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LOVETOLEAVE.COM: A WEBSITE ABOUT NICHE ONLINE DATING IN ANGELES CITY, PHILIPPINES

Marlei Martinez

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**LOVETOLEAVE.COM:
A WEBSITE ABOUT
NICHE ONLINE DATING
IN ANGELES CITY, PHILIPPINES**

A Capstone Project Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements of the Renée Crown University Honors Program at
Syracuse University

Marlei Martinez

Candidate for B.S. Degree
and Renée Crown University Honors

April 2011

Honors Capstone Project in Broadcast Journalism

Capstone Project Advisor: _____
(Professor Seth Gitner)

Honors Reader: _____
(Professor John Nicholson)

Honors Director: _____
Eric Holzwarth, Deputy Director

Date: _____

ABSTRACT

The global community is quickly growing due to the constant advancement of telecommunications across the land and sea. No longer do people have to settle for dating within their hometowns; now, they can simply sign up online, create a dating profile and search for their soul mate with just the click of a mouse.

Niche online dating is a very personalized form of internet romance. Men and women can now sit in front of their computers, type the words, "I want to date an Asian girl/guy" in the Google search bar, and dozens of 'Asian' dating websites will appear. This phenomenon is known as niche online dating. It is a personalized form of dating where users can specify which ethnic, gender or identity pool they want to date in. FilipinoCupid.com, formerly known as Filipinaheart.com, is one such dating website.

There is something very different about the world of niche online dating in comparison to typical online dating- the reasons behind why people participate. For her Capstone project, Marlei Martinez, a senior broadcast journalism major at the Newhouse School, sought to investigate why women living in Angeles City, Philippines participate in international niche online dating.

In the Summer of 2010, Martinez and a fellow student ventured halfway across the world to Angeles City, Philippines. She was accompanied by Sam Disston, a senior Spanish and psychology major. After travelling for 22.5 hours across twelve different time zones, having touched down in Alaska, Japan and Manila, the duo arrived in the thick of it, in the hot, humid and traffic-congested region of Angeles City.

The mission was to investigate the world of international niche online dating in the Philippines by documenting the lives of six women who participate on dating websites and/or chat rooms. For eight days, the team travelled into the barrios, villages and neighborhoods of the sprawling third world to tell the stories of different Filipina women.

After travelling to the Philippines, Martinez spent a year sifting through and editing the video footage and still photographs. She then put them all onto her Capstone website, LovetoLeave.com. Throughout the website, you'll see the stories of women who utilize online dating for a number of reasons, such as Margie Elevera, who is hoping to find a job, Katrina Umali, who is hoping to find a "better man," and Adelyn Acosta, who is hoping to find a way out. The website also includes a Behind the Scenes photo gallery and Behind the Scenes interactive Google map of Angeles City where viewers can actually go behind the camera and watch the making of this series from the locations the team visited.

The most important thing this team discovered throughout the making of this series is that the advancement of telecommunications across the seas not only provides people the chance for love, but a chance to leave.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The completion of this project would not have been possible without the following people and organizations:

Renee Crown Honors Program- First and foremost, I'd like to thank the Renee Crown Honors program for funding and motivating this project. Thanks to the generosity of the Honors program, I was able to travel to the Philippines to meet these women and document their stories by way of the Crown Wise Award program. Year after year, the Renee Crown Honors Program at Syracuse University motivates scores of students, such as myself, to push ourselves to learn, investigate and uncover new and eye-opening discoveries that will lead to a better tomorrow.

Professor Seth Gitner- I'd like to thank Professor Seth Gitner, professor of Newspaper and Online Journalism at the Newhouse School, for being my Capstone advisor and aiding me with this project every step of the way. From our initial planning meetings in the Fall of my Junior year to our completion of this website a few weeks before my graduation, your online expertise has single-handedly made this production possible. I can't thank you enough for the endless amount of hours you've put into this project.

Professor John Nicholson- Thank you for being my Capstone Reader. More importantly, thank you for mentoring me throughout these past four years, and more specifically, for reviewing and critiquing my work. Either fortunately or unfortunately for you, most of what I've learned at the Newhouse School can be attributed to you.

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Roehl "Pie" Canlas- Thank you for being the most wonderful host. You made the trip not only a learning experience, but an enjoyable experience. Thank you for keeping an eye on us and safely guiding us to each of our shoot destinations. I can't thank you enough.

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Vincent Cobb- Thank you for setting up the camera equipment for the trip.

David Lopez- Thank you for setting up the camera equipment for the trip.

Kelly Sullan- Thank you for the awesome website logo.

Emily Ann Brandstetter- Thank you for the inspiration for the domain name.

Professor Jeff Passetti- Thank you for your web design assistance.

Ryan Balton & Clay LePard- Thank you for covering videography for the trailer.

Jason Kohlbrenner- Thank you for the editing assistance.

Mark & Leilani Martinez- Thank you for assisting with travel plans and the constant background knowledge.

Jill & Jim Disston- Thank you for transportation to the airport.

Adelyn Acosta, Margie Elevera, Gretchen Odi, Jerson & Mira Reyes, Aveline Santos, Cristina Tiamzon and Katrina Umali- Most importantly, thank you for sharing your stories. Thank you for opening our eyes and giving us this chance to learn.

SCREEN GRABS OF “LOVETOLEAVE.COM”

Home Screen:

The screenshots show the home screen of the website 'Love to Leave'. The top navigation bar includes links for 'About', 'Behind the Scenes', 'City Scenes', 'Stories', 'Contact', and 'Home'. A sidebar on the left features the 'LOVE TO LEAVE' logo and a bio for Mariel Martinez, Senior Broadcast Journalism major at the U.S. Southwest School of Public Communications of Agriculture University.

