

Patreng and the Bayanihan Story of the Filipino People

(Original)

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All I could hear that day was myself breathing through my mouth as I gasped for air while walking down the street. I was looking for the right spot, thinking that it may be in front of a residential building or a supermarket.

As I continued walking, my mind and soul were dancing with the music of silence around me. The market stalls were closed, and the street was empty. I could see some drivers standing by on their trikes, hoping for passengers to arrive. A few residents were walking around but were not wearing a facemask. These scenarios were unusual before the pandemic, but they became like recurring episodes of a movie series.

After several minutes of walking, I came across the perfect location. It was in front of a convenience store near a Korean restaurant. I did not hesitate to talk to the store owners, and they did not hesitate to allow me to use that spot.

I rushed to go back home. Then I returned with a bamboo cart and the groceries I packed earlier that day. I set them up on that spot with a note "Take according to your needs; Give according to your capacity" written on a piece of a cardboard box. I took a picture of it and posted it on Facebook to reach out to the poorest people in my community.

My heart was smiling as I walked home. Thinking of the poor people who lost their jobs and livelihood because of the pandemic makes me feel sick. I had something to eat on my plate, but knowing that many families could not have anything on their tables, I couldn't even take a bite. I knew putting up that small community pantry was something I needed to do because that is what my community needed.

I was already in the comfort of my bed when I went on Facebook to check my post. The netizens shared it more than a hundred times with thousands of heart reactions. I even saw

a few posts showing residents getting some of the groceries from the pantry.

Before I slept, I received messages from friends who also wanted to extend their arms to donate money and more goods to the pantry. The following day, it was already in the news. I revisited it that morning and put a new set of packed groceries. As I was organizing the cart, some cars stopped by to also set up their donations. I would meet new people of different economic statuses who wanted to donate and give every day until the small community pantry became a program for the community.

A few weeks after, I heard in the news that more and more communities around the Philippines also set up their community pantries. I heard stories like some fishermen who donated their harvests. There were also agricultural farmers who donated fruits, rice, and vegetables, while some even put-up boxes of facemasks and cooked food.

Looking at a bunch of people patiently falling in line under extreme heat made me cry out of happiness. These people waiting for their turn to get rations were reasons why many Filipinos generously help. Those generous hearts believe that the poorer members of the community deserve to taste the sweetness of life despite the bitterness of the situation. At that moment, I felt very proud to be born a Filipino.

I remember my values teacher teaching us about one of the unique values of the Filipinos—*Bayanihan*. It doesn't have an English translation, but it is simply the spirit of civic unity and cooperation among the citizens. I am lucky to witness the impact of this value with my own eyes.

The pantry we set up could not feed all the Filipinos, but the action could influence millions of them—and that is the true meaning of *Bayanihan*.

Our third-world country cannot beat the technological advancement and industrial revolution of others, but what we can offer to the global community are our people and the values they carry that can change the world.

I am Patreng, and this is the *Bayanihan* story of the Filipino people that everyone in this world needs to hear.