

## My Proud History as a Newsman

Maybe it is best to start at the beginning. Except I am no longer completely sure if what I once fully understood to be the beginning, what I and every other person here is taught from a young age, is the real beginning -- or if it is just the Official Version.

*Ah bolah*, I have surprised myself.

*Ah bolah*, or, "Oh, my goodness," you might say in English or another unauthorized language. *Ah bolah!* I am sorry for writing down something so rude.

Please accept my previous apology.

And perhaps to save time and space you will forgive me in advance for other terrible things I am about to write? And for writing it all without obtaining the necessary permission?

It happened this year. For us, Year 14.

We measure the passing of time a little differently than in other places, since we no longer recognize false calendars created by the Jews or the Christians or the Muslims, or any other degenerates who would attempt to impose their debased values on us. Our History Book shows that these people once occupied our sacred Homeland, and so did the British and Americans at various points. And the Spanish, for a time. And so did others, it has been rumored, although you cannot find confirmation of this in the Guiding Text.

Much of what occurred here before the Caring Leaders rescued us is probably misunderstood and slightly mixed up. If you were not here at that exact moment, it is

easy to be confused by hearsay repeated and enhanced by very old comrades who possibly have drunk *bolo* beyond their ration and started imagining unhappy thoughts.

However, I was here in Year 1, when everything was switched: the calendar, the flag, the anthem, the money, the policies. Everything.

We cleansed ourselves of all that was not working.

*Ah bolah*, it was rather confusing in Year 1.

Many of my acquaintances mysteriously disappeared, simply vanishing overnight. Others I saw with my own eyes being taken away by uniformed National Heroes.

Some of my acquaintances were attached to the failed old ways. They were so brainwashed that they broke the new rules *intentionally*, as I am doing now. And some broke the rules by so-called “honest mistake,” which we all quickly learned was not a valid excuse. It was a confusing time, I must say.

I was still in my Twenties then, in Year 1. A young man.

Before the changeover, I was even younger. A boy. Forgive me, please, for displaying *meowkaleet* (too much pride) when I report that I was a serious student with top marks in all disciplines, including the important ones such as Chemistry, Agriculture, and Homeland History, and also frivolous ones that are no longer taught, such as unauthorized languages, European Art, and International History. Because I had performed with honorable distinction at my university studies, I was given every opportunity to be a Dedicated Servant of the people, and, it was understood, I might eventually learn to be a Caring Leader.

Unfortunately, I was not able to fulfill my destiny.

Before the changeover, serving in the military was not yet mandatory. But even back then the law was clear: one could not be a lifelong Dedicated Servant without first volunteering to be a National Hero for five years. One of the two great tragedies in my life, please allow me to say, was being disqualified from joining the National Heroes because of my condition.

My right leg is two *plongi* (maybe a centimeter or so?) shorter than the left, which causes me to walk with a very slight limp, which almost none of my fellow citizens notice or comment upon, except naughty children. It is not a serious condition. But, apparently, serious enough to exclude me from proudly serving.

Although I quietly accepted the examiner's decision at the time, and I never said so out loud, to this day I remain convinced that I could have been an exemplary National Hero, despite my imperfections. To my great dismay, I was not permitted the honor.

Because I had demonstrated advanced academic abilities and significant promise, upon graduation, at age 21, I was assigned to the excellent position of Junior Assistant, specializing in Information Gathering at our highly respected National News Service, where I was trained in the approved methods of keeping my fellow citizens educated, motivated, and committed to the future.

I did important work there, gathering information. My superiors went so far as to characterize my work as heroic. But I did not feel this way.

Except on *Tink*, our weekly Day of Reflection, when the electricity is turned off, every day I saw National Heroes parading past my office, high on the 3rd floor of the imposing National News Building. I could not march with them. This, I confess, hurt me, like the slap your teacher administers when you are not concentrating properly. Although

I understood I would never wear the handsome green uniform or carry a weapon, I consoled myself with the knowledge that I was not altogether worthless. In my position of unusual privilege, working in a room with air conditioning and given free drinking water and *uchaana* (our version of cigarettes, but without tobacco), I could do my small part for the National Heroes by helping prepare informative and inspiring articles about them.

My boss at the time, whose name I prefer to not invoke, since he has been discredited (and who has vanished), was the Deputy Supervisor responsible for organizing all the stories about our Heroes. We were expected to produce as many as eight or nine articles a day, although the average at that time was closer to four, since a certain amount of editorial space was expected to be set aside for other Dedicated Servants and Caring Leaders -- and also for *scrachi*, our national sport, which involves stones and tethered birds, and is badly misunderstood by those who were not lucky enough to be born here.

When I started out at the National News Service, our sacred Homeland still had many tabloids and magazines. Back then, there were four daily broadsheets in addition to the official newspaper, *Perriodocko*. Published proudly by the National News Service, *Perriodocko* has never contained advertising or commercial interests, and is therefore the only newspaper that can be trusted. The other newspapers, the “alternative” publications, which we later learned were financed and controlled by foreigners and internal subversives, were at one time quite popular among the uneducated members of our society. These second-rank papers published numerous photos of our beloved singing

stars, the most celebrated entertainers in our sacred Homeland. As well as extensive *scrachi* coverage, of course.