The main content area features a video player titled 'Love to Leave' from Mariel Martinez. Below the video are several featured stories, each with a small photo and a brief description:

- Searching for Hope:** Avelyn Acosta, 23, is one of the many mothers in the Philippines who try to get by while living in dire poverty. Although she has a live-in boyfriend, she logs on to the dating website, FilipinaHeart.com, in hopes that she'll find a way out.
- Searching for Love:** Katrina Umali, 21, is a single mother in the Philippines. Between working part-time at a local supermarket, going to college as a part-time student and taking care of her son, she logs on to FilipinaHeart.com in hopes that she will be able to find love once again. (Photo by: Sam Dizon)
- Searching for Stability:** Gretchen Ong, 23, lives in Friendship neighborhood in Angeles City. She is a single woman living in the Philippines who maintains a less than traditional work relationship in order to support herself. (Photo by: Sam Dizon)
- Searching for Company:** Cristina Tamazon, 23, lives in Filipiniana neighborhood in Angeles City. Although she is one of the few people in the city who has her own apartment and mode of personal transportation, her lifestyle causes her to stay inside and spend most of her day on the computer. (Photo by: Mariel Martinez)
- Searching for a Career:** Marga Elewera, 22, lives in the Metro Clark Executive Villas in Angeles City. She is a FilipinaHeart.com member who uses the dating website for more than just finding a potential love interest.
- Searching for Escape:** Aveline Santos, 36, is one of the many women who works on Fields Avenue, the red light district of Angeles City. While she is an entertainer in an area that some call the sex tourism capital of the Philippines, she has maintained an international relationship online that she says may be her gateway from the neon-lit district. (Photo taken by: Mariel Martinez)

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“Contact” page:

[About](#)
[Behind the Scenes](#)
[City Scenes](#)
[Stories](#)
[Contact](#)
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LOVE TO LEAVE

"Love to Leave" is a literary magazine project by Maria Martinez, Senior Broadcast Journalism major at the U.S. Newhous School of Public Communications at Agriponos University.

Love to Leave - Comment Form

* Required

Name: *

Email address: *

Comments:

Submit

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“City Scenes” photo gallery:



Stories:




LOVE TO LEAVE

'Love to Leave' is a honorary Capstone project by Maribel Maribon, Senior Broadcast Journalism major at the S.J. Neohouse School of Public Communications at AgriScience University.

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Searching for Hope

Mother tries to get by while living in dire poverty

Ailyn Acosta, 23, lives in a one-bedroom concrete house in the Santa Lucia Resettlement Center. She is one of the many people who live in this area designated for those who lost their homes after the Mount Pinatubo eruption that killed Angeles City two decades ago. She and her late-in-law boyfriend, Mark Caluwayan, live in this house and she said they do what they can to take care of their one-year-old son, Iking.

"He has a fever," Acosta told us during our visit.

Acosta said her son is very sick and doctors have told her he needs a blood transfusion. Although she wasn't able to explain what type of illness he has, Iking's fever, constant coughing and runny nose told us he at least had some type of virus.

And yet, with only 80 pesos, or \$1.85 USD, to her name, there is little Acosta can do to provide for her son. Neither she nor her boyfriend are employed, so she said they typically go days without food and medicine for their son. Instead of working, Caluwayan spends most days playing basketball. "My dream is to play basketball professional," Caluwayan said.


Acosta also does not have a job, so she said she spends most days saving care of Iking.

"It is hard to find a job here in the Philippines," Acosta said. "If I have a money, I will buy milk and some foods for my son."

Acosta was one of the six women we met who explained that it's difficult for women in the Philippines to get a job, especially if they don't

Neohouse School of Public Communications at AgriScience University

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vimoo

Searching for Love

Mother hopes she will find love again on dating website

Katrina Umali, 21, is a single mother in the Philippines. Between studying computer programming at Clark International School for Science and Technology and working part-time as a cashier at the local grocery chain, Hypermarket, she finds time to take care of her three-year-old son, Philander Rodman.

"I took his name from his father," Umali explained. "His father's name is Philander. So I just took Phi-andre Rodman."

Two years ago, Umali's life was different. She was happy in love and was preparing for the future. Umali and Rodman were high school sweethearts and were planning on setting down.

"We were about to marry," Umali said.

She said their plan was to move to the United States. They filed a fiancé visa, however, she said her request was rejected.

"We failed because of lack of support," Umali said. "The U.S. Embassy told us that we might be public charge in America."

Despite their setback, Umali said Rodman decided to move to America to begin making a living for his family. However during their time apartment, she said he found someone new.

"We broke up? September 2009 'cause I knew that he already has a girl there," Umali said. "It really affects me a lot. It really hurts me a lot. Like I can't eat for three months. I was too skinny that time."


But now, Umali said her eyes are once again set on the future.

"I just want to give my son good future. I can support him without the father. I can stand on my own feet," Umali said. "I can do whatever I want to do. I can work hard. I want to be a good mom to my son."

She set up a profile on FilipinasHeart.com in hopes that she'll be able to find love once again. And when we asked her who her perfect man is, her response:

"Perfect guy? I'm not looking for good physical. But I'm looking for a good man that is caring, that is loving and that can love also my son."


*Note: Katrina Umali said her ex-boyfriend Philander Rodman is the half-brother of former NBA basketball player, Dennis Rodman. While we did contact Philander Rodman, he did not comment on this relationship to Dennis Rodman. However, according to a 1996 article by the Washington Post (property needed her: self sent to your e-mail account), Dennis Rodman's father, Philander Rodman, lived in Angeles City, had two Filipino wives and 27 children.




