May I present to you a book of poems and stories, written by some of the children belonging to Don Bosco Youth Centre, Pasil. I went to Pasil as a volunteer for Bosco Volunteer Action (BOVA), the overseas volunteering organisation of the Salesians of Don Bosco in the UK, a Catholic Religious order. It offers placements for adults to serve the young and the poor, living and working alongside Salesian communities around the world.

Pasil is an overpopulated slum area with a very bad reputation throughout the city. It is situated just outside the city of Cebu in The Philippines. Once the city’s dumping area, its population boomed with squatters moving from rural areas to the city. In the 70s there were many drug- and gang- related problems.

Today things are peaceful – apart from thousands of children, hens, cockerels (for cock-fighting), pigs, dogs, cats, rats (sometimes bigger than the cats – no exaggeration), cockroaches, loose basketballs, trisikads (bicycles with sidecars attached for paying passengers), videoke stalls (video karaoke) and the constant drone of the city’s main power station– the immediate neighbour. So maybe peaceful isn’t the right word!

In the middle of all this chaos are the gates of Don Bosco. Don Bosco was an Italian Priest who worked with the young and the poor, and this is exactly what the Don Bosco centre in Pasil puts into action. By day it is an oasis of calm as a vocational training centre for local out-of-school youth. Trainees spend 70% of their time here learning practical skills in the various workshops (Automotive, Machine Shop, Woodwork and Garment Technology) and the remainder in the classrooms, for maths, English, Christian ethics and job motivation training. Time is also allocated for assemblies, Mass, music and sport. It is a unique place where there is so much life, and such a sense of community.

At 6pm each day Don Bosco becomes a busy youth centre with over 200 young people. As well as basketball there’s also a games room with table tennis, pool, videoke and table football. The little ones play a variety of games, including games with flip flops and bottle tops.
At the same time as all this fun and games, the scholars study in the library. Although education in the Philippines is theoretically free, it comes with many hidden costs. These include paying for school uniform, textbooks, notebooks and stationery. Through Don Bosco’s Scholarship Program around a hundred children from poorer families receive their school supplies free of charge. In return these children are expected to attend one-hour study sessions in DBYC five evenings per week. Don Bosco also offers a Clinic and Pharmacy, which opens 5 half days per week giving free consultations with visiting doctors and dentists as well as cheap medicines.

The huge air-conditioned malls of the city feel a million miles away from the tiny, fragile buildings squashed onto and over narrow alleyways in Pasil. I have visited a number of houses within Pasil, and living within the community myself has enabled me to experience the reality of life here. The corrugated iron roofs make the houses unbearably hot, so many people, including the sick, lie on benches, tables, in trisikads or on hand carts outside. There is little or no privacy here - people even wash themselves on the street.

Children seem to be everywhere. Families are large, with 7 or 8 children not being unusual. At the back of Don Bosco there is a beach covered in rubbish. It is swept in by the tide or dumped by the locals, making a thick carpet of plastic, card, glass, metal and rotting food. Unbelievably there are usually children playing here, searching through the rubbish for bottles, plastic or scraps of metal to sell, or doing acrobatics using the softer trash as a crash mat. They also swim in the heavily polluted waters.

All of the stories in this booklet were written by some of the members of the Don Bosco Youth Centre, Pasil. The participants of the short story and poetry writing competition were asked to write about ‘Life In Pasil’. Some of the pieces in this booklet are fictional, whilst others are non-fictional. Please note that although I have edited these stories, I have done so in order to correct language mistakes: I have not changed the meaning of these stories at all. Note that the original American English spelling has been retained, as this is the form of spelling used in the Philippines.
I hope that you enjoy these pieces of writing, and that you are able to get a glimpse of what Pasil is really like in the hearts and minds of those who live there.

Pasil has been lifted over the years by the continued presence of two religious orders – the Salesians and the Missionaries of Charity (Mother Theresa Sisters). NGOs have come and gone, but these two have continued to live with and for the people. At a much simpler level I believe that my time in Pasil was meaningful for Don Bosco and the people it serves – in what I have done but also in my presence. People are so pleased that I have been willing to learn about how they live and give them my time. I hope that this booklet enables you to learn something of the lives of these people.

I feel so privileged to have experienced something of life here. According to the UN about a third of the world’s total urban population now live in slums worldwide – how important it is that we in the (rich) UK understand what this means.

If you are interested in volunteering with the Salesians, please contact Father Bob (the British Salesian Priest in charge of BOVA) bobbybosco21@hotmail.com, or James Trewby bova@salesianyouthministry.com.

If you feel you would like to make a donation to benefit such people in Pasil please contact mariamurphy87@hotmail.com, or either of the above named.

