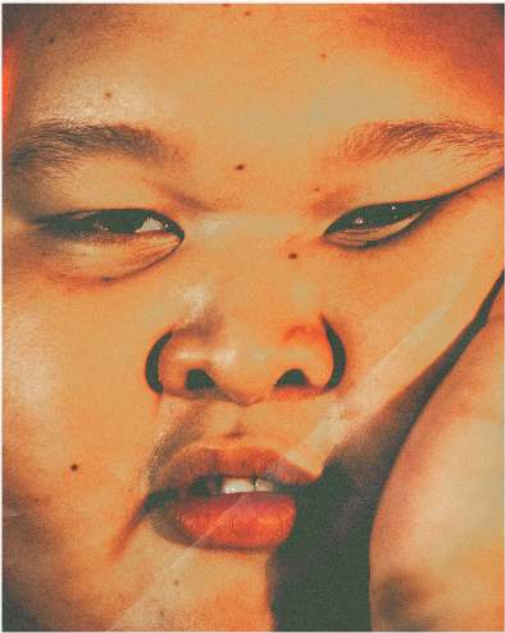
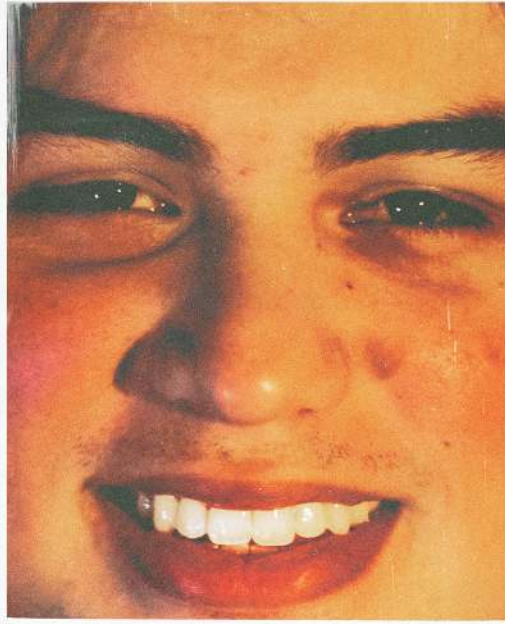
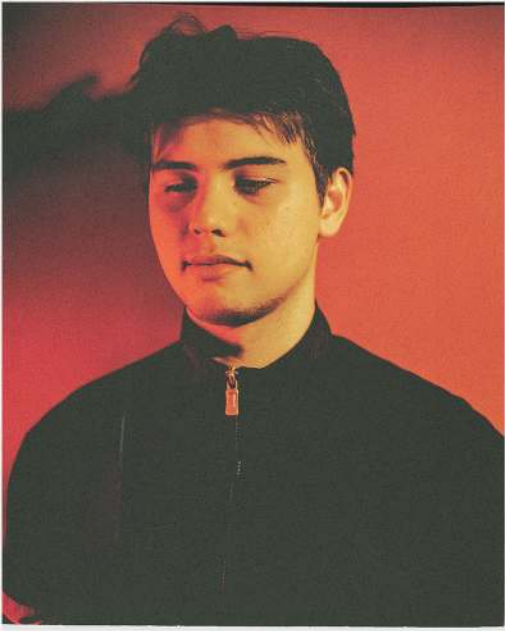
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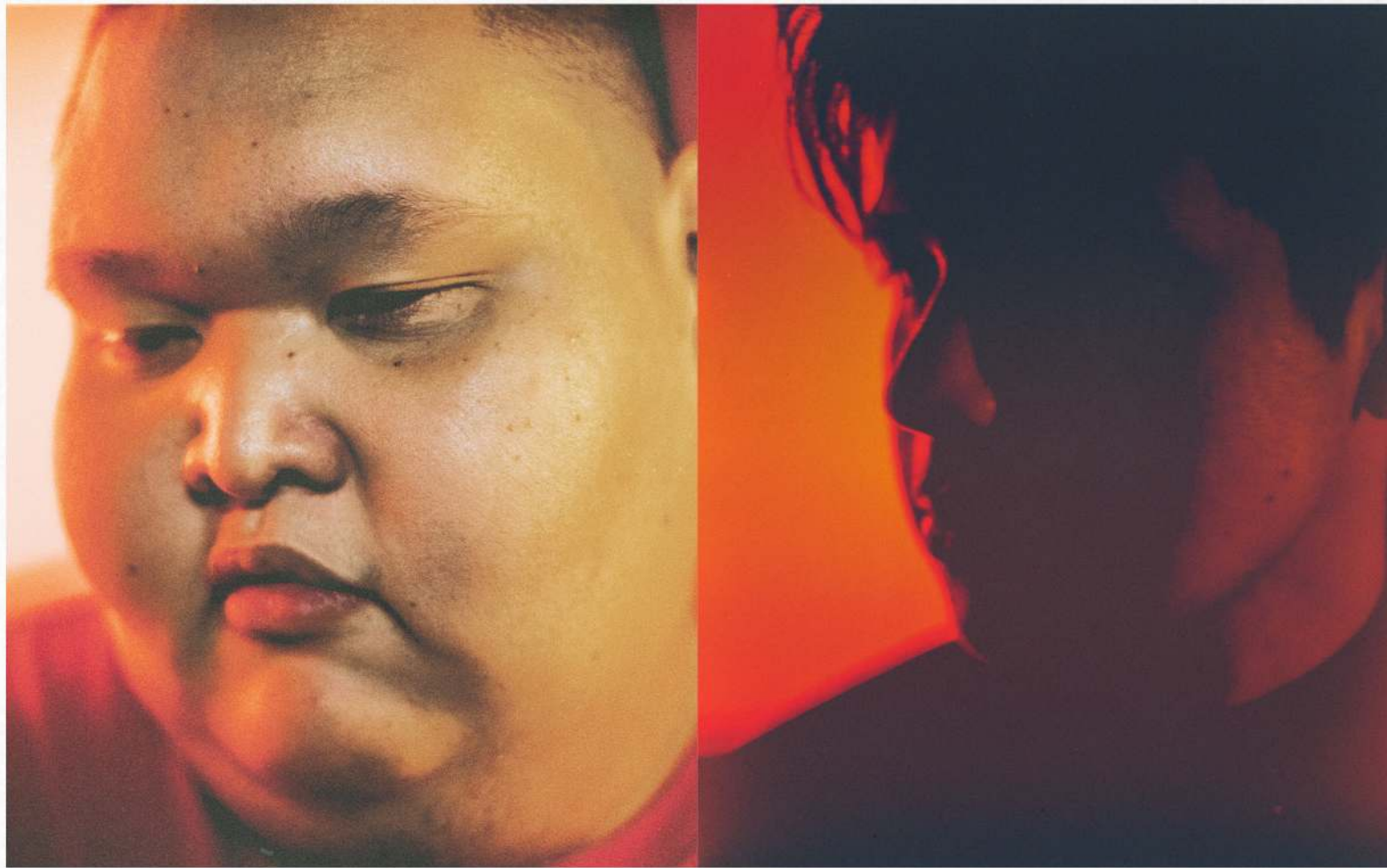
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Edrian Paras

