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Sonny and Jesse:
They worked in and for the Vineyard of the Lord, and they
left great, giant Footprints.

Most times, at work, you do what you have to despite the conditions around you; despite the emotions involved. Since the 13th of August, and the following days (until this day that I am writing this article) I continued to be at work. Or so I thought. But not quite. Deep down, I was unsettled and unfocused. You bet, my productivity was simply minimal. I struggled, pushing myself to make up and do some work. Until, I had to confront what was eating me up. Or I do not give justice to both my self and my work. So, I had to claim some space for my un-expressed mourning and grieving for two people, a friend and a student (of many full moons ago). Within almost the same week, two Bikolano great leaders passed away from this earthly world. They were not just great Bikolano leaders. They were dear friends who contributed a difference in my life; in the lives of many, I would think!

Truly, a mantra one can keep at work is to envision the difference one's work can and will contribute to humankind.

Congressman Salvador 'Sonny' H. Escudero, III and DILG Secretary Jesse Robredo are two Bikolano leaders who have become icons without trying to. They were simply natural, 'living life in full throttle.' More vividly, a quote from Howard Thurman captures how Sonny and Jesse lived out their respective lives:

***'Don't ask what the world needs.
Ask what makes you come alive, and go do it.
Because what the world needs
Is people who have come alive.'***

The former *Congressman Salvador H. Escudero, III* is not the usual politician you and I know. Rather, he was more the ordinary man you and I know. Simply low profile, un-guarded, no frills, un-imposing. Always in that bush jacket styled shirt with red-blue stripes on the shoulder. His fashion statement. Congressman Escudero, at the time of his passing away, was the *President* of the Foundation for Upgrading the Standard of Education (FUSE) and *Chair* of SAIDI Foundation, Inc. In both the FUSE board and the SAIDI Foundation, Inc. board, I happen to sit also as board member. Through these avenues, my peak into his world of great duty to his fellowmen and country, I got to know the man better.

At FUSE, for over 15 years now, I was in monthly board meetings with *Sonny* (as he was fondly called). In all these meetings, a major topic of interest to him was the state of Philippine education – discussing ways to contribute to insure quality education and motivate teachers to remain dedicated to quality teaching. I had a few travels with Sonny and the FUSE Board of Trustee-Members freely distributing learning materials to schools in very faraway places in behalf of *Tan Yan Kee Foundation*. He listened to school officials and teachers. He looked for generous

donors to extend funding to initiatives that will support the cause of quality education. In this endeavor, Sonny was great influence to *Dr. Lucio C. Tan* who learned to be more generous to education.

Sonny lived a prayerful life. To book him in a hotel in those travels meant an unconditional requirement: the church must be within walking distance from the hotel. And if you happen to be part of his travelling party, expect a wake-up knock an hour before the first mass in the place commences. To take a long road trip with him, expect silence the moment the bus rolls out of its bay because Sonny simultaneously also 'rolls out' his novena and rosary prayers. *Sonny valued every moment.* His brisk movements reflected how he transacted business. To the point and with dispatch. When there is a prolonged quibbling during meetings, his un-obtrusive interventions: pick up the issue, declare his position and then, push the process onwards. Quite an impressive swiftness but which didn't embarrass his colleagues at *FUSE*. When a meeting lingered, he takes out his pad paper and snitches time to write in his own handwriting (nope, he wasn't computer-techy), as many letters he could responding to simple folks waiting for an answer on matters of agriculture and education that they had called his attention to. Indeed, in Sonny's life no time was wasted. And yes indeed, he kept himself connected to people. *Sonny was loyal to his Boss.* I remember that time when I joined his group to drop by the Marcos Museum in Batac, Ilocos Norte where the remains of the late President Ferdinand Marcos may be viewed. (Remember, he was a Marcos-boy!) It took me sometime to calm my troubled heart to get inside the viewing room of the Museum. I was struggling with my post-martial law feelings and sentiments towards the late President Marcos. On hindsight, I now realize that I came to the place at the right time. And with the right person. Sonny led me and our other companions to the place. When I finally helped myself inside the room (dotted with dimly lit pinlights and with soft heavenly music in the air), my focus centered on the waxed-encased remains of the late President Marcos and on Sonny who was ... in a corner, solemnly praying. This sight was so moving that I could not resist the grace that came to me at that moment, definitely from my God, to utter a prayer for the late President who gave us, Filipinos, an unforgettable bitter taste of martial rule. Witnessing Sonny's loyalty turned my hard heart to let go of ill-feelings towards the late president and be forgiving. In those many *FUSE* meetings and few but memorable travels, I saw that honorable side of Sonny known to few people.

