

ENRIQUE COMES HOME

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Although his bus was not expected to reach the village from Manila until ten thirty in the evening, at seven villagers began to gather at the roadside in anticipation of Enrique's arrival. The women chatted with each other, the children played tag, and the men killed a goat and started a fire to roast it—and sent teenage boys to the nearest store to buy soft drinks, beer, and gin.

Enrique Cruz,* age 65, was coming home. He was coming home to the village in the Philippines that he had left forty-five years before to work on a sugar plantation in Hawai'i. Since then he had never been back to the village—not even for a short visit. His arrival was eagerly awaited by his brothers and sisters and members of his kindred, many of whom had been born and reached maturity in his absence.

Enrique's village stood next to the national highway, a paved narrow ribbon which stretched from the capital of the province, Laoag, thirty kilometers to the north, to the nation's largest city, Manila, four hundred kilometers to the south. It was located at the northwestern tip of a horse-shoe shaped valley, bounded by low-lying hills on three sides and the national highway on the fourth. Across the road to the west was the Simbaan River which dissected rice fields and flowed into the south China Sea two kilometers to the northwest. About nine hundred people lived in the village.

It was the third week of May and the air was hot and humid. Unirrigated rice fields were dry and cracked, and the bamboo which grew on hillsides was brown. The slightest wind, like a child's scuffle, stirred dust into the air. To the east, above the

*Enrique Cruz is a pseudonym. All other personal names used in this essay are also pseudonyms. The research upon which this article is based was conducted in 1973 and 1975 and was sponsored by a grant from the National Institute of Mental Health.

Cordillera mountain range, thunderheads had begun to form in the past few days, but none had yet moved out over the narrow coastal plains. Village farmers prayed that the rains would come soon so that they could plant their first crop of rice. In the meantime they collected firewood, repaired their homes, and spent long hours along the river banks gathering grass for their livestock. It was a time of uneasiness and waiting. Even the social season of weddings, baptisms, and fiestas was ending, since no one was quite sure when the weather would change.

Enrique's imminent arrival would mark the last round of partying before villagers turned to the harrowing, plowing, and planting of their fields. Perhaps, as several of those who congregated by the roadside suggested, it might even culminate in Enrique's marriage.

Enrique had left the village as a single man, and he had not married in Hawai'i. As the fourth child of nine, seven of whom were male, the chances of Enrique's father providing him with a dowry upon his marriage had been slight. In Ilocano culture and society a young man receives his share of the family estate in the form of dowry at marriage. The dowry provides the economic foundation for the marriage and becomes the joint property of the husband and wife. Ideally, each child, male or female, receives an equal share of their parents' estate. But land, when Enrique was a young man, was a very scarce resource, and his parents did not possess enough of it to provide all their sons—let alone their daughters—with a dowry.

So, like many young men in his peer group and like three of his brothers, Enrique grasped the opportunity, provided by recruiters who came to his province, to work in the sugar plantations of Hawai'i. This was not his only option, however. Two of Enrique's brothers migrated to frontier regions of the Philippines—one to the Cagayan Valley and the other to the southern island of Mindanao—to seek land to farm. Only Enrique's youngest brother, Pedro, did not leave the village. It was Pedro, of course, who cared for his parents in their old age and eventually inherited their land. Enrique's two sisters also remained in the village; one, Adelina, married and raised a family; the other, Espirita, a dependent in her brother's household, like many in her peer group, was to remain a spinster. Suitable suitors were scarce.

The Filipino migration that had brought Enrique and three of his brothers to Hawai'i was first organized

by the Hawai'i Sugar Planters' Association which represented thirty plantations on the islands of O'ahu, Kauai, Maui, and Hawai'i. To meet the needs of a rapidly expanding sugar industry, the HSPA recruited cheap foreign labor. From the beginning in 1906 a predominant HSPA strategy was to recruit single, uneducated men in the hopes of maintaining a transient, flexible labor force. As inducements, recruits were initially offered free passage to Hawai'i, housing perquisites on the plantation, and, after 1915, return passage to the Philippines upon completion of three-year labor contracts. The HSPA's most intense recruitment efforts occurred in the 1920s. Between 1906 and 1946 (when the recruitment ended) approximately 125,000 Filipinos went to Hawai'i. most of them single males from the Ilocos region, an area of exceptionally high population density and limited land resources.

Not all of these men remained in Hawai'i, however. Many, like two of Enrique's brothers, returned to the Philippines after the completion of their contracts to marry and buy land with their savings. Those, however, who stayed constituted the backbone of the unskilled labor force on the plantations. Because of the demographic imbalance in the Filipino population (many more males than females) few, however, married.

