

A Renaissance Girl

the web log favorites



Mona Magno-Veluz.

To Mel
who after 13 years,
can still make my heart flutter,
my head spin and my PC hang

To Carlo, Diego and Lisa
who crams my being with so much joy,
my flatulence comes out in a dance tune

To Papa, Mama,
Kuya Jun, Ate Sushi and Bebs
who love and understand me best,
considering we share the same
wonderful neuroses

Prologue

After three years of writing a web log, I decided to stop mining my life for material in February 2005 – to the relief of my favorite subject, my husband.

But as the dust cleared, I found myself sitting on more than three hundred entries about what moved me, enraged me, pleased me over a focal time when I questioned and decided on what mattered most in my life.

This booklet is a collection of web log favorites – those readers wrote to me about on the most and those I loved because of what was going on in my head when I wrote them. I also tossed in entries from my “blurt” page – well, because I needed something to add color to the lay-out.

Thank you for being a welcome lurker in my life.

The Mother Rocker

TOYS FOR THE NOT-SO-BIG BOYS

My dad gave me a lengthy sermon about my approach to what I allow my boys to play with. Carlo likes Lego's, Crash Bandicoot on Playstation, Half-Life on PCs ... and kitchen sets. Diego likes Barney, Sesame Street, Winnie the Pooh ... and Powerpuff Girls.

What's the problem?

I don't understand that old-school notion that a child's future sexual orientation is determined by the toys he/she plays with. When I was eight, my favorite presents were jackstones, electronics (like Mr. Spell) and money (now on the top of my list). I never liked stuffed toys -- in time, they just stank. I never liked Barbie's or girls who played with them -- even then, "cute" made my teeth itch. And if I got that cool Radio Shack electronics experiment set I whined about when I was nine, I STILL don't think I would be on the "other side of the fence" today -- I'd be an outrageously-paid rocket scientist at NASA!

I bought Carlo, when he was five, a cool tyke-size kitchen counter even his female cousins drool over -- only because he showed interest in cooking at a young age. He would drag the thing in front of the television every Sunday and monkey Sandy Daza. Today, my nine-year-old can bake brownies and butter cookies from scratch. Ask him what he wants to be when he grows up and he would proudly answer, "Chef." This child is a far cry from boys coached into thinking they'd be lawyers, doctors or members of the ABS-CBN Star Circle. My spawn has vision!

"the glue my son's school gave them to use for art class has the seal of approval from the bureau of food and drug. it's disturbing how what was meant to reassure parents is soo not doing the job" (11.16.2004)

My boys are also enamored with the Powerpuff Girls -- the same way I mimicked Batman, Superman and Spiderman when I was their age. I don't see any long-term damage being done on their sexuality there. If anything, little boys today are growing up, knowing little girls can kick their butts if provoked or if they feel like it -- an important fact many grown men in my generation still has to learn.

And on a parallel note, so what if they end up with alternative sexual preferences? I trust the way Mr. V and I raise our children. In the end, sexual orientation is a personal decision they have to take a stand on as adults. And it is a facet independent of their capability to do the world good. I don't share my father's fears. Obviously, he has never watched "Will and Grace." (04.16.2002)

RAMBLINGS OF A FUTURE VICKY BELO CLIENT

My husband's genes make me feel inferior.

His 77-year old mom who brought 10 children into this world can still walk 2 kilometers and not go into cardiac arrest. They have clear taut skin, do not have a tendency to be overweight and look younger than they are. They like talking healthy – their vitamin supplements, their non-consumption of oil, salt and preservatives and their successful weight maintenance diets. They bring all sorts of salads and green, leafy crap at family potluck dinners, poke around the preservative-laden goodies in my fridge, and invite me to their outrageous detox sessions. Oh, the pressure!

“she looks at her hands and sees how special she is. i look at my hands and go, “dang, i need to start using mega-moisturizing cream.” (9.30.2002)

They are effortlessly gorgeous people with a radiant healthy glow about them. My genes, on the other hand, descend from a long line of contemptibly intelligent, over-achieving, meat-loving, soda-guzzling folk, whose idea of exercise is brisk-walking to the corner store for some deep-fried banana *turon*. My husband and Carlo have that eternally boyish look that makes it difficult to place their ages. It's still too early to tell for Diego; but it sure looks like he's part of that club too.

No matter how cute and desirable I am now, decades hence when my husband and I are in our seventies -- when I've grown a mustache and sprout bat-like wings under my arms -- Mel will probably look like my nephew.

Will timeless charm and enviable wit be enough? Haha! Not likely!

So for ladies thinking of getting hitched anytime soon, you should do an age morph on your fiancé, along with blood tests, criminal background checks and credit evaluations. You don't want a husband who is potentially prettier than you.

We all do not want to be Jennifer Aniston, do we? (06.01.2002)

BATTLE ZONE

Me, today: “We're out of dishwashing liquid. Nooo! I don't want to go back ...”

I dread going to grocery stores. Except for the junk food and soda aisles, the place leaves me feeling vulnerable. It brings out the chinks in my armor in a landscape flooded with arrogant “mommy-types” who unknowingly taunt me with the effortless “domesticated-ness”.

Top Secret: I don't what "fresh" fish looks like, okay? I have no idea why some women smell meat – the scent of meat one should not buy is still a mystery to me. I cannot distinguish a bad eggplant from a good one. When the fish guy asks how I want my *bangus* cut, I would say, “With a really sharp knife?”

So I’m a mom who once flunked Home Ec – skewer my guts, why don't you?!

Before my Sunday visits to SM Supermarket in Riverbanks, Marikina, I would prepare my grocery list on an Excel spreadsheet and conceptualize my strategy in tackling the tricky layout. I would never go alone. I would always enlist my husband as a lieutenant. You know, backup.

