

On My Mind  
5/21/99

While the Flame Tree festival is over, the glory of the flame trees continues to intensify - the brilliance of their orange-red blossoms accentuated by the contrasting bright blue sky and the occasional white cloud that frame them. Though not native to the CNMI, here is an "immigrant," a non-indigene, that has not only survived well, but has also contributed significantly to the wellbeing of its host.

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In the evening, there's the new moon, a bright, narrow sliver in the darkening sky, passing by the night's first visible "star" - ever-bright Venus.

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And this morning, a high-arching rainbow, one end seemingly springing from the church roof, the other falling into the waters of the lagoon.

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But it's also the season for those miserable flying termites, getting into face, food, clothing - a major deterrent to evening enjoyment of sky- and star-watching. Seems life is always like that, flavoring, as it were, the positive with a dose of negative.

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The MVA's "Taste of the Marianas" is really quite a nice affair. Major hotels - and a few other restaurants - offer samples of their cuisine - for a price, of course, but it's not all that unreasonable. There are tables to sit at while savoring the food, live music for entertainment, and the beautiful setting of Memorial Park.

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In addition, there's the display of hotel "haute cuisine," if you will - the elaborate and mouth-watering dishes prepared by hotel chefs as part of the culinary cook-off competition. Last week, one hotel had prepared a huge browned stuffed pastry crust in the shape of a fish. Another had prepared a crust over a layer of rice that in turn covered the entree. There were smaller individual-sized artistic - and edible - productions as well.

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Unfortunately, there wasn't any information available on the dishes themselves, nor was it very clear which entry belonged to which hotel. And that's a pity - because the event offers a great opportunity for the hotels to advertise, to showcase, for the community what each has to offer in the way of culinary expertise and specialty.

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It would be nice, too, if descriptions of the dishes prepared, and the winners of each of the past three events, were being listed in the paper. Broader recognition of excellence in food preparation would clearly benefit the hotels in terms of local patronage. Other booth vendors would also benefit, since more publicity about the event and the competition could be expected to attract more customers the following week.

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It doesn't really take that much effort, cost all that much money. All it would have taken was finding someone who was knowledgeable about food, and liked to cook. Certainly there's no

shortage of that here.

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It's strange how rarely people seem able to generate effective publicity.

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While on the topic of generating effective publicity - it's acknowledged fact that the CNMI budget doesn't allow for high-priced Washington lobbyists and public relations firms. But that doesn't mean government should just sit on its hands and do nothing. The CNMI does have a spokesperson in Washington - Washington rep, Juan N. Babauta. It should be but part of Babauta's job responsibility, as the CNMI rep, to make its case to those members of Congress and of the Executive branch who are attempting to curtail CNMI authority over its labor and immigration policies.

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The CNMI also has a powerful ally in Robert Underwood, Guam's elected representative to the U.S. Congress. He, too, has provided, and continues to provide, assistance to the CNMI in presenting its position to the powers that be in Washington.

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But neither should be expected to work alone. The help of the numerous special, assistant, advisory and other staff in the executive and legislative branches here on Saipan should be enlisted to provide Babauta and Underwood with the data, and the arguments, and the text to counter the current surge of unfriendly and patronizing proposals in Congress and the White House CNMI's foes in Washington.

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The preparation of such materials takes time and effort. The effective delivery of those materials takes more time and effort. That, in fact, is what lobbying is all about. It is unreasonable to expect either Babauta or Underwood to undertake such lobbying against CNMI's foes in Washington - in addition to their other responsibilities - without help.

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And, as this column has suggested once before, the help of individual members of the community could also be enlisted as lobbyists for the CNMI's position in Washington. Local community members or businesses and organizations could be encouraged to write, e-mail, or otherwise communicate - on their own, or using text and data supplied by government staff - with those in Washington who are attempting to take away CNMI authority over its internal affairs.

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Such an effort may not be as slick as a commercial lobby product - but that just might make it all the more effective.

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And speaking of public relations: An early commentary on coverage of the Littleton rampage noted that 'the community has a tremendous appetite' for information - as though apologizing for the intrusiveness of some of what was aired. Yet despite all the post-Littleton analyses there's

apparently been no further mention that the media might once again have exceeded good taste in its coverage of personal tragedy.

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Does this mean the public has now been hardened, become immune, to such excesses? God forbid!