

Rufino Bomasang Featured Among Modern Day Filipino Heroes*

By Lambert Sagalla

Engr. Rufino Bomasang, also known as Boomie to close friends and associates, was among 44 living Filipinos featured as modern day heroes in a book entitled *Modern Day Filipino Heroes (Values They Live By)* by Maria Rosa “Bing” Nieva Carrion-Buck. The book was launched last November 30, 2008, Philippine National Heroes Day.



The living Filipino Heroes, which include former President Fidel Ramos, Cardinal Vidal, Governor Panlilo, Governor Padaca and Manny Pacquiao, were selected on the basis of their exemplary accomplishments in their respective professions and the values that they have lived by. Engr. Bomasang was the only one selected from the Energy Sector and the indigenous communities.

I. **Energy Sector Accomplishment.**

Engr. Bomasang’s selection as a living hero was, no doubt, in recognition of his efforts towards helping reduce Philippine dependence on imported oil through the development of indigenous energy resources (i.e. coal, geothermal, petroleum, and renewable energy). Coal has displaced oil in most Philippine power plants and in all Philippine cement plants, while the Philippines is now the world’s second largest user of geothermal energy, a renewable energy source, for power generation, next only to the United States.

Boomie is particularly famous for his leadership role in the “development of the Malampaya gas-to-power project, considered the largest single infrastructure project in Philippine history with total investments of 4.5 billion US dollars. The fruition of the Malampaya project has substantially reduced oil dependence in the power sector, ushered in the era of clean natural gas, and now contributes about a billion US dollars to the Philippine economy annually in terms of direct government share and foreign exchange savings.”

Engr. Bomasang was one of very few senior officials, the only top level official, in the Philippine public energy sector who was retained by all five political regimes from President Marcos to Arroyo, an impressive feat considering the usual practice of replacing senior government officials with every change in administration. He was therefore the only top executive among the companies (i.e. Shell, Chevron, and PNOC-EC) involved in the Malampaya gas development who had been continuously involved from gas discovery to gas production. As the state’s representative in the project, he made sure that a newly elected President and/or newly appointed Secretary of Energy understood and fully supported this all important national project, while ensuring that the project was managed as efficiently as possible without interference from government officials. He believes that this was one of the key reasons why

the project was finished on time and under budget and untainted by corruption, or scandal. This rarely happens in infrastructure projects, particularly mega-projects, in the Philippines.



Engr. Rufino Bomasang (2nd from left in left picture) has also been involved in the government's program of promoting the development of renewable sources of energy in far flung areas of the Philippines, especially in isolated areas where electricity is not available. Said program has led to successful projects, such as the 25 MW wind farm in Bangui, Ilocos Norte, the first major wind farm to be installed in Southeast Asia; the Tulgao-Dananao Micro-hydro systems (up to 100 KW) in Kalinga Province; and the PNOC Solar Home Systems Distribution Project (PSDP) in remote

areas throughout the Philippines. In the Cordilleras, the PSDP was availed of by, among others, 2 remote areas in the Cordilleras – Kibungan, Benguet and several municipalities in Eastern Ifugao.

During his 28 years as a public energy official, Engr. Bomasang led several Philippine delegations to periodic meetings of energy ministers, senior energy officials, energy experts, and top executives of energy companies from the Pacific rim countries which includes China, Japan, South Korea and members of the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) comprised of Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam.

Even after retiring from PNOC-EC in 2004, Mr. Bomasang continues to be a “much-sought-after” consultant by companies involved in oil exploration, coal development, and renewable energy development in the Philippines and the Asia-Pacific region. Currently, he is either a Chairman, member of the board, or senior adviser in five such companies.

II. Values He Lives By

The values exemplified by Engr. Bomasang in the article written about him by her two daughters, featured in the book Living Filipino Heroes by Ms. Carreon-Buck, and from congratulatory emails from his co-alumni from St. Mary's School of Sagada [SMSS] include diligence, strong preference for good quality education, tolerance, humility, family first and sense of giving back particularly to his indigenous community roots.

Intelligence, Diligence and Good Quality Education. Engr. Bomasang is a naturally gifted student who took full advantage of good quality education administered by Anglican missionaries or American educated teachers in his hometown, Besao, and adjoining town

Sagada, Mountain Province where he finished his elementary and high school educations, respectively. Notwithstanding coming from a poor family and having to contend with the barest of living conditions in order to attend school, he was consistently a top student in his elementary and high school years. His high school contemporaries remember him as a study-focused student avoiding the loitering and liquor-drinking prone student “barkadas” of his time.

