



CLAUDINE Barretto is glad to be a guest in her husband Raymart Santiago's hit show, "Bantatay." "Nag-guest din naman siya sa drama show ko noon and also, our kids and I are really fans of 'Bantatay' as we watch it nightly," she says when 'Showbiz Central' interviewed her on the show's set in Subic. "So when they invited me sa show, I said yes agad to support my husband. But si James Blanco ang katambal ko rito. I play a vet who'll help Bantay. Tawang-tuwa nga mga anak namin when they learned I'll appear with their dad."

How does she feel about persistent rumors of their marital breakup?

"Paulit-ulit na nga, nakakapagod na. Somehow, kahit ayaw mo patulan, you get affected as friends call to ask kung totoo. So explain ka nang explain na hindi."

It's said the insinuations about their alleged rocky marriage come from one of her own family members. When Gretchen was asked about it, her reply is she doesn't want to say anything "dahil ayoko magsinungaling," which implies that something is really wrong. "Para namang labas-masok siya sa bahay namin and she knows everything. It's better kung ang sariling lovelife na lang niya ang pansinin niya, huwag na ang buhay namin."

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We posted in our website, [www.showbiz-portal.com](http://www.showbiz-portal.com), Iza Calzado's fotos in "Beauty Queen" (to be shown this week) where she joins a bikini contest and dons a skimpy two-piece swimsuit, along with Luis Alandy who also wears trunks, and it quickly got 2,000 hits.

"Binigla kami ni Direk Joey Lamangan diyan," says Iza. "I thought my wearing a two-piece was only in the pictorial. I didn't know I'd also do it on TV. Inisip ko na lang na it's part of my role, I'm playing a character who joins the bikini contest to win money for my mom's bail dahil she's in jail, and 'yun na, I'm in character all throughout the taping. 'Yun nga lang, my friend Maggie Wilson is one of the judges and she tries to prevent me from winning so we end up fighting."

"Wala namang dapat ika-insecure si Iza in donning a skimpy bikini as she's got something to show," says Luis. "Her constant running and dieting paid off. It's good panay rin ang workout ko

sa gym kaya I didn't have any second thoughts anymore when Direk Joel told me I'd have to bare my body in this episode."

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Maja Salvador is excited to do her first indie film, "Thelma," directed by Paul Soriano for Time Horizon Pictures.

"I got offers before to do indie films but they were sexy and I didn't like the story," she says. "When I met with Direk Paul, he told me the story of 'Thelma' at nagustuhan ko agad as it's very inspiring at hindi sexy. I will play a runner na probinsiyana who goes to Manila to compete and she sees this as a means to improve the life of her family na very poor talaga. Walang love story, talagang character-driven focusing on the struggles of the runner to be a champion athlete. I started training for the part even before we started shooting, with Elma Muros as my coach on and off screen. Katatakbo ko nga, I already lost several pounds. Ibang klaseng acting ang ipapakita rito kaysa sa usual acting that I do on TV."

Direk Paul says Maja is his first choice for the role.

"As I started writing the fifth draft of the script, I started casting it in my mind and Maja was my first choice. I've worked with her before in a commercial and she fits the role best. I talked to Mr. Johnny Manahan of Star Magic and I'm thankful he allowed her to work with us right away."

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Fans of Anne Curtis have long been curious as to how her current BF Erwan Heussaff looks. His sister, Solenn, says Erwan hates showbiz but because of their closeness, he was forced to make an appearance in "Survivor Philippines Celebrity Showdown" when the castaways were visited by their closest relatives. Erwan's TV debut was shown last week and it generated a lot of good feedback for the show. Solenn was teary eyed when she saw Erwan visiting her and they hugged tightly. Anne said she also cried when she saw that episode and her fans now chide her for having such a handsome and hunky boyfriend who's a year younger than her at 24. It'll be recalled that Anne used to be the squeeze of "Survivor" host Richard Gutierrez who's now being linked to Solenn. Small world where they're playing a game of musical chairs, isn't it?

