

By Bobby M. Reyes (This article was written on August 30, 2016) **Eduardo (Ed) Navarra was one of my good friends and my number-one defender in the National Federation of Filipino-American Associations (NaFFAA), which he chaired at one time. Ed was one of the finest and most-decent Americans of Filipino descent that I met in my more-than two decades of community activism in the United States. It was a pity that when I started my crusade for reforms in the NaFFAA in 2000, Ed was not yet then one of the national leaders of the federation.**

*"Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God."*  
(Matthew 5:9 -- New International Version) Perhaps St. Matthew intended to characterize Eduardo "Ed" Navarra a peacemaker, as described in the said biblical narrative. I first met Ed Navarra, a retiring Ford engineer, online when we were both contributors of a publication owned by Bart and Yoly Tubalinal, the Philippine Time, a Chicago area weekly. It became later the Fil Am Megascene, now a fortnightly newsmagazine. We frequently exchanged e-mails, especially since we were both AOL subscribers and we never changed our e-mail addresses to date. Two of our colleagues, Joseph G. Lariosa and Don Azarias and of course the Tubalinal Couple were long-time friends of Engineer Navarra. All my comrades at the Philippine Time knew of what I called the "Ballygate Scandal" -- when the ruling clique of the National Federation of Filipino-American Associations (NaFFAA) cheated my supporters and me in the election for regional chairman of its Los Angeles (California) chapter. The election was done on October 1, 2000, at the Bally Hotel and Casino in Las Vegas, Nevada. I was able to document the election scandal. Thereafter the NaFFAA ruling clique kicked out our 35 convention delegates from its roster, without the benefit of a hearing. Sometime in 2003, Ed Navarra invited me to represent Sen. Aquilino Q. Pimentel, Sr., then a Philippine presidential aspirant, to deliver the senator's message in an event of the Filipino-American Community Council (FILAMCCO) of Michigan. It was our first face-to-face meeting. Lo and behold, the NaFFAA had four speakers in the program. The four community leaders delivered speeches that ran together for more-than an hour. When my turn came, I delivered a speech shorter in length than President Lincoln's Gettysburg address. I had hundreds of Xeroxed copies of Senator Pimentel's message distributed to the motley crowd. Despite the efforts of

Ed Navarra, the NaFFAA national officials ignored me. He did not succeed in arranging a meeting with my adversaries. His first effort as a peacemaker failed.

### **A PROFILE OF COURAGE**

Also in late 2003, Ed Navarra, then the new regional chairman of the NaFFAA for the Midwest, invited me to attend and cover the NaFFAA regional conference held in Michigan. I learned from Chairman Navarra's fellow regional officers that the national chair, Alex Esclamado, ordered Mr. Navarra to disinvite me and withdraw the invitation. Ed Navarra replied to Mr. Esclamado that it was a regional conference and the NaFFAA national office did not have the right to screen delegates and press people to it. And so I attended the Michigan event but again the NaFFAA honchos did not talk to me, except for Loida Nicolas Lewis, my childhood friend from Sorsogon. She hugged me as we were entering the ballroom and we chatted for a few minutes. But that was all that happened. Ed's second try at peacemaking failed. But my fellow writers and I said that Mr. Navarra was indeed a Filipino-American "Profile of Courage" to ignore the Esclamado directive.

### **WIT AND HUMOR**

When Ed Navarra learned that I had a scheduled meeting in Chicago in the second week of December 2003, he invited me to attend Rizal Day in Detroit. I readjusted my booking and attended it in my Knight of Rizal uniform. Ed had me join the contingent from the Knights of Rizal chapter in Windsor, Canada, which was tasked to be the color guards. I carried the Philippine flag that night. I distributed also hundreds of a two-page essay on Jose Rizal as the first Filipino overseas medical worker that I earlier wrote. Before the Rizal evening event, Ed treated me and my host and cousin, Joesan Gabarda, to lunch in a Detroit casino. There I learned that Ed's pastime aside from smoking was casino gaming. After Joesan left Ed and me to attend another meeting, Ed demonstrated to me his wit and humor. After I advised him to quit smoking (in the manner that I did quit in November 1988) or else he would not be able to make it to my 100th birthday in 2046, he said it was all right. Why so? He said that he was sure -- if he conks out -- that several NaFFAA national officers would be there welcoming him in Heaven and among them were non-smokers. Well, Ed's joke was prophetic, as non-smokers Alex Esclamado, NaFFAA Florida chapter chair Dr. Ernie Ramos and NaFFAA co-founder Col. Hermie Ongkeko, among others, predeceased Ed. He kidded me also that by 2046, I would be the oldest

NaFFAA applicant for membership renewal and nobody among the Old Guards would be able to oppose me as they would probably be all in Heaven with him.

