

Written by

Tuesday, 25 June 2013 13:53 - Last Updated Tuesday, 25 June 2013 14:02

The News UpFront: (TOP STORY) as of Tuesday, June 25, 2013

The high-profile hypocrites in Toronto's Filipino community are now being unmasked from their rickety pedestals. They who packaged themselves as virginal and without sins. They who strut in high horses preaching the good but living a life of pretense. The masquerade is over for the couple Hermie Garcia and Mila Garcia and their sneaky collaborator named Oswald Magno. Along the way, Philippine Press Club -Ontario is dragged into the fray because no PPCO member or officer has so far dared to stand against them. If PPCO is to be saved from extinction, it must show its independence and kick members who bring ill will and disrepute into it.

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PREROGATIVE The Moral High Ground

By ROMEO P. MARQUEZ Member, *Investigative Reporters and Editors (IRE)*, *Asian American Journalists Association (AAJA)*, *National Ethnic Press and Media Council of Canada (NEPMCC)* and *Reporters Without Borders*

Let him without sin, be the first to throw a stone. - John 8:7

TORONTO - The local press association is not exactly a monastery where vestal virgins live in seclusion, preaching and leading a life of sacrifice and denial. It is figuratively a shelter of men and women who either work in media or have links with them in some capacity.

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Humans, not robots, inhabit Philippine Press Club Ontario (PPCO). They interact with other humans and the interaction comes in many ways - physical, verbal, spiritual, mental, etcetera - that only affirms man's superiority over animals.

In their lifetimes, humans make blunders. It's in the nature of the species that humans inevitably commit mistakes. But there are some who miscalculate. Others slip unknowingly, some habitually and still others hideously.

The degree of culpability varies from one person to another. There's no one individual who can be said to be blameless or free of any fault. As Lewis Thomas says: "We are built to make mistakes, coded for error"

PPCO is one organization unlike any other of similar intentions.

There are members who fall into what may be called "square peg in a round hole" - the unknowledgeable kind who dwell in the club to promote themselves and their businesses. Others are there strictly for professional reasons while some use it for their personal and private agendas and as a way of validating their activities which may or may not be above board.

If PPCO is a house, it is built of glasses. Knowing that now, "people who live in glass houses shouldn't throw stones," as the saying goes. But the stones keep coming from there, mostly from rats lurking underground that mutate into humans.

In February 2012, Tess Cusipag, my editor and publisher at Balita, submitted my name for membership in PPCO much against my wishes. I wasn't interested, being a member myself of four regional and worldwide journalist organizations.

The Missouri-based Investigative Reporters and Editors (IRE), for example, helps hone skills in investigative journalism that are very helpful in uncovering criminal activities in the community. So my membership there is fruitful in terms of sharpening knowledge.

Reporters Without Borders, on the other hand, fights censorship, monitors attacks on freedom of information and supports persecuted journalists from its headquarters in France. Membership affords some protection, specially in situations where harassment could turn into physical attacks, as could be my case here in Toronto.

Not to belittle PPCO, but it's simply out of synch and out of my league.

Last year when my application for membership was filed, it had 53 members and four applicants. This year when a succession of presidents took over - from Ricky Caluen to Rubi Talavera to the incumbent Hermie Garcia - the number of members had dwindled to 47, seventeen of whom elected Garcia president.

Clearly he lacks popular support, likely because he and his wife's (Mila Garcia) leftist sympathies are well-known in the community. I have not known this couple from many years of active practice and never crossed them until lately. (Related video at: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i4vVh6sZsPc>).

While they were engaged in provincial journalism and the communist underground, I was already making headway as a foreign correspondent, first with the *Asahi Shimbun*, and

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later on at Hamburg-based

Deutsche Presse-Agentur.

(Video at:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lk0AXXyPXaE>

).

Their ideologies have mellowed somewhat I believe, following the collapse of communism, although there are countries still holding out, notably China, Cuba, North Korea, among others. The Garcias' *Philippine Reporter* follows the political left but espouses capitalism just as well, a conundrum dictated by needs and convenience.

The couple is still very much involved in underground activities here in Toronto but in a different way, like fighting off perceived enemies that could lessen their self-importance in the community. Their past experience with covert activities in central Philippines provides them with knowledge on how to subvert the status quo as it affects them.

In the midst of the discussion last year on amending the PPCO constitution, Hermie Garcia, according to PPCO insiders, circulated a 2005 news video about me which alleged that I was deported from the United States (where I lived for 16 years) because of another unfounded allegation that accused me of bigamy.

It's the same video that his sneaky collaborator, Oswald Magno, had mass-emailed for no reason to colleagues at the University of the Philippines Alumni Association in Toronto in March 2012. Magno's confederate in San Francisco, bankrupt lawyer Rodel Rodis, had provided it to him. (Full story at: <http://www.balita.ca/2013/05/the-truth-about-hermie-garcia-and-oswald-magno/>).