The plantations became unionized in 1946, and today Hawai'i's agricultural laborers are the highest paid in the nation. At retirement workers become eligible for monthly retirement benefits and may remain in low-rent plantation housing. They are also eligible for Social Security benefits.

In the 1960s and 1970s many of the recruits, including Enrique, reached retirement age. Concerned with the need to provide housing for younger employees, both the plantation management and the union encouraged men to consider returning to the Philippines for retirement. If the men chose to do so, they would receive their plantation benefits from the plantation in a lump sum. An advantage, the men were told, to retiring in the Philippines was the favorable exchange ratio. In the Philippines a retiree's Social Security benefits make him wealthy; in Hawai'i they are just enough to make ends meet, if that. For this reason, men like Enrique who would have probably remained in Hawai'i otherwise, returned to their natal villages to retire, renewing ties to kinsmen and village-mates after what was often more than a forty-year absence.

Still single when they returned to the village, many married women at least thirty-five years their junior shortly after arrival and within a year or two became parents. The Philippines is fourth among foreign countries in the total number of retirees receiving benefits but *first* in the number of dependents also receiving benefits, a direct consequence of these May-December marriages (U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, Social Security Administration, Office of Research and Statistics Report, 1975).

Of the forty-three men sixty years of age and over in Enrique's village 72 percent (N=31) have had work experience in Hawai'i. Of these, 65 percent (N=20) returned to the village before the Second World War, shortly after completing their three year labor contracts. The remainder (N=11) did not return until they reached or were approaching retirement age. Almost all of the latter have taken young women as wives and fathered children. There are, of course, emigrants sixty years of age and over still in Hawai'i, some of whom may yet return to the Philippines. A consequence of the predominantly male migration to Hawai'i is the fact that 30 percent (N=18) of all the village women sixty years of age and over (N=60) are spinsters.

In the years that he spent in Hawai'i, Enrique did not, like some emigrants, send money to his relatives to buy land. There was no need to, for two of his brothers who had returned from Hawai'i upon completion of their contracts had purchased land with their savings, and his youngest brother, Pedro, had inherited land from his parents. Rather, Enrique had chosen to spend his earnings on the cockfights. It was rumored among the crowd at the roadside that he had made some handsome winnings that numbered in the thousands of dollars.

But whether Enrique was returning with part of this fortune was unimportant because he had another—the lump sum provided all retirees who returned to the Philippines by the plantation management. And he would be receiving monthly Social Security benefits, which, converted to pesos, would be more than four times the salary of a local public school teacher. Enrique's lump sum amounted to more than fifteen thousand dollars, an incredible fortune in a peasant economy.

As a young man, Enrique had left the village with only the clothing and blankets provided by the plantation recruiter, and now he was returning with a

commodity that was as rare as land forty years ago—money. While his relatives were certainly looking forward to his return, they were also a little apprehensive, for they did not know how he would choose to handle his fortune.

As the hour grew later, more and more people gathered by the side of the road, carefully watching the sparse highway traffic. An approaching bus suddenly slowed, and the crowd, realizing that Enrique was at hand, let out a big whoop and rushed to surround the bus as it came to a stop. The cry went up, "*Hawaiiano simangpet! Hawaiiano simangpet!*" (A Hawaiiano has arrived). More people rushed to the roadside. Excitement mounted; women cried and shouted; youngsters jostled each other to get the first glimpse of the Hawaiiano.

Enrique, with a head of white hair and wearing a bright red aloha shirt, stepped off the bus and was immediately engulfed by his relatives. He did not seem to know what to make of the situation for he recognized no one. Led by his brother, he proceeded to the back of the bus to claim his luggage from the hold. Then, as the bus started up, Enrique's relatives directed him to Adelina's home where he would be staying.

The next day a continuous flow of visitors came to see Enrique, many of them to collect letters he had hand-carried from Hawai'i. To provide snacks and a meal for their guests, Enrique's brothers, with the help of men who had reputations as skilled cooks, butchered a pig and a goat. Enrique enjoyed the attention he received from the visitors and he willingly entertained them with tales about his life in Hawai'i. On Sundays, he said, he and his friends held cockfights at the Waipahu plantation. Once he and several others went to Arizona to attend the cockfights. On the way he stopped in California to visit his brother who had left Hawai'i during the Depression. Enrique's brother did not recognize him and started to cry when Enrique told him who he was. "Long time we brothers no see each other," commented Enrique to his guests. He bowed his head briefly and then shook off the unpleasant memory by changing the subject.