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With success comes intrigues. Now that he's famous, "Pilipinas Got Talent" champ Jovit Baldivino is said to be a drunkard in his native Batangas that destroys his voice. "Inaamin kong noong 12 ako, umiinom ako ng lambanog," he says. "Pero matagal na ko 'di umiinom. Hindi ako binabawalan, ako na ang may ayaw talaga. Sana 'wag na nila balikan ang nakaraan kasi ang hinaharap ang mas importante sa'kin ngayon. Kung nagbago man ang boses ko, kasi nagbinata po ako."

His coming concert, "Faithfully," is produced by Edgar Mangahas at Aliw Theater on Nov. 13. How has his life changed since he won?

"Dati, pagala-gala lang ako, pasipa-sipa ng bato. Ngayon, nakikilala na ko ng mga tao. Ako ng nagpapaaral sa apat kong kapatid at nakabili na rin ako ng Starex van na ginagamit ko sa trabaho. Sana lang, magtuloy-tuloy. Natatakot ako, baka isang umaga, hindi na ko gusto ng mga tao."

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We got this report from Cris Ojeda, GMA Artist Center handler. He says Aljur Abrenica helped a waitress, Rosalinda Tuban, who had an accident in the Timog Ave. resto, Snackaru, where Aljur and his brother were having a snack after working out in the gym. Rosalinda slipped when she stepped on an ice cube on the floor and lost consciousness when her head hit a nearby post. Aljur quickly carried her and brought her to a nearby hospital in his car. He waited until she

regained consciousness and tests showed she had no serious injury. Aljur also paid all the hospital bills. "It's no big thing. Ginawa ko lang ang dapat gawin para sa isang taong nangangailangan ng tulong," says Aljur.

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Did you know that Kris Bernal prepared well for her title role in "Koreana"?

"I really studied Korean history and culture as I want to take my role seriously," she says. "They have a rich culture as seen in the epic Korean soaps shown here like 'Jewel in the Palace' and 'Jumong.' As a whole, mababait talaga sila and friendly. Some Koreans nga who saw me in public told me, 'We watch your show. You're a Koreana'."

Would she entertain a Korean suitor?

"Why not? Marami na talagang naging romance between Filipinos and Koreans dito sa atin so it's not surprising anymore. But I'd like to have him as friend muna, bago serious relationship." How does she feel being given two newcomers as leading men, Rocco Nacino and Steven Silva?

"Masaya. Kasi ako naging baguhan din and I like the feeling that I'm now given the chance to help the latest batch of 'Starstruck' winners. Sana makatulong nga ako para mas sumikat pa sila. I think tanggap naman kami ng tao kasi ang taas-taas ng ratings namin so far, which is good dahil it means viewers also accept me kahit iba ang kapareha ko at hindi laging si Aljur Abrenica."

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We just came from our third visit to Thailand. The first time we visited, our money and theirs had the same value. But their economy has now left us behind, just like Kuala Lumpur, and we can't help but feel sad for our country. We saw the factories where they now make patis and bagoong, Philippine products that they now export to the US, along with mangoes and lanzones!

Our guide, Preeda Charaporn, told us: "We learned about rice farming from IRRI in Los Banos in the '60s. Now, you're importing rice from us."

But their biggest industry is tourism. In spite of the protest riots early this year, they still expect to get 14 million tourists this year. Our country gets only 3 million visitors a year when our beaches are even better than Thailand's. The key is in their infrastructure. Their airport is so huge and modern it can accommodate all day-all night air traffic. And they have a dizzying road network that connects Thailand from one end to the other. In Bangkok alone, they have amazing skyways all over designed to combat heavy city traffic. We can do all the inviting to tourists to visit us, but without the infrastructure, they'll never come.

We got to watch "Siam Niramit," a show about the history of Thailand with great costumes, special effects and flying scenes like Cirque du Soleil, only more fabulous with cannon explosion scenes and thunder and lightning scenes. In one sequence, a river sprung on stage and an actor dove into it for a short swim. We don't know how they did but it's really amazing. We went to the floating market in Radchaburi, the Samphran Elephant and Crocodile show, then the underwater world in the basement of Siam Paragon, a classy mall right in the heart of the city. Really amazing. We also took the temple tour at the Reclining Buddha temple, the tallest Buddha temple, and passed by the palaces where members of Thai royalty live. If you want a good guide in Bangkok, contact Preeda Charaporn in Facebook.