

Getting to Know the Igorots - On Being Named Igorot Style
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In October 1993 I was in Sagada, Mountain Province, in the Philippines. There I found myself in the midst of a fascinating culture, the culture of the Igorots. The elders in the community took an interest in me because I was constantly asking questions, I clearly had an intense interest in their customs and ways.



This eventually resulted in two key elders within the local dap-ay (meeting place) deciding I needed a name. And with that decision they (on the left) proceeded to call all the key leaders to the dap-ay to start the process.

The first step was a general discussion in terms of which ancestor to honour. But of course this wasn't enough, what was I to become? To answer this question they killed a chicken and examined its entrails. After ruminating for some time they concluded that I was destined to be one of their leaders and with that they named me after Agpad, an ancestral leader.

With that concluded I was instructed to appear at what passed for the local restaurant where I had to present the elders with gifts. These were leaf tobacco, newspaper, matches and gin. Once I sat down among them having given them their gifts, they instructed me in my duties.

Agpad was a revered leader and his spirit must be honoured. I must go forth in life living an exemplary life and making a significant difference in the community in order to earn my name. And with those instructions the ritual was over and the community was told my name.

I thought little of this experience afterwards other than it being quaint. However two months later I found myself being invited to an Igorot conference which I eventually agreed to attend. There I was introduced to the overseas leadership and the issues they faced at home. I found this

interesting too, offered a few thoughts and returned home once more. Six months after that I suddenly found myself appointed as one of six leaders charged with creating an NGO (Non Government Organization), what was going to be called the Igorot global Organization. And from here I found myself increasingly more involved with ever more responsibilities and challenges.

One day I was lamenting my workload and the issues I was carrying to one of my peers. He was not sympathetic. He simply said to me “that’s the destiny the chicken decreed for you so get used to it.” And so I did. It was a lot of work but also a lot of fun. In the course of my responsibilities I’ve had to make peace in the Cordillera, I’ve been part of a medical mission, I was a player in resurrecting a small school and I founded a scholarship program for kids attending cordilleran colleges.

And on one of my trips as I returned to Sagada again some of the elders came to me to tell me that Agpad is proud of me and that I have indeed honoured his name. So in the West I sign my name as Claus but whenever I am in the Cordillera and/or I am dealing with Igorot affairs I sign with Agpad and this name seems enough these days for people to recognize who I am.

In Western society we tend to be quick to judge such rituals as being superstition and meaningless. Yet perhaps we would do well to pause in our judgements and allow sufficient time to pass to test what really happened. I never aspired to a leadership role in anything especially in the Igorot world yet there I was, one of their leaders and today one of their elders as well albeit a young one. As Shakespeare said – there are many things in this life that are not dreamt of in our philosophies. My western mind says being named was simply an interesting ritual but my subsequent experience suggests it was the shaping of my destiny. You’re welcome to look at it either way.

Below are the elders who gave me my name in 1993. Alas many have died since but I honour their spirits too by honouring Agpad’s spirit.

