

INSEARCH OF BALING

Balay Rehabilitation Center

© Copyright 2005. Balay Rehabilitation Center

All rights reserved.

This publication may be reproduced, as a whole or in part, provided that acknowledgement of the source is properly made. Prompt notification of source would be highly appreciated.

ISBN 971-93220-0-4

Published by: Balay Rehabilitation Center

No. 25 Maalindog Street, UP Village, Diliman, Quezon City 1101 Philippines Telefax:+63 2 9216301 Email: balay@tri-isys.com URL: http://www.balayph.org

With the support of: The Danish Church Aid (DCA)

Printed by: 2A Printworld Carina V. Anasarias Writer

Prof. Miriam Coronel-Ferrer Editor

Lorena B. dela Cruz Ernesto A. Anasarias Project Coordinators

Elvie Ruga Wilbert Mercado Research Assistants

Janette Noblefranca Transcription Assistant

Armando Paragat

Jose A. Fernandez

Design and

Desktop Composition

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgment	i
Foreword	. ii
Survivors	1
Nanding	11
Benjie	23
Jake	37
Sylvia	51
Randy	65
In Search of Balms A Walk Forward to Healing	79
5	

CKNOWLEDGEMENT

ALAY Rehabilitation Center is profusely and forever thankful to the following persons and organizations for all that they have shared to make *In Search of Balms*, A Walk Forward to Healing come true, including their precious time, talent, and love, and for demonstrating once again that from the wellspring of good hearts are born the good things in life:

Torture/Detention Survivors and Resource Persons

Anacleto Mercader Basilides Badion Bernardo Itucal Jr. Brenda Escalante Bryan Arcinal Danilo Manoloto

Dante Vargas Edwin Guarin Fortunato Quito

Jack Lebrilla Jaime Lozano

Mariano B. Reyes Jr.

Michael Parada Ramon Perdon Rogelio Galero William Esquivel Research Consultants

Prof. Anabel Manalo Dr. Ben Molino

Photo Sources

Mr. Jojo Pasana

Philippine Center for

Investigative Journalism (PCIJ)

Philippine Human Rights Information Center (Philrights)

Project Partner

The Danish Church Aid



OREWORD

we decided to develop this book in 2003 with the encouragement and support of our good friends from the Danish Church Aid based in Copenhagen, Denmark. In March of 2004, our book took shape on the drawing boards. We wanted to achieve many things all at the same time in one project. We thought of something uncommon and charming like a coffee table book, at the same time that we were interested in an introspective book on surviving and healing. Finally, we decided that we will have both. With divine help and the mortal limitations of our own efforts, we were able to sift our aims and concepts of this book so that in nearly twelve grueling months, which have been wonderfully revealing as well, our work came full circle with more merits than we expected.

Though it gives an impression of being one, this book is not only about torture. While we had liberally mentioned and referred to such phenomenon in writing its contents, we purposely went way beyond. Thus, torture was used merely as a doorway through which we entered and strived to walk around more personal reflections on the positive themes of healing and renewal, among other inputs, from the chronicles of torture and detention survivors in the country whom we had the privilege of interviewing.

We hope we had produced in this book something new and useful and that many would welcome. We believe civil society has already given a good deal of space and attention for the hard facts on the subject of torture and detention all of which could be found in the well-springs of advocacy literature we have today. We recognize and respect the initiatives of our colleagues who have built and enriched the printed resources. In the last few years, their work has significantly leveled the way for positive developments and is now still shaping the agenda for human rights issues. Most of all, our past efforts continue to give hope to survivors.



However, for the time being as well as for a change, we are reserving the facts and figures about torture and detention. As an alternative, we have written stories coming from the private realm of individual human experience. We believe that the power of storytelling can still appeal to the interest regardless of what we try to teach- from the life morals we have known in our childhood, to the revolutionary paradigms for social change many of us now advocate as adults. In our humble capacity, we have used the same formula and simply retold the survivors' stories as they were revealed to us.

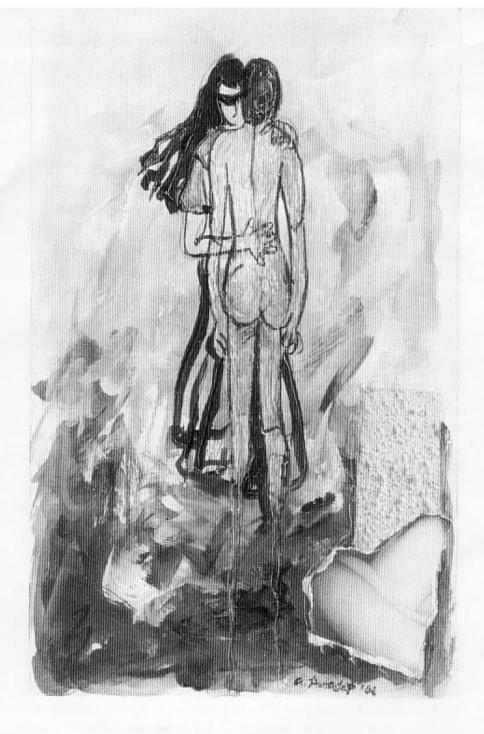
Even as I want to grab this precious space to also write my personal tribute to our torture survivors, I have decided nonetheless to waive the honor of doing so. Having read, root and branch, the manuscripts, I knew that there is little else I could add to its contents in order to emphasize even more the courage and willpower of our torture and detention survivors. I wish to thank them instead for their kindness and generosity in helping us generate this book. Every page was written on the wisdom of their experiences, which were acquired at the cost of great pain. Indeed, "our wine comes from the crushing and pressing of the grapes." From the suffering of our fellowmen, we are able to extract our glittering treasures.

