

# Manila Women's Forum

A Network of Women Professionals

November 2003

## Through My Eyes

By Hillary M. Marshall

Newspapers deliver truth daily to our doorsteps, but each event is captured and filtered through the eyes and experiences of the journalist who writes about it. Joanne Rae Ramirez, editor-in-chief of PEOPLE Asia magazine and associate editor and ten-year veteran journalist of the Philippine STAR newspaper, cultivated a provocative discussion on news and the perks of working in the field of journalism at the October MWF meeting.

Joanne said journalists must be disciplined and attain both sides of a story so their writing reflects the truth. Media sources (newspapers, magazines, television and radio stations) must uphold the truth at all times to gain respect from readers and keep their advertisers. But Joanne stressed that journalists can't help

but bring their experiences, background, and preconceived opinions to each event. They evaluate the situation, get the facts, and filter understanding of the event through their own perspectives. And, due to the high pressure to meet deadlines, sometimes there isn't time to check all the facts and get both sides of the story.

One of the members said she was staying at Oakwood during the rebels' siege and was stunned to see that many things so far from the truth got reported during and after the standoff. Joanne replied that her (the member's) view of the standoff may have been different from those of the reporters who covered it, but this does not



Joanne Rae Ramirez

necessarily mean that there was an attempt to distort the truth. When asked if sensationalizing news was justified if it meant selling more newspapers, attracting more TV viewers and radio listeners, Joanne replied that indeed media sources must attract attention to "seduce" readers to keep their news product. However, she said that if they stray far from the truth in the name of circulation, ultimately, they would lose the support of the readers and the advertisers. They will lose their reputation for quality.

Like a glass that is broken and very difficult to put back together, a damaged reputation for covering the news and attaining truth is hard to put together again.

*(Continued on page 4)*

*Left to right: Vivian Gal, Claudia Brueggen, Carolyn Gibson and Penny Poole at the meeting last October 20.*



### Next MWF Meeting

**When:** 6:30 p.m.  
Monday, November 17  
**What:** Pamela Arychuk, doctor of naturopathic medicine, will speak on natural healing options.  
**Where:** Lisa Cadiz's house, 10 Dap Dap Road, North Forbes Park, Makati  
**Bring:** Something to share for the potluck dinner  
**December meeting:** 6:30 p.m. Monday, December 8



## Voice of the Chair

By Lisa Kircher Lumbao

# Photos that Provoke A Debate of A Thousand Words

By Ruth O'Brien  
Freedom Forum  
Media Studies Center  
(Centro de Estudios de Medios)  
9/16/98

New York

A picture may be worth a thousand words, but it can also spark a thousand-word debate, as was pointed out by various important newspaper photographic editors from New York City at the New York Newseum.

Newspaper photographic editors work with controversial photos almost every day. But an apparently benign image published recently in the New York Times has brought to the fore one of the most important themes that photographic journalism faces at present.

This summer, the Times published a photo of President Clinton standing on the Great Wall of China. The photo shows him looking out over the wall with Hillary and Chelsea in the background. It is a beautiful photo, serene and at first glance uncontroversial. But if you look more closely you can see a line of red chalk at Clinton's feet indicating that the shot was pre-planned.

"This is a photographic creation of the White House," said Mike Smith, Deputy Picture Editor for the New York Times, in a debate over controversial photos. "We are manipulated constantly."

Jim Dooley, Assistant Administrative Editor and Director of Photography at Newsday, agreed with

him: "The press, especially the news photographers, [are] manipulated every day, about where to stand, what to show, when to enter a room, when to leave it. I'm not sure how many people realize that the images they see in the newspapers and also on television every day are very, very controlled," said Dooley.

Its rare nowadays that the Presidents are filmed in a "real moment", said Smith. But this is not the case with many news photos, which are often too real in the way they capture violence and death, he added. There is frequently a subtle difference between a fixed image eloquently capturing a history of extreme violence and a gratuitously violent photo, he said.

"We want to make the horror [of the situation] present without causing the viewers to immediately look away, because [if they do that] they are not going to receive the message and we want them to understand immediately how significant the event was," said Smith.

The bombing of the United States Embassy in Kenya was an example of a graphically violent news event which obliged the photographic editors to pay special attention to the selection of images. One photo that many newspapers ran showed a bloody woman being removed from the rubble. Although it was extremely graphic, the editors agreed that it was an important image, appropriate for the front pages.