LOVE TO LEAVE

Love to Leave is a honors Capstone project by Maribel Martinez, Senior Broadcast Journalism major at the S.J. Neumann School of Public Communications at Agnes Scott University.

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Searching for a Career
From Maribel Martinez



Searching for a Career

Women use website for more than just finding a love interest

Margie Elevera, 22, lives in the Metro Clark Executive Villas, an upscale neighborhood in the Philippines that is sectioned off by a security gate. With a flat screen TV, entertainment center and desktop computer at her disposal, the difference in living situations throughout Angeles City is apparent.

Elevera is one of three daughters, all of whom have their college degrees. This is a rarity for women in this part of the Philippines.

She spends majority of her day working on her Master's thesis. She is currently studying for her Master's in Arts and Teaching in Angeles City. Career-driven, Elevera spends endless hours in front of the computer screen in her living room working on her thesis and searching for job opportunities in Hong Kong and then one day Canada. After studying nursing for four years, she said her dream is to become a nurse abroad.


"I want to be a nurse in Canada," Elevera said. "I want to study their culture and their nursing practices."

In her down time, she said she logs onto Flipahart.com, a dating website, to find more than just love.

"I got interested in his profile because he's a nurse," Elevera said in reference to a man in Hong Kong that she was messaging on the website. "I want to ask him help to find me a job, so I got interested in him."

While Elevera said she is looking for romance, it's "a career first before I commit to a relationship with a husband."


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LOVE TO LEAVE

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Searching for Stability
From Maribel Martinez



Searching for Stability

Maintaining a less than traditional work relationship in order to support herself

Gretchen Odi, 23, is a single woman in the Philippines. She lives in a one-bedroom apartment that shares an outdoor kitchen, bathroom and washing machine with her neighboring relatives. She grew up in Mindanao, the southern region of the Philippines. But she said finding a job in the south was difficult.

◆ Finished school there until high school. In 2007 I decided to go here to Angeles City to work. ◆ she said

◆ Upon her arrival in Angeles, Odi found a job just down the street from her new apartment. She got a job processing salmon at Royal Norwegian Seafood where she made 350 pesos, or \$8.00 USD, and a sack of rice a day.

◆ You work so hard but the income is not enough to support yourself or the family. ◆ Odi said.

But a few months after starting her job, a new opportunity came her way when her boss introduced her to a colleague. They met at a company party.

◆ He asked me what my name is, how old I am. ◆ Odi said. ◆ He asked me if we can talk to his room in hotel ◆

◆ At ten o'clock in the morning, she decided to visit him.

◆ So I got there and we talk to each other and he say you can work for me, so I work for him. ◆ she said.


LOVE TO LEAVE

Love to Leave is a honors Capstone project by Maribel Martinez, Senior Broadcast Journalism major at the S.J. Nicholls School of Public Communications at Agnes Scott University.

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Searching for Escape
From Maribel Martinez



Searching for Escape
Working the red light district of Angeles City

Avelina Santos, 36, used to be an "entertainer" on Fields Avenue, the red light district of Angeles City. While there is not an official job description available for this region, the expectations of the boss and the customers include providing sex for money.

"I don't like going out because there's a lot of customer coming in the bar, going out that bar," Santos said. "I don't like sex [sex]. I don't like going with that guy, making sex [sex], make one less that."

Santos has been working on Fields Avenue for the past decade. But recently, she found a way to limit her services to serving drinks.

"My boyfriend help me," she said. "My boyfriend takes care of me and give me support."

Santos said she met her boyfriend during one of her shifts. He was a customer visiting from Australia.

"He told me to be careful about the customer when going out, make sure take medicine or make sure going to the doctor and check all the body," she said.

She said her boyfriend visits her in Angeles City every three to four months during his business trips and gives her financial support. During the time that they're apart, she said they communicate online.

"He help me about computer," Santos said. "And then I need more and more English. He helped me about computer and English."

While she said she doesn't know exactly what her future is, she hopes it'll be long term.

"I want to go to Australia for my boyfriend, getting married," Santos said. "I don't like working in the bar. I'm scared."

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Journalism major at the S.J. Nicholls School of Public Communications at Agnes Scott University.

04:27

Searching for Company
Woman spends most of her day on the computer

Christina Tamzon, 33, lives comfortably in a studio apartment equipped with a balcony and indoor bathroom in the Filipiana neighborhood. She even has her own motorcycle and laptop computer, a rarity for most people living in Angeles City.

"No, I'm not working," Tamzon clarified. She does not pay for the luxuries at her disposal. Instead, she said her boyfriend does.

"He help me, my family, everything," Tamzon said.

Tamzon used to be a waitress at a bar on Fields Avenue, the red light district of Angeles City. In addition to serving drinks, she said her employer expected her to sleep with customers.

"If she [the customer] like you, she pay you bar fee for coming outside, or hotel," she said. "Before, my boss fire me because I not go with customer for sex."

Tamzon said she refused to have sex with customers, using excuses like "you can take other," or "I'm sorry, I have menstruation." But this decision kept resulting in her being fired and having to find a new job. She said she continued to work, despite the possibility of having to have sex with customers, in order to pay for her mother's heart medication.

But a new opportunity came her way when one of her customers offered her a way out.

"She [her boyfriend] ask how much my salary, about my family. And then I give answer," she said. "That's why my boyfriend said, 'Out the bar.' He said, 'Come with me.'"

Since that day, she said her boyfriend bought her the apartment she now lives in and all of the amenities that come with it. She said he gives her 3,000-4,000 pesos, or \$60-80 USD, everyday.

However, she said there is one drawback to their relationship- his wife. Tamzon said her boyfriend is married, so in an effort to avoid running into the Mrs., she stays cooped up in her apartment for most of the day. She said she often spends an average of eight hours a day online, often communicating with foreign men in chat rooms "only as friends."