The battle codes are determined by where we end up parking. Last Sunday (payday week-end), we could see the Mayon Volcano from where the van ended up – definitely, a Code Red. The lack of grocery carts and the mushrooming of taste test booths confirmed the “state of emergency”. My husband cringed as we reached the crowded entrance – a sign of battle-dread and possibly, a desire to retreat. But driven by the noblest of causes (my son’s dire need of diapers), I slung my shoulder bag over my head and clutched his arm. “We have to do this. I’m going in first. Watch my back.”

*“sm megamall painted the floors in their in-door parking structure. when you turn a corner, your car tires will make a screeching that sounds like someone farting while seated on a leatherette couch.”
(10.25.2004)*

In the battle zone, I systematically searched for my targets and weaved as quickly as I could through the crowd. I instructed my lieutenant not to drive the cart into hotspots where he can be stranded for days, like the shampoo/soap aisle – for that, one-man guerilla tactics were employed.

Delays in the Operation were caused by the arrogant shopper at the seafood section who didn’t want to give up the lone thong, the unmotivated produce lady who commanded the scales in slow motion, and the family ahead of us in the check-out lane with a cart full of items, most of which had unreadable bar codes.

We were out of the zone in 2 hours -- right on schedule. And I successfully managed without engaging in an exchange of fire with people who cut in line. Only injuries sustained were an ankle gash from an aggressive cart driver and a considerably lighter wallet.

Next Sunday, I fight again. (08.07.2002)

WHOSE ****BLEEP****ING FAULT IS THIS?!

I have not known pain until now -- my throbbing head leaves me in a flood of tears and my tempestuous stomach rejects anything that could nourish me and my unborn. I have not known a decent night's sleep in two weeks, as alien aches now haunt parts of me I never knew could even hurt. I walk through my days and get through my nights, consciously managing the pervasive propensity to hurl. And if my previous pregnancies were any indication, I will remain like this for another three months. ****Bleep****ing hell!

I blame Eve for eating that ****bleep****ing apple. I blame my husband for not having a ****bleep****ing uterus. I blame my husband's boy-scout sperms for being great swimmers. I blame those stupid romantic movies that make me feel hormonal. I blame my parents for making me a nausea-prone wimp. I blame science for inventing too many ****bleep****ing penis and boobs enhancers -- and not enough pregnancy-safe painkillers. I blame my children for being so wonderful that I forgot how ****bleep****ing painful it was to make them.

I am in so much pain. ****Bleep****. (02.24.2003)

GETTING MIDDLE AGE-Y?

Since my "temporary uselessness," my husband has graciously stepped up to the plate to pinch-hit for me. He managed to go to work, do the grocery shopping, oversee the kitchen, keep the boys amused, supervise the maids, deal with parent-teacher conferences himself -- and still take grand care of me. In my bed-ridden days, I dealt with my guilt by promising myself to treat him to a nice evening out as soon as I'm feeling up to it.

"my boys convinced me to re-enact black eyed peas' 'hey mama' video. i think i threw my back trying to move like fergie. i feel like i just got run over by the 'midlife express'."
(09.02.2004)

Last Friday was the night. I made plans for us to have a super nice dinner and to see Rex Navarette at the AFP Theatre -- a break I felt he truly deserved. But when he picked me up at the office at 6 o'clock and saw I was nauseated and weak, he good-naturedly called it a night. In the car, I was apologizing to my eyeballs about the cancelled plans. Instead of negotiating for a better deal the next time (something I would certainly have done, if roles were reversed), he said, "It's okay. Staying at home with you and the boys can be more fun than any show."

I would never have thought that my boyfriend from the early 90s who could down half a case of beer, liked to barhop 'til two am and had a thing for driving to nowhere just so we didn't have to go home would say something like that. It was a very . . . um, "middle-age-y" thing to say. But who cares? It's exactly what I've always wished the man I was going to love for all eternity would feel.

So the next time my husband chews with his mouth open just to spite me, or licks chocolate icing off his plate, or forgets to flush the toilet, I will resist the urge to kick him in the shin and remember how truly lucky I am to have him in my life. (04.10.2003)

BOYS OF SUMMER

I have been screeching more often at my boys lately. With my 10-year-old on summer vacation, he and his 3-year-old brother have had a lot of time to “bond”.

More than once, I caught them beating on each other (it wasn't a fair fight -- the little one is a fearless biter) all because one wanted to watch Channel 2 and the other wanted Channel 23 on TV -- while the stations were on simultaneous broadcast! Let me clarify -- the stations were showing exactly the same program! Bites, bumps, and bruises have been the siblings' summer staples.

When they're not tearing each other to bits, the two can be found extinguishing their boredom through backyard explorations. The latest experiments include a shampoo taste test, a can-we-stop-an-electric-fan-from-spinning-using-only-our-fingers trial and a what-would-happen-to-the-washing-machine-if-we-dump-gravel-in-it demo. On one particularly troublesome day, I could have sworn I saw my maid searching my children for 666 birthmarks.

I grew up in the company of well-behaved (most of the time) little girls. My boys' increasing hyperactivity is something I'm finding hard to get used to. My husband, being the tenth of 10 kids (5 girls, 5 boys), on the other hand, never even raises an eyebrow when one of our kids come crashing down the stairs!

So I just got me a new resolution. Instead of upsetting myself into a coronary and ruining my “cool mama” rep, I will let my boys be boys. I will not panic as long as:

*“being a parent
three times over, i
know for a fact that
shouting is a futile
exercise. only my
children can do that
and actually get
what they want.”
(09.28.2003)*

One, body parts remain intact.

Two, no one is unconscious.

And three, there are no blood stains on the couch.

We just had it re-upholstered. (04.28.2003)

ASTIG-MAMA-TISM

We got a nice surprise yesterday. Together with an outrageous bill for a Christmas pageant costume, my youngest son brought home a Gingersnaps catalogue where he and some five or so of his play school classmates appeared in the "Kids Say" page. And as expected, Mommy beamed -- I smiled so much I had a face cramp.