Gretchen Viehmann, Photographic Editor for the New York Post, said that the newspaper decided to publish this image because it summarized the situation in one frame and showed not only the horror of the bombing, but also the efforts of everyone to help.

Another image of the bombing which generated a massive response was that of the family members of the victims in line at the morgue, looking at severely burned corpses. The photo was electronically altered by the San Francisco Examiner to make the bodies less recognizable.

"It was ridiculous to retouch it: either you use it or you don't use it," said Eric Meskauskas, Director of Photography at the New York Daily News. He also criticized other newspapers, including the New York Times, for removing the charred bodies from the photo.

"You do a disservice to the reader when you crop the image. Take out

the commentary and you could be looking at people in line at the DMV," said Meskauskas.

Smith defended the Times decision. "We always have to make decisions based on...what we know or think we know will be found the minds of our readers at that moment," he said. "The power is in the faces of the people who are looking, and when you know what they are looking at, the photo is very, very powerful, even when cropped."

Dooley agreed with Meskauskas that it was dishonest to manipulate the background, but stated that he believed the decision of Newsday to crop the photo was correct. "Cropping it changes the content somewhat, but it still maintains the intention," he contended.

Viehmann said that the Post decided that the photo was too strong for its first page, and "in a rare moment of good judgment," decided to put it in the interior of the paper.

The icon of the Oklahoma City bombing, the photo of the little girl in the arms of the fireman, was a very sensitive image that many newspapers preferred to save for a few days before publishing. Many newspapers published a big photo of the bombed building and a smaller photo of the little girl, or they placed the photo in the interior of the paper instead of on the front page.

"Its just coincidence that the face

*(Continued on page 4)*

### The Manila Women's Forum

The Manila Women's Forum (MWF) is a cross-cultural network for women. It provides opportunities to build friendships, to talk to women of various cultures, and to share information about resources. Our meetings are intended to provide intellectual stimulation and lead to personal and professional development. All women are welcome to join. The current officers are **Lisa Lumbao**, Chair, Programs, Treasurer, and Newsletter. **Penny Poole**, Programs, Newsletter. **Beulah P. Taguiwalo**, Newsletter.

Cost of membership is P300 per year. Members receive a copy of the current mailing list in addition to the newsletter, which is also sent to non-members. A contribution is collected at each monthly meeting: P20 for members, and P40 for non-members. Please contact Lisa Lumbao at Tel. 818-2887 or 813-0168, or at [lumbao@mozcom.com](mailto:lumbao@mozcom.com) for more information about MWF.

# Women's Voices Women's Faces

By Beulah Pedregosa Taguiwalo

“Writing saved me from the sin  
and inconvenience of violence.”

— Alice Walker



BPT 2003

## On Journalism: Non-Women's Voices

“There can be no higher law in journalism  
than to tell the truth and shame the devil.”

— Walter Lippman

“What someone doesn't want you to  
publish is journalism; all else is publicity.”

— Paul Fussell

“The secret of successful journalism is to  
make your readers so angry they will write  
half your paper for you.” — C.E.M. Joad

“I suggest that what we want to do is not  
to leave to posterity a great institution,  
but to leave behind a great tradition of  
journalism ably practiced in our time.”

— Henry R. Luce, On recruiting a staff  
for *Fortune* magazine

“We won't  
run a story  
unless  
we know  
that even if  
we're sued  
for libel,  
we'll win.”

— Sheila Coronel



BPT 2003

Sheila  
S. Coronel  
is the Executive  
Director of the  
Philippine Center  
for Investigative  
Journalism (PCIJ).

In 1989 she and a group of like-minded journalists formed the PCIJ when they realized that they couldn't do the kind of reporting they wanted if they remained in the newsrooms. “The structure of newspapers, and their unforgiving, daily grind, were not conducive to in-depth reporting,” says Sheila. “Moreover, the interests of media proprietors sometimes limited what we could write about.”

Sheila and her colleagues in the PCIJ did not believe that all the audience wanted was to be entertained, that “out there are just passive consumers perfectly content with nonstop titillation.” They had faith in the capacity of citizens to understand the issues that have an impact on their lives, and in the power of an informed citizenry to effect positive change. That faith has been resoundingly reaffirmed by events.