We share this book to anyone who looks forward to the next day believing that the hope it brings depends on our will to survive the present. Whether we are reformers or revolutionaries, scholars or laypersons, doers or dreamers, we must all first and foremost survive our own share of crises, in their varying shapes, colors and sizes, as we carry on with our respective journeys on the paths we have chosen to go forward. For survival is a universal experience, just as struggling to move on in full awareness and with good purpose, is a collective mission.

To the cynics, we hold no false confidence that the stories in this book will surely come anywhere near your heart to touch your life and change your perspectives. But farfetched as it seems, we will always hope and pray hard for that possibility. May this book be a blessing to the reader.

Stalla Cana Lorena B. dela Cruz

Executive Director



Life uses survivors and every person alike for a painter's canvass where she can draw images of her lessons for the rest to see, feel, touch, and interpret, first with common sense, and with wisdom as we increasingly learn. Our task is to find the treasures in her sketches of chaos or to see the hidden colors in the splashes of her brooding black paint.

SURVIVORS

be practice of torture is as ancient as civilization. It has been with humankind long before social psychology and the related fields were born to explain why it seems natural for human society to instinctively turn to brute force and violence in conducting its affairs.

Even New Testament scriptures have documented the knowledge, skill and active use of torture by governments in early history to punish those considered as political offenders. One casualty of such practice was a man named Jesus Christ, a mystical person who healed the sick, fed droves of people from a few baskets of bread and fish, and brought the dead back to life, among other wonders.

Based on biblical accounts, Jesus Christ, was not only a miraculous healer but was also a most profound preacher of social responsibility. He exposed the greed, corruption and hypocrisy of the leaders of that time and defended the weak and poor from oppression. For his deeds, he offended the church and the government, and was charged with treason against the Roman regime. He was arrested and tortured by the soldiers of Pontius Pilate before they hung and nailed him on the cross, flanked by two other tortured and condemned criminals.

It can be said too that as soon as societies and governments emerged and corresponding institutional and political cultures were developed along with the social and economic structures worldwide, a life-long history of repression and violence, marked by deplorable practices like torture, unfolded at the same time. Where authoritarian political systems rose, the phenomenon of torture also grew. The Philippines was not exempt. It now holds one of the most remarkable records on torture statistics, in fact, even after the highly repressive Marcos government was brought down in 1986.

Today as we increasingly understand human rights, we have also generated a common language that will help us further understand torture not only as a word but as a phenomenon that has very serious implications in the life of our society, and on each one, as open targets and thus vulnerable citizens. In many of our current literature, attempts have been made to define torture in the most efficient technical terms. Accordingly, post-martial law torture has been defined in many books as "the deliberate, systematic, or wanton infliction of physical pain or mental suffering, by one or more persons acting alone or on the orders of an authority, to force another person to yield information, or to make a confession, or for any other reason."

Yet, despite sophisticated vocabulary, the meaning of torture especially to the victims and survivors goes way beyond words. Even in the most graphic descriptions of an act of torture, human terminologies will be in short supply. To illustrate in depth what takes place inside the torture chamber rooms, or to know what goes on further in the memory of the survivor years after the actual experience took place, is perhaps to invite the curious to go through the same ordeal and learn the truth first-hand.

Although gruesome, torture happens to be the order of the day.

It happens on a global scale. We see it viciously ravaging people and trampling upon their rights, especially the right to life and to live such life in fullness, with dignity and respect. But while it represents one of the most outrageous acts of incivility in a time supposedly of humanitarian law and restored democracies, torture has persisted like a virulent virus, which pushes our societies in a state of relapse and sickness. For a long time, torture has been a most thought-provoking problem besetting and challenging the moral values of humanity.

Why does torture happen?

Torture happens due to the same reason other crimes leading to social problems exist today. Torture happens due to the same reason poverty and



VARAD-PCLI

hunger, wars and destruction, racism, drug abuse, inequality, hopelessness and a host other social and economic afflictions remain in our day. Torture is a sign that society is sick and dysfunctional, and in urgent need of healing.

In his book The Road Less Traveled, Dr. M. Scott Peck concluded that all human beings have a sick self that constantly challenges the healthy self. He wrote, "No matter how healthy... there is a part that does not want to exert itself, that clings to the old and familiar, fearful of any change or effort, desiring at any cost and absence of pain at any price, even if the penalty be ineffectiveness, stagnation or regression."

The same is very true of our societies. Despite proclaimed breakthroughs in various frontiers of progress, Dr. Peck observed that we have constantly failed to evolve towards healing. Fearful to part with their old, unrepentant and sick selves, societies have continued to preserve acceptable norms but decadent ways, avoiding more radical changes, choosing decay instead of growth, and consequently repressing their potentials and capacities for goodness and well-being at the highest possible levels.