I went to the school this morning to return the magazine. I wasn't sure if it was mine to keep, you see. It would be a tad embarrassing if they asked for it back and I already had it framed in oak and bolted to a wall.

After being told I could go ahead with my plans to laminate, I bumped into another corporate mom. Upon seeing the catalogue I carried, she was immediately inclined to march up to the directress' office with a burning question: "Why was my child not in the magazine?" I had to control myself from blurting the obvious: "Umm, *kasi ho ang pangit ng anak n'yo.*"

Moms are truly cursed. We are cursed with limited sight when it comes to our kids. We all have a bad case of my-murdering-spawn-on-death- row-is-really-really-a-good-boy kind of astigmatism.

*"diego. my son. poet
extraordinaire:
"mommy you are so
very very very very
not stinky."
(02.01.2004)*

And that, my friends, is why I never bring mini-photo albums around in my purse. Showing your kids' photos to friends is like holding a gun to their heads and asking "*Ang cute ng mga anak ko, di ba? DI BA?!*" And the poor friends, with crossed fingers, raised eyebrows and dilated pupils, will have no choice but to nod and lie through their teeth.

Not that my friends will ever have to lie. My kids ARE cute, *di ba? DI BA?!*
(12.05.2003)

MY SON'S BALLS

"MOMMY, HELP!" My four-year old screamed from his bedroom. "MY BALLS ARE STUUUUUCK!"

Instantly, my brain churned out a scene from "There's Something About Mary." I was panicking as I ran up the stairs from the living room, expecting to find my little baby losing a battle with his zipper. The incessant thuds and Diego's wailing from the bedroom did not help.

I opened the door and found him, teary-eyed from frustration, struggling to get marbles out of the mini-snooker table he got for Christmas. If that was a Rorschach, how'd you think I did? (01.16.2004)

BAD LUCK

Mel and I were driving home one night when a black cat crossed our path. As usual, Mel didn't even decelerate and we missed the poor feline by an inch. I felt I had to say something. "If we ran over the cat wouldn't it be like double bad luck or something?"

The love of my life pondered on this dramatically before retorting, "If I ran it over and it's guts were splattered all over the cement, who do you think had bad luck?"

*"he said: i want to
watch 'road to
perdition'. i said:
sabi nila mabagal
daw. he said:
syempre naman.
1920s e. luma yung
mga kotse."
(09.25.2002)*

I hate it when he's right. (11.11.2004)

MEL AND MONA

A few days ago, Mel and I celebrated our wedding anniversary. 13 years together. That's 156 months. Or 4,745 days. However you look at it, that's a long time! Not long enough to learn how to totally ignore each other's "quirks" (like always forgetting to flush or licking icing off OTHER PEOPLE's plates); but long enough to know our individual "weirdness" is balanced out by more important things.

Years after that fateful Saturday I took Mel's last name, I realize that being with a man like him for so long has changed me for the good. And the not so good:

1. I can belch audibly now -- something I didn't know how to do until Mel taught me how.
2. I'm hopelessly obsessed with getting rid of body hair -- freakishly so. He pushed me into it.
3. I can name all the basketball playing positions now. And after wondering for most of my childhood, I finally know what "travelling" is.
4. I have no drive to wash the car, check the oil or take my vehicle to the mechanic. I don't sweat over mechanical hiccups -- especially since my husband is only a call away when a flat needs changing or when the car battery needs resuscitation. I figure I shouldn't deprive him of the joy of "saving" me.
5. I can now hold my breath for roughly two minutes. That's how long it takes for the stink of Mel's flatulence to dissipate in a well-ventilated room.

*“it just dawned on
my husband and
me. there's two of
us versus three
kids. uh-oh. we're
outnumbered. “
(10.19.2003)*

No doubt about it -- my husband has been an important force in my life. His unwavering support helped me through hard decisions I had to make with my career, my health and my hair-dos. His prudence with money balances out my genetically-dictated tendencies to take out my tension-anger-frustration-menstrual cramp on my credit card. His love is constantly and flagrantly showered on our three children who we pray will grow up with his patience and my passion, his discipline and my drive, his body fat ratio and my intelligence quotient.

Oh, how I love him so -- *grabe!*

M&M -- the adventure continues. (11.30.2004)

The Corporate Slave

THE TRUTH

An HR guy from another company called me today. Apparently, some guy I sacked five years ago wrote me in as a character reference. Me? He was probably desperate for work, I realized. I opted to hold back on the truth a teensy bit:

Why did he leave the company? The slanted truth: He had good personal skills and was an excellent marketer; but there was a gap between his skill set and the technical competencies the job urgently required. The god-honest truth: The guy was dumb beyond belief and didn't know it. I had to sack him.

How was he at work? The slanted truth: He was well liked by his co-workers. And he performed as expected in the six months he was in our employ. The god-honest truth: Remember Woody Harrelson's character on "Cheers"? He was like that -- only not as cute and not as funny.

Was he ever involved in militant activities? The slanted truth: We are not unionized -- so, no. But I would not know about his affiliations after he left the company. The god-honest truth: The guys in my division could be sacrificing virgin women to pagan gods in their spare time, and I wouldn't know. Honestly, how deep-down-personal do employees want to get with their bosses?

Would you recommend him to take on managerial responsibility? The slanted truth: It's been five years since I saw him. I am not familiar with how his managerial competence has developed since. The god-honest truth: I got one word for you -- Enron. (05.14.2002)

*"some jerk forwards
a 3-month-old
instruction from
head office
requesting for a
detailed 5-year
econometric forecast
of telecoms-specific
indices with a note:
'sorry forgot to
include you in the
distribution.
deadline's
tomorrow. your best
effort will be
appreciated.' how
do you say, 'bite
me!' in swedish?
(? 14 2003)*

A GHOST OF FOLLIES PAST

Mrs. C walked up to me as I was on my way out to lunch last Monday. She was a delicate, retirement-anxious supervisor who worked in the department next to mine in PLDT a decade back. Seeing her after all these years was an odd surprise. The fact that she still remembers me was an even bigger wonder -- until she said with a raised eyebrow: "Oh, I can never forget what you did to me in Cavite."