"I'm not going to work anymore because I have a pension." He laughed at the thought. Tapping the chair that he was sitting on, he said, "I'm going to sit here until I die. I get more than two hundred

dollars a month on my pension. I came back here because I won't have to spend money on anything. I'll get a garden for my vegetables. I'll get a rice field. I'll get a house. In Hawai'i I have to pay for everything: electricity, water, everything." But he mentioned that he had not decided if he would stay in the village permanently. He wanted to see first if he liked it. Already he had noticed that the air was too hot, and the wooden bed he had slept on had been hard and uncomfortable. The rice he ate for breakfast was too grainy. "Oh," he sighed to himself, "I wish I had brought some good rice with me from Hawai'i."

Enrique had little intention of returning to Hawai'i, but he was being careful to assure that his relatives treated him well. The first retiree who had returned to the village six years earlier was so angered by the financial demands made upon him by his kin that he and his young wife moved to another province. Enrique, who had heard of this in Hawai'i, was not about to let the lesson be lost.

Among Enrique's visitors were his fellow retirees. One, Berto Castro, had spent twenty years in California before being deported to the Philippines by immigration for being a pimp. "Berto," so said his friends, "could start across the country with a nickle in his pocket—as long as he had three girls with him."

Berto had returned to the village in the early fifties. He came back with only a small amount of savings, and his family had no land. Until he was old enough to qualify for a Veteran's pension (he served briefly in the U.S. Armed Forces during the Second World War), he made a living by investing small amounts of money in the garlic trade. And to earn prestige (which would more easily have been his if he had owned land), he invested in what he termed "public relations": when he could afford to, he gave or lent money to relatives and neighbors in need, and he often acted as the master of ceremonies at baptismal and wedding parties. He even ran for a seat on the village council and won with the highest number of votes.

Yet a gulf existed between Berto and the other retirees. He was, despite the Veteran's pension, nowhere near as wealthy as they were. But he did have an edge over them, and he often pointed this out: "Their public relations are very bad. These men are too tight with their money. They don't know how to be good to people. Here you are nothing if you do

not have good *public relations*." Clearly, unlike the other retirees, Berto was a bit more shrewd.

Although Enrique had not seen Berto since they were both young men, he knew Berto's past, and he teased him about it, "How come you leave the States, Berto? I tell you, you're no good!" Berto did not like the comment, but he accepted it good-naturedly and reached out to shake Enrique's hand.

The two could not help laughing at the changes they saw in each other. Enrique pulled Berto's cap off and chuckled at the sight of his bald head. Berto, in turn, laughed at Enrique's white hair. But he snorted at the San Miguel beer which Enrique was serving his guests. The San Miguel, a treat for Enrique, was commonplace to Berto who demanded that he be served something imported to drink. Enrique went upstairs to his room and brought back an opened bottle of Canadian Club whiskey. He and Berto seated themselves at the kitchen table and drank several shots in friendly verbal sparring. How, Enrique inquired, could Berto have a pension when he did not stay in America long enough to qualify for Social Security benefits? Berto explained that he qualified for Veterans' benefits. He then asked Enrique for some American cigarettes. Enrique's sister Adelina overheard Berto's request and advised Enrique not to get him any. "That man already has plenty of money." Berto was annoyed at the rebuff and requested more Canadian Club, but Enrique refused to go upstairs to get another bottle. "You come tomorrow, we drink again," he told Berto.

As he departed, Berto teasingly asked Enrique if he would be getting married. Enrique laughed and said, "I don't know. I am living with my sister, and I don't think she wants me to."

But Enrique was wrong. Within two weeks of his arrival his siblings had convinced him to marry. He would, they said, need someone to care for him in his old age.

Of course, most men marry when they are young, and their fathers provide them with a dowry. Also, most men marry *within* the village in order to keep property rights in the larger kindred and to maximize property resources, since their wives might also bring property to the marriage. But a couple of factors create a twist in the tradition in the case of the retiree marriages. First, a retiree establishes his own dowry

and he does this by purchasing prime quality rice land, in keeping with his status as a rich man; and, second, he, of course, is either too old or sufficiently uninterested to farm the land himself. What this presents is a situation in which it is to the advantage of a retiree's siblings and their children to encourage him to marry a woman from a socially unimportant family in a distant village. Geographical and social factors inhibit the wife's kindred from requesting usufruct rights to any of the dowry land, and, therefore, the retiree's kindred have exclusive rights to it (although, they, of course, share the produce with the retiree and his family).