After graduating from St. Mary’s School, Sagada in 1958, he topped the Commission on National Integration (CNI) examination enabling him to enter the University of the Philippines, considered by many as the country’s premier university, where he obtained his mining engineering in 1963. He went on to top the Philippine Mining Board exams in 1964 with a grade of 85.79% - the highest score since 1953. It took a few more years since 1964 when this score was surpassed by another Igorot mining engineer from Besao – Frederick Villanueva.

Apparently one of the firm believers that education is a never ending process, Boomie enrolled in the Strategic Business Economics Program (SBEP) at the Center for Research and Communication, now the University of Asia and the Pacific (UAP) in 1984. He finished a Masters degree in Business economics in 1985, in record time. Normally students of the course were allowed to finish the required thesis within four years. Boomie finished his thesis entitled “A Proposed Strategic Plan for Accelerating Philippine Coal Development” in four weeks.

Later on in his book entitled “From Gathering Firewood to Managing Energy Resources”, Mr. Bomasang credited the good quality education he obtained from St. Mary’s School, Sagada as a key factor in overcoming numerous obstacles in his professional life.

Ethnic Roots, Tolerance and Humility. Engineer Bomasang traces his ethnic roots to Kankana-ey Igorot parentage from Besao, Mt. Province, Philippines. Igorots have, for centuries, been the object of ridicule or ethnic derogatory stereotyping such as primitive, beyond civilizing, beggars, and unclean. Bomasang took these all in stride, knowing pretty well that these are more the product of ignorance or myth rather than meanness or disrespect. He never succumbed to the derogatory stereotyping pressure which has made not a few faint hearted Igorot professionals to deny their ethnic identity. Neither does he begrudge those who tend to look down on Igorots. Instead, he patiently explains that Igorots are not that bad pointing to himself as an example that an Igorot can be as good and helpful as anybody else.



It seems Engr. Bomasang has successfully ingrained the value of tolerance and humility to her daughters. In their article entitled “What Boomie Taught Us; Lessons from our Father’s Remarkable Life” they state: “Respect for others and tolerance of differences have guided us through the respective paths we have taken. Today, we are both married to men of different

nationalities, religions, and cultures, but these are differences we welcome and accept, and have never posed any issues.”

Giving Back. Cognizant of the importance of good quality education in propelling him to what



Boomie drumming up support for SMSS from SMSS alumni and friends at the Holy Trinity and St. Benedict Church social hall in Alhambra, California.

he is now, Engr. Bomasang has committed himself to helping promote good quality education in the Philippine Cordilleras starting with St. Mary’s School of Sagada, his high school alma mater. It was mainly, through Boomie’s fund-raising efforts from his corporate network as well as from SMSS alumni and friends, that St. Mary’s School of Sagada is now well on the way of reclaiming its stature as a

source of quality education for children of indigenous communities in the Cordillera mountain ranges of Northern Philippines.

Boomie had also been getting his friends and corporate contacts to donate books and computers to sister institutions of SMSS such as Besao Elementary School; St. James School, Besao; All Saints Elementary School, Bontoc; and Easter School, Baguio City and even to a public school in La Trinidad, Benguet.

Engr. Bomasang, likewise, continues to explore possibilities of helping promote the development of the Cordillera Administrative Region’s (CAR) vast but largely untapped renewable energy sources. He is convinced that such development efforts constitute an even more immediate means by which to reduce poverty and/or uplift living standards of indigenous communities in the region. The most recent of such efforts include the following:

1. The possibility of getting a Japanese wind turbine manufacturer to donate a new small wind turbine in a pilot area in the Cordilleras with possible funding from a Japanese aid agency, JICA.

Small wind electric turbines ranging from 300 watts to 10+ kilowatts are extensively used internationally, but virtually unused in the Philippines. They are well-suited for water pumping for small irrigation, battery charging, and hybrid power systems.

Big wind farms are found in Europe and North America, where one turbine can generate as much as one and a half megawatts. In the Philippines, the first wind farm in Southeast Asia has in fact been built in Bangui, Ilocos Norte and is currently generating as much as 40 megawatts.

2. Continued support to promotional efforts of the now world famous PNO Solar Home Systems Distribution Project (PSDP). The PSDP is essentially a rural electrification project in support of the government's electrification and social reform agenda.

As of May 31, 2004, 2435 SHS had been installed all over the Philippines, of which 1012 had been installed in the Cordilleras, 669 in Ifugao and 343 in Abra. Of all Philippine provinces, Ifugao in fact had the largest number of installations, followed by Palawan at 547 and Abra. The systems in Ifugao are spread across far-flung barangays in the municipalities of Aguinaldo, Asipulo, Hingyon, Kiangan, Lagawe, Lamut, Mayoyao and Tinoc. In Abra, the systems are spread throughout the municipalities of Bangued, Boliney, Bucay, Lacub, Baay, Malibcong, Penarubia, Tayum, and Tubo, but mostly in Tubo and Malibcong.