Suddenly, I felt a dark wave overwhelm me. It surged in a downward spiral that flushed me back to February 1990. I was fresh out of college, attending a company workshop in Puerto Azul. I was boisterously flirting with Cutie-from-the-other-department while 300 co-slaves faked listening to a speaker drone on about corporate loyalty crap no one would remember in 10 years. In an exaggerated *pa-tweetums* motion, I crossed my legs, only to sense my heavily heeled shoe fly up into space. All Cutie-from-the-other-department and I could do was watch it ricochet from my foot ****swoosh**** ... to a wall ****bog**** ... to the ceiling ****blagabog**** ... to the chandelier ****plink**** ... to the table behind us ****ARAAAY!****.

*"i was lovingly
grooming my baby
today. as i fished
out her first booger,
i accidentally
dropped it into her
mouth."
(09.22.2003)*

At its maximum velocity, my shoe hit poor Mrs. C right smack in the middle of her forehead, shattering her reading glasses and knocking her off her chair. The seminar was interrupted as half the room rushed to her aid, thinking she was shot! The other half thought she was having a heart attack! How could I have forgotten her dazed, glassy-eyed look and my shoe print between her eyebrows? I lived the next 15 minutes in slow motion. Mrs. C thought it was a sick joke and I did it on purpose! (After all this time, deep down, I feel she still thinks so.)

Man, assorted renditions of that moment entertained the division for weeks! Not to mention branded me for years -- "Oh, so YOU'RE the airhead from ManCon with the homicidal shoe!" ****stifle snort snicker****

It took this long for me to regain a semblance of professional dignity ... and for Mrs. C to talk to me again. If I haven't said it enough these last 12 years, sorry, sorry, sorry, sorry *po talaga* Mrs. C. (07.31.2002)

CUSTOMER CARE

The responsibility for our company customer care center may be moved to my division, or so they say. During the discussions for the possible transfer, I kept thinking, "Crap, they don't know what they're getting themselves into."

Given my short-lived experience in call handling, I hold the privilege of being the worst call center personnel of all time. If the transfer happens, I will be living proof that "Those who can't, lead."

Back in the days of the telephone monopoly, PLDT made the most money out of its operator-assisted long distance services. So, when the PLDT rank-and-file went on strike, those who weren't in the union (as we were ****cough**** "management" -- sans the executive benefits) were REQUIRED to sit as long distance operators.

On the first day of the strike, I arrogantly yawned my way through orientation. *"It was just a friggin' phone with a headset, attached to a mainframe. How complicated could it be to work it?"* I thought. By the end of my first 8 hours on the board, I was told I haven't been pushing a little red button before each call - - ergo, I have not been charging the calls I were setting up. That was probably P50,000 of revenues out the window because of me. Oopsie.

That figure didn't even include the calls I dropped because I didn't have the energy to complete them.

Me: *"PLDT, Long Distance."*

Nok *"My name Nok Takdnaiorralgnadgnonlksnngalor.
Call Thailand."*

Me: *"Could you please spell your name for me, Ma'm?"*

Nok: *"Eng-Or-Kay..." (spells rest of name for ten minutes)*

Me: *(Aaaaaw, hell...) "One moment please." (Press "end call")*

I don't know how patient people do it -- they possess gifts I will never have. All I know is the world is a better place because my rear end is not parked in a call center somewhere. (05.22.2003)

*"overheard two kfc managers in an elevator, musing on the mysterious reason for their weight gain since they started working at the fast food franchise. my take: uh, free fried chicken?"
(02.12.2003)*

MY FAVORITE DOG STORY

My first job was with PLDT where I worked for the Management Control Division and eventually Provincial Operations. We did audits on a lot of people - commercial front liners, traffic operators, field installers -- and ratted on the slackers to top management. We were the folks who people either avoided or tried to bribe. It was from my stint there that I got this little gem.

"the man at city hall taking my tax payment was snacking on peanuts. a nut then fell and lodged itself in the keyboard causing panic and mayhem. it took 4 bureaucrats and 15 minutes to get it out. reaching through the hole in the glass and flipping the keyboard upside down would have been faster, but i wouldn't have anything to blog about. (10.28.2004)

Filipino folktales tell us that dogs can tell if evil spirits are afoot. A Manila City (a place where they still report sightings of *manananggal*'s) household that just had a wired phone installed, observed that every time the phone rang, their three dogs started to bark and howl like mad. Ergo, the family reported to our repair call center that their phone was possessed by evil. When our audit team got there, it turned out that the telephone was grounded to a metal pipe outside -- the same pipe to which all three dogs were tied with a metal chain. So, every time the phone rang, the dogs were actually being jolted with electricity.

The report on this incident read: "Sub-standard installation. Poor dogs. Stupid humans." (04.04.2002)

The Philosopher Stoned

WEB DESIGNER LIMBO

The personal computer became commercially successful when I was in college. Once upon a time, I raved over the capabilities of my 286KB PC. Computer education in the 80s meant I had to learn to code in Basic and Pascal. My sister, who is only 4 years older and was a Math major, had to do computations on mainframes and carry scads of “IBM” cards.

My peers missed the whole Internet bruhaha. Still recovering from the uselessness of learning Pascal, they have resolved to breathe “computer independent” lives. When I first started publishing stuff on the net, my friends never got to see my amateur creations as they didn’t have web access -- those who did, couldn’t figure out how to make Microsoft Internet Explorer work (“So I have to dial-up every time? This thing is really stupid, *ha.*”). When I announced I now had a web log -- just this week -- my husband thought it was a new let’s-not-let-the-kids-know-we’re-horny term (“Sure, dear, I want to see your blog; but can I touch it too?”). I am learning new java scripts from kids who were born the year I started high school (“So, you were actually at EDSA One?”).

