

On My Mind
10/10/03

Despite the flooded homes, the washed-out roads, the sedimentation in the lagoon caused by the heavy rainfall that hit Saipan this past Saturday, that run-off also constituted a prodigious waste of water. All those thousands of gallons of rain - that could have provided homes and businesses with clean water - for free - instead just collecting mud and debris and running into the lagoon, killing the corals.

It's bad enough that so few people - or businesses - have taken the trouble to build rain water catchment systems. But what's worse is that those who haven't built catchment systems blame the government for their lack of water - when providing for their own is so do-able. Every resident that doesn't have one should be required to build one, and no new construction should be allowed that doesn't include a rain water catchment system.

Admittedly, even that would hardly catch all the rain that fell on Saturday, for instance. What are also needed are an entrepreneur or two, or more, to go into the rain harvesting business. All it would take is some sheets of tin, a gutter, and a basin. At first, the rain harvesters could sell the rain water as is - they could even require that purchasers bring their own containers. But as business grew, the rain harvesters could provide their own containers, large and small, and perhaps eventually even deliver water to customers.

Since the water wouldn't be salty, there'd be no reason to run it through a reverse osmosis system. And depending on how sanitary the rain harvesters kept their system, there might not even be a need to treat the rain water at all. After all, it is clean as it falls.

Though in all probability there'd still be some flooding, even with an increase in water catchment systems and entrepreneurs harvesting rain water, if the rain harvesters were to locate their collectors at sites most prone to generate excess water flow, it's possible that the damage from such storm water run-off as was experienced last Saturday would be far less.

The wasting of all that rain water could almost be called criminal.....

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Though it may seem as though that Saipan is getting more rain than usual these last few months, statistics from the U.S. Geological Survey show that in the last three months Saipan had about 3 inches of rain less than usual. It was during the first six months of the year - with the exception of February - that Saipan had more rain than usual, adding up to a total of 6.72 inches of rain more than usual for the year to date.

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Israel's bombing of Syria, and the U.S. position on the bombing, have been the last straw. I feel as though I've lost my footing, as though I no longer have a base, a foundation, an origin - or at

least, one of which I can be proud, one in which I can feel comfortable, secure. I was born in Germany; fortunately my Jewish father was brave, wise, enough to flee while emigration was still possible. I have never felt any affiliation with Germany, and have never returned to that country.

I have, however, long considered myself Jewish in religion and heritage - despite the fact that it is my father, and not my mother, who was Jewish - in both religion and heritage. But it's increasingly difficult to take pride in a country that so consistently demeans and denies another people's right to exist. That follows the U.S. (ugh) and preemptively bombs a country it sees as threatening its security.

We came to the United States by way of Canada, and while I am a bona fide American citizen, I've long had a love-hate relationship with America, shamed by its treatment of blacks, adulating Presidents Franklin Roosevelt and John Kennedy, uncomfortable in watching overbearing Americans overseas (not the least being their treatment of Micronesians during TT times), idolizing Jimmy Carter, embarrassed by the shallowness of much of its culture. But whatever residual pride I might have had in being able to claim American citizenship has been erased by the appalling policies and actions of the current president (not to mention California's election of Schwarzenegger).

Then there's the CNMI - my home for the last 23 years. I have taken pride in following the progress of the Commonwealth as it has struggled from infancy towards maturity.. But the shenanigans of the current Senate minority, the collusion between governor and erstwhile Senate president, the pervasive sense of self-serving of that faction, have put a major dent in that pride.

So I am left, at the moment, without a base I can take pride in being part of.

I once belonged to a small group, in college, that we irreverently named the g-d damned independents, in protest of the overbearing presence of sororities and fraternities - and in which we took considerable pride. And that, it seems, is where I am - still and yet again - a gdi.

But I guess that is as it should be. We are all, when it comes down to it, forced to rely on ourselves.

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A country I've wished, on more than one occasion, that I could claim to be part of is the Republic of Palau. Take, for example, the words of its president, Tommy E. Remengesau, Jr., at last week's meeting on Saipan of the U.S. Coral Reef Task Force. He warned that "biodiversity is declining a thousand times faster than its natural rate, that half of the tropical rainforests and mangroves have already been lost, that 70% of the marine fisheries have been fished to capacity and 70 % of coral reefs are endangered."

Small islands are the front line of defense in the world's battle to counter this destruction, and that is why Palauans historically have taken their oceans, marine life and coral reefs very

seriously, he noted. Saying that their ancestors knew how to sustainably manage their resources, but that somewhere along the way some had cast aside those 'old ways' as obsolete, Remengesau said, "I believe that they were wrong....We must return to traditional practices," "must reconsider, regroup, and be willing to merge traditional resource use practices with new technology."

"In Palau, our vision is to know, to understand and to manage in order to protect our children's future. To know, we must re-educate all of our people to the realities of our environment. To understand, we must research and study in order to build our base of knowledge. And to manage, we must merge the traditional wisdom with what science and technology can tell us," he said.

In concluding, Remengesau offered to work with the governors of the U.S. Pacific flag territories, and the presidents of the FSM in developing a regional sea grant consortium focused on training young people and future leaders of the islands in coral reef and related marine resource management. He said Palau would like to discuss Palau's contribution to a network of Marine Protected Areas as a means of protecting regional coral reef biodiversity, and lastly, he said, Palau is committed to partnering with the federal members of the Task Force in pursuing the goals and objectives of the Task Force's enabling act.

Nor are these all empty words. Palau is home to the first permanent marine research laboratory established in the Western Pacific, is the location where giant clam mariculture was first developed, and is the home base for the U.S. National Cancer Institute's marine collection program, Remengesau said.

Would that he were our leader!

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Instead, we have the unholy duo of Juan N. Babauta (sigh) and Paul A. Manglona, creating an ever more convoluted dilemma and bringing the entire legislative process to a standstill, to the point where something as simple as swearing in Tinian's newly-elected senator appears condemned to an indefinite limbo.

With the reasonable expectancy that the court will rule in the case brought by Manglona as Govendo did in the case brought by the AG: that the Judiciary will not risk violating the principle of separation of powers, Manglona and Pete P. Reyes, current Senate president, might better seek [binding] arbitration to settle their differences.

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Last but not least, what in the word was the 12th Legislature thinking of when it passed that provision in Public Law 12-18, the election reform act, that requires all donations to candidates or their parties of \$100 or more in cash or in kind be recorded, and made public?