She said she has no intention or desire of getting married.


"I don't like married," Tamzon said. "Cause I see other married, they separate like that. I'm scared."

When it comes to romantic relationships, she said she prefers online relationships, although she wasn't able to explain why.

"It's better on computer only but not in real."


“Behind the Scenes” photo gallery:

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LOVE TO LEAVE

Love to Leave is a honorary Capstone project by Maribel Martines, Senior Broadcast Journalism major at the S.J. Neukam School of Public Communications at Agriacore University.









Behind the Scenes

We began our journey at Aveline Santos' house. Although she was nervous about the interview (she's her broken English), she quickly warmed up to the camera. (Day 1) (Photo by: Sam Diaton)

1 / 40

Surf Stop (3)

This Behind the Scenes photo gallery showcases the four people who were on the ground in the Philippines and contributed to the production of this series. Sam Diaton, Augie Dizon and Roehl "Ph" Caritas were the main people who accompanied me to each and every hot and humid shoot.


Angies City is by all technicalities my "hometown." I was born on Clark Air Force Base in September 1989. My father was in the United States Air Force and was stationed at Clark A.F.B. when he met my mother, an Angeles City native. We lived here until the Mount Pinatubo eruption in 1991.

Therefore, when I began this project and decided to travel to Angeles City, I was lucky that my cousin, Augie Dizon, and family friend, Roehl Caritas, lived in the city and offered to act as my tour guides, translators, hosts and driver. Sam Diaton is a senior spanish and psychology major at Syracuse University and accompanied me during my travels. In addition to being my all-around wingman, he is responsible for being many of the still photographs as well as recording my video standups.

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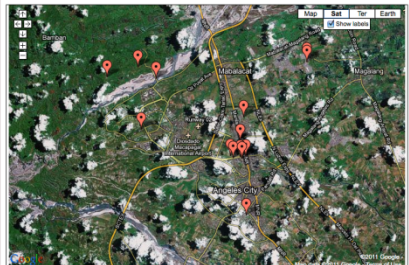
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This interactive Google Map pinpoints the different locations we visited during our journey to the Philippines. Each placemaker on the map shows a "Behind the Scenes" picture or video that we documented on our journey. In addition to showing you the layout of Angeles City, the map will also put you behind the camera during our shoots.

About this project

In the Summer of 2010, a team of two Syracuse University students ventured halfway across the world to the Pearl of the Orient, a.k.a. the Philippines.

For her Renee Crown Honors Capstone project, Maribel Martines, a senior broadcast journalism major, travelled to Angeles City in the Philippines and was accompanied by Sam Diaton, a senior Spanish and psychology major. After traveling for 22.5 hours across twelve different time zones, having touched down in Alaska, Japan and Manila, the duo arrived in the thick of it, in the hot, humid and traffic-congested region of Angeles City.

The mission was to investigate the world of international niche online dating in the Philippines by documenting the lives of six women who participate on dating websites and/or chat rooms. For seven days, the team travelled into the barrios, villages and neighborhoods of the sprawling third world to tell the stories of different Filipina women.

Throughout this website, you'll see the stories of women who utilize online dating for a number of reasons, such as Mergie Eleveira, who is hoping to find a job, Kaitlyn Limel, who is hoping to find a "better man," and Adelyn Anzola, who is hoping to find a way out. The most important thing this team discovered throughout the making of this series is that the advancement of telecommunications across the seas not only provides people the chance for love, but a chance to leave. (By Maribel Martines)

“About” page:

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David Lopez

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Kelly Sullan

Thank you for the awesome website logo.

Ryan Balton & Clay LePard

Thank you for covering videography for the trailer.

Jason Kohlbrenner

Thank you for giving the editing assistance.

Professor Jeff Pasetti

Thank you for your web design assistance.

Emily Ann Brandstetter

Thank you for the inspiration for the domain name.

Mark & Lellani Martinez

Thank you for assisting with travel plans and the constant background knowledge.

Jill & Jim Diston

Thank you for transportation to the airport.

Adelyn Acosta, Margie Elevera, Gretchen Odi, Jerson & Mira Reyes, Aveline Santos, Cristina Tiamzon and Katrina Umali- Most importantly, thank you

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REFLECTIVE ESSAY

For my Honors Capstone project, I investigated the world of niche online dating in Angeles City, Philippines. Niche online dating is a specialized type of dating, a phenomenon in which men and women date within specific identity pools such as specialized racial, ethnic and interest groups.

I am a Filipina-American, born as an American citizen to Filipino parents on Clark Air Force Base in Angeles City, Philippines and later raised in the United States. As an Air Force brat, I have called more than four countries, five states and 11 houses home. And one thing that I have found in common in every place I've lived is a Filipina friend who met her husband online.

The most recent example of this was when I interviewed Sharon Luehring, a former co-worker of mine in Warner Robins, GA, during the summer of 2009. At the time that I interviewed her, Luehring had lived in the U.S. for a total of one year and three months. Before then, she lived in a barrio in the mountains of the Philippines. She met her husband, Steve Luehring, online through Filipinaheart.com. After two months of instant messaging and video chatting, he flew to the Philippines and put a ring on her finger. It happened just like that.¹

During the interview, I asked Luehring why she joined Filipinaheart.com. She told me the reason was because a friend had recommended it to her after she found an American husband. Luehring told me of her dream to come to America and to find a way to work in the States so that she could send money home to provide for her younger brothers' education. After signing up on

¹ Luehring, Sharon. Interview. Marlei Martinez. June 2009.

Filipinaheart.com, she found her current husband and said she is in love and happily married.



