

On My Mind
by Ruth L. Tighe

It is perhaps an uncharitable thought during this holiday season, but a friend of mine inadvertently made a suggestion that just might lead toward the break-up of the stranglehold the Manglonas appear to have over Rota and its politics, its affairs, its governance. She was wishing - in this season of wishes - that there was a way long-time haole residents who could not afford to purchase a leasehold interest could apply for homesteads, and suggested, knowing that the waiting line for Saipan homesteads is pretty long, that homesteads on the other islands be opened to Saipan residents.

It would take a strong and determined person to take the lead, but just suppose that homesteads on Rota were available for Saipan residents - a not illogical idea, since there is far less demand, and far more available land, for homesteads on Rota than there is on Saipan. Once the number of "outsiders" grew a little - and it would not take all that many - the mayor would be forced to recognize their presence, and to allow their participation as well in the affairs of that island.

And, as more people settled on Rota, it is not unreasonable to expect that the Manglona stranglehold would eventually be effectively broken - in a far less drastic manner than might otherwise occur - and thus allow a return of sanity and reasonableness to Rota's governance, to Rota's presence in the Senate.

At present there are regulations established by the Marianas Public Land Authority that limit homesteads to the residents of each respective island. But fortunately, they are regulations, not law. The MPLA can change those regulations by a vote of its board members. The change would not have to go through or be approved by the CNMI Senate.

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The Commonwealth Utilities Corporation must be breathing easier these days. Due, apparently, to the sluggish economy, the elaborate Christmas light displays that usually brighten the night during the holiday season have been considerably more modest this year. The San Roque's Fiesta Mall lights are particularly dim, but that is due, no doubt, to the sale of the facility to Northern Marianas College.

But with less of a seasonal drain on the power output of CUC, there is hope that minor power problems can be overcome without shutting down feeders, as would, no doubt, be the case if there were no margin of power available.

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Either the CNMI has been fortunate, or the vendors have been wise - in that the fireworks for sale in the CNMI seem to have caused very few of the ugly accidents that tend to occur with fireworks elsewhere. There have been no tales of children losing their hands, or their eyesight, or getting burned, or of fire damage caused by fireworks. Thus, there's been no real demand to restrict their use or prohibit their sale - as has occurred throughout most of the mainland.

In my neighborhood, however, it isn't the fireworks - always fun to watch - but the noisy firecrackers that I would like to see banned.- or limited in some ways. Those big, thumping,

explosive-sounding ones, fired randomly during the day, never fail to make me jump. Though they generally stop at midnight, for which I am decidedly grateful (is there a law that says they must?), some do continue to go off, randomly, until the wee hours of the morning.

But would it be possible to go a little further? To limit the use of those big ones to two hours in mid-afternoon or at dusk, for example? to limit them to only Christmas Eve and Christmas Day and New Years Eve and New Years Day? at the very least, to ban them after 10 p.m.? or to limit the decibel level of allowable firecrackers? As it is, even though I have lost some of my ability to hear, those heavy thumpers still startle me. I can't imagine what it's like for those whose hearing is not impaired.

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Two brighter thoughts for this Christmas season: federal appeals courts in New York and in San Francisco have just ruled, independently of each other and in separate cases, that the U.S. cannot indefinitely hold suspected terrorists prisoner without access to lawyers or the American courts. Hundreds of these "suspected terrorists" - classed as "enemy combatants" - have been thrown in jail in Guantanamo, Cuba, and throughout the U.S. with no charges filed against them, no access to attorneys - or, often, to their families either - and no access to the U.S. judiciary system, in the aftermath of the 9/11 attack on New York City's Twin Towers and the Pentagon.

Unless the federal government appeals those rulings - already promised in the New York case - such prisoners will finally receive the fair, just and presumably, public hearings that underpin the U.S.' claim as a democracy.

The second bright thought is that a framework seems to have been established for dealing with those people in the CNMI who might ask for asylum. In a presentation made to the CNMI bar at its December 18th meeting, Attorney General Pam Brown described what is being called "refugee protection" in the CNMI. Not having attended the presentation, and having at hand only a sloppily put-together written statement, it is not possible for me to say much more at this point. But details will follow in this column - as, hopefully, clarification is provided by the AG's office.

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With New Year's Day less than a week away, it's not too soon to start thinking about New Year's resolutions. Even if the resolutions aren't kept, the act of thinking about what one might want to do better is probably good for the soul. It offers an opportunity to review one's conduct during the past year, and to identify one's achievements - as well as one's shortcomings. In some cultures, the review of one's short-comings also calls for making peace with those one might have offended, for asking others' pardon for real or imagined offenses, for atoning - not only to one's deity, but also to one's friends and acquaintances - for errors of omission, or of commission.

With it's focus on celebration - with noise and drink - the observation of New Year's eve and New Year's day doesn't usually involve much introspection. It has no element of conscience, of accountability, of concern for others. Yet the state of the world is in dire need of everyone's concern. What better time to reflect on this, and on the role of each of us in the earth's survival and good health, in the survival and good health of its peoples, than when

looking in the mirror, and drawing up New Year's resolutions!

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Saturday's "Christmas bird count" is a great way to show one's concern for the good health of the world - or at least our niche thereof. First of all, it provides a count of birds still to be seen on island - their kind and number - so that the count can be compared with years past, and can be used for future comparisons of the health of that sector of the environment. But it also allows the bird counter to explore areas of the island perhaps not seen very often, if at all. It heightens an awareness of the variety of bird habitat, the variety of island topography, the varieties of birds and their songs. And it provides an opportunity for those concerned about the environment to meet like-minded people.

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The New Year will be the Chinese year of the monkey. What follows is a portion of one of the predictions on the web of what that will mean for all of us.

This is a year that will find us all trying to get a better deal by outsmarting the other man. It is hard to keep track of who is winning, as the right hand has no idea of what the left hand is up to. One thing is for sure, this will be an extremely progressive time.

It is said that the Monkey's year will bring many new and unconventional ways of doing things. The motto of this year should be: "Don't take No for an answer!"

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