

Across Oceans

by Edessa Ramos



Edessa Ramos has lived in 10 different addresses during the past decade, across oceans and continents, and through countless difficulties which forged her intensity as a writer. She lived in Chicago for some years, then returned to Manila in 1994 to work for the Philippine Centennial Commission, the Asian Women Human Rights Council, and PETA. Some Chicagoans still remember her from the days of the Philippine Forum, the Alliance for Philippine Concerns, the Friends of Gabriela, various solidarity movements, and most of all, as one of the founders of Pintig Cultural Group. Since moving to Switzerland in 1996, she has published two books and performed in the literary festivals of South Africa and Central America. Though having been away for a number of years, Chicago will always be a place she longingly calls home. Email her at: EdessaRamos@solnet.ch

The higher art of self-defense



Master Bambit Dulay fends off multiple attackers.



Master Dulay and Edessa Ramos give a machete cultural exhibition.



Cultural arnis gives a historical context to our fighting art.



Master Dieter Knüttel gives a modern arnis exhibition

Philippine fighters demonstrate the higher art of self-defense. Thus read the headlines in the local section of the Dortmund Rundschau. During the weekend of March 6-7, 2004, over 600 athletes from 23 countries met at the TSC Eintracht in Dortmund for the Second Filipino Martial Arts Festival. It was just like a scene from a Hollywood movie, reported the newspaper, with fighters staring each other in the eye... but instead of blood flowed sweat. Streams of it. It was certainly a weekend of hard training, a test of skills, the sharing of prowess, and above all, the kindling and renewal of friendship and camaraderie.

"Maynilad takeover, not a bailout"

MAR 28 - There was no bailout for the cash-strapped Maynilad Water Services Inc. as alleged by critics of the Arroyo administration.

Albay Rep. Joey Salceda, chairman of the House oversight committee, also asserted that the compromised rehabilitation plan for the utility was neither a "sweetheart" nor a "midnight" deal between President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo and the Lopez family, majority stockholder of Maynilad. Prior to his election to Congress, Salceda had been a stockbroker and financial analyst.

The legislator said that the Maynilad takeover could neither be considered a bailout for the Lopezes in as much as they would have "zero stake" in the new Maynilad.

While the P8 billion loan of Maynilad are retained, he noted that they are not declared sovereign debt and have no government guarantee.

"Credit risks stay with the bank as loans will be paid out of the revenues of the new Maynilad and not from automatic appropriations of the government," he said.

Presidential Spokesman Ignacio Bunye has also justified the rehab plan for Maynilad, saying its primary consideration is to ensure uninterrupted water supply for the facility's service grid composed of the western portion of Metro Manila. He also gave assurance that the deal was still subject to approval by the Court and the Securities and Exchange Commission.

Salceda indicated there could be no "sweetheart deal" with the Lopezes since their holding company, Benpres, stands to suffer losses amounting to P3.8 billion. PNS

The legendary Balintawak Grandmaster Bobby Taboada was a show-stopper. He was a magnet for a crowd, which always seemed to be milling around him, eager to learn a few tricks, asking questions which he always generously answered, happy to hear his stories and jokes. Speed is not a word adequate enough to describe the cane in his hand. Still unmatched in agility, breathtaking skill and style, that's Bobby Taboada.

Modern Arnis was represented by Master Samuel Bambit Dulay (Philippines), Master Dieter Knüttel (Germany) and Master Roland Dantes (Philippines and Australia), who was also the special guest in the festival. Now Roland Dantes deserves special mention in the most reverent way I can muster. He was a strong and inspiring presence throughout the festival. He was a source of encouragement for many participants as he went around explaining patiently, coaching and answering questions. He saw the gift of the fighting art in every unique individual and so he gave effort to make it blossom. This he accomplished by sharing his decades of experience in arnis, his deep friendship with Grandmaster Remy Presas, his trials and tribulations as an actor, an arnis practitioner, an immigrant, a law enforcer, and above all, a simple man who always tried to keep to the rules and principles he had set for himself.

Bambit Dulay taught 5 sessions of Modern Arnis. His chosen topics and range of teaching encompassed the classical styles which he then linked to the Modern Arnis techniques developed by the late Grandmaster Remy Amador Presas. It was an opportunity for Modern Arnis practitioners, particularly those in Europe, to be led back to the roots and to re-learn the classics with renewed fervor. Grateful students commented on how it helped them to appreciate and understand even more the art of Mod-

ern Arnis.

Dieter Knüttel, together with the indefatigable Alfred Plath, made the whole festival a reality. I had the privilege of helping them in some of the preparations these last few months, and I daresay, their energy and determination made a bulldozer pale by comparison. To top it all, Dieter still had the enormous energy and pizzazz to give an excellent Modern Arnis exhibition during the Gala night, plus teach numerous classes during the festival. Where does such energy come from? It must be that the spirit of the art has truly found a home in his heart and soul.

As a student of Bambit Dulay, I was very lucky to be asked to assist him in his classes. During the Gala event, Master Dulay and I performed an original cultural piece that integrated the classical dances of southern Philippines with the fighting art of the itak (machete) and dagger. It was our interpretation of a historical fact: that through our indigenous dances, the Filipino martial culture was preserved and protected from annihilation by the Spanish colonizers. The itak (machete) portion, wherein we not only danced with the weapon but actually used it in contact fighting, amazed the audience. The performance was described as breathtaking and unforgettable. True to our intention, the use of the itak brought to fore the higher art of self-defense and warrior culture in the Philippines.

This festival ignites the fervor in each of us to continue learning, documenting and researching the Filipino martial arts. Its diversity and wide range of styles, not to mention the continuing innovations, call for a lifetime of learning.

ago, I discovered in me everything that I am saying here. It was there, in the heavy weight and coldness of the steel, where I found meaning in contradictions... in femininity and ferocity, in darkness and light, in heat and chill, in hard and soft, control and abandon, lock and release, physical and spiritual. And that was just through one weapon. Think of all the other indigenous martial instruments created by our ancestors, majority of which are now buried in time. What if therein lies the secret of who we are as a people? That part of us that colonialism and succeeding external influences have destroyed. It is time to bring it back, that key to reclaiming our lost identity.

Every minute of that festival in Germany brought to me a surge of pride, not only in my teacher or in the styles I practice, but in every Filipino master to whom we owe our martial art. It was an occasion for our martial culture to be brought to prominence for all the world to admire and appreciate. It was an affirmation of our contribution to mankind's cultural heritage.

Towards the end of the Gala event, there was a film tribute to the Filipino masters who passed away in recent years. There were tears in many eyes as we all said goodbye and thank you to these great Filipinos to whom the world owes a great fighting art. May they watch over us on the ground where we train and keep us glued to the passion of practicing the Filipino Martial Arts.

Ever since I started handling the blade, particularly the itak, a few months



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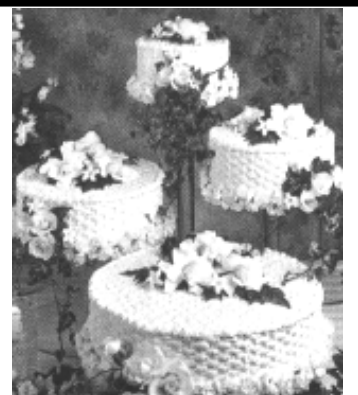


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