If the unofficial publications had simply conducted themselves responsibly, with proper ethics and etiquette, there is a chance they would still be around today, printing their colorful concert pictures and exclusive backstage interviews with beautiful recording artists. *Chu-chu*, we call this kind of thing, the *chu-chu* world of show business. Silly, perhaps, but harmless. *Ah bolah*, we are crazy for our *chu-chu*. Some say we are a nation of *chu-chu* maniacs, and they mean that as a compliment.

But the other “news outlets” were not happy giving the citizens what they wanted. Instead, the unofficial papers got into the regrettable habit of printing the most revolting slander, making rude accusations about respected and influential citizens. Senators, even.

The syndrome started out small, as these things usually do. An anonymous tip. An impertinent question. A so-called “investigation.” And then everything went out of control. Common decency was sacrificed for the sake of scandal. *Ah bolah*, reputations were destroyed, just like that!

They even wrote that our most reverend Agriculture Minister, who came from a very good family and needed nothing, was diverting public funds that were meant for purchasing seeds and fertilizer. Can you imagine?

The entertaining *chu-chu* reporting gradually diminished, and the lies increased, primarily among the top columnists. It later came out that these writers were being manipulated by unscrupulous handlers, who plied them with *bolo* and drugs, and sometimes immoral women, and, in one case, it was rumored, peasant boys from the provinces.

This was indeed a dark and challenging time, this period right before Year 1. You couldn't pick up a newspaper – except *Perriodoko*, of course – without finding some wild accusation of corruption and deceit. *Ah bolah*, the so-called Opinion Section, where the most reckless “journalists” could say anything that came to their head without fear of consequences: I tell you, it was criminal without being technically criminal, and a big embarrassment to those of us at the National News Service, where dedicated Information Gatherers conscientiously reported the real news and advocated for the betterment of the common man.

But these newspapers, these dirty rags, worthless except for wrapping fishmeal cakes, got into vulnerable minds, like trash in the river, infecting them with dangerous and unhelpful ideas. All you heard was problems. Problems, problems, problems! Never solutions.

If it is possible for an entire country to be depressed, to feel that there is no hope for a better future, we experienced that kind of suffering. It is a very sad way to live.

Fortunately, several of our Senators – this was, as I say, just before the changeover, back when we still had Senators – devised a clever solution. They concocted and unanimously passed a new law, popularly known as BABA (an easy to remember acronym), whose official title is difficult to translate directly but which more or less means “Legal Right to Reply, Retort, and Refute Anything That Is Said Against You.”

If one of the scandal mongers wrote something negative about you or your family, you were legally entitled to BABA: to reply, retort, and refute the accusation in the newspaper that started the trouble. By law, the offending publication was required to give equal space to anyone who had been insulted. The newspaper was also required to print

the BABA in the identical place as the accusation. If something rude about a Senator was written on the front page above the fold, that was where he was entitled to have his BABA. If a malicious column appeared in the so-called Opinion Section, where much of the most irresponsible dirt was flung about, like monkeys playing with their droppings, then the next day's column would be authored by the offended party, who would be granted equal space to clear his good name.

It was very fair.

Predictably, the worst violators, the publications that caused all the turmoil in the first place, complained and whined like spoiled children, claiming that their precious editorial space, which really ought to have been dedicated to stories about *chu-chu* and *scrachi*, would be monopolized by back-and-forth bickering between their writers and the people whose reputations were being wantonly damaged.

For a very brief time, there was talk of all the newspapers in our sacred Homeland banding together in a kind of cartel and organizing an anti-BABA crusade. But the Chief Editor of *Perriodoko* at the time, a great and humble man, reminded us all of what really matters. The Chief Editor, who to this day still permits every citizen, important or not, to call him by his informal nickname Junior, or Jun, even though he is now the Minister of Information and one of our most beloved Caring Leaders -- he made a very interesting point. Chief Editor Junior said that there is no amount of newsprint and no amount of ink that should be spared in the pursuit of fairness. That was the most important thing, Chief Editor Junior told us. Fairness.

*Perriodoko* flourished during the BABA era, because our newspaper was the fairest. We enlightened our fellow citizens *and* showed respect to Dedicated Servants who had pledged their lives to helping the public. We were polite.

Do not assume we shirked our national duty to thoroughly investigate and report our findings to our fellow citizens. We did, and at the risk of exposing my tendency for *meowkaleet*, I must brag a little bit and note that we won many, many awards for our valuable work. We were the only publication in our sacred Homeland to be multi-awarded by the most respected awarding organizations. Our record spoke for itself.

The other newspapers, with their disgusting stories and interminable disagreements, could not match our determination to do things the right way. They rapidly faded into oblivion. People lost interest in reading two grown men shouting at each other in print.

We at *Perriodoko* were not insensitive to the needs of our readers. We expanded our *chu-chu* and *scrachi* coverage. If you asked any educated citizen, they would tell you they were happy to have one completely reliable and trustworthy newspaper.

It was certainly more convenient.