Many Thanks,

Maria Murphy
Pasil is known as a trash place. That's why many people work as garbage collectors, to earn money, to help their family and to have food.

Many people find plastic and metals to sell at the scrap yard. Children also copy the adults collecting garbage so that they may have food, notebooks and other things they need. Pasil is also known as a danger zone for strangers...because there are some 'out-of-school youths' living here who do not know what values are. But some people do have good values because they study hard.

By Jonmar Cabaron, aged 14
The first day at my school I was very happy because I met my dream girl, and also my new classmates. I am getting to know my classmates and I am starting to learn my Grade Six subjects.

About the occupation of my father, he is a laborer. And my mother stays at home caring for the family. I’m very happy in life because my mama and papa are very understanding of their children. I have two brothers and I am the youngest in our family.

By Ar-Ar Fernandez, aged 11
The place where I learned to understand
my hopes and ambitions at hand
The place I learned to accept
With all that life could offer.

The place where people don't want to be
for once it was a dumping sea.
The Place where all evils hide,
Where the angels fear to tread.

The place that doesn't have evenings,
with people day and night working.
The place that everybody thinks
That's helpless, hopeless and stinks.
But they don’t know what really lies in this place after all,
A haven where all my dreams are built.
For no one knows that in this place my happiness truly lives.

PASIL, the place of hope,
The place of dreams,
The only place of love I’ve ever known.

By Lope Abas, aged 15
I'm just a kid
Full of life
Well pain
Liked gone

However, it's not that easy
The life moments
When to finish
All the raindrops?
For time comes,
Joy will be fulfilled.
Tiresome, hardship

Were sacrificed

To find

The true meaning

Of success.

By Angelito B. Cabanilla, aged 14
(not edited)
My name is Jonathan Ocarol, thirteen years old. I have observed that Pasil is a very poor place, you know. Many are sick, many die and many use drugs. Many have no food, no home, and they live on the street. Many have no money to buy what they need. When I have solved my problem of completing school I want to help everyone with what they need, and I want to reach out to my country, and especially to Don Bosco Pasil. I pray everyday, go to church every Sunday, and I trust in God. I love my family; papa, mama, and my brothers. I want to help them. We pray and we love you God.

By Jonathan Ocarol, aged 13
People say that Pasil is too crowded, and a very noisy place. There are many children running, playing and shouting.

Pasil is also known as a squatter area. It is a special place where people work together and form good relationships. But some people living in Pasil cause problems in their own lives, in their country and in Pasil, examples are noise, pollution and improper disposal of their waste, even sewage waste. That's why some people say it's a dirty place full of dirty people.

But for the people who live in Pasil, it is a place of joy and happiness. People help one another. Keeping Pasil clean is the pride of everyone. It is a beautiful place to live.

By Jay R Ynoc, aged 15
My name is Jovelyn Aragon. I’m twelve years old. This is my story about the nature of Pasil. I’m thinking about the nature of Pasil because the river is so dirty and smelly, and why does the road have lots and lots of garbage?

I can see the dirt and I can smell the smelly river in Ermita. I can see the people throwing their waster and garbage in the river and I don’t know why. The next morning as I go to school I hear the ringing of the bells of the dump truck. Few people are throwing their garbage into the dump truck because they are sleeping, or too tired to throw their garbage into the truck. I know why the river is dirty. It is because people and sleeping and when they wake up they have missed the dump truck, so they throw their garbage in the river instead.
The other question I ask myself is why the roads are dirty. When I was walking in the road on my way to school, I saw a man throw his empty junk food packaging onto the road. I don’t know why he did this when there is a trash can nearby, just inside City Hall. When I am at school I see the kids playing, eating and drinking. After they eat and drink they throw their trash on the ground and they go back to play again. And so I know why the roads and the ground are dirty; the children are too lazy to put their waste in the trash can, because they want to go back to play quickly.

I hope that in 2010 the river and roads in Pasil will be clean. If not in 2010, I hope in the future this will happen, and not only in Pasil but also in other provinces in the Philippines.

By Jovelyn Aragon, aged 12
On the sixth day of January, in the year 1994, a cute little boy was born. His family was so happy when he came into the world. Everybody was so excited to see him in the nursery room, because the doctors and nurses had told them that the baby looked like an American boy. He was so white, with red lips and such black hair, and his eyes were smiling. This boy is Joharriz Rhey C. dela Cerna.