Therefore, after speaking with Luehring, I was interested in finding out what other Filipina women's objectives were on the dating website. For the purposes of this project, I decided to specifically focus on Filipinaheart.com, now known as FilipinoCupid.com, to further investigate the various reasons Filipina women in Angeles City use niche online dating.

In the Spring of 2010, I began my project by contacting women who used Filipinaheart.com. It was at this stage of the project where I made my first major decision. As a journalist, I had to decide how I was ethically going to proceed with making contact with these women. My first attempt at making contact with these women was contacting Filipinaheart.com directly via the telephone service and asking for the Media Relations Department to gather contact information. However, they quickly shot me down citing customer privacy rights. So my second strategy was setting up a profile for myself on Filipinaheart.com. In order

to make contact with women on Filipinaheart.com, you must sign up for an account as a man. So, I ended up signing up for an account as a man with the account name, "M Martinez." Although it was deceitful to portray myself as a man, my following course of action added legitimacy to my project. I searched for various women on Filipinaheart.com who lived in Angeles City and sent messages to their personal email accounts, such as Yahoo Mail, and explained in my email that I was in fact a female journalism student putting together my Honors thesis and was interested in speaking with them. This is an example of an email thread between myself and one of the women:

"Hi Katrina,

This is M from filipinaheart. As I told you, I'm looking for a pen pal to help me with my school project for when I visit Angeles this August.

Before I proceed with my questions, I want to be honest with you and inform you that I am in fact a Filipina-American girl living in New York. Like I said, I'm traveling to Angeles this August, and the only way for me to find women pen pals was to sign up online as a "man."

Are you still willing to communicate with me?

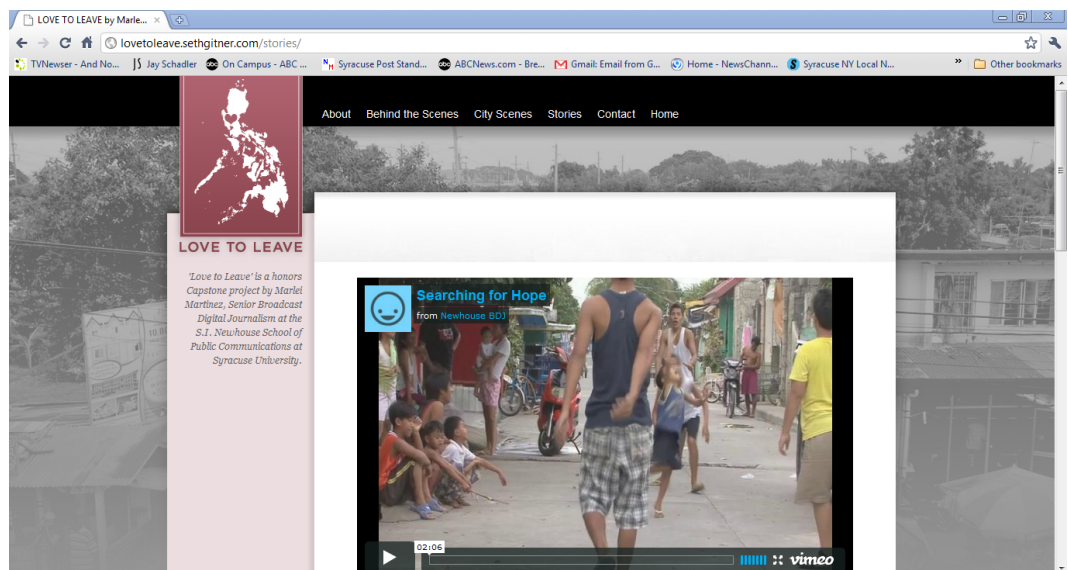
Thank you,

M"

To which she responded:

“yeah its fine with me..just tell me what is it so i could help u then..”

In the Summer of 2010, I traveled to Angeles City, Philippines, and after travel time, had eight days to interview six women (Adelyn Acosta, Margie Elevera, Gretchen Odi, Aveline Santos, Cristina Tiamzon and Katrina Umali) on camera about their online dating lives. After meeting and interviewing these women, I traveled back to the United States and spent the following year sifting through and editing the video footage and still photographs. To finalize my project, I put all of the material I collected and edited onto my final Capstone website, LovetoLeave.com, which consists of six video stories, text stories, a photo gallery of scenes of the Philippines and an interactive Google map that is embedded with Behind the Scenes photos and videos.



While I am a broadcast journalism major and did employ many of the skills I learned throughout my broadcast journalism curriculum at the Newhouse School of Public Communications in the making of this series, this project was put together and showcased much differently than the traditional broadcast style. The most apparent example of this is the occasional personal reference in the writing of my scripts, such as the following from Margie Elevera's script:

“The neighborhood's security gate, the flat screen TV and the prepared lunch for us strangers said it all. Margie Elevera comes from a very different background than the other Filipinaheart members we met so far on the trip.”

In my day-to-day producing of broadcast television packages for class and my job with ABC News On Campus, I rarely employ personal references in my pieces, as that is seen as unprofessional and biased. However, as this was a project that I took on in many ways for myself based on my personal interest in the topic, I ended up utilizing more personal reference than I normally do for other broadcast platforms.

With regard to the number of stories I decided to showcase in this series, time was the main factor dictating this decision. During the summer of 2010, the summer after I received funding from the Renee Crown Honors program to go to the Philippines, I was employed by ABC News On Campus and had to fulfill my summer tenure. Therefore, I only had about a two week period where I could travel to the Philippines to collect these interviews before school started. After travel time, that only left me with eight actual shooting days to collect footage.

Therefore, six women were the most people I was able to interview during my visit to Angeles City.