The Philippines has a telephone density index of about twelve percent. Of the twelve percent, I would guess only ten percent have PCs and are wired to the net. Of the ten percent of twelve percent, about five percent publish or blog or contribute in some shape, way or form to Internet content. Of that number, it is optimistic of me to speculate three percent is in my age group. Removing those who run sites on politics, organized religion and Erap jokes, only I am left. (02.26.2002)

*"i got an email from
a mr. r. FENIS from
south cotabato. my
heart goes out to
you and your entire
family, sir."
(11.25.2002)*

IMELDA'S DISCIPLE

I got me a hot pair of Ferragamo's. Sexy, strappy, black leather sling-backs with 3-inch heels. They are so fine ...

... I was willing to feed my boys "Spam" and "Lucky Me" for a month just to have them. The darn thing set me back 15 g's.

... I hang around the office elevator lobby for minutes at a time so I can admire the reflected silhouette on a nearby glass door of what looks like my long thin legs.

... I stand still, put my feet on my desk and cross my legs a lot -- just so I can do model poses.

"the lifestyle network is the devil. watching it makes me want to rob a bank." (7.11.2002)

... I want to have sex with them on.

... I do not mind the shoe-induced backache.

... I dream of getting them in 3 other colors.

Ah, nothing like covering one's feet in dead animal hide to lift a woman's spirits. (05.10.2002)

UNSAID

WHAT WAS SAID:

No, I don't want to have this conversation. In fact, I don't want to talk to you ever again. Good-bye.

WHAT SHOULD HAVE BEEN SAID:

I loved you like you could never comprehend. A lifetime ago, our whispered conversations would translate to 50-page entries on my old purple diary with the lock and key. I memorized your eyes and the way they crinkled when you grinned. I could trace from memory where the skin on your face plunged into your dimples. I loved the scent of Irish Spring – because it reminded me of how adorable you looked whenever you came to class late, as if you just stepped out of the shower. You were among the handful who could make me blush. And you alone could torment me.

You became a juvenile ideal against which all other men were measured. So the loves that came after you were TOO MUCH like you – they seemed larger than life yet hollow where the marrow was supposed to be. Just when I was convinced that my life would just be a series of near misses, your unembellished opposite came in the guise of a friend. And we were right on target.

Now, eons after it mattered, you say you want to be with me. Looking at photos of my children stings your eyes because you envy their father. I can still light up a room, you say. Only I can calm your heart, you claim. I am your soul mate, you realize. I searched the recesses of my soul for the right words -- and the answer that was true to what I really felt eluded me until now.

*"sure way to meet men: pop your car hood and look into the engine. 'doesn't matter if your car is in perfect working order and you were just checking if your missing cat was caught in the auxillary fan, throngs of men will come offering to fix your motor vehicle. it really is baffling how they can't help themselves.
(05.27.2004)*

ARE YOU **bleep**ING CRAZY, YOU STUPID ASSWIPE? I called you a year ago because the nausea from the disaster-that-was-our-relationship just wore off (10 years later) and I was curious (as in car-accident curious) about what you've become. How the hell did you get the idea that I wanted an affair? Cripes! Even if your inference to "Same Time, Next Year" amused me, I am shaking my head at how I overestimated your depth.

Please take this down, so there is no misunderstanding this time:

- * If you think coffee and conversation constitutes an invitation for coitus, consult your manual again.
- * If you think you are so irresistible to me, you were thinking of the "me" who didn't know what the national dick length average was.
- * If you just want kids, I know at least two unmarried women who want the same thing. You can give them your magna cum laude sperm and split the litter.
- * If my likeness now haunts you, cherish it as that's the only way you're ever going to see me again.
- * If not being with me will kill your spirit, tough!
- * If you blame me for coming back into your life, well hell, I didn't know you're a whining loser now.
- * And no, I'm not flattered.

That ****pokes both eyes**** is for the years of torture. That ****karate chops his Adam's apple**** is for once insulting me with a replacement girl who had a mustache. And that ****kicks his very small balls**** is for thinking I am soul-less enough to trade my wonderful husband and beautiful kids for the likes of you.

IF our last conversation was NOT your I-need-to-get-laid-bad dialogue and IF indeed, you are in authentic emotional torment (in a sick Glen-Close-in-Fatal-Attraction way), then GOOD. (06.17.2002)

"a red ford explorer cut in front of me along libis, almost sending me crashing into another car. as he sped away, his bumper sticker glared at me: "god loves you." oh yes, he does and when "the big guy" finds out what you did, i hope he fries your ass with lightning bolt." (01.21.2003)

THE TAO OF CUERVO

I dreamt I lost all my teeth last night: I was sitting in a car, talking to Bessie (my colleague) when I felt my teeth loosen and fall off – painfully reminding me of the 8 years it took to straighten my bite. I looked up “lose teeth” in my dream dictionary and the darn thing told me I am entering a period of “existential angst or famine.” Unless the McDonald’s stores I usually buy my lunch from are running out of cheeseburgers and french fries, I figured I am meant to question and re-define my life’s purpose – AGAIN.

‘Sounds about right. After rage, the natural progression in my emotional cycles leads to melancholia, after all. And what better way to think oneself in to depression than to examine one’s purpose in life – or lack of it.

Cuervo, our X-dog, runs after a school bus that goes through our street every day. He was run over by the same bus once; but he recovered and surprisingly, has failed to associate that four-wheeled child transport with his near-death experience. He knows when the bus is due -- his ears would stand up in alert mode at the same time every morning. As soon as his target is in sight, he would break into a sprint, with his head close to his doggie shoulders – as if he studied which running form is most aerodynamic. Over the last year or so, his fervor has infected other neighborhood dogs. Now, he leads a whole pack of canines in a mission to, one day, capture that blasted bus.

