

Written by Bobby Reyes

Wednesday, 31 October 2007 01:53 - Last Updated Monday, 22 September 2008 03:28

The very-humorous satire of Poet-pundit Fred Burce Bunao about the First Gentleman becoming the first Filipino cosmonaut immediately brought to mind the case of Irene Mora, whom I called a Filipino cosmoNUT or an astroNUT in 2004.

Remember when Ms. Irene Mora became the toast of the Filipino cyber world in the first quarter of 2004? Many Manila-based newspapers printed her story as the first Filipino ever to fly in outer space. And Filipino-American newspapers published the reports from Manila as if they were the gospel truth. To my limited knowledge, I was the first journalist to write that she was a "Hoaxbalahap." I said that she was lying and Filipinos worldwide were falling – hook, line and sinker – for her claim that, among others, she flew on a U.S. space shuttle in 2000.

The reactions by many Filipino Internet users were swift. People, especially my long-time critics in the NaFFAA, the FANHS, the Books for the Barrios and their allies in the Fil-Am press, vilified my person and they said that I was anti-Filipino. Some of them even said that I was making fun of a legitimate achievement of a Filipino and a woman at that. Some e-forum participants started hitting me as the messenger of the bad news that the Mora claim was a hoax but they did not address the message at all.

This writer was telling people that he was not a politician who likes only to say what people want to hear. A journalist should write the truth.

To end the online dispute and silence my critics, I told the e-forums that I would engage the services of a third party, Joseph Lariosa, a veteran journalist, to find out the truth. Mr. Lariosa is the Chicago-based representative of the National Press Club of the Philippines. He is also the correspondent of the Manila Bulletin and Tempo newspapers of the Philippines. So, Mr. Lariosa did investigate the issue and came up with a report that confirmed my original statement that the Irene-Mora story was a hoax. Ms. Mora's statement that she was the first Filipino astronaut or cosmonaut was false.

To read Joseph Lariosa's investigative report about the Irene Mora hoax, please go to your browser and type this link: http://www.pinoyonboard.com/2004/0620_mora.html

We are also reprinting Mr. Lariosa's report at the end of this article, as some of our readers may not be able to access it online.

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I said then that my exposé, as confirmed by Mr. Lariosa, should serve as a lesson to Filipino newspapers in Manila that they should investigate allegations first before they print them as news. And the Filipino-American publications that copied verbatim from Manila newspapers the Irene-Mora story should make sure that they are not copying a hoax. Filipino-American wannabe journalists should use their common sense in copying articles from Philippine publications.

Indeed the Media Breakfast Club (MBC) was right in giving Mr. Lariosa the First MBC-Dean Reyes Award for Journalistic Excellence and Literary Distinction on Nov. 21, 2001. It was a validation of his stature as a real journalist.

Aside from the newspapers in Chicago and San Diego and online publication in New York that carried my original story about the Irene-Mora hoax, all the Filipino-American publications reprinted the false news from Manila newspapers. After Mr. Lariosa verified my stand, only two Filipino-American media practitioners acknowledged my exposé. Here are their notes, as posted in the www.pinoyonboard.com :

"Dear Bobby:

"After the warning, there was another e-mail that did confirm the veracity of the story. The other newspaper based in New York ran the same headline that week. But again, with your and Joseph Lariosa's (who is a reporter for our newspaper) investigation, we will run another Mora story; this time as a cosmoNUT. Thank you for the information you have given me. Everything is highly appreciated.

"Warmest regards,
Anthony Advincula
Editor
The Filipino Express
2711 JFK Blvd. Jersey City
NJ 07305
201-434-1114"

Larry Pelayo posted also in the www.pinoyonboard.com these notes: "Thanks a million. It is an honor to be a reader and receiver of reliable news and factual exposes from your end.

"I know Joseph Lariosa by heart and I am a friend of Bobby Reyes.

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"Currently, I am the Chairman of the Board of the United Philippine National Press Club USA, Inc. and write on various Fil-am newspapers and magazines here in Los Angeles. I am also the current secretary of the Press Photographers Philippines USA."

A Ms. Ana posted also her comments in the www.pinoyonboard.com : "Your expose on this hoax, to my mind, has left the mainstream media in the Philippines not only-cross-eyed but almost half blind!!!"

Dr. Eddie AAA Calderon of Minneapolis, Minnesota, posted his comments, to wit: "Just to let you know that I sent the article of Bobby Reyes to both the Philippine Inquirer and Philippine Star when he sent us the first e-mail about Ms. Mora's claim that she was training to be an astronaut or she was an astronaut.

"Have not received anything from the Philippine newspapers.

"Also the previous article of Ms. Mora stated that she was a polyglot or multilingual and speaking at least 8 or 9 languages. If her contention that she was training to be an astronaut is false then her multilingual claim can also be a suspect."

The Filipino newspapers in the Philippines and in the United States, with the exceptions of the Filipino Express and the Ang Panahon, never bothered to issue any retraction after they published the false claims of Ms. Mora.

Here is Joseph G. Lariosa's investigative report, as originally published in the www.pinoyonboard.com on June 21, 2004: QUOTE.

After an Investigation: Filipina's Claims to Be a Cosmonaut Do Not Check Out

Chicago, ILLINOIS --- When your mother says, "I love you," check it out. This rule of thumb that guides hard-nosed journalists to double check their sources for stories that are too good to be true appears have slipped by some Philippine newspapers, which are the chief source of most of their stories of Overseas-Filipino newspapers.

