



*Village A at present. Photo by Jerald DJ. Caranza, UPDIO*

# A walk down memory lane

BY **BINO C. GAMBA**

Romeo A. Sebastian cannot help but smile as memories flashed in his mind, while taking a trip down memory lane of the neighborhood and friends he grew up with at Village A on the UP Diliman (UPD) campus.

**A**s he looked back, Sebastian said he would wake up by the sun's rays passing through the slits of their front window. Within their yard were his favorite fruit-bearing trees such as "balimbing," "langka," and "santol." On occasion, he would see pipits hopping from one tree to another.

"Beyond that window lies the community plaza. As I stand slowly turning towards the east, I can see in my mind the UP Playground near Area 14 and Area 17," Sebastian said.

He recalled the gentle morning breeze that brought the smell of ripe mangoes from the two big trees that, even together, he and his brother could not embrace. Then, the two gigantic mango trees were beside the huge boulders located at the back of the current UP Credit Union site.

"As I complete the circle, looking probably west or south, I remember a hill with a hut at its very top. He fondly recalled, "We would run and play in the nearby rice field and even ride on the grazing carabaos."

Sebastian said that the National Stud Farm, which now houses the Diliman Environmental Management Office, used to be a hill with nearby rice fields.

These were just some of his childhood memories in a place where he truly felt safe.

**MEETING PLACE.** His favorite playing area was the Village A community plaza which, he said, was the center of activities and special occasions back then.

"The concept of the plaza during the time of Rizal has retained its importance. During my time, the plaza was a place

for many activities such as the 'pasayaw' or 'sayawan,' amateur singing contest, film showing, 'palaro,' and gift-giving on Christmas and New Year's Day. [It was also the venue of] inter-color or community basketball and volleyball games, venue for political campaigning, and the hangout of all 'barkadas,'" explained Sebastian.

At the plaza, a young Sebastian and his friends would play "tumbang preso," "tsato/syato," "luksong baka" and "luksong tinik," "patintero," "agawan-base," "piko," "teks," and "lastiko." At night, the games would change to "taguang pangkat." All games, according to him, were hotly contested.

The plaza was also a favorite meeting place to plan for adventures. One adventure, Sebastian recalled, was running to the nearby rice field to catch "tarat" or shrike birds with traps that he and his friends made themselves.

"We were also armed with slingshots which we used to strike snakes and rats," he said.

Catching spiders from the trees and shrubs around the campus was another adventure.

"My friends would bring in their spiders as well and we will put them on a stick in pairs. The spider that wraps the other with its web or made the other spider fall wins," Sebastian said with fondness.

**SUMMERTIME.** The young Sebastian would always look forward to summertime. School was out and the dry summer wind meant it was time for kite-flying.

Kids would busy themselves making their "saranggola" out of plastics, newspapers, and bamboo sticks.

"Every summer, my friends and I would be at the rice field at the back of our house or at

### ***The plaza was also a favorite meeting place to plan for adventures.***



the UP Playground to fly those enchanting ‘saranggolas,’” Sebastian said.

Sebastian, like other batang UP, would join the “Pabasa” during Holy Week. Come May, he would watch the Santacruzán or “Sagala.” People would look forward to the parade of ladies who were beautifully garbed with fantastic and elegant gowns.

One summer, Sebastian sold “turon.” It turned out to be an unforgettable time.

“I was in Grade 3 or 4 when I first sold ‘turon’ at the UP Theater during a play depicting the declaration of Martial Law and its issues.”

Everybody was abuzz about the play, but his attention at that time was to sell all the “turon” in his basket. That experience led him to sell “turon” campus-wide. Needless to say, his “turon” was a great hit to the UP ROTC (Reserved Officer Training Corps) and Sunday soldiers.

“I can honestly brag that my selling skills were great. My ‘turon’ was always sold out,” Sebastian said.



Sebastian. Photo from Sebastian

**CHRISTMAS.** Another occasion that Sebastian eagerly looked forward to was Christmas. This was, and continues to be, the best time of the year for him. As soon as the “ber” months start, he would eagerly wait for those merry events.