ART





**portraits, before
I left the city**
Joseph Bermúdez

ART +
P H O -
T O G R A -
P H Y

“portraits, before I left the city” is a series of photographs taken on March 9, 2020, before the Metro Manila lockdown. It was two days before I left Davao for Manila. My friends and I haven’t seen each other for the last two years. One has left the country to study in Denmark, and the other one settled in our hometown, Tagum.

ART

+

PHOTOGRAPHY

Juliana

Hellmuth

When I was asked to contribute with the theme about how we felt during the quarantine. I didn't know what to paint, but I clearly remember a night when I plopped down on the bathroom floor and cried to my ex-boyfriend. "I just feel like a paper boat drifting through the storm," I said between sobs.

My usual style is a palette of pastel pink, lavender, and gold. But for this one, I had to deviate from it to truly express what I feel. This is titled, "**adrift.**"

A watercolor painting on toned watercolor paper.



Julia Fell
2020



I had just moved to my first apartment—living alone to feel the isolation and loneliness, being alone on many nights listening to different shoegaze bands and reverb. I was also going through a breakup, which feels when you start to distort your own reality.

u n t i t l e d
Amelia Baird



ing alone for the first time. I was really starting
all alone with my thoughts. I had spent too
e bands and had become lost in the distortion
ak-up at the time and these photos are how it
eality and wrongfully internalize emotions.



