

Raul Dancel ~ Dreaming Of Own Home In Manila's Slums



A row of decrepit apartments built on government land in Baclaran, a sprawling poor district south of Manila. In 1946, there were about 46,000 slum dwellers in Manila. Now, metropolitan Manila is host to about 2.1 million slum dwellers. -ST PHOTO: RAUL DANCEL

MANILA • I grew up in one of the many slums scattered all around metropolitan Manila. Ours was just south of Manila, in Baclaran, a district known for a sprawling shrine dedicated to the version of the Virgin Mary known as the Lady of Perpetual Help.

It was fitting, really. I always felt our neighbourhood was in perpetual need of help. We lived in one of the upper floors of a row of decrepit two-storey flats our landlord somehow managed to build on land he did not own. It was government land.

It was in the middle of thousands of shacks that were really nothing more than cardboard, plywood and tin sewn together with nails, chicken wire and adhesive tape covered with galvanised steel and held in place with cement blocks, used tyres and other heavy debris.

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