Another stylistic choice that I adopted in the making of this series was my extreme attention to detail, primarily with regard to the extreme amount of care I took in executing the interviews. As a journalist, I make sure to never “treat my interviewees as fodder” as the saying going in the industry. In other words, for all stories I maintain the understanding that we’re all human and acknowledge the fact that the people I’m speaking with are people and are sharing their personal stories that affect them. With most stories that I produce for class and ABC News On Campus, the story topics do not require such precision with how I execute the interviews and interact with interviewees.

With this series I had to be very careful with the women I was speaking with for a number of reasons. Firstly, I had to be wary of the fact that many of the women I met and interviewed were living in dire poverty. Actually, before I flew to the Philippines, Adelyn Acosta asked me to send her money before the interview. According to the Society of Professional Journalists Code of Ethics, however, journalists do not pay for interviews. In the code of ethics, it states the following: “Avoid conflicts of interest, real or perceived,” and “Be wary of sources offering information for favors or money; avoid bidding for news.”² So I had to explain to her that while I understand the position she is in, I was not ethically allowed to give her money as that would compromise my position as the journalist reporting on her story. As we drove to her shack in the Santa Lucia

² Journalists, Society of Professional. "Society of Professional Journalists Code of Ethics." 1996. 20 June 2010 <<http://www.spj.org/pdf/ethicscode.pdf>>.

Resettlement Center, I picked up some groceries for her and her sick son just purely based on the acknowledgment that she is a human in dire need.

Another example of the way that I was particularly aware of the details of my production was in the way I presented many of the boyfriends of the women in my stories. In Gretchen Odi's video story, for example, you'll notice that I blurred out her boyfriend's face. The reason I decided to do this was because I was not able to reach her boyfriend for a comment. While I did reach out to him via email, he never replied to my inquiries. Due to the sensitive nature of the information Gretchen Odi provided about him, specifically that he pays her to sleep with him, I decided that based on standards and practices policy, blurring out his face was the best option.

You'll also notice in Katrina Umali's video story, however, that I did not blur out her boyfriend's face. The reason I chose to do so was because I was able to reach him via Facebook and over the phone and he confirmed that he is Katrina Umali's ex-boyfriend and that he is also the father of Philandre Rodman.

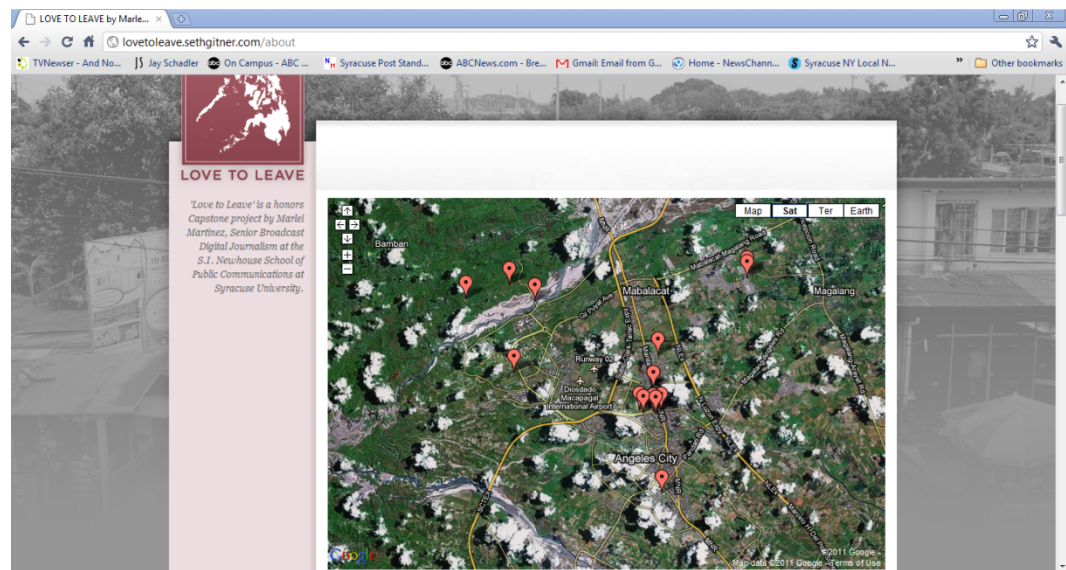
Taking a further in-depth look at my stylistic choices for how I edited the video stories of each woman, you'll notice that each woman is speaking in English. During the interviews, I considered interviewing each woman in Tagalog, the national language of the Philippines, and then providing subtitles in the post-production phase. However, I noticed that many of the women preferred speaking to me in English and actually prided themselves in their ability to speak it, so I decided that was a more natural way to present them.

You'll also notice that in most of the stories, there are quick pops of natural sound, such as the crowing of a hen, a beep of a jeepney (the Philippines' version of a taxi cab) or the chug of a washing machine. The reason I chose to do this was to make the viewers feel like they were right there in the heart of Angeles City, Philippines, to try to enhance the understanding of what life is like halfway across the globe in the third world. I also framed the still photographs of each woman widely in a further effort to capture the environment of the area they're living in to give viewers a heightened sense of how these women live their day-to-day lives.

Lastly, you'll notice that many of my video stories are constructed with a good amount of my voice tracks. While I normally prefer short and concise voice tracks, the reason I decided to incorporate myself speaking a bit more is because I believe these stories and situations require more explanation for the viewers since these stories are of such a literally foreign nature. In addition, many of the stories were complicated with regard to the content of what the women were telling me, so I wanted to do my best with fairly portraying what they said in a way that was accurate and understandable to an American audience.



