

ProQuest

[Databases selected:](#) ProQuest Newspapers, Ethnic NewsWatch (ENW), GenderWatch (GW)

San Francisco Chronicle

PERSONAL PERSPECTIVE / A new day for the 'I' -- and for me; [FINAL Edition]

Pati Poblete. San Francisco Chronicle. San Francisco, Calif.: Aug 7, 2006. pg. B.6

Abstract (Summary)

[Emil DeGuzman] talks about the early days of "Manilatown," which stretched for 10 blocks along Kearny Street from California Street to Columbus Avenue. The I-Hotel, he says, was at the heart of it, where many of the Filipino immigrants who worked seasonal jobs came to live.

In the colorful lobby of the hotel at 848 Kearny St., Rudy Daga, one of the original occupants when DeGuzman came in 1969, was seated on a bench. Because he was one of those evicted, Daga was given priority when it came to filling the 104 studio and one-bedroom apartments. Others had to submit applications and were chosen through a lottery.

Daga, now in his 80s, stands up to give DeGuzman a hug. "I will take you around," he said, shuffling his slipper-clad feet toward a large room. "This is where we eat, and sing," he said, pointing to an old, upright piano. "Sometimes, we even dance."

Full Text (801 words)

Copyright Hearst Communications Inc., Hearst Newspapers Division Aug 7, 2006

You can e-mail Pati Poblete at patipoblete@hotmail.com

WE WERE sitting in the swank Restaurant Seven Fifty in San Francisco's new Hilton Hotel. The man who I had come there to meet, Emil DeGuzman, was across the table, gesturing for me to finish my salad before we embarked on our "tour."

DeGuzman, a housing investigator and mediator for the Human Rights Commission, was merely a young man when he was driven out of the original International Hotel -- or "I-Hotel" -- in 1977. The city's controversial decision to demolish the three-story, single-room occupancy hotel to create a commercial development was followed by a series of court battles.

The eventual eviction of more than 50 elderly immigrants, most of whom were Filipino and Chinese farm workers, ignited numerous protests and created years of resentment among the I-Hotel's residents and the advocates who fought for them. In the end, the commercial development was never built, and what once was home to those forced out remained, for years, a symbolic hole in the ground.

But now, DeGuzman says with hope and a smile, it's a new day.

The resurrected I-Hotel, in the form of a 15-story structure, celebrates its first "re-birthday" on Aug. 26. With that milestone marks a type of renaissance for the city's Filipino community.

DeGuzman talks about the early days of "Manilatown," which stretched for 10 blocks along Kearny Street from California Street to Columbus Avenue. The I-Hotel, he says, was at the heart of it, where many of the Filipino immigrants who worked seasonal jobs came to live.

It was difficult for me to imagine a whole segment of the city dedicated to the Filipino-American community. Nowadays, we just call that Daly City.

In the colorful lobby of the hotel at 848 Kearny St., Rudy Daga, one of the original occupants when DeGuzman came in 1969, was seated on a bench. Because he was one of those evicted, Daga was given priority when it came to filling the 104 studio and one-bedroom apartments. Others had to submit applications and were chosen through a lottery.

Daga, now in his 80s, stands up to give DeGuzman a hug. "I will take you around," he said, shuffling his slipper-clad feet toward a large room. "This is where we eat, and sing," he said, pointing to an old, upright piano. "Sometimes, we even dance."

The old, spry man then led us to the elevator, pressing the button for the roof. "Wait," DeGuzman says, hitting the button for the third floor, what used to be the top floor of the old I-Hotel.

He walks over to a large window, staring at the same buildings he used to look at as a young man. "I remember getting locked out and swinging out of a window to get into my bedroom window," he said. "The old guys, the manongs, thought I was crazy."

Eventually, we reach the roof, where there were two older women having a conversation with one of the male tenants. Daga decides to join them.

The view is breathtaking -- the Bay Bridge, Coit Tower, the Transamerica Pyramid. "It's wonderful that these people can have this for themselves after what happened," said DeGuzman.

I thought that we had reached the height of the tour, but what has become a symbol of the community's resurgence wasn't at the top of the building, but on the ground floor.

A narrow hallway from the lobby leads to a community center, with all new bamboo floors and cabinets, and brick-and-mortar panels from the original I-Hotel.

Compelling black-and-white images of the protests and the eviction on the large banners hang from the windows. But while the past is everywhere in this center, it's the future that brings it to life.

The center has become a site for various Filipino-American artists -- from musicians, to photographers, to authors -- to share and celebrate their work.

Most recently, documentary photographer Rick Rocamora held an exhibit there, displaying photos of Filipino World War II veterans.

"We always try to remember that the hole in the ground was like a hole in our hearts," said DeGuzman. "But now we have a space where we can come together and unite generations. We can value the history and celebrate the new things."

The I-Hotel -- though not what it once was -- is now a place where the past, present and future have a home.

The Bay Area will always be my home -- I was born and raised here. But I am about to embark on a new stage of my life as the deputy editorial page editor of the Honolulu Advertiser. This is my last column for The Chronicle.

With me, I take the lessons of the I-Hotel: Believe in strong foundations, soaring dreams and the ability to rise again if we fall.

Indexing (document details)

Subjects: Filipino Americans, Apartment buildings
Locations: San Francisco California
Author(s): Pati Poblete
Document types: Commentary

Column Name: *PATI POBLETE*
Section: *EDITORIAL*
Publication title: San Francisco Chronicle. San Francisco, Calif.: Aug 7, 2006. pg. B.6
Source type: Newspaper
ISSN: 19328672
ProQuest document ID: 1090065911
Text Word Count 801
Document URL: <http://proquest.umi.com/pqdweb?did=1090065911&Fmt=3&clientId=3266&RQT=309&VName=PQD+>

Copyright © 2007 ProQuest-CSA LLC. All rights reserved.

