

THE GK HOPE BALL: A VIEW FROM WITHIN

By Rose I. Cabrera, GK Hope Ball Planning Committee Member

Oh I'm so busy already. My plate is full. It's not my forte. I'm not from high society. I don't even move in those circles. It's not really my cup of tea. I will not have much to contribute to an event like that. I don't know this Beliz lady and others in the planning committee.

These are but some of many reasons I gave myself why I cannot serve in the GK Hope Ball planning committee last year. As a longtime GK volunteer, however, I knew better than to say "no" when faced with a great challenge and presented an opportunity to break new ground. Eventually I said "yes" because it was an opportunity for me to do something concrete about the conflict in Mindanao and somehow show care for our Muslim brethren.

So began my journey with the GK Hope Ball.

June 28, 2010: The First Committee Meeting

Today is the first time we are meeting as a group, with just 3 ½ months to prepare for the big event! The GK Hope Ball 2010 Committee is composed of 12 individuals led by Beliz Balkir-Crook, the Turkish wife of Jonathan Crook, the General Manager of The Peninsula Manila. Although some of us have worked together in some GK projects, this is the first time many of us will be working together. Nobody knew HOW we could pull this off, we just knew we will. It was a big leap of faith.

October 4, 2010: A Microcosm

Today is our last committee meeting before the big event. For the first time after 3 months of meetings, we opened with an Islam prayer followed by a Christian prayer.

We've always had Christian opening prayers in our meetings since we are all Christian (except for Beliz). I assumed that's what we'll do again when I asked Johan to lead the opening prayer, but her spontaneous request for Beliz to start with an Islam prayer surprised me and left me teary-eyed. Beliz prayed in Arabic, none of which I understood, but I got goose bumps as I listened and felt her prayer in my heart. Johan then prayed in English in her usual soft-spoken powerful way.

Our committee is composed of different individuals whose common bond is Gawad Kalinga. In our little way, the Hope Ball was our contribution towards building peace in Sulu. It was ironic because there were times in the last 3 months when peace was the farthest thing reigning in our committee! In the end though, we were able to overcome our differences and personal hurts... all because of GK and our desire to be bearers of hope.

Our prayer today was such a powerful moment to me. Very simple yet so poignant. So representative of what our future as a nation should be.

October 8, 2010: The Hope Ball

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Tonight was truly an evening of hope.

I saw hope in businessman Felix Ang of Cats Motors as he sacrificed a huge profit when he provided the Mercedes Benz for the GK auction.

I saw hope in accomplished chefs like Jessie Sincioco, Glenda Barretto, Claude Tayag, Myrna Segismundo, and Freddy Schmidt, in their willingness to work together to provide the best meal possible for GK supporters.

I saw hope in the many artists of hope, like Arturo Luz, Federico Alcuaz, Betsy Westendorp, Malang, Daniel Dela Cruz, Mike Cacnio, Ramon Orlina, Nino Quartana, JA Tan, Cesar Caballero, Ramon Diaz, Impy Pilapil, Dudley Diaz, and Manny Padilla, when they sacrificed significant earnings and offered their great works of art for the GK auction.

I saw hope in the elegant lady who took off her precious emerald ring and permanently parted with it by spontaneously offering it for live auction that night, and in the family who sacrificed their annual vacation to donate something for the auction.

I saw hope in Nedy Tantoco of Rustans and her tireless assistant Lulu Casas who so generously shared their resources and network with GK.

I saw hope in the guest artists, like TJ Manotoc and Mikee Cojuangco, who returned even the modest honorarium we gave them.

I saw hope in my fellow Committee members Au Pijuan, Johan Chuaunsu, Pinky Antonio, Eena Meloto, Wee Ramas, Christine Cunanan, Tess Rodrigo, Tess Moreno, Yvonne Policarpio, Mike Toledo, and Cat Turingan, as each sacrificed time with their families to fulfill their respective roles in ensuring the success of the event.

Lastly, I saw hope in Beliz and Jonathan Crook, the couple who started the GK Hope Ball and whose love for our people has really inspired me. They did not have to do this. I thought it was funny when Beliz shared with us that some of her friends are avoiding her now because she is always talking about GK - "GK this" and "GK that." Beliz and Jonathan have done so much for our poor brethren in Sulu, and they are not even Filipinos! With their abundance and their comfortable lives, they did not have to organize the GK Hope Ball and deal with the attendant headaches and heartaches. They chose to do so. They chose to care.

These are some things that give me hope, when people are willing to sacrifice and give something of themselves for the least of their brethren.

Because of them and many other nameless heroes of the GK Hope Ball, a peaceful and beautiful community will soon rise for at least 30 families in conflict-ridden Sulu. Quite inspiring indeed.

2011 ... Moving On

The GK Hope Ball continues in 2011. The GK Hope Panamao Village has been built in Sulu,

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with the houses turned over to 31 families in July. For this year's GK Hope Ball, we aim to help in sustaining that community. We welcomed a new partner (Lifestyle Asia) and new committee members (Pinky Poe, Joker Arroyo, Anna Sobrepena, Cristina Gomez, and Jaja Oquinena).

As we focus on October 7, 2011, I can't help but wonder about the future of the GK Hope Ball in the years to come. Beliz and Jonathan moved to New York City a few months ago. I myself may be moving back to Los Angeles soon. Uncertain as the Hope Ball chairmanship and committee composition may be, I am certain that the GK Hope Ball tradition will continue. As with everything GK, the nobility of the work allows it to evolve and morph into ways we mortals may sometimes not understand. If only because thousands more of our brethren in Sulu need help and millions more yearn for peace in Mindanao, the GK Hope Ball tradition must continue. Any interested volunteers? ☺

P.S. Someday I hope to visit Sulu with my friend and fellow Hope Ball Committee member Johan Padua Chuaansu. She was diagnosed with Cancer late last year that's why she had to beg off from the Hope Ball Committee this year, but we still plan to visit GK Hope Panamao soon and meet our Muslim brethren for whom we did all our shameless lobbying for the GK Hope Ball. GK Sulu, here we come!