Taking a look at the photo gallery of the scenes from the Philippines, you'll notice that I included a good amount of photos from Sitio Monicayo, the “baluga village” or black village as the locals call it. This area is where the indigenous Filipinos live, and while it doesn't directly have anything to do with the stories the six main women who participate in niche online dating, I think the inclusion of these photos were vital in illustrating to viewers the general makeup of the Philippines.



Focusing on the interactive Google map, I decided to construct this and include this on my website to not only give my American audience an understanding of the layout of Angeles City, Philippines, but to also put them in my shoes of being behind the camera. While the focus of this project is on the women who told their stories, I believe the actual production is a vital and interesting perspective for viewers to observe.



The last stylistic element I'd like to discuss is the actual design of the website. Professor Seth Gitner and I sat down and constructed the wireframe for this website in January of 2011 and I completed all of the content that would be filling the website. You'll notice that the website is fairly simple, with regard to the fact that there are not Flash elements. The logo, pink and grey color scheme and gray background photo are for the most part the only 'jazzy' elements of the website. I decided to stick with simplicity for two reasons. The first reason is because I want my audience to be able to easily navigate around the website. Too many tabs, too many Flash elements and too many graphics often confuse viewers and dissuade them from continuing to investigate what the website has to offer. The second and more important reason why I kept the website simple was because I want the videos and photographs to speak for themselves. The main attention-getters of this project are the women and their stories, so I didn't want too many fancy website design techniques to dilute the power of what they had to say.

After viewing this website, I hope viewers will learn the effects of the advancement of telecommunications and what that means for impoverished women in the third world. As I was travelling throughout Angeles City, I found it very interesting that the same women who were struggling to pay for food also had cell phones and computers in their shacks to maintain outside communication. The overwhelming prevalence of this craving for communication really illustrated the power of telecommunications among the global community. I also hope viewers will see to what these women will do to survive and provide for their families.

Much of the inspiration and motivation behind this project can be attributed to my college mentor, Professor John Nicholson, and his past four years of teaching. The most important lesson that Professor Nicholson taught me was at the end of the day, I'm still a human. So while I am a journalist, it's important to remember that I, and the people I am interviewing, are all humans. He was the one who taught me the importance of not treating your interviewees as "fodder for yourself," but at the same time stressed the importance of doing my job as a journalist of telling the story accurately. It was this lesson that really formed my plan of execution throughout the entire production of this series.

In conclusion, after working on this project for almost two years, I have learned more than I could have imagined about the power of communication. As a broadcast journalism major, my entire purpose is sharing true, meaningful and newsworthy stories. And through every avenue of putting together this series, I have further honed my communications skills and learned the importance of the

craft all around. I hope viewers will discover this as well after visiting my website.

Before ending this reflection, I'd like to acknowledge those who contributed to this project. Without the following people and organization, the completion of my project would not have been possible.

First and foremost, I'd like to thank the Renee Crown Honors program for funding and motivating this project. Thanks to the generosity of the Honors program and their Crown Wise Award, I was able to travel to the Philippines to meet these women and document their stories. Year after year, the Renee Crown Honors Program at Syracuse University motivates scores of students, like myself, to push ourselves to learn, investigate and uncover new and eye-opening discoveries that will lead to a better tomorrow.

Secondly, I'd like to thank Professor Seth Gitner, professor of Newspaper and Online Journalism at the Newhouse School, for being my Capstone advisor and aiding me with this project every step of the way. From our initial planning meetings in the Fall of my Junior year to our completion of this website a few weeks before my graduation, his online expertise has single-handedly made this production possible.

I'd also like to thank Professor John Nicholson for being my Capstone Reader. More importantly, I'd like to thank him for mentoring me throughout these past four years, and more specifically, for reviewing and critiquing my work. Either fortunately or unfortunately, most of what I've learned at the Newhouse School can be attributed to him.

Next, I'd like to thank Sam Disston for accompanying me to the Philippines. I'd like to thank him for his un-ending support with this project. From swatting the mosquitoes away from my legs during our interviews in the barrios to getting up extra early to de-fog the camera lenses, I couldn't have done this project with him. Even though he won't be receiving class credit from the school for his contribution to this project, he funded his travels to the Philippines, and for that, I can't thank him enough.

Also, I'd like to thank Augie Dizon for being so helpful. He completely rearranged his work schedule in anticipation of our arrival in the Philippines, so I can't thank him enough. I really appreciate his time and constant assistance with showing us all across the city and really bringing us into the thick of things. His geographic and language expertise were priceless.

To Tito Roehl "Pie" Canlas, I'd like to thank him for being the most wonderful host. He made the trip not only a learning experience, but an enjoyable experience. He kept an eye on us and safely guided us to each of our shoot destinations.

To Tita Aimee Canlas, I'd like to thank her for also being the most wonderful host. Her constant words of encouragement kept us going. Even though the sun and humidity beat us up sometimes, her constant smile and supply of food gave us the energy to keep moving.

To Professor Frank Currier, I'd like to say thank you for the constant script review. His edits greatly enhanced my scripts.

To Professor Jon Glass, I'd like to say thank you for setting me up with all of the equipment I needed overseas and for reviewing the site. Without his contribution, documenting and telling these stories wouldn't have been possible. Also, Vincent Cobb and David Lopez deserve a thank you for setting up the camera equipment for the trip as well.



I'd like to thank Kelly Sullan for the awesome website logo, and Emily Ann Brandstetter for the inspiration for the domain name. I'd also like to send a huge thank you to Professor Jeff Passetti for the web design assistance.

To Ryan Balton and Clay LePard, I'd like to thank them for jumping in last minute to assist with the videography and lighting for my trailer. And to Jason Kohlbrenner, I'd like to extend a thank you for the editing advice.

