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The author and her companions stopped for a quick swim in the river stream pictured in this photo, located near the road of a mountain village in Nanga Nangan, Philippines. (Courtesy of Marjorie Guingona)



by Marjorie Guingona

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"Then the angel showed me the river of life-giving water, sparkling like crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb. ... The Spirit and the bride say, 'Come.' Let the hearer say, 'Come.' Let the one who thirsts come forward, and the one who wants it receive the gift of life-giving water" ([Revelations 22:1;17](#)).

Yes, I can still feel it, the refreshing cool water that unforgettable Sunday of Jan. 22 tingling my tired and aching body in the flowing stream by the roadside. For one moment in time, I felt a deep sense of connection with the crystal-clear spring water cascading down from the rocks, spilling over my head, down to my face and shoulders. This vital source of life that quenches our thirst and slakes our longing for something more than a mere commodity for our daily existence, or a profitable source of revenue in our market-driven world.

On that seemingly ordinary Sunday the community walked — accompanying Deacon Ariel on his way back to Pagadian City after our chapel liturgical celebration — along the muddy road of the mountain village in Nanga Nangan, Philippines. We were surprised to be blessed with nature's gift, that invited us to take a break and enjoy the moment. The mere sight and sound of the fresh gurgling river made us splash into the water with childlike joy and wonder. For one moment in time, I saw water with new eyes: it shimmered with spiritual radiance as the sunlight dappled it with light and shadows through the verdant tree branches swaying gently with the silent breeze.

Suddenly I became acutely aware that I am a water being and a spiritual being at the same time. Since some [60%](#) of the human adult body is made up of water, without consuming adequate water every day we cannot survive. That is more than enough reason why water is an essential part of our nature as human beings — for this element embodies strength, clarity and persistence.

The refreshing power of water certainly has a healing effect that revitalizes our depleted energy, purifies our negativities and renews our soul to wholeness as it moves around and through obstacles set in its path with grace, and cascades into

the unknown with force and persistence.

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In short, our splash in the unstoppable grace flowing down gave me a renewed sense of inner peace and harmony with all of creation, a feeling of coming home to my true self. I also felt a deeper sense of awe and gratitude for being in the communion with our Indigenous brothers and sisters, the Subanens.

The word [Subanen](#) means "river dweller" from the root word "*suba*," meaning river. Like many Indigenous peoples the world over, the Subanens live simply, sustainably and in harmony with nature. They share a deep connection with the natural world, honoring its seasons and cycles, and respecting the treasures creation showers on them — consuming minimally and when necessary, and ensuring that the flow of energy and natural order is conserved in everything they do.

It made me recall the [movie](#) "Avatar: The Way of Water," which I had the rare opportunity to watch on the big screen while in Manila. The movie reintroduces the innocent Na'vi indigenous tribe from the land of Pandora, who lived in peaceful coexistence with the lush flora and fauna of their beautiful ecosystem. It contrasts them with the "sky people," whose insatiable greed exploits the rich natural resources at the expense of the environment, threatening the precious biodiversity and displacing communities most vulnerable to their destructive invasion.

It may not be a real-life story, but it carries with it an urgent environmental message from the world of Pandora that far exceeds even this awe-inspiring film. Even more admirable to discover is that the director, James Cameron, is a staunch environmentalist. It is no wonder that he produced "Avatar" with an eco-conscious [message](#), in order to "[\[rekindle\] in us an awareness](#) of our innate connection to nature, and to each other, which [for him] is primordial." It should shake us from our apathy and inspire us to apply Pandora's principles to life on Earth, and take action to protect our one and only planet in order to mitigate the impact of climate change and global warming.





The author splashed in the river stream pictured in this photo, located along the road of a mountain village in Nanga Nangan, Philippines. (Courtesy of Marjorie Guingona)

I believe St. Francis of Assisi would say when water is not seen as ministering to us humans and all life, when it is not seen as our sister, or as representative of Spirit or of God, or of cosmic presence, it dies. We [lose](#) our identities as water-beings and creatures of spirit.

The ancient poets who wrote the Genesis narrative [expressed](#) from the outset the cosmic origin of water: "In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth — and the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the

deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters."

I have therefore come to value this essential element all the more, especially aware that about [71%](#) of Earth's surface is water but less than 1% is fresh water in rivers and lakes. A 2006 report in the journal Science projected that edible ocean fish may [decline](#) by 90% by 2048.

What is even more worrisome: since much of our water now is [polluted](#), including sacred rivers such as the Ganges and Jordan, future wars may be [fought](#) over water.

[According to Water.org](#), in the Philippines, the water crisis is heartbreaking; some 3 million people living in Manila rely on unsafe and unsustainable water sources and about 7 million lack access to improved sanitation. Despite its growing economy, the Philippines and its growing cities face "significant challenges in terms of water and sanitation access."

My heightened awareness now of being a water and spiritual being is a call to a deeper union, to a marriage — so to speak — with water. We have a choice about our relationship with water. I am reminded of the Samaritan woman's life-changing encounter with Jesus at the well ([John 4](#)). She chose to leave her empty jar in a rush to spread the good news of the living water found in the person of Jesus. Moreover, Jesus himself humbly chose to be baptized by his cousin John at the River Jordan with the living water, for all to see the need to be cleansed from our sins and begin life anew in Christ ([Luke 3:16](#)).

That momentary splash was an unstoppable blessing, which opened up a crack in my dry well of emptiness and fatigue to a wonderful awareness of water and renewed responsibility to care for the Earth. I felt invited to journey with our Indigenous peoples, for we are water and spiritual beings called to evangelize and tell the great news of Jesus, the fountain of life-giving water ([John 4:14](#)). Likewise, we are called each day to celebrate with awe and gratitude the boundless love of

God for us, coursing our way through the water running from our faucets and from the rivers and streams of life constantly flowing.