

The News UpFront: (TOP STORY) as of Monday, 17 September 2007

One of the MPs (morals police) in the ABC team (of Rita Andrews, Faith Batista and Aurora

Cudal) hurls her usual challenge to "go over the records of COPAO" to find out the other "coPAOs" - the crooks and opportunists of Philippine American organizations. The problem is, nobody in COPAO is willing to open the records for public scrutiny.

'MY GOODNESS'

'Are You Insinuating That I Got the \$27,000?' Cudal Asks

By ROMEO P. MARQUEZ

SAN DIEGO - Former COPAO president Aurora Cudal admitted on Sunday that she and her friend Rita Andrews saw the boxes of documents that could have contained the evidence being sought by the District Attorney to prosecute the culprits in the check

forgeries and the missing \$27,000.

The contents of the boxes were critical to the case as National City police investigators had recommended to the DA to bring charges to an unspecified and unnamed number of people from COPAO (Council of Philippine American Organizations).

"Again, how sure are you that we (meaning Cudal and Andrews) broke the sealed boxes," Cudal asked in an e-mail reacting to an earlier story. "The boxes delivered by the Treasurer, Norma de Guzman to the tax preparers office were not even sealed," she disclosed.

Cudal also explained: "We just saw to it that the boxes were delivered so that the outside auditor could pick them up. We did not touch the contents of the boxes. You were not even there? How could you say that we broke open the sealed boxes of documents?"

This is the first time since the discovery of the missing \$27,000 and the check forgeries -- which all happened in 2004 when Cudal was president -- that Cudal spoke about the documents.

Her statement contradicts Andrews' assertions that they unsealed the boxes and rummaged through them.

The DA later on said it had no sufficient evidence to pursue the case.

* * *

Commentary

In 2004, Aurora Cudal, COPAO president, went on a cruise in the Bahamas. That year,

she also traveled to the Philippines and received an honorary, perhaps a recognition of her monetary contribution to a school. That same year, she defied demands for an audit. That year 50 checks were "forged" and \$27,000 disappeared.

"Are you insinuating that I got the \$27,000?" she asks, then goes into a rant: "You should be ashamed of yourself as a journalist, concocting lies" -- without as much as clarifying the confluence of events leading up to this story.

None of those is a lie. They are factual events that became current lately in the wake of the unresolved money issues in the Council of Philippine American Organizations, the community's umbrella organization of about

50 associations.

Neither is it a fabrication that Cudal worked as an "under-the-table" administrator of a facility in the City of Lemon Grove owned by her friend, Remy Broas, while supposedly availing of government aid like a supplemental income and housing benefits. Broas was in fact recognized by COPAO.

The mention of the Bahamas cruise and the sudden trip to Manila in 2004 while the COPAO treasury was being emptied of the \$27,000 was a "blatant innuendo";, charges Cudal in an e-mail on Sunday.

"The cruise was a gift of my daughter and son-in-law to us as an anniversary gift," she explains without giving any details.

Pure coincidence or not, the Bahamas cruise and her visit to Manila for her honorary take a new significance as they all happened in 2004, the year San Diego Mayor Dick Murphy appointed her to the Park and Recreation Board, ostensibly because, as one magazine puts it, she was "a Paradise Hills (San Diego) resident". In truth, she calls a seniors center on F St., in the City of Chula Vista her home.

"Your kind of journalism defies all the ethical principles of journalism. Your 'facts' are twisted. You do not investigate but just

write what your twisted mind concocts,"
Cudal writes in an e-mail.

Look at who's talking. Were we to go by a strict ethical standard, Cudal would be its worst violator. Why her principals put up with her with a willingness and cold detachment of a robot is a mystery.

With no journalistic background, Cudal markets herself as "associate editor" of the entertainment paper, the Filipino Press, while working as consultant at Kalusugan Community Services and San Diego Councilman Tony Young. Where's the commitment to fairness, unbiased reporting, honesty and balance?

Cudal is the person who wouldn't be caught without a title, a honorary, or a semblance of both, even if those give way to conflicts of interests. For example, she gets access as COPAO officer to insider information that are denied the media, and uses her media link to get into meetings not available to others who are not press. And she speaks of ethics?

She knows how to work those "kodak moments" that most times, she had to be in the picture accompanying her own self-promoting stories. Just take a look at the Filipino Press for confirmation. Makes one wonder whether she's working as Filipino Press or socializing as whatever. And she speaks of ethics?

Cudal was a COPAO president and unless

she's a living clone of the three monkeys (the blind, the deaf and the mute), she would not have any idea of what went wrong with the checks and the missing \$27,000.

Yet she tosses her responsibility like she throws dagger looks. She writes:

"You know full well who are the real culprits but you are beholden to them so you do not even mention their names. You know who is responsible for the financial management of COPAO but he happens to be your friend and townmate so you are defending him. Go over the records of COPAO so that you will be able to find out the financial reports signed by your friends".

This is pure and simple cop-out. Through the years I've sought records, financial statements, minutes of meetings, etc. and whenever I asked for them the three monkeys come alive.

I have consistently identified Cudal, Pastor Romen Rivera, Norma de Guzman and Charito Balanag in my stories because they were the president, vice president for finance, treasurer and auditor, respectively, of COPAO when the scandals happened.

And I honestly don't know of anyone in COPAO who hails from the same town as I am and who I am defending.

Come clean Mrs. Cudal. Be candid. Tell the community what you know. Don't be afraid of opening a can of worms. And please don't blame it on other people. I am not part of COPAO, I'm just a reporter looking in. You were president of COPAO. You were a check signatory. Your signature appeared 43 times in 50 of the "forged" checks.

The year 2004 was the final year of your term. That year, you went on an expensive cruise in the Bahamas. You flew to Manila. You donated money to a school. You got your honorary from the same school. You got your honorary appointment. In the meantime, \$27,000 just disappeared from COPAO!

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