Ironically, it is the government, the paramount organization in society, which has not only exemplified but also frequently cultivated this pathological behavior in various ways. In the case of the Philippines, observers of the country's political culture have noted trends in violence and repression as signs of an ailing system.

In the article "Understanding Impunity: Beyond a Legal and Judicial Perspective," which was published in the book "Human Rights Treatise on the Legal and Judicial Aspects of Impunity," author Rebecca Koeller implied that aggression and the subjugation of the people (a state of affairs which breeds torture) will continue until efforts are taken to address them. She quoted from human rights advocate, Maria Socorro Diokno, some of the problems that contribute to violence and repression which are: "national doctrines that seek pre-emptive control of ideas in order to ensure the internal economic status quo that benefits those in power; the use of law to subvert people's rights; disregard for the rule of law; lack of political will; lack of an independent judiciary; and the rise of the police and military to a status of privilege."

Koeller mentioned factors like "increase in the efficiency and capacity of the justice system, equal access to economic, social and political power; and cultural patterns that affect perception of justice," as conditions that would help stamp out impunity in environments of violence and repression.

Given the enormity of society's affliction, manifestations' like torture and other atrocious crimes and human rights violations may seem permanent woes we are cursed with, and which we are all born to bear and suffer from until we find the remedies to cure and dispel them in time. But on the contrary, society is not fated for doom. In the same book where Dr. Scott Peck exposed the power of the death urge in human beings and the same downward strain for society, he also wrote: "No matter how sick, there is a part that wants to grow. There is the instinct for goodness."



Redeeming our society from the problem of torture and detention is only one of the many paths towards our wellness. We co-exist everyday with social malignancies in various and constantly changing forms. From the global scale down to the national and local levels, issues like wars, genocide, debts, unemployment, poverty, environmental destruction, illiteracy, domestic violence, rape and suicide, are weighing down on each one's conscience. The list of our burdens go on and on. Wherever life takes us, they are like the pangs of guilt relentlessly breathing down our necks.

And so for our own liberation from the specters of conscience which is the cradle of the purest hopes and goals in each one, we simply choose to



act. We choose our journey. The fight against torture and detention, like all other journeys for a cause, is difficult. We will have to cross the angry seas of resistance and climb hills of fatigue, as we take up the cudgels for the survivors and their families, and as we endeavor to satisfy our own sense of justice. However difficult, each single step has to be taken with resolution and without reserve, if we are to succeed in reaching the end of our mission, if we are to serve at all the purpose for which we have set ourselves on the road.

Our journey will take us far and wide. But some of our steps must inevitably lead our attention to this country's lawmaking arena. Well-taught and learned in the way of justice, we know that the creation of a law against torture, among other ultimate steps, can truly heal the wounds of the victims and survivors. We know that only justice in a court of law, along with the rehabilitation of oppressive social structures and the healing of psychological impacts, will bring solace and rest to those who have walked on the shores of doom and have returned to their families debilitated and half alive, and in many cases without a future.

The avowal that torture is wrong in principle and in fact, and the resolve that those who commit it must be made liable to the censure of the law, have long been absent from the commitment of our policymakers. A legislative action that will criminalize torture and punish perpetrators has been overdue for years. Definitely, getting rid of torture and detention will take more than rules to accomplish. It will take political will, faithful enforcement, and a vigilant people to safeguard their laws. But until such legislation has been enacted and in place, the vision of justice remains a dream that survivors would only chase in their fitful sleep. And until impunity is ended and the heads of culprits begin to roll on the ground, the losses of those who have survived will remain as permanent and senseless tragedies.

Along the way, we must march back to the streets and into the domains of government to press for the freedom of survivors who remain in jails to this day. The campaign for their release has slackened over time. And over time too, the political prisoners are being lost one by one, to death if not to despair. Government continues to violate their constitutional freedoms and other human rights guaranteed by internationally observed legal and formal documents by keeping them in prison as political prisoners. Moreover, for as long as they remain in detention, they continue to be exposed to environments where torture and other violent acts abound. The

country's inferior jails are the worst places for the rehabilitation and healing of torture survivors. Ironically, the jails have become lifelong homes for many.

Unless actions are taken to immediately release and remove them from the detrimental conditions of imprisonment, the survivors of torture who have once cheated death with courage that is more than humanly possible, would have survived in vain. In jail, they will eventually be irreparable-



wasting away with those considered the silt of society, rebuked instead of rewarded for what they had stood for, and plunged down to the cellars of our memory for the rest of time.

But there are also those who have come back from the depths. Torture survivors released from jail, are now picking up the pieces and reconstructing to useful forms whatever had been left of their lives. They have welcomed the opportunity to build anew from the losses and to take on the challenge of moving on from the ruins. They have accepted the past realizing that, however painful, it was the only doorway to their healing.