(AS an aside, Magno initiated a petition in PPCO seeking sanctions against Balita. It was supposed to be junked already until Garcia interfered to let it stay

, according to PPCO sources. Until now, PPCO as a body has not decided on the issue despite the fact that Magno is not a member nor is he with media. Video at:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D91DxGQt9OU>

).

The same unverified video surfaced after I reported on the story involving Rosemer Enverga's alleged failure to submit complete financial statements about the conduct of three beauty contests she run and managed under Philippine Independence Day Council. (Full story at: <http://www.balita.ca/2012/12/pidc-earns-a-paltry-from-beauty-pageant-revenues-of-100k/> and video at: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h0BAxCQYRoc>).

None of it is true, of course. To this day, no proof exists that would affirm the accusations simply because there's none in the first place. My attackers would not listen to this, however. The news channel and the reporter had refused to air my side knowing my rebuttals would impact their credibility.

Failing in that, I had to publish my answers to every single assertion in that story in my own newspaper, the *Philippine Village Voice*, in San Diego, California. That and the story that triggered it are neatly bound in a book I self-published in 2005. (Related video at:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q9vcuamfGCI>

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A journalist worth his salt would necessarily have to satisfy certain standards in reporting. But Hermie Garcia, covetous of the PPCO presidency, didn't bother. The video would surely affect my chances of running for PPCO president, assuming that my application has been approved and I already qualified to run.

Only a few knew that the idea of fielding my candidacy was nothing serious. It was a test.

Tess Cusipag and some friends had thought about floating the idea just to see how members would react. PPCO was not moving anywhere; its activities were confined to picnics and socials that had no relevance to journalism. Moreover, a left-leaning faction seemed to be calling the shots there to the utter helplessness of other members.

Talk went around mostly in social media and by word of mouth. Every time my test candidacy was told and retold, the story acquired new meaning. For our part, we were watching how the events were unfolding.

At one point, Rose Tijam, then PPCO president and presently vice president, had informed Tess that my application had already been approved and that it was just a matter of making an announcement that I have become a member. It didn't happen. Along the way, a decision had been reversed.

Knowledgeable PPCO sources tell me how Hermie Garcia orchestrated PPCO to deny my membership, ostensibly based on the issue of morality. The news video that he had earlier circulated had now become the basis for rejecting my application. (Related story at: <http://www.balita.ca/2013/04/is-he-president-of-press-club-or-drumbeater-for-a-friend/>

).

That means he, and the others too, believed the video's allegations without even asking me whether or not it was accurate and truthful.

For more than a year, I labored to find out why PPCO refused me. Not that I was interested; mine was to know the process and the reasons for reaching that decision.

The mainstream press organizations of which I am a card-carrying member for years never have made any attempts to question a member or an applicant for membership if he is "of good moral character". Doing so would flush out the hypocrites.

I don't claim the moral high ground. And neither should Hermie Garcia and wife Mila Garcia. Nor should many PPCO members who lead a life of sin. (Related story: <http://www.balita.ca/2013/05/editor-warns-of-misuse-of-press-club-for-monetary-grants/>

).

In June 1996, for example, after evading being served with a claim for loan repayments, the Ontario Court of Justice ordered the Garcias to pay creditors more than \$20,000 for debts they owed. (Details in the next installment of this story).

Should this case reflect on their moral character? If it does - and it is my opinion that it does - officials and member should kick them out of PPCO on the same ground that they refused my membership.

What's good for the goose is good for the gander. # # #

(Copyright by Romeo P. Marquez, Editor, *Philippine Village Voice*, Toronto, Ontario, Canada. Volume 7, Issue no. 42, June 25, 2013. Email at: TheFilipinoWebChannel@g

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Background videos of my You Tube channels:

- 1. Romar Media Canada: Redefining Community News at The Gotcha Journalist Channel's Currents & Breaking News: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=42YXRLqaQYA&feature=channel&list=UL>
- 2. The Filipino Web Channel: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wQD8macEjAM>

- 3. In Service of the Community: <http://animoto.com/play/Zt02JnetbCSlqEqNqlobgg>

Other stories for the mainstream available at: <http://digitaljournal.com/user/130094/news>

My news and food channels can be viewed by clicking the links:

- 1. The Gotcha Journalist Channel's Currents & Breaking News at: <http://www.youtube.com/user/TheGotchaJournalist#g/u>
- 2. The Filipino Web Channel at: <http://www.youtube.com/user/FilipinoWebChannel#g/u>
- 3. Filipino Web Entertainment Channel at: <http://www.youtube.com/user/FilWebEntertainment#g/>
- 4. EatsNRestos Channel at: <http://www.youtube.com/user/EatsNRestos/videos>

PHILIPPINE VILLAGE VOICE/The Filipino Web Channel - Redefining Community News Currents & Breaking News

Volume 7, Issue No. 42 OPINION/COMMENTARY / News That Fears None, Views That Favor Nobody /

. A community service of The Filipino Web Channel (TheFilipinoWebChannel@gmail.com) and the Philippine Village Voice (PhilVoiceNews@gmail.com) for the information and understanding of Filipinos and the diverse communities in North America

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