



ONE VOICE, ONE DREAM: A TEACHER'S JOURNEY

by: **DR. EMIRY PALOMAR DEPALUBOS**

In a small school nestled between the mountains and coastline of Mabinay Negros Oriental, Ma'am Em stood before her College of Teacher Education students, chalk in hand and wisdom in her heart. Every morning, she would greet her students with a smile, speaking in warm, fluent Filipino.

"Magandang umaga, mga anak. Handang matuto?" she would ask, and the students, from different barangays—some from the upland farms, others from the fishing villages—would nod eagerly. For many of them, Filipino was more than a subject—it was the bridge between home and school, between what they knew and what they were still to learn.

Ma'am Em wasn't just a teacher. She was a law student by night, commuting twice a week to Cebu to attend evening classes. She believed that language and law were not separate paths, but two pillars that held up a just and united nation. Her weekends were spent reading Supreme Court rulings, but her weekdays were filled with lesson plans on Filipino proverbs, national identity, and moral values.

One day, during a class discussion on "Bayanihan," one of her students, Jomar, raised his hand and asked, "Ma'am, paano po kaya tayo magiging tunay na magkaisa kung iba-iba tayo ng lugar at salita?"

Ma'am Em smiled and gently replied, "Ang wika, anak, ang tulay ng pagkakaisa. Kahit iba-iba tayo ng pinanggalingan, kapag nagkaintindihan tayo, nagkakaunawaan tayo. Doon nagsisimula ang pagkakaisa."

Moved by her words, the class began a project: writing letters in Filipino to students from far-flung schools, sharing their culture and dreams. Through this exchange, they learned not only geography, but empathy. They wrote about their hometowns—their fiestas, tabo markets,

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their lolo's stories, and their nanay's sinugba. And in return, they read about the lives of students like them in other provinces—different, yet familiar.

Ma'am Em submitted her students' work to a regional competition celebrating "Buwan ng Wika." They didn't just win—they were invited to perform a choral recitation of their class poem entitled, "Isang Tinig, Isang Pangarap."

After the program, a judge approached Ma'am Em and said, "Your work shows what education and love for language can do. You are shaping more than students—you're shaping a nation."

That evening, as she sat quietly on the ferry back to Cebu with her law books beside her, Ma'am Em whispered to herself, "Bayanihan sa wika... this is the law of the heart."

And so she continued teaching by day and studying by night, fueled not just by dreams of passing the bar exam, but by a deeper calling: to use her voice, her knowledge, and her language to help build a nation—one word, one child, one dream at a time.

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