

Filipina's Dream Ends Up In A



by Maurice Malanes

Elyrose Miguel's dream for herself was typical of the rural Filipino woman that she was: to find better fortune through a job overseas.

After obtaining her college diploma, Elyrose could have become a low-paid but respected teacher in her hometown in Tabuk, Kalinga province in northern Philippines. But upon computing how much she would earn, Elyrose came to the conclusion that it would be better to work abroad. Aside from contributing to the family income, she was also expected to see her siblings through school.

In December 1996 Elyrose accepted an offer to work as a domestic helper in Taiwan.

But the cost of getting there required a fortune. The placement fee alone amounted to PhP70,000 (over US\$1,450), equivalent to 14 months' pay of an ordinary Filipino wage earner. But this did not discourage Elyrose and her husband, Dominador. The couple sold their rice harvest and some pigs to make a down payment of PhP38,000 (US\$792). After passing some tests, off she went to Taiwan on 11 March 1997.

After 10 days, Dominador was glad to receive a letter from his wife. Elyrose informed him that she was assigned to Yien Ching Piao, a Deputy in the Provincial

Assembly of Taichung County. But her official papers gave the name of her employer as Huang Mei Hui.

Only six days later, however, Dominador received a letter saying that his wife had killed herself in Taiwan. "Depression on account of homesickness," according to the *China Post*, a Taiwanese paper, was the reason for her suicide.

The husband was shocked. He could not believe it. After going through all the difficulty and expense of working abroad, he said, Elyrose would not go to Taiwan just to commit suicide. Besides, he said, they had three young children and she knew that her family was pinning their hopes on her. He suspected foul play.

Elyrose's body arrived in the Philippines on 1 August, five months after she "committed suicide." Her kidneys were missing, and her heart had been tampered with. This made her family and Philippine officials suspect that the dead woman may have fallen into the hands of a syndicate trafficking in human organs.

Elyrose's family sought the help of the National Labor Relations Commission and hired the services of a law office. In October 1998 the regional labor court issued a

decision against the recruitment agency that had brought Elyrose to Taiwan. Aside from substituting another name for that of her actual employer, the JLC Manpower Co. Ltd. was found to have a permit to recruit only for Saudi Arabia, not Taiwan.

The recruiters were ordered to pay the family a total of more than PhP700,000 (US\$14,500) to cover actual, moral, and exemplary damages, unpaid wages, and a repayment of placement fees.

But the recruitment agency refused to pay, and has appealed the verdict. Three years after Elyrose's death, the government agencies who received the appeal have not taken any action. The only money the family received was PhP70,000 from the welfare fund of the Overseas Workers Welfare Administration (OWWA).

Justice for Elyrose cannot be attained unless the truth surrounding her mysterious death surfaces and those responsible are put on trial. But granting that the mystery is uncovered and those responsible are tried and jailed, these still will not bring back the life of a young mother whose dream ended up in a coffin.

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