In 2000 the PCIJ undertook its most ambitious investigation of corruption in high places when it tackled the unexplained wealth of then President Joseph Estrada. The investigation took almost a year and involved five journalists, three researchers, and about a dozen interns. When the House of Representatives eventually moved to impeach the President, three of PCIJ's reports were cited in the impeachment complaint.

Just recently Sheila was given the 2003 Ramon Magsaysay Award for Journalism, Literature and Creative Communication Arts. The foundation's board of trustees cited her for “leading a groundbreaking collaborative effort to develop investigative journalism as a critical component of democratic discourse in the Philippines.”

“Investigative journalism is hard, lonely work,” said Sheila in the lecture that she presented at the Magsaysay Center in Manila on September 2, 2003. “One cannot keep on plodding without faith, without a sense that one is making a contribution to public discourse and to building a vibrant democracy.”

***Through My Eyes*** (From page 1)

Filipino culture loves *tsismis*, the latest gossip, and that is the news that seems to sell, according to Joanne. From the similarities and relationship between Philippine President Gloria Arroyo and American President George W. Bush to the headlining news of Kris and Joey's tumultuous romantic relationship, journalists have an exciting ringside view of current events. Joanne highlighted defining moments in her career like interviewing such handsome stars as Pierce Brosnan, to meeting the Pope, and being on a first name basis with some of the most powerful and influential people of our time.

Although information is power and freedom of the press is a reality, Joanne remembers the days of Martial Law when journalism was kept under very tight control. One of the MWF members asked why the Philippines has the highest number of murdered journalists in the world (53 since 1986 and not one solved case). Joanne pointed out that these unfortunate deaths do not reflect a government policy-journalists in the Philippines, by and large, can go about their work without fear that they will be executed or imprisoned by the government for their exposes. In other words, these deaths are not sanctioned by the state. Some of the executions of journalists, especially in the provinces, were at the behest of powerful people whose toes they had stepped on and whose interests they had endangered. Joanne condemned

every journalist's death in the pursuit of his or her work as "one too many."

As soon as she learned how to write her ABCs, Joanne knew she wanted to be a journalist. Her mother discouraged her, worried that she wouldn't make any money and would be putting herself in danger. So, dutifully, Joanne studied business administration at the University of the Philippines. However, her mother happened to meet journalist Max Soliven one day and asked for his advice. He said it would not be long before press freedom would be restored in the Philippines and therefore anyone wanting to pursue a career in journalism had a future. So with her mother's blessing, Joanne shifted to a journalism course. A couple of years later, as fate would have it, Joanne would work for the Philippine STAR, whose publisher happened to be Soliven.

There were sacrifices Ramirez faced and a balancing act she perfected between family and work life. She has one son, and said maybe she would have had more children if her job hadn't been so demanding. In the end, Ramirez gave up the hectic life of the daily news desk to move her passionate writing spirit to the administrative level by becoming the editor-in-chief of the widely read PEOPLE Asia magazine. She continues to grace the pages of the STAR newspaper with a twice-weekly column ("People") and a Sunday section ("Allure"), and handles editorial functions as well.

Thanks, Joanne, for an enlightening and enjoyable evening. ■

***Photos that Provoke...*** (From page 2)

was turned away," Smith said of this photo. "Perhaps, if the face had been visible, [the Times] would have changed its decision."

The editors restated the fact that every decision is unique, that every situation is different and that there are no rules. "We are talking about situational ethics, photo by photo," said Meskauskas, and Smith agreed.

"There isn't a correct answer and in the end you have to make the best decision you can in the moment, and generally we hear that we did it wrong," said Smith. ■

Source: La Iniciativa de Comunicación. Placed on The Communication Initiative site September 30 2002.

"Journalism can never be silent: that is its greatest virtue and its greatest fault. It must speak, and speak immediately, while the echoes of wonder, the claims of triumph and the signs of horror are still in the air."

— Henry Anatole Grunwald, Editor in Chief, Time Inc., Introduction to Time magazine's 60th anniversary issue, Fall 83

"You gain strength, courage, and confidence by every experience in which you really stop to look fear in the face. You must do the thing you think you cannot do."

— Eleanor Roosevelt

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