Bobby M. Reyes, an online community journalist from Los Angeles, California, pointed the breach of this journalists' cardinal rule when he alerted this reporter, who is also working with an

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upstart Chicago-based news agency, Journal List Press Exchange (JLPX), on June 5, 2004, to check the veracity of reports from some leading newspapers from Manila that a Filipina is in line to become the next astronaut or cosmonaut.

According to the Philippine Star article written by Joanne Rae Ramirez, which came out on February 28, 2004, it said: "Irene Mora, the first Filipino likely to conquer outer space, has been to "the edge of the earth" and loves it there. This year, she aims to go beyond it.

Irene, 31, flew on a space shuttle to the "edge of the earth" in 2000 as part of a research mission sponsored by the US National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA), and in the darkness beheld "a sparkling diamond."

On Dec. 14, 2003, the Philippine Daily Inquirer came out with an article written by Volt Contreras, which alleged that: "Mora is now studying Russian as she will be heading for the Yuri Gagarin Cosmonaut Training Center in Star City next year under a training program offered by Space Adventures of Arlington, Virginia.

"Space Adventures is the company that launched in 2000 the world's first "space tourist," Dennis Tito, an American."

A check by JLPX with the NASA's public affairs office yielded an email response on June 14 from Bobbie Ferguson, who said that "I do not have any information that Irene Mora was or is a NASA astronaut. She has not flown on the Space Shuttle in 2000."

An email message sent on June 6 to the Russian Cultural Centre and the Russian Embassy in Washington, D.C., on how to get in touch with the Yuri Gagarin Cosmonaut Training Center in Star City resulted with a phone call from Russian Cultural Centre Director Natalie Batova, directing JLPX to get in touch with Space Adventures in Arlington, Virginia.

A check with the Space Adventures directed JLPX to Stacey Tearne, vice president of Crosby-Volmer International Communications, which handles the publicity of Space Adventures. Ms. Tearne wrote an email response on June 13 that said: "I do not know of a Capt. Irene Mora nor is she a Space Adventures' orbital client."

A news story published by the Manila Times on April 14, 2003, under the headline, "Filipina is world's best skydiver," said! Lt. Commander Irene Mora, a lady pilot from the Philippine Coast Guard Auxiliary Air Operation Wing, made the Philippines proud by winning the gold in the Friendship Airborne 2003 Skydiving Championships in Bangkok, Thailand.

In winning the skydiving crown, Mora became the first-ever Filipina to win the prestigious crown in this death-defying event which drew participants from the best skydivers in the United States, Europe and Asia.

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This story, however, appeared to have been confirmed by Dr. Frank Osanka, president of Friendship Airborne organization based at Racine, Wisconsin. Mr. Osanka wrote an email response as follows: "Thank you for your thoughtfulness in forwarding the piece on Ms. Irene Moro (sic). She is outstanding. Friendship Airborne hopes to be invited to jump again in the Philippines as we were in 1998. Best wishes, Doc.

The JLPX initially contacted on June 5 retired Admiral Reuben Lista of the Philippine Coast Guard, who was vacationing in Las Vegas, Nevada, at the time on a tip by Mr. Lista's tour guide and friend, Mr. Fernando "Ronnie" M. Estrada of San Jose, California. Mr. Lista directed JLPX to contact Admiral Joselito Aseniero of the Philippine Coast Guard Auxiliary. An email reply from Capt. Harold Wolf of PCGA on June 7 said, "Your message has been forwarded to Adm. Aseniero." As of press time, Admiral Aseniero has not yet responded to verify the veracity of news reports about Ms. Mora's "astronaut or cosmonaut" aspirations.

Last Thursday, June 17, a Ms. Mora called up JLPX, saying she was informed by Dr. Osanka that a media representative wanted to talk to her. The voice from the other line identified herself as Ms. Mora. As the voice was breaking, she said she was in Beijing and that she said "I could hardly hear you." She gave away her email address so she could understand what the media outlet wanted from her.

An email was sent to Ms. Mora on June 18, seeking comments that both US NASA and Space Adventures are dismissing press reports that she flew on NASA's Space Shuttle in 2000 and that the Space Adventures said she is not an orbital client. As of press time, Ms. Mora has not responded to the email inquiry.

In its June 3-9 issue, the weekly Ang Panahon (Time) based in Daly City, California, published and edited by Greg Macabenta, ran a banner headline: "Doubts cast on First Filipina Cosmonaut." The paper also contacted Space Adventures and quoted Emeline Paat, a Filipina working with the company, informing Ang Panahon that Mora never actually trained with them or even visited.

Ang Panahon said Mora had called up the company (Space Adventures) several times, from early this year, to inquire about the company's space tourism program.

Bobby Reyes said that if Ms. Mora could not prove that she flew NASA's Space Shuttle in 2000 so she cannot be an astronaut nor is she heading to Russia so she can be a cosmonaut, she might as well call herself either "astronut" or "cosmonut."

Meanwhile, the numerous stories posted on the Internet about Ms. Mora's going to outer space are likely to be entered into the "hoax of fame" or become a famous bum steer (koryente), according to a JLPX staff.

As to reports that Ms. Mora renounced her US citizenship to become a Filipino, it is still a subject of investigation. # # # UNQUOTE.

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