Our dog and his pals probably have no idea what to do with the bus when they do catch it – but that’s not the point, is it? The point is: there is no point, but one has to keep going.

What/Where the ****bleep**** is my “bus” anyway? Perhaps, the greater question is: if I find my “bus,” will I have the passion to chase after it with the gusto of a dog undaunted by death by Bridgestone tire? Or will I be the bitch sitting on the sidelines, barking how stupid her death-courting, butt-sniffing friends are, until the day she crosses the street without looking and gets run over by a same bus herself?

Sigh. (08.28.2002)

OF STERNER STUFF

I was on the phone the other day with my older sister who now lives in Southern California. At the time, she was calmly sitting through a blackout that has plagued their Memorial Day weekend. Outside her house, her neighbors were freaking out, most likely spewing theories of unlikely rebel invasions. This proves what I've known for a long time -- Filipinos make wonderful expats. We speak good English. We work hard. And we were weaned on generous doses of disasters, both natural and man-made, that we chuckle at the worst of what developed countries have to offer.

If anyone ever organizes a Mr. Tough Guy World Pageant, we would DEFINITELY make it to the interview portion:

Arnold Aryan: “I am from the First World. My body is a product of a protein-rich, hi-fiber diet and daily workouts. I can bench-press 300 pounds. See my perfect muscle tone? I won 12 Olympic gold medals in 5 different events. In my spare time, I enjoy snowboarding and car racing. My country is safe, rich and efficient. Our Armed Forces is the best in the world. We stand for excellence, integrity, and justice. We are a global superpower -- piss us off and we'll nuke your sorry hides.”

Bhong Batungbakal: “I'm from the Philippines. I am only five feet two inches and 110 pounds; but very strong from a steady diet of *balut* and Lucky Me Supreme. I work 10 hours a day, unloading trucks of 50-kilo rice sacks -- I can carry three sacks at a time. I've had malaria once, typhoid fever twice and dengue fever three times. I've been stabbed by neighborhood drunks on four occasions. See my scars? For fun, my countrymen and I vote for crooks, liars and cheats for the highest public offices – so we can have a big Kick-the-President-Out party at least once a decade. My country's armed forces fly World

*“police visibility --
that's when, instead
of sleeping in the
precincts, policemen
nap in full view of
the public.”
(12.7.2003)*

War II vintage aircrafts, but hell, our soldiers can survive in the jungles of Mindanao for years, living on nothing bugs, snakes and tree bark. Our government is a mess -- Murphy's Law being an integral provision in our Constitution. If a superpower ever nukes us, I'm sure we'll just get a really dark tan."

We're Filipino. Don't. mess. with. us. (09.08.2002)

MY NEW SUPER POWERS

Pregnancy has sent my senses on hyper drive. I feel like a *bleep*ing Marvel superhero -- a really fat one.

Last week, a lady wearing vanilla perfume got in the elevator with me. The scent sent me prying the metal doors open with my fingernails before we got to my floor, as I could actually taste her perfume. Eew.

I thought that was freaky -- until I realized yesterday that, between my husband and my two boys, I could tell who farted by the smell alone. Yep, I'm sure that skill will save mankind very soon.

*"i'm losing my neck.
damn, i need to
start working out. if
i slide any more, i'm
going to look like a
walking lpg tank."
(9.11.2002)*

And don't get me started on garlic. I could taste traces of the thing (a spice I abhor when pregnant) on plates even after thorough washing. 'Vampire-ish almost. Uh and no, despite my husband's constant pleading, I have no intention of naming my unborn child Spike.

If only my new powers could help me reach my toenails. As I'm five months on the way, it's getting harder to paint them myself. Sigh. (05.05.2003)

MY BORACAY

Everybody -- as in absolutely everybody -- has been to Boracay this summer. Even my friend Tess (who is 6 months pregnant), her 1-year old daughter and their dog have a Boracay tan. Everyone has recently had their moment under the clear blue smog-less Boracay sky and has had the island's powder-fine white sand creep stealthily into their crevices. That is, everyone except me.

Not that I should complain really. The last time I was in Boracay was in 1993 (jeez, that's ten years ago!) when urban-dwellers were only starting to discover its charm. Yes, folks, I saw Boracay before they built the country clubs, the golf courses and the spas. Back then, having a "Boracay body" meant you were a

local fisherman whose motor boat conked out a lot and you got buff because you had to swim 20 kilometers to shore one too many times. "Going out for dinner" meant we had to brave the local *talipapa* and had to ask a kind toothless local to charcoal-broil us some fish and eggplants, which we devoured on banana leaves by the beach. A beach front hut rented out for less than 500 pesos (US\$ 10). There was no phone on the island (much less a cell site to give coverage to our 2-kilogram cell phone-in-a-bag) -- just an antiquated public trunk radio system run by a guy who got his kicks imagining he was a communications officer for the Navy or something ("*Rujir. Tin-por un dat, gud badi. Obir-obir.*"). The only Boracay souvenir you could get was the sand you harvest out of rear crack when you got home.

Crazy as it may sound; I loved the "old" Boracay – MY Boracay. Clearly, the whole "lifestyle" associated with the island these days is a far cry from the sleepy rural village that first blew me away.

Wonder if going back means I am setting myself up for disappointment?
(05.16.2003)

THE BRA DILEMMA

When it comes to putting on the standard snap-at-the-back brassiere, women can be classified into two groups.

The first are the "Back Snappers." They sling the straps over their shoulders first, and hook on the snaps with their hands at their backs.

The second are the "Front Snappers." They swing their bras around their waist, hook the snaps in front of them, slide the bras around until the cups are in the right place and finally, sling the straps over their shoulders.