Each day, with the help of those around them, they have started shifting back to a life of normalcy- rebuilding their relationships, working with others, searching for meaning and dreaming their dreams again. They have begun to make more room for the present and future in their lives, and less space for the past. They are taking one step at a time away from victimization. And with every step made, they come a stride nearer to restoration. They are turning their half-damaged lives into half-healed ones by tapping into the core of their beings for the resources they need towards complete regeneration.

The care and support of torture and detention survivors will have to be entrusted to those whom they live with and those around them. Whatever competencies they possess, the spouses, children, other family members, friends, relatives, and neighbors, counselors and church ministers, are still the most qualified persons to form the support system since it is only in an atmosphere of deep trust, privacy, and encouragement that renewal of personal purpose and meaning can be worked out for the survivor.

Other helping partnerships can be tapped in the larger community including those with organizations and institutions that have welfare and rehabilitation as their foremost concerns. Such partners will not be as profoundly and personally involved in the healing process as the survivor's closest kinfolks, but the support they provide is important to sustain and would complement the synergy of all existing positive energies and reserves of goodness around them that can be accessed.

The rest of us will also heal from the indirect impacts of torture and detention as soon as we learn that the experiences of survivors are not their exclusive and sole lessons. They are ours as well. When survivors tell their story and when others take heed, bridges are built and fellowships are woven. We experience life together and life becomes our common teacher. Surely, we are bound by life's unwritten edicts: one of them is to instruct one another and to learn from each other. Life uses survivors and every person alike for a painter's canvass where she can draw images of her lessons for the rest to see, feel, touch, and interpret, first with common sense, and with wisdom as we increasingly learn. Our task is to find the treasures in her sketches of chaos or to see the hidden colors in the splashes of her brooding black paint.

We must learn from survivors the same way we must learn from life. As life is the great school where, ironically, there will be no books to learn

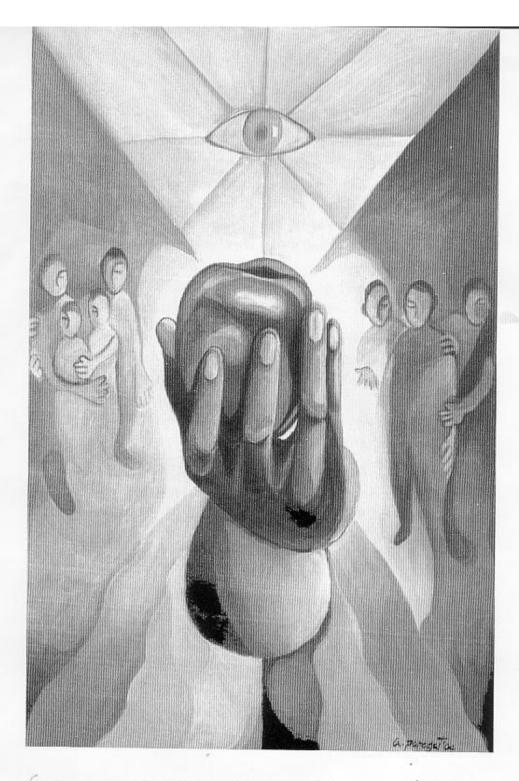
from but pains to understand, survivors are teachers who teach life and how to live, with stories instead of their woes and triumphs. Through the sorrow and suffering of survivors, we learn that life puts people in the middle of storms because humans learn more deeply from the stab of their misfortunes rather than from the pleasures of their comforts and ignorance. Life calls us all survivors, for indeed, we are. We are all survivors in this planet. And being so, we must tell and retell our stories. We must reach out to each other for help. And in the oneness of our grief and overcoming, we create a lasting reservoir of hope and courage to heal the world of its problems.

We owe ourselves the tranquility of mind and soul knowing we have done our part in restoring our survivors. Our connectedness- our sameness at the core, makes healing an act that we do for neighbors as much as for ourselves. In fellowship amidst pain and grief, in the ritual act of communion and community, we rise above our fractured conditions when we are able to help others prevail over their own brokenness. In the same way, survivors surmount their tragedies.

But perhaps more than anything, we must take to heart the task of healing torture and detention survivors as a way of our giving back, as a gesture of gratitude. These people were plain and simple folks with huge and selfless deeds. They came from ordinary homes, mostly from poor ones, and many of them had left their families to fight and lay down their lives as revolutionaries. Believing that poverty and oppression were mortal diseases that were slowly killing our society, they have come forth with courage to change and to heal. They are today's unsung healers.

The stories in this book are simple acts of kindness and generosity from torture and detention survivors. This book is a gift that they want us to keep. It is all up to us to use the gifts we receive. What we do with this gift, how we learn from its message, is the tribute we give our survivors in return.





She was there the night I survived what could have been a terrible death in the hands of my torturers. Her sympathetic presence loomed like a warm sheltering place on my way back home. I can't help crying whenever my thoughts drift back to that fateful night. For me, that little act of kindness from the elderly woman is now a precious memory to live by for the rest of my life.

MANDING

hey dropped me off near Philcoa. I was just half-alive and, by then, worthless for any more thrashing. That was sixteen days after they dragged me off from my own neighborhood and detained me in secret rooms, where they took turns in beating the daylights out of me. From the van that transported us after we left the last safehouse, they ditched me, blindfolded, famished and reeking of deathly stench.