PSDP is expected to have the following positive impacts: pollution reduction through reduced use of oil products; catalyst for agricultural, industrial, and commercial development; increased income for greater income generation; improved literacy; improved health; and improved situation of women, who are most often the ones inside the house.

3. Continued support to identifying, with the end in view of future development, of good potential areas for mini hydro projects in remote areas of CAR such as the Tulgao - Dananao micro hydro electric project in Kalinga Province. So far Preferred Energy Incorporated (PEI), a non-profit corporation where Boomie has served as a board member for more than 5 years and is currently the board chairman, has identified 5 good potential areas in Mountain Province: Lias, Barlig, 40 kilowatts; Lunas, Barlig (56 kilowatts); Tamboan, Besao (88 kilowatts); Tuboy, Balangao, Natonin; and Sabangan (96 kilowatts).

The cost of developing each of the identified areas is estimated to range from 254,000 US dollars for Lias to 505,900 US dollars for Tamboan, including project development, community organizing and training, hydro construction, and livelihood projects. The bulk of the funding for said projects can be obtained from donor agencies and PEI says that it can help secure said funding. Igorot entrepreneurs may want to consider investing in these projects in joint venture with major energy companies who want to go into decentralized power generation.

Family First. A strong sense of family ties and disciplined upbringing of children are the defining traits in Engr. Bomasang's experience in raising his family. Through these values he was able to help mold her children to the successful individuals they have become.

Emily, her elder daughter, successively finished BS Biology at UP, took up Medicine at the UE Ramon Magsaysay Medical Center, specialized in Internal Medicine at Cardinal Santos Memorial Hospital, sub-specialized in Infectious Diseases at the Philippine General Hospital,

and obtained a Master of Science in Virology at the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine. She then worked for several years at the Rizal Institute of Tropical Medicine and later practiced as Consultant on Infectious diseases at Cardinal Santos Hospital, St. Luke's Hospital, and Medical Center Manila. In early 2007, she married John Layno, a natural born American of Filipino (Tagalog) descent now working as a senior systems engineer with Sentel. They currently live in Falls Church, Virginia.

Ellen, her younger daughter, finished Economics at UP. After graduation, she worked in Petron Corporation and later Energy Development Corporation, both subsidiaries of PNOOC. She then obtained a scholarship and took up a Masters degree in Policy Science at Saitama University in Japan. After finishing her master's degree, she worked successively in Japan with the Institute of Energy Economics, in the Philippines with First Philippine Holdings, and later in the United States with Alternative Energy Development Corporation and Winrock, a renewable energy company where she is currently Program Manager. In 2000, Ellen married Myoung Soo Son, her Korean boyfriend at Saitama University, now a Senior Director in the Korean Ministry of Transportation and Construction and is currently on assignment as Korea's Construction and Transportation Attache in the United States. They have two sons, Ernest (7 years old) and Andrew (11 months old). They reside in Oakton, Virginia.

Boomie is married to the former Madelene delos Santos of Puerto Princesa, Palawan, a former school teacher at the Santa Lourdes Elementary School near the Palawan Quicksilver Mines where he was Mill Superintendent from 1964 to 1967. After they got married in 1967, Madelene retired from her teaching job and became a full time wife and mother. Madelene's parents were both born in Palawan, but her grandfathers on both sides originated from Iloilo and were married to a Chinese and a Cuyonin (the largest ethnic group in Palawan) with Spanish blood, respectively.

Boomie's and Madelene's grandchildren, therefore, have mixed Korean, Igorot, Ilongo, Cuyonin, Chinese and Spanish blood. How's that for ethnic differences, acceptance and tolerance.

Concluding Remarks. Congratulations, manong Rufino. May you continue to be an inspiration to the countless economically handicapped students of the Cordilleras – that through the values you have exemplified in life, they too can become living heroes even if only to their own family circles and friends. For all self-respecting Igorots, you are a worthy addition to the likes of Marky Cielo, Mauricio Domogan, Alfredo Lamén, Sinai Hamada, Bishop Francisco Claver, Macliing Dulag, Mateo Carino and others who treasure their Igorot ethnic identity as a badge of honor and with whom we would like our youth to emulate. May your tribe increase.

**Reference materials: "From Gathering Firewood to Managing Energy Resources" by Rufino B Bomasang; "What 'Boomie' Taught Us: Lessons from Our Father's Remarkable Life" by Emily Bomasang-Layno & Ellen Bomasang-Son; related emails from the SMSS Yahoo emailing group; personal communications with Boomie; and a presentation paper by Boomie at IIC-6 entitled "Empowering Indigenous Communities Through Renewable Energy".*