Descending from a long line of short-limbed women, I belong to the second group -- which is a real bummer as I'm pregnant. I get stuck after the "hook the snaps" step. The damn thing won't go around my waist like it used to. When I manage to get the brassiere all the way around, the blood circulation to my legs have already been cut off. Darn it.

Tomorrow, I'll improvise. Will sling my bra around my neck, hook and pull down. (06.07.2003)

*"found carlo and diego hunched over the baby's crib, laughing at how lisa's legs are so fat. the seed of my daughter's body image issues has been sown."
(12.05.2004)*

AS IN, NOW NA TALAGA!

In my book, the following situations can be labeled “urgent” and in classifying them as such, no time should be wasted contemplating on details.

. . . When you’ve downed 6 bottles of beer and nature calls.

. . . When your best friend cannonballs into the shallow end of the pool and doesn’t come up after two minutes.

*“people keep telling me that pregnancy suits me and that i’ve been especially “radiant” lately. ergo, before i got knocked up, i looked like crap.”
(04.30.2003)*

. . . When your soul mate is at the altar marrying the bitch from hell and the priest asks if anyone disagrees with the union.

. . . When enemy nuclear missiles are 30 seconds from you and you’ve got the red button.

. . . When a pregnant woman says she’s famished and asks for a friggin’ donut. (06.16.2003)

IMAGINE

Imagine having a twenty pound mass on your belly for say ... three months. It makes your back ache and cuts circulation to your legs when you stay on your feet for more than thirty minutes.

Imagine trying to get some sleep but can’t do so on your back because the weight on your tummy won’t let you breathe right. So you try sleeping on your side -- but after staying in that position for an hour or so, you lose all feeling in your fingers.

Imagine hearing funny creaking sounds when you walk -- that come from either the strained wooden floor boards or your aching hip joints.

Imagine your feet swelling to ginger-like things which look really creepy, especially after a French pedicure.

Imagine a time when the most challenging part of your day is getting into your underwear under five minutes.

That's right -- imagine all of that the next time you and your husband/partner decide to get frisky without birth control. (08.26.2003)

STUPID QUESTIONS

I was a patient at the Makati Medical Center from August 30 to September 12 (Relax, I won't bore you with the details of the state of my bodily functions). In that period of time, I came across many brilliant and caring health care professionals, as well as a few from the other end -- waaay back on the other end of the spectrum.

A student nurse got my permission to ask some questions for what I assumed to be standard medical profiling. Right after "Do you have any allergies?", the kid goes, "Do you have any problems with your family?" I said, "No" when I wanted to whack her on the head and bellow, "*Hija*, I'm here to deliver a child. The psych patients are ten floors down."

A nutritionist sat down with me to revel at the range of hospital cuisine. She asked: "So, do you have any food preferences?" I said, "No, I have none" when I really wanted to grab her by the shirt collar and shake her into realizing the obvious, "Lady, I've been on a low-salt, low-fat, zero-caffeine diet for nine months. I want potato chips, a cheese pizza and a caramel frapuccino!"

After hours of lying in bed, fighting the tendency to sleep the day away and render my brain lethargic, I was entering the REM sleep phase at around 10 pm one night, when I awoke to an urgent tap and a nurse aide's wide-eyed query, "Ma'm, *ilang beses na ho kayo nag-wiwi* since 2 pm?" I ignored her completely – but I would have enjoyed bonking her unconscious with a bed pan. (09.15.2003)

DYAHE

When I'm out driving with my husband, the radio is tuned to an a.m. station. After all, responsible adults are supposed to know about politics and government whitewashes, about the price of fish and about traffic traps, right?

But when I'm alone in the car, as I was yesterday, I plug in my mp3 player, switch it to "random play" and listen to my current favorites. Well, I sing to them actually. More accurately, I sing to them aloud.

So, I was doing my best Rob Thomas, when I realized a group of college boys on the back-end of a *jeepney* were watching me, smiling. A lifetime ago, I would have done my patented goddess of *dead-ma* look and turned away, just like any respectable woman in her thirties. But something snapped in my head and I did the strangest

*"just when i thought
comedy was
running thin in my
life, i see a street
vendor wearing a t-
shirt with the word
"hope" printed all
around the torso. if
you read it from the
front, you get "ho".
ya-hah, i want one.
(11.5.2002)*

thing. I shifted my shades lower on my nose, raised my hand with my thumb, pointing finger and pinky in the air and mouthed “rock on.” They laughed and signaled me back.

Dyahe talaga -- I am so in denial.

That little episode must be an unexpected outcome of my niece’s 17th birthday party yesterday. She’s a head taller than I am and a college sophomore now. Jeez, I was a college junior when she was born. That’s 17 plus . . . oh hell.

When I start wearing pigtailed and tiny cropped shirts, shoot me. (10.06.2003)

MINE IS JUST TOO BIG -- OR SO THEY SAY

A woman’s purse is her arsenal. It gives her a sense of security, peace of mind. It doubles as a shield from rain, from unflattering mirrors and from people she wants to avoid. So it really annoys me when someone insinuates my purse is too big. Aside from irritating me (*Ang kapal mo! Ikaw ba ang pinagdadala ko ng bag ko?*), he insulted my “war”-tested black Coach stewardess bag. He hurt my baby’s feelings.

Besides, I only bring essentials: a wallet (which stores 30 cards, cash and a fountain pen), a mobile phone, a Palm m130, a Palm keyboard, an mp3 player, a digital camera, a paper diary, rouge, a rouge brush, eye make up, eyeliner, lip gloss, a hair brush, keys and a lot of mints. On some days, I toss in a hair dryer, a phone charger, some stationery, a book – but that doesn’t really happen oft . . . okay, it does. But who cares? *Ikaw ba ang pinagdadala ko ng bag ko?* (Uh, Mel, you don’t have to answer that.)