Although they were in such a hurry, they remembered to until me and to remove the cloth plastering my eyes shut. "Don't turn your head," said a voice again. I panicked for the instruction sounded more like a farewell remark before they bowed out of the scene. I imagined myself sprawled and bloodied on the road as the culprits raced away in their car. I heard firearms cocked forcefully. I waited for the shots to be fired. But none went off.

When my feet touched the road, I felt very weak and could hardly support even the diminished weight that was left of my body. My vision still blurred from the pressure of the blindfold. I sensed vehicles speeding past me. I tried to feel the road with my feet and reached out to the gutters. When I finally made it to the pavement, it felt like I had used up all my strength. I looked around at the trees that bordered both sides of the road. As my eyesight began to improve, I got up and hobbled my way towards Philcoa.

I thought of my children even as I struggled with the disarray in my mind. I reached for my pocket and was thankful to find some money in there. When I reached a bunch of sidewalk fruit vendors in Philcoa who were still waiting for customers, I approached one of the stalls to buy apples to bring back home. An elderly woman attended to me rather tautly. When I was already leaving with my purchase, she called out, "Hey, wait for your change. I went back to her stall. Still fazed and unable to think well, I just stood there before the woman wordless and looking blank.

"What happened to you? You look like a mess. Are you hurt?" she asked very concerned.



"Nothing," I answered. She invited me to sit for a while.

"Where would you go home?" she asked again.

"Somewhere just near." I pretended to count the change she gave me. I did not know her and was trying to be very careful.

"You seem to be in trouble."

"Yes," I said to myself weakly.

At that time, everyone at home was already frantic thinking where I went or what had come upon me. My sister had been asking friends and neighbors she knew to pray for me. They had already gone around looking in morgues and funeral homes for my dead body. My wife, whose father had just died, was away in the province, not knowing what was happening. When I arrived in our house at around twelve midnight, there was only bewilderment and relief from those who received me. My children, who thought I was already dead when I failed to come home for two weeks, were afraid to come near me. I can never forget the foul air of wretchedness and gloomy confusion that hung for days in my home beginning that night.

Four years had passed since then. Whenever I would get to pass by Philcoa these days, I feel the compulsion to stop for a moment and search for a face among the crowd. I never saw again the woman from whom I bought the apples. Something within me longs to meet her again up to now. She was there the night I survived what could have been a terrible death in the hands of my torturers. Her sympathetic presence loomed like a warm sheltering place on my way back home. I can't help crying whenever my thoughts drift back to that fateful night. For me, that little act of kindness from the elderly woman is now a precious memory to live by for the rest of my life.

Prior to my arrest and torture, I had been helping the families in an urban poor community in Kalookan build simple and constructive lives. I lived with them in the same community. We faced common problems there and worked together for solutions that would benefit each one of us. I enjoyed being able to help poor people. I came from a penniless family myself and had remained dispossessed all my life. In Kalookan where we lived, just like in other urban poor communities, it was necessary for the residents to act jointly to seek better terms with the government agency regarding the payment for the housing units that have been distributed. At that time, the residents had just been relocated into the place. Most of us lacked employment and needed some time to look for jobs before we could make the payments.

Thus, we decided to come and work together as one community to ask the agency concerned to grant a moratorium in the collection of the payments.

Our lives went on unremarkably and peacefully until one day. I found myself knocking at the door of Ka Dencio, one of our community members, to ask for a small loan. I was desperate then. We needed the money to buy food. My wife was away in the province to pay her last respects to her father who had just died. As a community organizer, I don't receive allowance regularly from our association. At that time, the coffers had been running dry.

Most people didn't like Ka Dencio because he had been asking others to pay him money if they wanted to acquire a lot in our community. Our association did not authorize the collections he made. There was even a time when we confronted him so he will return the money he got from some residents. Anyway, I managed to get the loan from his wife. But as I was about to leave his house, several men suddenly approached and surrounded me. One of them asked my name and began pulling me away as soon as I confirmed my identity. I was alarmed and tried to fight back but they eventually overpowered me. They punched and kicked, and hit me with the end of their guns. When I became feeble enough, they tied and hauled me in a white van like a hog ready for the butcher's block.

Inside the van, they continued to beat me up. Frightful scenarios came flooding my mind but the one thought I prepared myself for was to meet my death when things got bad enough. At first, I tried to calm down by telling myself that perhaps all they wanted was to rough me up and not to kill me. But then, the other possibility was the chilling opposite—that they were really going to kill me. Not knowing which to believe, I already began dying within me. My thoughts raced on what to do, and how, granting I could withstand the dark days that lay ahead. They kept me for sixteen days since they took me on the 8th of January 2000. Until now I still ache physically for the beatings I got. Maybe I still have wounds in my mind that need more time to heal.

They brought me to a room. I could hear aircrafts flying above us. Sometimes the planes sounded like they were taking off. At other times they seemed to be landing nearby. I guessed they could have brought me in Fort Bonifacio or any place in the vicinity of an airport facility. I could see a little outside the window, which was a few paces where they got me hogtied. But apart from the small glimpses of the world outside that room, there were not much clues as to where I was. I just thought about the sound of the planes.



