

Published in full by BusinessWorld on August 4, 2009

“THOUGHTS ON A HOMECOMING ”

By Ambassador Albert del Rosario

This is a reprint of a Business Day article dated October 6, 1986 by Ambassador Albert del Rosario who was then a member of President Cory Aquino’s official party during her historic visit to the United States.

When the College of Mount St. Vincent in New York which overlooks the Hudson River opened its gates on the first day of Autumn one warm and sunny Sunday afternoon last September, it was to signal a homecoming event. Unlike the usual collegiate reunions, however, all the balloons were a bright yellow, and a unique excitement filled the air. For on that day, a very special welcome had been prepared for an alumna of the Class of 1953 who, by any standards, was no ordinary graduate.

In recalling the younger days of the celebrated alumna, the head of the college run by the good Sisters of Charity recalled Cory Aquino as having been a bright and reserved student who was not only well-liked but also much sought after by her classmates for her dancing grace and ability. For her major fields of concentration, she completed a most respectable combination of French and Mathematics. To bestow honor and as a manifestation of their pride and admiration for Cory, her alma mater was more than delighted to create two scholarship grants to be made available for the benefit of deserving Filipina students.

In her usual charming and dignified manner, our president spoke of how happy she was to be back to see old friends and mentors. She also reminisced that it was by the lingering death of a former classmate of hers there that she first experienced the meaning of placing one’s fate in God’s will. This seemed to be part of a

series of learning experiences which helped her in fulfilling the many difficult roles in her life.

For the trials ahead, she begged for prayers. As she cut short her address to spend a few minutes alone with more 20 classmates, several of us were left seated, isolated with our own thoughts about how this lady has come to be where she is now.

For she has literally and figuratively come a long way – from student, to housewife, to widow, to revolutionary leader, and finally to duly-elected president and hope of a nation. How, some of us must have thought, could she – without either desire or design – have achieved her current position as well as successfully earn for herself unequivocal acceptance as a world-class leader?

There must be an over-abundance of literature from many cultures on the education of princes and other selected leaders for them to be meticulously prepared (some even before they are born) so that they can properly exercise authority. Others yet find their way to positions of leadership by painstakingly readying themselves and making a competitive scramble as soon as opportunities arise. Howsoever, what is generally believed is that an effective leader can only be such if he or she has been educated in the nature of future tasks.

There were no such preparations for Cory. What little she may have gained about the prerequisites of leadership must, at best, have been acquired second-hand from Ninoy. Yet, she was evidently able to transform a deep sense of citizen duty and skillfully carry it forward when needed to assume both a reform and charismatic leadership posture.

Of the various leadership types, reform leadership must be easily the most exacting as – in addition to commitment, sincerity, courage and selflessness – it necessarily implies a high sense of morality. There are without doubt strong indications that President Cory Aquino would, moreover, appear to fit the mould

of a charismatic leader. Quite apart from endowment of divine grace, charismatic leadership, as expounded by Pulitzer Prize winner James McGregor Burns, is when there is experience of an emotional bond between the leader and the led, when there is admiration for a leader's virtuous qualities, and when the simple popular support for a leader verges on love.

Some days later in the same city, a black elevator operator took notice of several ladies wearing the popular Cory pin denoting affection for her. "We love her, too", he expressed.