### **AT THE AAJA CONVENTION**

Joseph G. Lariosa and I attended the Asian-American Journalists Association (AAJA) annual convention in Detroit in August 2011. Joseph had a grant from the Ford Foundation and I was a guest of General Motors, who was the main sponsor of the AAJA event. A day before the convention, Ed Navarra picked up Mr. Lariosa at the airport and brought him to the hotel where I was also booked. Joesan Gabarda was my host, as I planned to stay at his residence for two days more after the convention. We all agreed to meet with Mr. Navarra, who was already the NaFFAA national chairman.

After we checked out at the convention hotel, Joesan, Joseph and I met Chairman Navarra at a Japanese buffet restaurant, where he treated us to lunch. Mr. Navarra explained that he was still trying his peacemaking idea at the NaFFAA and to give him time. I cracked in jest that as the new national chair, Ed was now presiding meetings with no-longer Bored (sic) Directors (who were previously bored to death during NaFFAA gatherings). We had hearty laughs as Ed cracked more jokes.

### **MORE FUTILE EFFORTS AS THE "NaFFAA CONSCIENCE"**

After Mr. Lariosa left for Chicago, Ed, Joesan and I met Ed for brunch the next day. Again Ed refused to let Joesan or me foot the restaurant bill. He said that it was his duty to treat visitors. He planned to invite me to a scheduled NaFFAA Board meeting in Las Vegas, NV, later that year; and hopefully paved the way for my group's reentry at the next NaFFAA convention in San Diego, CA, in 2012. He was doing it and all as perhaps the "Conscience" of the federation. The people of several provinces will remember the efforts of Eduardo Navarra and his wife, Dr. Vickie Navarra, who were among the prime movers of the Philippine-American Medical Mission Foundation of Michigan, in doing medical & surgical missions in the Philippines. Mr. Navarra told us in August 2011 that the plan was to send the PAMMFM missions to Tarlac in 2013, Allen, Northern Samar, in 2014 and Gubat, Sorsogon, in 2015. I aided the Navarra-led Mission to Gubat town in the little ways that I could in February 2015. But the NaFFAA controlling clique always outvoted National Chair Navarra when it came to deciding what to do with my "rebellious group." Even when he was re-elected in the San Diego, CA, NaFFAA convention, the majority of the national officers,

with the exception of NaFFAA co-founder and former Pennsylvania chairman Ernesto Gange (Apo Ernie), did not support the peacekeeping efforts of Chairman Ed. A "Talking Point" for the potential "peace summit" in Las Vegas, NV, was my suggestion of bringing in Tonie Sison, the founder of the "Federation of Filipino-American Associations of Southern Nevada." But again a majority of the NaFFAA Board decided that the federation should not deal with Mr. Sison's group, which in 1998 had clashed with then-new Las Vegas resident, Alex Esclamado. The NaFFAA National Board refused to approve Chairman Ed's proposed invitation to Mr. Sison and me.

Perhaps, God called Ed Navarra to Heaven to help in maintaining peace among the NaFFAA national officers who are now in the Great Beyond. They may still be quarreling on what to do with me and my supporters in the federation. And God needs the peacemaking ability of Chairman Ed. There are more anecdotes about Ed Navarra that I can share, along with our plans of developing the economy of our homeland. But it will take lots of pages, especially if we include Engineer Navarra's plan for a ethanol plant for the Negros provinces. Perhaps Joseph Lariosa and Don Azarias can pitch in and write the next chapters of this literary work.

I posted this Tribute to Ed Navarra earlier in my Facebook Timeline and several Facebook Groups:

### **Tribute in Haiku to Eduardo Navarra (1943-2016)**

Ed's "NaFFAA's Conscience" but clique prevented reforms. It may die like him. Ed refused order to dis-invite a critic to 2003 event. It made him to some a "Profile of Courage," too. Clique hates him for that. In 2010 kind folks Voted him NaFFAA's Top Chair. But could not do much. Clique muzzled Chair Ed Even during second term. But he was too nice. He loved FILAMCCO foreign medical missions, wife, kids, grandkids, too.

Ed got accolades like Chicago's Pamana's Mabini Award. Ed's life full of love, wit, humor, public service and above all, God's. But Ed will regret knowing Heaven allows not tobacco use there. Community, friends, and family will miss Ed -- Til' they meet again. (To be continued someday ...)