PHILRIGHTS

They were loud and the planes passed by often. After some time, those observations became useless. They transferred me to one place after another.

There were nights when they would take me out for a long ride in a van. We burned fuel just riding around a building in Makati. Then they would always bring me back in the safehouse after the ride. That went on for many nights. In the morning they asked me questions, which always ended up in queries about a bombing incident they said happened in the building we had

been visiting for days. They told me suspects had tried to blow up the office of a gasoline company inside the building and they were simply confirming my participation in that crime. I had no idea of what they were telling me. But they seemed deadset to prove I had something to do with the bombing. I sensed they had no real suspects to go after and I was just being held as a scapegoat.

Days went by but they continually failed to make me admit anything. They resorted to other devices including forcing me to identify some persons. They showed me pictures of persons whose names I did not know, though I did recognize some of them. They asked me where the persons in the photographs could be found. I told them I knew nothing for I have not seen them for a long time. I dared my tormentors to file a case against me if they really believed I committed a crime. They told me that filing charges would not make my situation any better.

One day, we rode to Makati again. I sat flanked by two men in an FX van. Our car went around the same building, which they said housed the office of the gasoline company that was bombed. They showed me maps supposedly indicating where the building was located in the city. When we had gone around several times, they ordered me to reach out to the outer side of the car's window and point to the direction where the building stood. They also had a video camera ready to take a picture of me pointing towards the building. I realized they wanted evidence against me. When I refused to do as ordered, one of them wrested my arm and almost broke it as he forced me to pose for the shot they wanted. Because I was straining hard against them, they failed to take a convincing shot. They began shouting cuss words at me.

Meanwhile, the guards watching the building seemed to have noticed our car going past the spot several times. One of the men in the car with us ordered the one at the wheels to drive away from the building. At some distance from the building, our car suddenly stopped. They cocked their guns as they all got out of the car. One of them said to me, "Man, you are tough!" and began to pull me out of the car. "Let me have this one," said another one of them. That sounded like he wanted to kill me and was asking for the consent of the others so he could shoot me right there. "No, the bosses will look for him," said the one at my right. They then began arguing. I thought it was all a show.

There were also days that they just beat me up. A plastic chair had cracked when they hit me with it. My wrists bore cuts and bruises from the handcuffs I wore. I once dodged a punch from one of them, but when my attacker lost balance and fell down on the floor, he came back at me with a

solid kick on my chest. I flew at the impact. Sometimes my head would hit the metal part of the bed in the room. Different parts of my body turned purple from the beatings. I sustained a crack on one of the bones of my ribs. They wrapped my head with a plastic bag. When I fainted, they tried to revive me with slaps on the face. I did not want to wake up for more cruelties.

Towards the last days of my detention, they used a more subtle form of torture. They said they had been following my wife and that she will be





taken too if I continued to refuse giving them the cooperation they needed. They further told me my kids are also being watched and that I was only inviting harm to come upon my family by being stubborn. They tried more intimidations by telling me my children are into drugs and that they could easily be arrested for substance abuse, and even harmed for the same reason.

At last they took me away to some place that was near the sea. I was tied up in the car as they talked in low voices, almost just whispering to each other. They carried huge sacks and some tools for digging. Someone yanked me out of the car into the open. Once I was out of the car, they tied me up further with copper wires. I felt exhausted. I thought I was finally going to die. To my confusion, all they did was batter me with more threats and insults. A point comes when one simply wishes death would come soon as mind and body become unable to bear anymore suffering and begin to lose grip of the will to live. Beyond that point, hanging on to pain a little longer and watching life slipping through is worse than death itself. Death suddenly turns into a coveted refuge. The numbness becomes a friend.

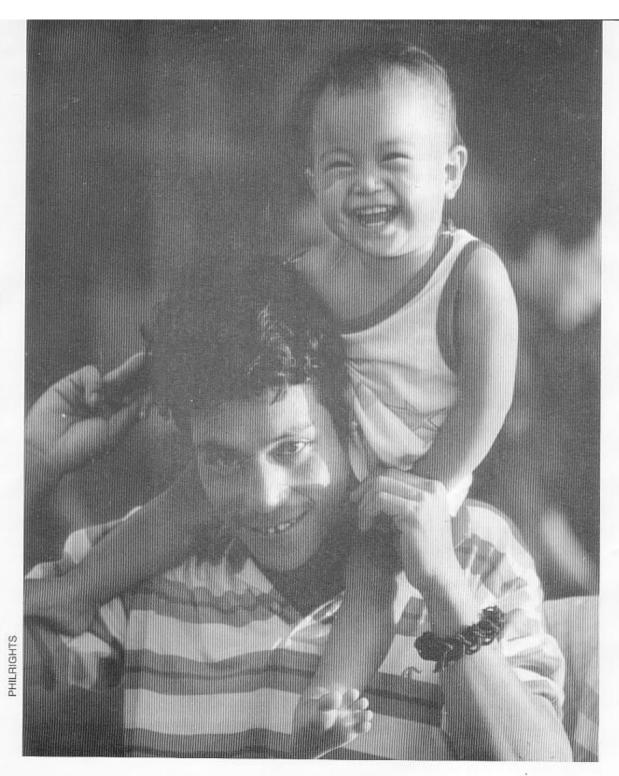
had survived nonetheless. I live to tell that story. No matter what, I am thankful I did not get the death wish I had. I still shed tears whenever I am reminded of what had happened. It's tough to think about torture happening to innocent and well-meaning people. My children were badly affected too. Neighbors told me my eldest son climbed the tree in our yard when I failed to come home for weeks. He stayed there and appeared to be holding back anger and sorrow for my disappearance. My son knew I helped many people and that I had no enemies. He was then 15 years old. My other son even went with neighbors to Camp Crame to look for me. They wanted to talk with the police officials there and ask for help to find me. He was very young but brave enough to join the others in the difficult search.

