

Sudtonggan 1976

“Rodney, (a Guardian) have you thought about coming to the Philippines?” Hale Prather asks Rodney this surprising question during the Institute’s 1976 summer staff meeting in Chicago. “Nancy and I are the directors of the ICA’s Human Development Project. We could sure use some of your exuberance and energy for a few weeks. Our family lives in the village of Sudtonggan, near Lapu-Lapu City. We are on Mactan, an island of sleepy fishing villages.”

Rodney and I talk about this astonishing invitation. Finally, we decide he should go because of his passion for villages and his sense of adventure.

In October, Rodney flies from Chicago to Manila. After a long and tiring flight across the Pacific Ocean he stops for several days to see his friend Don Quimby in Manila. Don’s familiarity with the development work in Sudtonggan leads him to say, “Let’s search for water pumps for the village while you are here. I know that they need one.”

They don’t find the water pump they need and Rodney continues his journey into Cebu City. To reach the village of Sudtonggan he takes a boat across to Mactan Island to Lapu-Lapu City and finally makes his way out to the village of Sudtonggan by bus.

During a planning session, the village men share the story of Lapu Lapu City with Rodney. “When Magellan landed on Mactan Island in 1521 his men were starving and sick with scurvy. Magellan’s ship came into the harbor. Chief Lapu Lapu sat on the beach and watched and waited for the tide to turn. When the tide went out the ship got stuck on the mud and Magellan couldn’t move; Lapu-Lapu’s men swarmed his ship and defeated him. A monument in Lapu-Lapu City shows this defeat on Magellan’s cruise around the world. Lapu Lapu, the village chief who defeated Magellan, gave his name for the city.”

The villagers had decided two top priorities: a water well and a better method for cutting limestone. During the village planning, the villagers said, “We only have rocks.”

The village income flows from fishing and the men cutting limestone. Cutting the limestone by hand is slow, difficult and tedious work. As a group, they only cut two or three stones a day. Merchants come each day and pay them a pittance for the stones. They chop rocks into blocks that are used under house posts to keep the poles from rotting. The stone can also be fashioned into corn grinders, mortars and pestles.



Rodney and a couple of village men take a block of the rock to the local Rotary Club in Cebu City. An architect slices the rock in his shop and finds it suitable as facade material for buildings and homes, and polished material for counter and tabletops. They are told that a stone industry will attract buyers who pay workers in advance to assure inventory.

Rodney spends time in Cebu City searching for a piece of chain similar to the one limestone cutters use in Indiana where they do the cutting on big circles like a band saw. His shoulders slump when he can't find a saw that works that way. However, he persuades the villagers to negotiate when they sell their stones. Instead of selling two or three stones each day, the villagers can hold their stones until a pile accumulates and sell them at a higher price. The stone industry of Mactan Island begins.

Again, Rodney faces a village with water problems. The single water pump in the village requires many short strokes to pump water. Each person has to make 1,000 pumps to get enough water to take a shower. Searching for another pump has proved futile, but Don has pledged to continue the search.

Rodney spends hours walking the streets of Lapu Lapu City going to one business after another looking for a saw to cut the stones and a water pump for a well. His disappointment grows after each rejection, and he talks to himself, saying, “It’s hard to keep hearing, ‘We don’t have anything.’ But I have to keep trying.”



Rodney, Village Elder, and
Hale Prather

The ICA staff's inadequate funds leave Rodney hungry most of the time. Even though he donates to their operating budget there never seems to be enough and rice is the main item at every meal.

He later tells me, "I often stopped to get a hamburger and beer while in Lapu-Lapu. I'm sure those hamburgers saved my life."

His weight, down to 124 pounds by the time he returns home, frightens me. I shake with dismay when I hug him and can feel every rib.

A bar and grill near Mactan Air Force Base provides food to the servicemen in that area who are being trained on survival in Vietnam. Filling up with a hamburger proves not to be the only gift of those stops.

One day he meets a young lady from Milwaukee who is serving in the Peace Corps. As they both enjoy a hamburger he spins stories about the needs of the Sudtonggan project. She listens for a while and then says, "We have supplies shipped to our project that we aren't using. I can provide big bags of powdered milk for all the kids in the village."

She also donates several sewing machines to the village women. The women are thrilled and sew green uniforms for all the school children in the village. The kid's giggles and laughter fill the air the day they show off their new clothes.

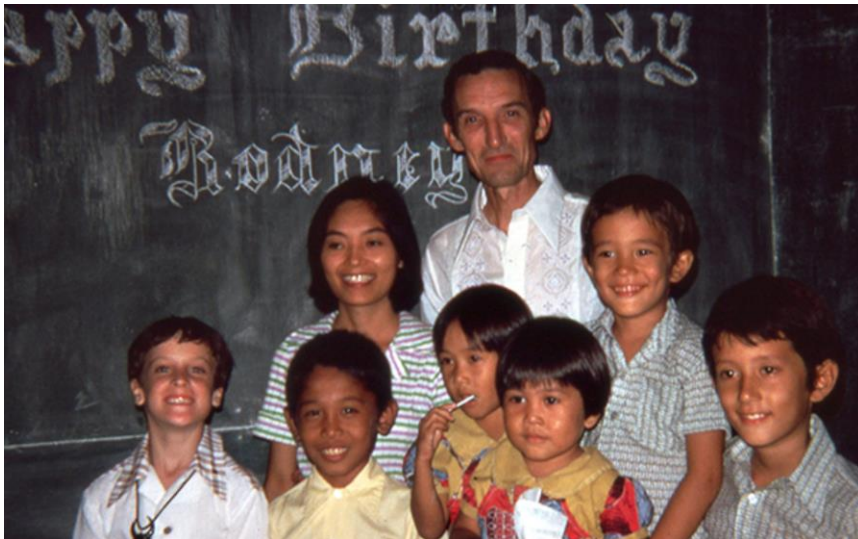
One of the plans includes establishing a fishing business. Some village youth go into the city to check out boats. They return and tell the village elders, “We found some boats about twenty feet long that will operate with outboard motors. But a boat costs about \$50.”

“We don’t have any money to buy boats.”

“Priscilla will donate the money for a boat,” Rodney says.

Several of the youth go back into the city and try to get the best buy possible. When Rodney returns home, he laughs as he tells me, “The men in Sudtonggan appreciated the boat that you bought.”

Rodney observes his 50th birthday during his month in Sudtonggan. A dinner with staff and villagers celebrates his life and the children join in singing Happy Birthday.



When he returns home, he describes his stay in the Institute facility while in the village. “The staff lived in an old romantic-looking building. It has a square compound that opens to the center with bedrooms around the center. It is constructed of straw and has no electricity. A little kerosene lantern furnished light in the little room I had.”

Back home, Rodney leans back with his hands clutching his knees as he shares his stories with me. Bright spots in the village fill him with hope but despair often overwhelms him when he talks of the nitty gritty needs of the ICA staff, the villagers and their development project. Because of his lifetime of hands on practical experience, he sees clearly what more needs to be done.

Rodney’s thinness when he returns home causes us both to wonder if the month was worth it. As I listen to his stories, I am convinced that his enlivening spirit and energy that he spreads across staff and villagers was the major gift to them.

Looking back, how did the efforts of the ICA with the village leadership enhance community? Over time, was population growth and

expansion what that took over from Cebu. We have no way of knowing, but by the year 2000 Sudtonggan had become a thriving suburb of Cebu City.¹

¹ According to the internet.