

Mail confirms that wife, mom is finally home

St. Petersburg Times (Florida)

February 26, 2006 Sunday

Copyright 2006 Times Publishing Company All Rights Reserved

Section: NEIGHBORHOOD TIMES; Pg. 14

Length: 822 words

Byline: WAVENEY ANN MOORE

Body

Late last week an Indonesian woman learned that her immigration ordeal is over, ending a 13-year odyssey that included deportation from the United States and an almost two-year separation from her husband and children.

Elizabeth Setiawan Navarro is ecstatic. So is her husband, Ramon+Navarro, an airline pilot who counts himself fortunate to have been able to visit his wife during her expulsion to her homeland.

Official word that she had been approved for permanent residency in America arrived in Friday's mail.

"This must be it," said Ramon Navarro, 57, speaking on a cordless phone as he went through the letters that had just arrived at the couple's Riverview home.

"It's addressed to her, but I'm going to open it," he said. "Boy, this took too long."

His wife, at work miles away in Clearwater, expressed relief.

"I feel happy. I don't get depressed anymore," she said.

The Navarros say they will put the difficult times behind them.

Perhaps the last few days have been the hardest. They had hoped to settle her immigration status on Feb. 15, when they kept an appointment at the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services office in Tampa. They left empty handed, their heady anticipation turned to disappointment and days of anguished waiting.

That day, as they waited for their appointment, the couple talked about Elizabeth Navarro's return to America last spring.

She had kept her arrival plans secret from her twin sons, then 10, for fear of disappointing them because of a bureaucratic delay, her husband said.

The night she arrived from Jakarta, the capital of Indonesia, via Hong Kong and Chicago, the boys were asleep. She stole a peek at them and couldn't sleep the rest of the night.

"I woke them up in the morning at 6:15" and hugged and kissed them, she said.

"And she cried," Ramon Navarro said.

One boy remembered her. The other didn't immediately recognize his mother, now 46.

Mail confirms that wife, mom is finally home

The couple's ordeal began one July day before dawn in 2003. Newly remarried, they were planning to move their blended families from separate Clearwater homes to a larger house in Riverview. A ringing doorbell would alter those plans.

That morning federal agents arrested Elizabeth Navarro on an outstanding deportation order as part of an immigration sweep in the Tampa Bay area.

Navarro said she tried to tell the agents that she had been granted a stay of the deportation order and that she was now married to an American citizen. She said she also tried to tell them that a new application was being filed to legalize her immigration status. But the wheels had already been set in motion. She was sent to the Clay County Jail, where she remained until her deportation.

Navarro said jail and deportation were frightening and humiliating. She spoke of fights among inmates and of arriving in Indonesia in the same T-shirt and pants she had been wearing when federal agents picked her up weeks earlier.

Indonesian immigration and customs officials laughed when she turned up with a paper bag containing her possessions, Navarro said. They asked how long she had been in America. When they learned that she had lived in the world's most powerful country for 13 years, they asked, "Is that all you have to show?"

In the days before her deportation, her husband scrambled to hire lawyers and sought help from political representatives, a family priest and anyone he thought could save her from being sent back to Indonesia.

"I wasn't asking for any favors. I just wanted somebody to give me the truth," he said. "In the beginning, I didn't understand the process and I was getting double-talk, so to speak."

During an interview back then, an immigration spokeswoman blamed Navarro for her predicament. The immigration official said the Indonesian woman had failed to leave the United States voluntarily as ordered years earlier. But Ellen Gorman, Navarro's St. Petersburg immigration attorney, said Elizabeth Navarro had found herself in a quagmire not of her own making. She had depended on previous attorneys who had not handled the matter properly, Gorman said.

Deportation comes with stiff penalties, Gorman said, adding that Navarro typically would have been barred from returning to America for 10 years.

Navarro was able to return sooner, the lawyer said, because her office filed immigration waivers for the Indonesian woman based on her marriage to an American citizen.

Ramon Navarro said he and his wife have been fortunate. He was able to use his airline privileges to visit her at minimal cost during her deportation and they were able to afford legal assistance. Many people aren't as lucky, he said.

Elizabeth Navarro said she is savoring the routine of family life.

She still has boxes of shoes to unpack, her husband teased. She said she is enjoying the large kitchen in the Riverview home and is cooking Indonesian dishes of rice, rice noodles and curry with coconut milk. Sometimes she succumbs to her children's American palates. She orders pizza.

Graphic

PHOTO, JOHN PENDYGRAFT

Mail confirms that wife, mom is finally home

Elizabeth Navarro and her husband, Ramon, wait on Feb. 15 for what they thought would be her last interview in Tampa to settle her immigration.

Classification

Language: ENGLISH

Publication-Type: Newspaper

Subject: IMMIGRATION (91%); DEPORTATION (89%); CITIZENSHIP (78%); DELAYS & POSTPONEMENTS (78%); SPECIAL INVESTIGATIVE FORCES (78%); FAMILY (77%); APPROVALS (76%); ARRESTS (76%); TWINS & MULTIPLE BIRTHS (72%); CORRECTIONS (63%)

Industry: AIRLINE EMPLOYEES (72%)

Geographic: TAMPA, FL, USA (92%); JAKARTA, INDONESIA (73%); UNITED STATES (94%); INDONESIA (92%)

Load-Date: February 26, 2006

End of Document