I look at my children now and I realize how fast they are growing up and that they need a strong relationship with a father to see them through. No one else will love and take care of them now the way my wife and I do. I thank God in my prayers for having let me live.

The men who tortured me did not come back for me again but I know they are still watching. Six months after they freed me in Philcoa, a man who intoduced himself as a police agent once dropped by our house. I was out that time and only my wife was there to receive him. The man did not stay long. He told my wife he was there just to ask how I am.

My life is now moving on despite temporary disabilities brought about by torture and detention. I am now still trying to live with the effects of that experience. In the early days after my release, I used to be very cautious and concerned with safety. I became so fearful. There were times when I would just suddenly get down the jeep on my way to some place, very afraid and smothered by my own thoughts and feelings. I felt my house and neighborhood were being watched all the time. My wife had to tag along whenever I had to leave the house. Until now she still worries about me. But I am slowly learning to shrink my fears into manageable size. I can now leave the house and go to other places on my own.

Before I began regaining the courage to meet my fears, there was also frequent tension at home. I would easily lose my patience and yelled at anyone who upset me. I felt bored and cross because I didn't have a job that made me feel productive and kept my mind busy. White hair grew fast all over my head. To ease myself, I would go out of the house and seek the company of friends and neighbors. I am blessed with good friends in my neighborhood. Apart from my own family, they are the ones who probably know me inside out. They were there to lift my spirit when it was caving in. When times



got bad, it was important for me to have people around whom I could trust, people who would stay on and stick with me through the bad days.

I still have bouts of startle reactions. It takes a long time to get over them. They just keep coming back especially at times when I'm falling asleep. I jerk back to wakefulness when I remember what had happened or when something related to that suddenly enters my mind. There are nights when I lose sleep because of that. I know the effects will eventually pass. I am making my own adjustments to help myself. I am glad we have NGOs around

which help survivors like me understand the stages one goes through after torture and detention. They help us cope by teaching us to tap into our own inner resources as we face the testing times. Without them, the effects will take a longer time to control and the situation would be more difficult for me and my family to handle.

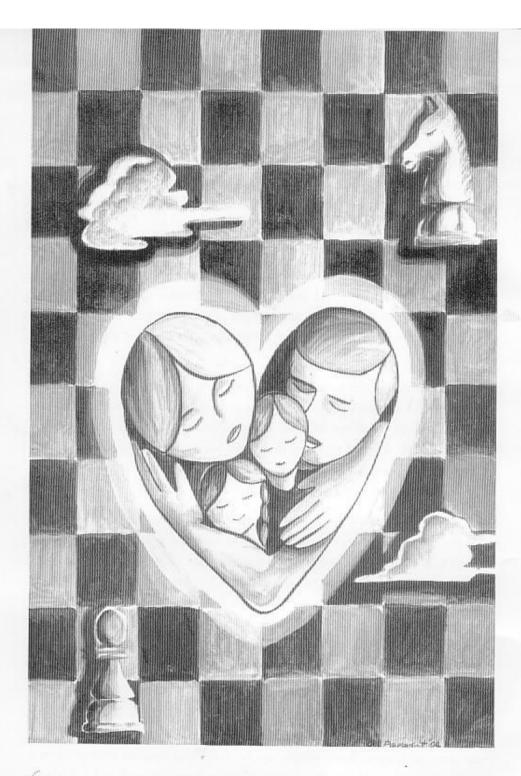
Some neighbors and friends were very sympathetic. They visited and hung out at the house just to talk with me and provide some companionship when I was still recovering. I am now doing part-time carpentry job. I still lend a hand to our community association, sharing my time and skill as an organizer whenever I could. All I wish for now is a sustaining job to support my family.

Good things did happen even in my time of crisis and personal tragedy. When I look back to my ordeal, I now realize that despite the dark side, there was also the challenge in it for me to offer something good of myself. I could have made a lot of mistakes in my life but the one thing I know is that I never betrayed anyone despite enormous pressure when I was being tortured. I look back to that and I feel good.

When I came back to my community, I told my neighbors everything I went through. While before, they seemed to miss the whole point in our efforts to help organize the residents, they now began to open up and see some sense in what we were doing because of what had happened to me. Members of my family like my in-laws are also now treating me better. They sort of frowned upon my work before but have accepted its worth when they realized I was risking my life helping other people. Problems will come but the best starting point to understand them and work out solutions is to have a strong family and to know who you are and the resources you have within you.