Sebastian, a former member of the Parish of the Holy Sacrifice choir, said that the choir would practice three times a week to prepare for the weekly Mass, the annual Misa de Gallo or “simbang gabi,” and the New Year’s Eve Mass.

“We would also go caroling in the houses of choir members and friends. It was great fun spending time and just hanging out with them,” he said.

Not to be forgotten is the annual Lantern Parade, the most awaited Christmas event in UPD which brings together all the people



UP Parish choir. Photo from Sebastian



*Staff members of the UPD SWF in the early 1990s. Photo from Sebastian*

in the University. Sebastian said that as a young lad, he did not miss a single year watching the event.

“When I studied for my master’s degree and eventually worked at the University, our office regularly participated in the event,” he said.

Sebastian was a former university researcher at the UPD Sentro ng Wikang Filipino (SWF). He left the University in November 1991, but he continues to bring his family to watch the yearly parade and to appreciate the Christmas design and lights setup at Quezon Hall and the Oblation Plaza.

**UPD TODAY.** While recalling his childhood in UPD, he noticed significant changes in the campus landscape. He cited the numerous new infrastructures and the ongoing constructions in the University.

Sebastian said that he was fortunate to experience the beauty of nature and the green surroundings of the campus then. He also witnessed the diversity of birds, the bunch of dragonflies, butterflies, grasshoppers, and other insects, all undisturbed.

“The rice fields at the back of our home, near the hill where we used to play, would grow a luscious green and turn golden during harvest season. These have all been bulldozed to give way to the construction of the Stud Farm and dormitories,” he said.

**REFLECTIONS.** In retrospect, Sebastian considers a lot of things that are worth treasuring while growing up in the area. He enjoyed the “barkadahan,” playing traditional Filipino games during his younger days, sports league (basketball and volleyball) during summer, and his choir stint at the UP Chapel, among others.

According to Sebastian, the experiences he gained from interacting and socializing with friends and participating in community events have contributed to who he is today—a fine individual and a responsible father. He earned his master’s degree (library science) from UPD in 1991 and is currently an instructor at the University of Santo Tomas College of Education.

“I can say that this reality is not only true for me. I would like to mention two people from our place whose lives I truly admire and I

found to be most encouraging: Pat Gamba, my contemporary, who loved playing “baril-barilan” or makeshift guns with friends, has become a member of the PNP Special Action Force. By persevering through all the challenges towards that goal, he achieved his ambition and retired as a dignified policeman. And Norman Dreo, my neighbor and a co-choir member at the UP Parish, has made a name for himself in the field of painting. He is a certified true artist with great talent. Despite receiving awards and recognitions, both locally and internationally, he has remained humble,” said Sebastian.

He also remembers and cherishes the achievement of their seven-man “marathon team”—the Omega Runners. When they were still young and had a lot of energy to burn, they competed in several marathon events. Sebastian said that their group won the top prize in the group category of the annual marathon competition sponsored by the Venerable Knights Veterans and the UP College of Veterinary Medicine (VetMed) when VetMed was still in UPD.

“I think it was in 1980 or 1981. It was a tough run, circling two times around the old Ikot route and we won against other

groups and student organizations in the University,” he said.

**COMING BACK.** Sebastian is currently residing in Tandang Sora with his family. He visits Village A from time to time because his brother and some relatives are still living in the area.

His family also frequents the campus, not only to attend alumni activities (his wife Emy is an alumna) but also to partake in all that UPD has to offer—its films, stage plays, exhibits, concerts, UP Fair, Lantern Parade, and nature tripping.

“We love walking around the Academic Oval amidst the big acacia trees, balancing on the makeshift bridge/log at the UP Lagoon, and having a picnic at the Amphitheater.”

When asked if he plans to live again on the UPD campus, Sebastian answered that, if there is an opportunity, he would readily move back to the place where he grew up. “Village A was, and continues to be, a place where everyone knows each other and treats each other with neighborly care and respect.”



Sebastian and friends at Quezon Hall celebrating a win. Photo from Gamba, digitally restored by Jerald DJ. Caranza, UPDIO