



Razor's Edge

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Congen Rebong: Onion Skin To Criticisms

NEW YORK, NY June 16 (PinoyGlobal) - Filipino newspapers have been dropping copies at the Philippine Consulate for so many years, now. Filipino Times (FT) is no different. We do the same for the fervent reason of keeping Filipino-Americans abreast with the latest news from the country. To deny us this privilege is arbitrary and discriminatory when other publications are allowed.

The genesis of Consul General Rebong's animosity for FT is a long story. It began with our exposé of her \$10,000 monthly rent for a cubicle at the fabulous Trump Tower condominium in Manhattan. After that bombshell, Rebong would spit fire on the mere mention of Razor's Edge where her grand life was exposed. Ironically, the column was propelled by the belief that good things come from bad; if corrected early.

Razor's Edge did that not because it hates her. It was because of her unconscionable lavish lifestyle then, which was at the expense of our impoverished nation. But even though she is destitute of any reason still her prejudice against FT and this writer borders on the hostile.

To put things in their right perspective, Filipino Times people never bellyached when we were left out in forums hosted by Rebong at the people's Consulate on Fifth Avenue. The nerve of her begrudging us now for writing anything about her or the Consulate, without calling her first.

If she thought FT will grovel on its belly just because she tried to spite us by not inviting any member of our staff to Consulate forums, she and her staff are dead wrong. The pleasure they derive in ignoring us has no rival, at least not from us. We could never be covered by vulgar bully tactics.

Bird dogging her watch of the Consulate conveys the message that two can dance the tango; especially because what we are doing is for our taxpayers. However, by her manifest pugnacity against FT, Rebong has proven to be onionskin to legitimate criticisms, a trait unbecoming of a diplomat.

It is said man is conceived in sin and born to corruption. On this note, two weeks ago, Filipino Times made an editorial regarding the calls it has been receiving that she was allegedly given cash money during despedida parties by "admirers" and friendly Filipino organizations. If this is untrue then she has nothing to worry much less complain against our editorial.

Oddly enough, the editorial was not written with malice to malign or question here honesty, far from it.

It just wanted to send the message that there is this ugly rumor she may not know about and for her to use the same forum (Filipino Times) to explain the circumstances regarding the alleged cash gifts she supposedly received during despedida parties.

But rather than appreciating our well meaning intention, in a chance encounter with our soft spoken and gentle publisher Manny Agbanlog who happened to be dropping Filipino Times copies at the Consulate last Saturday, she aggressively boomed on him rudely asking Mr. Agbanlog: "How would you feel if I go to your house and attack you?" meaning criticize him. The implication is clear: she is under the delusion that the Philippine Consulate is her own house and private property. No one can do anything there without her imperi-

ous consent. Wow! This is for Ripley's Believe It Or Not.

In case Rehong forgets the Philippine Consulate as well as our embassy in Washington D.C. and all the consulates around the world are GOVERNMENT PROPERTY. New York's Philippine Consulate belongs to Juan de la Cruz. For the love of sanity, I cannot divine how it became Rehong's personal domain.

If my International Law professor, the late Dr. Jose Aruego, was alive today, he will be forced to revise his book because it said embassies and consulates are extensions of Philippine territory. Not even the police of the accrediting country can just enter them without approval of the consul general or ambassador.

The trouble with us Filipinos is that we easily get drunk with even the aroma of power. Cecile is a clear example even though her glory is transitory contingent only on the incumbency of her bootlicking boss to the outgoing president. Foreign Affairs Secretary Romulo kept her here for 10 years, which by and large is grossly unfair for those with sterling qualifications who could give more credit and prestige to our country, if they were given a chance.

To be bakya is okay if you are a politician who uses subterfuge to win elections. Politics is like going through hell in a gasoline sports coat. Conversely, diplomats are refined people who show the country's best foot forward abroad, not by quarreling with the media.

Cecile tried to belabor Agbanlog for not calling her before writing the editorial. This is weird. Nevertheless, cool as a cucumber, Manny softly told her you are free to answer the issue in our paper.

On many occasions I personally asked Ms Rehong when we would accidentally meet in the streets, social functions and at the Consulate (her "privately owned domain"), to invite us in forums every time New York is invaded by junketing public officials and politicians. We wanted to hear both sides of the issue/s, I assured her. She never did. We would only read about it in other Filipino publications. Where does she get the gall now to begrudge Filipino Times for writing articles that do not tickle or inflate her ego when she blackouts FT from forums in the Consulate? Give me a break, Cecile!

I told my publisher, you have not been wanting in your turf. Ignore her. It is she who encourages us to write on our own initiative regarding issues involving her watch of the Consu-

late. Her hostile indifference gives us every reason to return the favor with the same pungent flavor.

On the issue about the alleged pakimkim from admirers it behooves her, for that matter all public officials, to refuse accepting from private sources, fat envelopes or checks out of delicadeza, unless in her case, she meant to add them to the anemic funds of the Consulate. Even that leaves a bad taste in the mouth.

Why did not Rehong exercise extreme prudence of graciously declining the gifts explaining the reason - is beyond me. Her "legions of admirers" will understand and would not jeopardize her position. For her benefit, they will freeze their good intention, which is virtually a culture to us: showing our appreciation for someone by giving gifts in any form or shape.

Isn't it enough that she had nine if not ten blissful years of lording over her domain, the New York Philippine Consulate, which she now perceives as her private property? Being glued there does not mean she is great. It was on the behest of her bewitched boss, Foreign Affairs Secretary Alberto Romulo, that she was twice appointed to the same New York post.

Her extended tour of duty in this great metropolis demolished the hopes and dreams of deserving career diplomats who have been waiting in the wings to be assigned to that premier post. But because Cecile has quite a grip on her boss Bert Romulo (for I know not what reasons) everybody is expendable, relegated in the corridors of the Foreign Affairs until they are due to retire.

In any language it is unfair that because Dona Cecilia Rehong has to be accommodated until she gets tired of New York and would fancy other foreign ambiance, she can plant herself in the Consulate for life. Nonsense!

It is said a good diplomat is one who can jump into troubled waters without making a splash. Rehong not only causes a splash but creates waves with her bias and vengeful disposition unfit of a diplomat. Hating a journalist or a newspaper for bird-dogging her does not speak well of a consul general. Cecile is supposed to understand the role of the media: we do not kowtow to public officials, especially someone whose prima donna complex is extremely nauseating.

I told Mr. Agbanlog, you have not been wanting as an impartial publisher. She provoked us to shoot from the hips, so forget it. Let her brood over her predicament of answering the rumor or not. We have done our part. It is not our fault that she has made us her worst nightmare.

Like I said a while ago, the controversial editorial she complains about was intended to help her put an end to the rumors by answering it in our paper. FT would have been the wind beneath her wings. But if she takes it against us we will not lose a good night's sleep. She can go fly a kite.