Joharriz was the second child of Rey A. dela Cerna and Lilibeth C. dela Cerna. He has one elder brother and one younger sister. He has also one half brother on his mother’s side. He has a happy family, although they are not rich. They live at 892 L. Flores St. Pasil, Cebu City.
Joharriz is so funny, a joker, and energetic. But behind his happy exterior, his life is problematic. Frankly speaking, poverty is the main cause of his problems. Joharriz encountered many challenges and problems, but he is stronger and braver now to face any obstacles. Joharriz doesn't want to tell his parents about his problems, but his friends know them. ‘Crizalynian’ is the name of Joharriz’s and his friends’ clan and they help each other find solutions to their problems.

But one day, when another problem came into his life, he was so sad that he didn't want to tell anyone. His mother notices that he was quiet and so she asked him what was the matter. He has never told his mother his problems, but she forced him to tell her. So he told his mother all about his problem. She was shocked to hear what Joharriz told her, but she was willing to help her child. Joharriz learned something; it’s important to tell his family his problems in order to solve them easily.
Now, Joharriz is in Fourth Year, the final year of High School. Encouragement and desire to finish studying has made him serious about his education. But studying at college will be a problem because his parents can't afford the fees. Despite the challenges he will try to do his best to go to college and finish his course, because he wants to work not for his own good, but for the good of his family and to create a better future for them.

Joharriz walks his journey of life with encouragement, patience, and fear of God. Alongside him are his dreams and ambitions. He believes that, ‘Poverty is not the hindrance to success', and ‘Education is a treasure that can't be stolen, and it is the sky of success'.

By Joharriz della Cerna, aged 15
Hurt at High School

In the past, some of my classmates at High School have said negative things about my home, Pasil. I was hurt and I felt angry when I found out what they were saying. Once I lost my temper and I started shouting at them. This incident brought the matter to the attention of my class. I realize that if I act like this I am playing up to their negative image of the people from Pasil.

I want to learn to be more competitive. I have to stand up to my obstacles and do something about them. I will find a way to prove that I can do it. I have to boost my confidence, to believe and trust in myself. I will let the world see that Pasil is the most wonderful place that will ever exist and I am contented with what I have.

By Mary Joy Fatima Tampus, aged 17
Pasil Family

A story based on our neighbor.

Here's the story of a woman named Mayet. She is very fat, untidy and poor. Despite that, she's still happy with her life. She respects everyone and most of all, she's God-fearing. She's illiterate, but she knows how to make her own decisions without doubts. She lives life to the full. One day she met the man named Negro. He is dark, tall and cute. Then Negro noticed that Mayet was staring at him. She was having a day dream! “Have I passed your standards, Miss Mayet?” But Mayet was still in a day dream! She didn't know the man was walking towards her. It was unbelievable that at that moment they both felt the same. Happy? No, more than that, they were both in love with each other. It all happened so quickly and unexpectedly. They were married after having met a few days before. They now have six children.
Due to Mayet’s illiteracy, it is difficult for her to find a job. Her husband’s salary is just enough to cover their expenses. The couple doesn’t give up. They worked hard together to raise their children well, but unfortunately one of their children became a thief. It was hard for them to accept this truth about their child. They have begged their son not to do bad things, and not to go out at night. But their son rebelled and escaped during the nights. When day came there were lots of complaints. His father was so angry, but he has pity for his son. His mother wanted to take him to the ‘Missionaries of Charity’, even though to take him to this orphanage would be hurting the deepest part of her heart. But it is the only way to solve the problem. Her husband agreed with her decision, and they entrusted him to the Missionaries of Charity. However, their son cried and begged not to be left there. The couple’s heart leaped with mixed emotions; shock, amazement, happiness, doubt, uncertainty at the reaction of their son.
He was begging and begging his parents. In one sense they were happy that the boy had promised to be a good son. On the other hand they were also worried that maybe it was a trick. Maybe he was just reacting in this way to convince his parents not to leave him at the Missionaries. Mayet and Negro didn’t continue with their plan.

These days they live a simple and happy life. Their family bond has become stronger. The lovely couple have noticed the big change in their son. Their son now goes to church and respects everyone in the community. So this story presents you with a chance to change your life and to follow the right path, not the wrong path. There will be a time you will realize your faults. Don’t give up and don’t ever lose hope!

By Cindy Castigador, aged 16
My Life in Pasil

When I was a child, I used to think that Pasil was peaceful and quiet, and that people were helpful to one another. However, as I grow up, I see its real color. Pasil is chaotic, there are a lot of drug addicts and gambler, and people have no respect for each other. The houses are very near to each other and it’s very noisy. Some are beautiful, but others are not. But, not everything is negative about Pasil. The presence of Don Bosco Youth Centre helps a lot; the children learn good traits. The Church is there to instill Christian values and ethics. The sports complex was built to enhance sports and keep children from drugs. This is all I can say of my life in Pasil.

