

REPLY OF TONY MELOTO TO BOO CHANCO

Dear Boo,

Thank you for honoring the spirit and the sacrifice of thousands of Filipinos here and abroad, who are helping our country through Gawad Kalinga in your inspiring column in Philippine Star on February 7.

The attention given to me due to the growing awareness about GK is embarrassing personally, but there are many other GK heroes who have also been featured by Philippine Star -- Joel Coronel, Dr. Charlie Capati, Dr. Primo Andres, Mayor Alex Tomawis of Barira (Camp Abubakar), the high school students from 20 schools who are now studying entrepreneurship in GK communities. Just like me, I am certain that they prefer to do their work quietly but it seems that this kind of good news is what our country needs and cannot be suppressed. While I am embarrassed by the attention, I have learned to deal with it if it means more people helping our country, more land donated, more houses, more schools, more volunteers -- to help the poor out of poverty. I have no doubt that more of these good news will find their way to media, because the heroism of our people is like a light that should not be hidden under the bed.

I have no profit motive, no grand dream of personal greatness and I will never run for public office. I am just a 57 year old in search of my soul as a Filipino and a father who wants to help build a legacy of a beautiful, squatter-free, slum-free, first world country to my children together with many other parents who want the best for the next generation.

Your column about GK inspired many but upset one - a certain Mr. Lorenzo Cruz. I know I need not defend myself or my family because our life is an open book, but let me clarify a few points.

Of my four children serving in GK, only Jay is receiving a modest salary for setting up GK in 43 calamity sites in Bicol. He left his life and his job in Southern California to do this. Anna, my eldest, left Nestle in 2004 a month before she was to be sent to Switzerland for training, to be a fulltime volunteer for GK. She does not receive compensation from GK. Wowie, our second daughter, is the host of the TV show Gameplan and a volunteer with Gkom under Director Maria Montelibano but she also does not receive any compensation from GK. Camille, a La Salle graduate, is also a volunteer with GK and receives no compensation.

As for Dylan, he's not only my son-in-law but a GK Partner that all of GK is happy and proud to have. After donating a BMW that he had bought just a few weeks before, he came to the Philippines to build a permanent life here. To date, he remains to be the single biggest contributor for homes to Gawad Kalinga -- he has built villages in San Jose Del Monte (Bulacan), La Carlota City, Concepcion (Tarlac), Isabel (Leyte), Maasin (Southern Leyte) and together with DSWD, helped fund 250 homes for Muslim communities in ARMM. He jumpstarted our work for food sufficiency and productivity with a substantial fund that is now providing livelihood to so many GK communities

throughout the country. His greatest contribution, however, is the inspiration he has evoked in others, especially Filipinos abroad, and how those he inspired have translated their awakened feelings for the motherland in terms of direct material support for GK communities.

His work brings him all around the world, but our growing work in the US is what prompted him to think of temporarily relocating his family in North America for six months to network with foreign corporations and institutions who want to help the poor in the Philippines, especially the victims of calamity and conflict. His children, whether born here or in any other country, merit by law British citizenship. They are already British and Filipino, and proud to be both. This is truly more than enough for them.

My hope is that we can rise together as a people and see the good in each other. On a personal note, I enjoyed the time with you and the company of many other kindred spirits who genuinely care for our country. My trip to Iloilo was paid for by the Lopez Foundation because they are building a legacy village in honor of Eugenio Lopez, Sr., among the many communities and schools they have built with GK.

Thank you, and please continue to spread the good news about our country and our people. God bless you!

Tony Meloto