ART + PHOTO-
TOGRAPHY



Liqourice Daryl

B
Na

It's a collaboration with Jana Silao, Jem conceptualized this shoot, I was thinking they are. I named this shoot Liqourice SkintyAsian. He is a man of color and

personality which make this as a me who are having a c

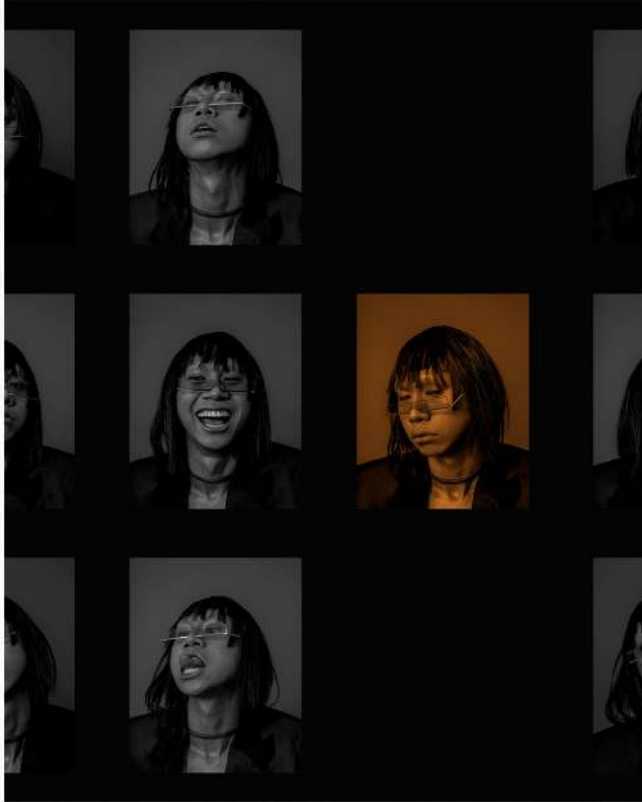
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more Wilson, and SkintyAsian. When I
ng of someone free from being who
Bitch because of how it represents
d always serving us with his strong
we always love about him. I want to
edium especially to those individuals
difficult time accepting and expressing
themselves freely.



Bread Shack™

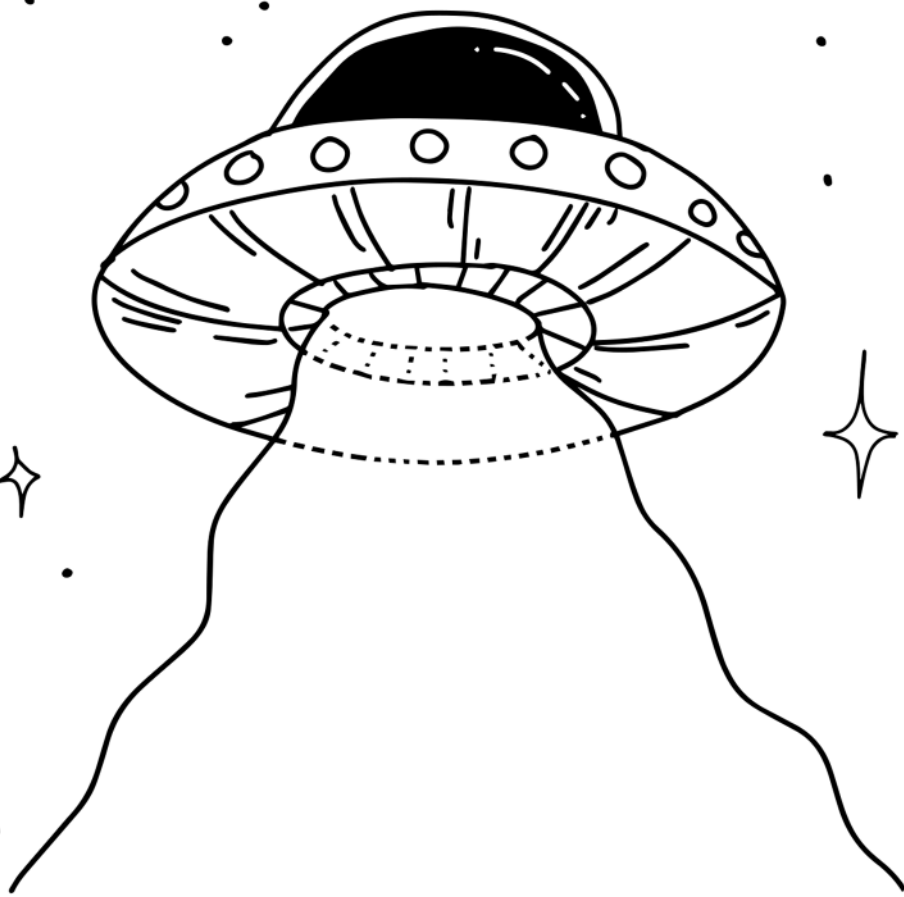
Warm hugs are best
welcomed with a

Pasalubong!



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#HopeInTheDarkestOfTimes

**"ANG
KABATAAN
ANG PAG-ASA
NG BAYAN"**

- DR. JOSE P. RIZAL

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