In the case of the former *DILG Secretary Jesse Robredo*, my connection is very privileged. He was my student when he was in freshman high school. I am trying to remember the year Jesse was in my high school English class at *Ateneo de Naga*. That must be the year after the declaration of martial law. I am trying to remember specific events about him in class. There aren't too many I can remember about him. Perhaps because he was not a naughty, troublemaking boy in class. Perhaps because he was not the most intelligent boy in his semi-honors' class. Perhaps because he was just a plain, intelligent and behaved boy in class. I think this was more the case. What stands out in my recall are two things: he was my elocution contestant from his class and he defeated my other contestants in three other classes including the contestant from the honors' class. The other is the quiet demeanor of this boy in class. He gave good academic performance; but not in ways that flaunted his successful work. He was consistently on the honors' list after each grading period. But he was never 'loud' about this!

Fast forward. When I left Naga City and settled in Metro Manila, I lost track of this boy (and many other ordinary boys in my Ateneo classes). The next time I would hear about him is from my brother, *Miguel* (his schoolmate at Ateneo de Naga). He was narrating to me the big things happening in Naga when Jesse started to serve his first term as mayor of Naga City. And Miguel continued to say that Jesse pushed waves of changes never witnessed by Naga City before. Jesse's moves visibly transformed Naga City to what it has now become. The Naga-residents who elected him to two sets of three separate terms as mayor of the city are the living witnesses to what he did to the Naga City community and to its people. Yes, all the stories, praises, commendations and citations given Jesse defined the different faces of 'greatness' of a public leader, a servant leader. The stories of how Jesse handled his opportunities to serve defined him as The Leader that the Philippines had for a good sometime which earned him reputable recognitions here and abroad, including one from the Ramon Magsaysay Foundation.

Moments to catch!

2010: *SAIDI School of OD* hosted the first Asian Appreciative Inquiry Summit. It was going to be a venue to disseminate the power of life forces within self and across individuals when they share common interests, common goals, common vision in creating a valued difference. As *SAIDI School of OD* was determined to have *Dr. David Cooperider* as keynote speaker of the summit, the event needed an inspirational speaker, an individual who has given positive change a face. An individual who possessed a generative and relational leadership that inspired and awed his followers. And the individual strongly recommended was *DILG Secretary Jesse Robredo*. Everyone got excited; I was excited, of course. This assembly of Asians must hear his stories of positive change in Naga City. Yes, they heard him; and they were not disappointed.

2011: This was the year *SAIDI School of OD* had the opportunity to work closely, as consultant, with *DILG*. I will not go into the details of this engagement. But, let me write just about this: what many have written or shared were identical to the data my team gathered about Sec Jesse. No pretentious or manicured data; simply, honest information of how each experienced Jesse at work.

Jesse's stories of leadership were peppered with pain and gain, with frustrations and successes, with fame and glory, with friends, supporters and a few enemies along the path of principled citizenship. But in the exercise of his leadership, he shared with all who he was, where he came from and where he wish to go. In his leadership journey, he was compellingly breathing greater *purpose* in his *intelligence, passion, service and focus: for God and country*. These have made him the rare breed of Filipino leader we lost. Too soon.

As Sonny and Jesse move on to their eternal destiny, they leave their work in and for the vineyard with great, giant footprints ... for us to fill in, or even just to try to fill in. (*Contributor: Rosalina Ora'a-Fuentes, PhD, President and Dean, SAIDI School of Organization Development*)