

Tales From the Web

One of the first tasks I occupied myself with after retirement was to create an Orosa web page. After retiring in January of 2001, www.orosa.org was uploaded to the internet not long afterwards. Starting out with just a few pages, it has ballooned over the years to a lot of content. One of the greatest pleasures of my retirement has been the continual feedback and inquiries I have received from people who have come across the website while doing their own research. Below are some of their stories, with the names omitted to insure privacy and sometimes to protect the guilty.

I have written a number of essays for the website, one of which is “The Pensionado Story” about the first large group of young Filipinos sent by the colonial government to the United States for study. I finished writing the piece in 2005. This was an important deadline for me since the following year would mark the 100th anniversary of my father’s coming to the United States as a pensionado. I have received emails from readers ranging from a Professor at George Washington University, grandchildren of other pensionados and researchers working on their thesis. The grandchildren were tracing the voyages of their individual grandfathers who were pensionados. But like my father, the other pensionados left virtually no account of their experience. The latest one is intriguing, the great grandchild of a chief of one of the Mountain Province tribes. One of the chief’s sons became a pensionado and received a medical degree from a prestigious university in the Midwest. This physician’s grandchild is now trying to close the loop on their family history. I hope I’ve been of help to all in some way for they have definitely enriched my knowledge of the pensionado’s stories.

It was an email out of the blue, from someone overseas in another continent. The writer was looking for their father, with whom there hadn’t been any contact for years. It so happened that I knew the father, whom I had been in regular contact with. I immediately called him and indicated his child had been trying to locate him. Because of the distance, no physical reunion was immediately possible but they were able to catch up. This was before the explosion of social media which now makes it a little easier to locate people but score one for our website.

For this story I will mention the name since without it, the story wouldn’t be as compelling. I received a very formal letter written on the stationery of a lawyer in the Los Angeles area. He mentioned that he was working on the estate of a client who had passed away. Among the papers they found was an insurance policy with three beneficiaries. However the beneficiaries had unfamiliar first names. Besides, his deceased client had no known children or relatives with those names. His late client’s name was Virginia O. Grey and I happen to have a first cousin of the same name who lives in the Philippines. When the lawyer searched the internet, he found our website and my cousin’s name then proceeded to contact me. His question was “Is your Virginia O. Grey the same as my client Virginia O. Grey?” My first phone call was to a sibling of Virginia. Is she OK? As far as he knew she was fine but he was in the U.S. and hadn’t spoken with her lately. Next was an urgent email to my sister in Quezon City. Please check on Virginia O. Grey – right now! To make it even more exciting, Virginia was on a trip and at the time cell phones weren’t quite universal. Eventually Virginia got tracked down and expressed surprise at the hullabaloo. It turns out that one of Virginia’s children had purchased an insurance policy and named three of Virginia’s children as beneficiaries. As unlikely as it seems, there was another insured person by the same name and middle initial and the insurance company mixed up the policies. That is in spite of the fact that the two lived at least 7,000 miles apart. By the way, my Virginia O. Grey is healthy, active and in her 80’s. She was quite amused by the story.

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This story is about as soap operatic as it gets. The writer is asking me if I knew the whereabouts of a woman who could potentially have been a relative on my grandmother's side. I have a listing of Orosas but not of my mother's side or either grandmother's branches. After all, the website is orosa.org. The name was unfamiliar so I again proceeded to contact my reliable correspondents in greater Manila. The response was negative; no one seems to know her. As I reported it back, the man writing told me the whole story piece by piece. The woman he was looking for was a former fiancée and he wanted to get back with her. He also wanted me to translate some letters he had written, from English to Tagalog. But the letters started turning sinister, talking about how he was going to self destruct if she didn't return. Val wanted me to cut the correspondence off. But it might be worth continuing if we could be a lifeline. Our letters tailed off and I never heard from him again nor did I find his beloved. I hope they are both ok.

I always get a kick out of receiving emails in Spanish. *Estamos relacionados? Es usted un pariente?* Are we related? With the help of freetranslation.com, I then proceed to answer. Although our parents spoke Spanish, none of us children could get much beyond *como esta* which Filipinos turned into our standard greeting of *kamusta*. Most of the writers were Orosas from Spain and Americans of Cuban-Spanish heritage. But there have been Portuguese, Mexican and even a writer from Ecuador. I try to explain that the Orosa family I'm writing about is Filipino and we received the surname compliments of a Spanish Governor General's edict in the 19th century. But it is interesting to share our experience, especially with the Cuban-Americans. Their ancestors did come from Spain, then to Cuba and finally to the United States. The Chief of Police of Miami, FL is surnamed Orosa. I think I'm going to write him and say "*hola pariente!*"

There are a few more stories for another time.