Traditionally, if a woman is widowed before she has a child, she is obliged to return the dowry to her husband's family. As a precaution against not having children of their own, some retirees adopt children shortly after they marry. All but one of the wives of retirees in Enrique's village had, however, given birth.

Another reason a retiree and his wife start a family is the fact that natural children are a source of dollar income since they are eligible for Social Security benefits until the age of twenty-two. In the case of her husband's death, a young wife can support herself with her children's benefits until she reaches the age of sixty-two and qualifies for benefits herself. One retiree laughingly remarked that if he had known he was going to live as long as he has, he and his wife would have spaced their children every five years!

With the advice of his siblings, Enrique purchased three parcels of land, each of roughly equal value. He, of course, had no intention of farming the land himself. His brothers and nephews would do it for him. He bought no land for Adelina, his married sister, since her husband had gone to California four years earlier, nor did he buy any land for his single sister, Espirita. She, though, would be given the job of supervising the shares and allotment of the harvest—and be awarded with a percentage of the harvest for her trouble. The three lots Enrique purchased had a total value of ₱32,000 (about \$4,000).

Enrique's siblings soon informed him that they had found a girl, Perlita, to be his wife. She was the maid of a retired emigrant couple who had returned to the village two years ago from Hawai'i. Perlita was

young and attractive. She had been born and raised in a small village in another municipality.

In comparison to usual standards, the terms of the dowry settlement were quite high. They included the land Enrique had purchased plus P60,000. The couple would use the money to build a modern home equipped with such amenities as an electric generator, refrigerator, T.V., and, for Enrique's own special comfort, a bed with spring mattresses. Enrique also promised to give a handsome gift of P1,500 to the mother of the bride. No young man getting married in the village would ever have a dowry that would even come close to one such as this, and few ever bestowed on a mother-in-law such a generous gift.

Everyone agreed to schedule the wedding for the last week in June; it could be held no later for fear that the monsoon rains, already late in coming, would spoil the event.

The morning of the wedding Enrique and his bride dressed early for the ceremony which would be held at nine in the morning at a church in Simbaan, a town two kilometers to the south. At eight-thirty Simbaan's vice-mayor, who had many friends in Bawang, drove the couple to the church in his jeep. Relatives and wedding sponsors rode to town aboard a bus Enrique had rented.

Few people actually went to the ceremony as most were busy preparing for the subsequent celebration. At three that morning a few men had gathered at Adelina's house to slaughter a carabao and two pigs, and they were now cooking the meat dishes. Women were washing the plates and utensils to be used, preparing the vegetable dishes, and scurrying about caring to a hundred details.

When the wedding party arrived at the church, Pedro went to fetch the minister at the rectory a block away. Everyone else stepped into the cool gloom of the church. Enrique wore a richly embroidered shirt, Perlita a flowing white dress and veil. Pedro and Adelina were dressed in new clothes tailored in Laoag. The two would be Enrique's surrogate parents for the day.

Young friends of Perlita had decorated the pews along the aisle with white crepe paper, flowers, and ribbons. Below the altar was a red cut-out heart, at which the bride and groom would kneel during the ceremony. At the back of the church, a five piece

orchestra tuned up off-key and, at the signal of the priest who appeared at the altar, struck off with the processional, Elvis Presley's "It's Now or Never." Enrique took his young bride's arm and marched solemnly with her to the altar. At the age of sixty-five, he was getting married, scarcely six weeks after his return from Hawai'i.

At ten the wedding party returned to the village where hundreds of people had gathered for the reception. A little boy shouted "They're coming! They're coming!" and the crowd jostled to get a good view of them. The two appeared hand-in-hand, but with their eyes cast humbly down.

Followed by relatives and wedding sponsors, they proceeded into the house and upstairs to the family altar on which an offering of food had been placed and candles lit. Old women knelt behind Enrique and Perlita and began to chant a prayer to ask for the Lord's blessing. The women prayed for ten minutes, after which Enrique and Perlita rose and ritually shook hands with their sponsors. The two proceeded downstairs to greet their guests and to take their place at the end of a long table, where, with their close relatives and sponsors, they were served the wedding meal. As soon as Enrique and Perlita were finished, they went into the house to change into informal clothes for the dance. Guests continued to be served until all who had come to the party had been fed.