“one gift i got for my birthday was a bag that had chinese calligraphy all over it. it was cute except i have no idea what the prints say. i might be walking around town with a purse that screams, “i’m a shanghai prostitute.” (11.7.2003)

We women with big purses are a special breed. Sure, we may not be popular when we attempt to maneuver airplane aisles; but we “save lives” by always having a spare safety pin for that popped seam. Also, if you were in a public place when nuclear bombs or fighter planes or alien spaceships were about to zap the city to a crisp, you’d want to stay close to the lady with the biggest purse. It’s likely she has enough mints in her handbag to feed three people through a nuclear winter. (03.26.2004)

TIL DEATH -- OR YOUR MISTRESS -- DO US PART

There comes a time in every adult's life when all your friends seem to be getting married, when thick embossed linen envelopes in the equivalent of a rain forest arrive at your doorstep with no end. On one hand, you feel blessed because you have been asked to take part in such an important part of someone's life -- you can gleefully insult your friends' gowns/suits until your eyes go numb. On the other, it also marks the end of your all-night adventures. If you're lucky, you'll get a gift-sucking *inaanak* to replace the drinking buddy you're losing.

Then you come to where I am -- when all of your friends seem to be breaking up -- some after two years, some after twelve. The horror stories from my female friends of stuff their husbands do is enough for me to want to beat Mel with a golf club now to save me future heartache. The revelations from my male friends of the passion in their marriage going "poof" make me want to go ask Mel to declare his undying love for me -- every three minutes. (Hang on. Hitting him with a golf club may dampen his desire to tell me he loves me. I have to rework that plan.)

During these cheesecake-coffee or beer-chicken-wings sessions, I try to do the decent thing and empathize, console -- except for that time when J told me he found his soul mate in his cheesy tube top-loving mistress, when of course, I had to cough "bullsh*t" between bites of my chicken. And I just had to highlight to T in our recent email: "if your husband sends you an annulment application form, he doesn't want to get back together!!!"

*"overheard a boy
shopping for home
appliances with his
mom: 'mama, look
it's an electric GIRL!'
ha, you wish.
you and 99 percent
of the male
population."
(04.13.2004)*

It scares me how I was the first on board the marriage train and how, after my friends got off at the last stop, I am still holding hands with Mel. You think they know something I don't? (06.04.2004)

DIAGON ALING

Growing up, I never liked to go to the *palengke*. There was the smell of raw chicken and meat that made me want to hurl, and the nasty stinky puddles that looked like primordial soup from which new life forms were about to emerge. On Sundays when my mom would ask me to drive her to the market (and carry her *bayong* around for her), I tried to fake mortal illness almost every time.

My mom was the ultimate *palengke* expert. She knew how to haggle. She knew what fresh food looked like. She knew obscure vegetables by name (a skill graduate school did not equip me with). She knew what to do with strange-looking seafood that looked like they should be on the endangered species list (personally, I only buy *tilapia* as buying fresh *bangus* still intimidates me). And she had a well-tuned shit-o-meter that no vendor ever successfully pulled a fast one on her. If only I wasn't so busy doing the grossed out *colegiala* act on those trips to the market with my mom, I would have probably learned something useful.

Given my unadventurous food-shopping disposition, I was happy to go to one of those warehouse clubs to get my supplies for my new business. The goods were cheap (as per my limited knowledge), they accepted plastic and the sales people didn't wear dusters.

*"just saw the scariest thing. a 40ish overweight woman with bleached blonde hair grocery shopping in a flimsy silk sleeveless top. without a bra. oh the nightmares i'm getting tonight!"
(12.8.2004)*

But my world changed when I ventured into one of Metro Manila's bigger markets a few weeks ago. My first reaction: "ANG MURAAAAA!" -- as much as 50 percent cheaper! Plus my suppliers had interesting nommes worthy of loyal patronage, like *Mang Jun Saging* and *Aling Lydia Lumpia*. The fact that they did not issue official receipts or that I had to pay cash or that I could see my *suki's* nipples peeking from the fringes of his well-worn *sando* is a non-issue.

Okay, so maybe the nipple thing still freaks me out.
(9.18.2004)

FINDING ME

Today marks the first anniversary of my exodus from corporate life. A year ago today, I gave up what was a relatively lucrative career to find that which seemed to be missing in my life. Having worked immediately and continuously after college, I knew experiencing a life different from the one I had for the last fifteen years would add dimension to my existence. While a mid-life "career" change in unheard of (especially in my circles), I knew deep-down that it was what I needed to feel fulfilled.

I wanted to be clear in what were most important in my life and I wanted my actions/career/goals to directly contribute to that. I wanted to do everything I dreamed about when I was younger -- and make a living out of it (except for the burlesque dancing -- long story).

I longed to spend, not just quality, but quantity time with my kids. I wanted to be at home when stuff happened -- not just hear about it from my maids when I arrived home for dinner. For Carlo and Diego, I was at the office when my babies walked and talked for the first time. I only caught the replays. I wanted things to be different with Lisa.

I aimed to prove that I could work the washing the machine. That I could iron a pair of pants and make crisp folds. While I know I will always design a Microsoft Access database better than I could make a Sunday evening dinner, I wanted to show Mel I could create a meal that didn't involve deep-frying.

A year hence, I got what I wanted. I've become an entrepreneur with an exciting medium-term plan. I've seen Lisa through many firsts. And today, I just hosed maggots out of our giant trash can with expert skill. Yep, I am feeling so complete right about now. (11.20.2004)

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Her site <http://monaveluz.com> has been featured in the Philippine Daily Inquirer for her web log. While she no longer writes about her day-to-day adventures, she continues to publish her prose and poetry and to contribute to on-line publications.

This emancipated corporate slave now pours her time and energy into her life's passions – her husband of 13 years, her three children and her budding business.

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