By Jonhjee G. Bacalde, aged 15

Translated from Cebuano by Alner Tagsip
Ever since she was a child, her parents have shown great love for her. Whatever she likes she gets. Until she reached eighteen years old, when she changed her attitude and became rebellious. She comes home very late, but even if she comes home on time all she does is text and talk to her boyfriend.

One time, when she sneaked into her parents' room, she accidentally heard that she was adopted. She couldn't bear the pain, and so she left home and lived with her boyfriend. She stopped going to school. One day she found out that she was pregnant. A month later, her boyfriend no longer supported her. An easy life suddenly became so complicated! She could have enjoyed her life, if only she hadn't lost her way.
Then she finally realized everything. She regretted leaving home, and couldn't go back, even though she knows she is always welcome to go home. The worst thing is, she still feels hatred towards her parents, instead of being thankful to them for treating her as a real daughter.

By Princes Cabansay, aged 15
Translated from Cebuano by Alner Tagsip
Children of Pasil

The Children of Pasil are pretty and good looking. But some tag them as “no good”. I say to them that they are no good as well. Some are playful, but others are naughty. Smokers and vandals are also rampant.

The Children of Pasil are simple, honest and cute. Some are doing well in their studies, others are good at sports. Every night they pray the Rosary. They are always enjoy surfing the internet.

By Apple Jean T. Quirante, aged 14

Translated from Cebuano by Alner Tagsip
What’s the Difference?

There is a remarkably big difference in the attitude of Pasil’s youth today in comparison with days gone by. The same is true with the environment. Before, people lived in peace; no chaos, with a clean environment. Children before respected their elders, and there were no gangs, like that of Bloods and Crips. Children went to bed early because they respected the curfew. The environment was clean and there was no pollution.

However, these days it is completely the opposite. People shout at each other and there’s no understanding between people. There is no unity. Pollution is increasing; the price of goods is increasing. Crisis hits Pasil, thus some steal or rob, some turn to prostitution, just to put food on their plates.
You can’t see the trees because there are none; the entire place is overcrowded.

Therefore, whilst it is not too late, let’s help one another to change this bad image. We can do it if everybody does his share. Let’s not abuse what God has given us!

By Rolly Batucan, aged 15
Translated from Cebuano by Alner Tagsip
There’s No Place Like Pasil

When I was a kid, my parents told me what Pasil used to be like, how it was originally just a seashore of Cebu. It all started when the city of Cebu designated the land as a dumpsite area. As years passed by, the seashore became land, and people started to live there. The name Pasil comes from the word ‘pasir’ which means ‘crystal sand’. The source of income here for many people is collecting garbage to sell to the scrap yard. Some people do illegal things, like selling drugs and gambling illegally. When people at school ask me where I live, and I tell them, “Pasil,” they become frightened of me, because in their mind people living there are bad and it is home to criminals. Despite these negative things, or ‘norms’ about Pasil, it is not a hindrance to my family to live in Pasil.

I really enjoy living in Pasil, because every night is a fiesta! The kids call themselves the ‘kings of the street’, instead of the vehicles.
The people own the streets and the vehicles will move around them. One day my parents decided to move to another place so that me and my siblings would not be influenced by the bad things that happen in Pasil. So, we moved to a peaceful, quiet village, but I missed the noise and the games in the street of Pasil. I could not get used to the place. The business my parents set up there began to go bankrupt, so they decided to return to Pasil, because Pasil is a place to earn easy money. If you are a hardworking person, you will survive in Pasil. I was so happy that we would return to Pasil, and I would be able to do all the things I missed doing.

My parents always told me never to be part of any gangs or fraternities, as they just destroy your life. I heard about Don Bosco Youth Center there and so I joined a group there with some of my friends. At Don Bosco youth center I learned a lot of things, especially fear of God and how to become a good citizen.
The center offers a lot of activities in order for the young people to develop their skills, talents, and especially to grow in love for God. The center makes me believe that Pasil is a place of good and talented people.

Aside much poverty in Pasil, illegal things are happening all around, and you may just not notice it, because everyone is busy in order to survive. The people are very joyful, but behind the smiles you will see big problems. At present, one of the big sources of income in Pasil is the fish market. The people who work in the fish market live by night; the evening is day, and the day is night, because the fish market will start to operate at dawn. In order to survive day by day, my parents, and many other people, will find a way, in whatever disguise, to put food on our plates.
Our family have tried to move away from Pasil in order to escape the ‘norms’ of the way of life here, but we cannot replace it; we cannot replace it in our hearts. It does not matter what people think of Pasil, but what matters is how we live our lives in order to survive each day. Just like the ‘crystal sand’, where Pasil’s name originates from, there’s a lot of crystal hiding in the sand that can only be found in Pasil.

By Daryl G. Babatiol, aged 23