Under a tent, set up near Adelina's house, chairs and benches were arranged about a circle, the center of which served as a dance floor. A ten-piece orchestra played both traditional and modern music. Dancing, however, had started before the wedding party had returned from the church. Berto, acting as the Master of Ceremonies, his spirits well fortified with whiskey, enjoyed entreating prominent guests, such as town officials, to dance. The guests chose as partners young, unmarried girls. Married women were only selected to dance the traditional *La Hota* in which the male, like a proud rooster flirting with an eager hen, set a fast and intricate pace for his partner to follow.

The group were joined by Enrique and Perlita who sat in two chairs directly in front of the orchestra. Neither took part in the dancing. Perlita had changed into an orange dress. A small, silver tiara adorned her head. Enrique wore an orange aloha shirt.

If Enrique had been a young man, he, like Perlita, would have been sad, for marriage would have signified a break with the past and long-time personal relations. Often a bride and groom weep when their relatives (especially grandmothers and great-aunts) present them with their wedding gifts. Today only Perlita would be so affected.

A friend nudged Enrique in the ribs and reminded him to strap a small fish trap to his back that night. This would ensure, he said, that Enrique and Perlita would have plenty of children.

Although no one under the tent had noticed, the sky was growing dark and strong winds were beginning to blow from the south. Pedro, however, realized what was about to happen and suggested the dancing stop in order to have sufficient time for the sponsors to present their gifts. Two large mats were placed at the feet of Enrique and Perlita. On the mats were set three empty plates, one in front of Enrique for his sponsors to put their gifts in, one in front of Perlita for her sponsors to put their gifts in, and one in the center for the customary peso contributions to the orchestra. Perlita's parents and Pedro and Adelina stood behind the couple to greet the sponsors.

When all was in readiness, Berto called them in pairs to come forward—to the accompaniment of a march played by the orchestra—and to make their presentation. Enrique and Perlita rose in each instance to shake their sponsors' hands. The municipal officials were called first and then the retirees. With their dark glasses, bright aloha shirts, and young attractive wives, the retirees added an extra dash of color to the affair. Unacquainted with local etiquette, Enrique often failed to rise in time to shake his sponsors' hands. He was reminded to do so by Pedro who nudged him in the back.

But before all the sponsors could present their gifts, the heavens opened, and the tent began to drip, then gush suddenly in small waterfalls from every corner. Some guests rushed home, others into Adelina's house—and just in time, too, for with a shudder the tent collapsed and what had once been the dance floor was now a soggy, muddy mess. If the rains had not interrupted so rudely, friends and relatives of the couple would also have had the opportunity of presenting their gifts.

However, tradition was now shattered and sheer gaiety took over. Enrique and Perlita went upstairs, not to appear again before their guests, and impromptu dancing commenced in the kitchen. Berto grabbed an old woman from the crowd and started to dance with her. She resisted and he grabbed for another. Soon all the women were screaming in mock terror as Berto made his flirtatious advances, but they also couldn't help laughing uproariously at his antics. Any woman that he grabbed broke away at the first opportunity and swatted him in the process. The mood was contagious and soon a few of the male cooks, who had had their share of sugarcane wine to drink, joined in the fun. The women, in laughter, began to flee out into the rain. Gradually, as the downpour ceased, the celebrants returned home.

Enrique was married. The rains had come. And the partying season was at an end. Enrique was a landowner, and after the rainy season he would build his retirement home. In a year he might be the father of a child who would inherit his fortune. Enrique's brothers and sisters, by encouraging him to marry, had found someone to care for him in his old age and had also helped incorporate his savings into the village economy. In the process they had increased their own prestige and helped to establish new social ties for Enrique. Now that he was married, Perlita would exercise her role as guardian of his wealth and see to it that he did not squander it on cockfights and other diversions. This would be an easy task. She was a stranger in the village, had few social obligations to anyone, and therefore could say no to the inevitable requests for money.

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Two days after Enrique's wedding it was market day in the nearby town of Simbaan. At ten that morning, a woman shouted from the national highway in a loud and urgent voice, "A Hawaiiano has arrived! A Hawaiiano has arrived!"

Odd, people who heard her thought, the bus from Manila does not usually arrive at this hour. But the call was repeated. Yes, it must be so! A Hawaiiano was coming! And men, women, and children rushed from their homes and ran to the highway taking up the call "A Hawaiiano has arrived! A Hawaiiano has arrived!"

But when they got to the highway all they found was the old spinster, Nana Rosa, standing in the center of a pile of goods that she had bought at the market. Nana Rosa needed help in carrying the

provisions to her home, and to get it, she used a call that she knew would attract attention. Chagrined at their gullibility but nevertheless appreciating her joke, they helped carry her belongings home.

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