LOVE TO LEAVE

To my parents, Mark and Leilani Martinez, I'd like to thank them for their assistance with travel plans and the constant background knowledge. To Jill and Jim Disston, I'd like to send a thank you their transportation to the airport.

And finally and most importantly, to Adelyn Acosta, Margie Elevera, Gretchen Odi, Jerson & Mira Reyes, Aveline Santos, Cristina Tiamzon and Katrina Umali thank you for sharing your stories. Thank you for opening our eyes and giving us this chance to learn.

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DVD OF VIDEO STORIES

CAPSTONE SUMMARY

The global community is quickly growing due to the constant advancement of telecommunications across the land and sea. No longer do people have to settle for dating within their hometowns; now, they can simply sign up online, create a dating profile and search for their soul mate with just a click of their mouse.

Niche online dating is a very personalized form of internet romance. Men and women can now sit in front of their computer, type the words, “I want to date an Asian girl/guy” in the Google search bar, and dozens of ‘Asian’ dating websites will appear. This phenomenon is known as niche online dating. It is a personalized form of dating where users can specify which ethnic, gender or identity pool they want to date in. FilipinoCupid.com, formerly known as Filipinaheart.com, is one such dating website.

There is something very different about the world of niche online dating in comparison to typical online dating. When comparing the homepages of FilipinoCupid.com to eHarmony.com for example, there is a stark difference in design. Filipinocupid.com displays a very attractive Filipina woman posing for the camera, whereas eHarmony.com displays a happy couple embracing one another. In addition, the sign-up process is very different. When signing up for a profile on eHarmony, users must fill out a 14 section survey before seeing their possible matches. Users then have to wait to see if eHarmony generates any potential matches before they can view those chosen profiles. When signing up on FilipinoCupid, however, the sign-up process consists of a measly three section

survey after which users are immediately directed to their account homepage where they can see a horizontal list of Filipina women's pictures displayed along the bottom of the screen, often framed very seductively.

The world of niche online dating blurs the lines. With regard to FilipinoCupid, in particular, it brings up questions of what are the users' intentions- Do users really want to find romance? Do they really want to find someone to marry? Do they really want to find love? After searching the Internet for more examples of niche online dating, I found websites such as blossoms.com and MeetFilipinagirls.com, websites that had the same general style as FilipinoCupid.com, but with obvious other forms of appeal, such as the giant "US Visa and Immigration Support" link at the bottom of the homepage for blossoms.com. Such a link showcases that there is the possibility that niche online daters are searching for more things than just love, like maybe U.S. citizenship for example.

Thus, this observation led me to the objective of my Capstone project, which was to find out- What are women in the Philippines using niche online dating for?

I actually began this project well before my Senior year. The effects of niche online dating among Filipina women were a phenomenon that I observed in my personal surroundings. I am a Filipina-American, born as an American citizen to Filipino parents on a Clark Air Force Base in the Angeles City, Philippines and later raised in the States. As an Air Force brat, I have called more than four countries, five states and 11 houses home. And one thing that I have found in

common in every place I've lived is a family Filipina friend who met her husband online. The most recent example of this was when I interviewed Sharon Luehring, a former co-worker of mine in Warner Robins, GA, during the summer of 2009. At the time that I interviewed her, Luehring had lived in the U.S. for a total of 1 year and 3 months. Before then, she lived in the mountains of the Philippines. She met her husband, Steve, online through Filipinaheart.com. After two months of instant messaging and videochatting, he flew to the Philippines and put a ring on her finger. It happened just like that. During the interview I asked her why she joined Filipinaheart.com and she told me the reason was because a friend had recommended it to her after she found an American husband. Luehring told me of her dream to come to America and to find a way to work in the States so that she could send home money to provide for her younger brothers' education. After signing up on Filipinaheart.com, she found her current husband and said she is in love and happily married.

Therefore, after speaking with Luehring, I was interested in finding out what other Filipina women's objectives were on the dating website. For the purposes of this project, I decided to specifically focus on Filipinaheart.com, now known as FilipinoCupid.com.

In the Spring of 2010, I began set up a profile on the then Filipinaheart.com to begin making contact with women in the Philippines. I decided to focus specifically on Angeles City since it was an area that I would be able to navigate around when I visited. During this time I also applied for a Crown Wise Award to get funding to travel to the Philippines. After submitting

my proposal and projected budget, the Renee Crown Honors Department generously provided me with a Crown Wise Award to travel to the Pacific.

In the Summer of 2010, I ventured halfway across the world to the Pearl of the Orient, a.k.a. the Philippines. I was accompanied by Sam Disston, a senior Spanish and psychology major, at Syracuse University. After travelling for 22.5 hours across twelve different time zones, having touched down in Alaska, Japan and Manila, we arrived in the thick of it, in the hot, humid and traffic-congested region of Angeles City.

The mission was to investigate the world of international niche online dating in the Philippines by documenting the lives of a six women who participate on dating websites and/or chat rooms. For seven days, we travelled into the barrios, villages and neighborhoods of the sprawling third world to tell the stories of different Filipina women. During our journey we met Adelyn Acosta, Cristina Tiamzon, Margie Elevera, Aveline Santos, Gretchen Odi and Katrina Umali who all told us their stories about why they date online or maintain online relationships. We documented all of their interviews on video and still cameras.

After travelling back to the United States, I spent the rest of the summer and my senior year, editing the footage and showcasing these women's stories on my Capstone website, lovetoleave.com. Viewers can see the stories of these women and will find that they utilize online dating for a number of reasons, such as Margie Elevera, who is hoping to find a job, Katrina Umali, who is hoping to find a "better man," and Adelyn Acosta, who is hoping to find a way out. The most important thing we discovered throughout the making of this series is that

the advancement of telecommunications across the seas not only provides people the chance for love, but a chance to leave.