

On My Mind

8/11/00

I'm still awed that the legendary <I>Rainbow Warrior</I> actually came to the CNMI, that I actually saw it, was able to go aboard, and got to meet the Captain and the crew. I've been so impressed with the high ideals (or is that an oxymoron?) it represents and supports, the courageous, seemingly fearless exploits of its crew, the persistence with which it pursues its course. And I'm happy to report that everything I saw and heard and experienced in the six days they were here only reenforced all I'd thought, felt, imagined before.

The vitality and energy, the quiet competence and inner strength, the earnestness and dedication of the <I>Warrior's</I> captain and crew are almost palpable. They are a varied lot, as is to be expected, but among them, they shared, as well, a sense of humor, a joy in living, compassion. One confessed she cried when she saw the dead puffins that had been caught in an illegal long-line fishing net. The captain described, quite matter-of-factly, the blood and gore on the ship when the crew hauled it in off Russian waters. The ship wasn't equipped to do that, he'd said, and added that it took several days to finally get rid of all the fish scales that stuck to the deck.

The <I>Rainbow Warrior</I> is gone. One can only hope that its visit was not in vain, and that world pressure will see to it not only that the PCB and other contamination in Tanapag is finally satisfactorily cleaned up, but also that the U.S. becomes more supportive of the Greenpeace goal to abolish that "dirty dozen" of chlorine-based pollutants known as POPS, or Persistent Organic Pollutants by working to promote and strengthen, rather than weaken, the proposed international treaty on POPS elimination.

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The efforts of Greenpeace on behalf of the CNMI have brought to the forefront once again the realization that achieving cooperation towards a common goal among a large group of people is no easy task. One would have thought that there would be no quarrel with Greenpeace's intention to prod the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency to "do right" by the people of Tanapag, to finally clean out - properly, safely, completely - the contaminants the U.S. military saw fit to dump on Saipan more than 30 years ago.

Yet there was a noticeable lack of enthusiasm among a number of both private and public sector groups, for any one of several reasons: some felt their livelihood threatened; others feared loss of face, or loss of power; some distrusted outsiders; some disagreed with Greenpeace's strategies; some disagreed with the focus taken by Greenpeace; some apparently felt it just wasn't their battle.

It's true that Greenpeace staff and crew were not on island all that long. They did, however, make a valiant attempt to meet with, talk to, all the players involved. A foundation has been laid. But unless the vying and often self-serving interests of those involved in the process are set aside, the final clean-up of Tanapag will not occur. To keep the momentum going, to build

consensus, to reach the goal, is, unfortunately, no easy task. It will require conscious acts of cooperation - and considerable time and energy - on the part of all concerned. The question is: will it happen? We can but hope.

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Congratulations to the chairpersons of the House Committee on Education and on Public Utilities, Transportation and Communications, for taking "ocular" tours (what other kind of tour is there, pray tell???) of some of the areas for which they are responsible. The chairpersons, Brigida DLG. Ichihara and Rosiky F. Camacho, respectively, took tours of selected CUC water and waste water facilities this past week, and earlier, the chairperson of the Education committee took her members on a tour of Kagman school.

All too often, it appears that members of the legislature sit in their comfortable air-conditioned offices way up there on the Hill, and propose, discuss and pass bills without any real sense of what they are dealing with. As a result, the problems are not properly defined and the proposed solutions unworkable. Often, in addition, the legality of what is proposed is questionable. All of which generally leads to poor pieces of legislation that, because of their shortcomings are not enforced, later have to be endlessly amended, or are vetoed before they even get off the ground.

Ichihara and Camacho, by going out into the field, and, in Ichihara's case, getting committee members off their duffs, to put it nicely, and out onto the sites of their responsibilities, have struck a new note of accountability at the legislature. Let's hope it spreads to the rest of the membership.

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I came back from my recent trip to the states with a coin purse full of shiny vintage 2000 pennies, dimes and quarters (don't seem to have picked up any new nickels). They were being used everywhere - one didn't have to make a special trip to the bank and ask in order to get them. In fact, even the new Sacajewea dollar coin was in use there - though that one was admittedly somewhat more difficult to find.

Collecting the new quarters, in fact, which are being minted with different states' symbols and logos, was all the craze there, and sales of albums to hold them were big business in the stores. The new quarters will be minted incrementally - with five or six new ones minted each year over the next several years. Out already - if memory serves me right - are the Delaware, Maryland, Connecticut, New Jersey coins. I'd been carrying a list so I'd remember which ones my granddaughter was still looking for, but I've already forgotten what states were on it.

In the CNMI, there is plenty of the new paper money, but I've yet to come across any of the new coins. Why is that? Is our remote location once again being used against us? I suppose one ought not to complain that at least the Feds are exchanging the paper money. Remember when it was so grungy because they didn't? But I still feel slighted that the Feds are not making the new coins available out here.