I have learned to let go of things that are no longer necessary in my life. I have also accepted the events, both good and bad. I hope that someday I can learn to forgive. Some people-can be very cruel because that goes with the jobs that they perform. But things change. I have survived and I live now. I will just have to move on.





Part of the game is sacrificing one's pawns and even giving up other chessmen while retaining the most important pieces and moving them well across the board in order to win. In the same light, I had to pare down all the excess stuff that was cluttering my mind and the way I lived. I had to reduce everything to the bare essentials. I held fast to only the things that really counted to me. I just made things plain and simple.

had the feeling we were being followed, but I waited to be certain. When the car suddenly turned right, I knew something was wrong. There was no traffic to avoid, but a car from somewhere suddenly cut across our way. Burly and stern-looking men descended upon our car. High-powered firearms paraded around me. Although I had long prepared myself for a moment like this, I still struggled to remain calm.

One of the men opened the door and called out to me, "Come with us, Ka John."

I had rehearsed that scene in my mind many times before. Yet somehow I wanted a little more chance to brace up myself. I mustered enough strength to feign a trace of surprise in my voice.

"Why? What is this all about?" I asked.

"Come on, let's get serious now. We've been hunting you down for a long time," the man replied half-mockingly.

I got out of the car and quietly gave myself up. My sister-in-law, who was riding with me, was ready to go, too. Everyone who was there understood



what was going on, what that was all about. When I joined the underground movement in 1976, I had already considered the likelihood of my arrest, if not getting killed, within two years. My anticipation withered because neither death nor captivity came soon. I considered the extra years a bonus, a new unasked for lease on life. But the long wait ended on that day of December 1998, the day of my arrest.

My captors brought me to a jail in Novaliches. They kept me there from 1:00 in the morning to 9:00 in the evening of the following day. No formal charges were filed against-me. I was made to stand in the toilet where newcomers are usually dispatched. That was the place for the one considered as the jail's lowest ranking member. At first, some of the inmates were trying to close in on me but they backed off when one of the police on duty warned them I belong to the Alex Boncayao Brigade (ABB). Immediately, they transferred me to the front, side-by-side with the old timers. There were around

fifty of us in that small chamber where we stood under each one's nose. I was lucky not to have received the regular welcome treatment.

Before I entered the jail, three members of the ISAFP and army intelligence officers grilled me one after another, in a room just outside the police station. The interrogation took many hours, beginning in the afternoon to very early morning the following day. The officers questioned me just the way I had expected, which was only to confirm information they already knew. The whole time that we were in that room, I thought of the moment as only the conclusion of the things that I have done in the past and the events that they led to; they were all just catching up on me.

Between 1994 and 1996, the military feverishly tried to capture me, along with some of my colleagues. Having assumed a responsible role in the underground movement, I worked with much more responsible people who were very much in the military's order of battle. And so the military also targeted me to have a lead on the others. However, my colleagues were seized ahead of me, so that by the time my arrest came, the intensity of the crack down had subsided. At the time that I stood face to face with my huntsmen, I was ready.

The ISAFP agents had a subtle way of breaking their prisoners. They did not beat me black and blue, but they purposely dumped me in jail together with common criminals. Political detainees like myself used to be confined in Camp Crame or Camp Bonifacio, separated from the ordinary felons. When the anti-subversion law or Republic Act 7300 was rescinded in 1992, political offenses were no longer recognized as such. The state began criminalizing acts and activities linked to any ideological agenda. Instead, arrested political personalites were charged with regular crimes. By pitching me in a pack of common felons, the ISAFP was probably sending a taunting message. I knew that my colleagues who had been arrested before me did not get the same affront and humiliation.

I felt strangely comforted when I was finally detained in the Novaliches police station. From 1:00 to 5:00 in the afternoon before I was thrown in jail, we shuffled from one unknown place to another. All that time I was blindfolded. I agonized at the thought that something bad would be done to me. When I was finally taken to the police station, I said to myself, "My time isn't up yet. At least, not right now."

From then on, the ISAFP agents regularly visited me. They wanted me to cooperate with them, in exchange for monetary assistance to my family. Later on they became more insistent that I help them. They began to threaten that if I would not enter into a reciprocal arrangement with them, my wife and other members of her family would also be dragged into very difficult situations. That was their way of saying we could be wiped out. Even before, I knew they were already monitoring my wife -- where she worked, wherever she went. I also knew they could and would make good their threat if they had to do so. But I would not take their offer. Serving as a state spy was certainly out of the question. I told them there was nothing I could do to stop anyone from arresting or making things difficult for my family, if that was what they really wanted to do. I made it clear that if they went ahead with their foul actions, I would take no blame. They will have to face up to the consequences of their own deeds. However, deep down, I felt very concerned. The government was in full control and I was powerless. I tried to comfort myself with the thought that the military knew they didn't have much to gain from what they were trying to bargain with me. It was just a futile matching of nerves and wills. Mental harassments like that were done to me in the early part of my detention.

At that time, I was also in a stage of denial. I was still emotionally unable to accept the reality of my being in prison. I continued nurturing the hope that my stay in jail will be cut short and I will be released soon. At the same time, the military was relentless about getting me to work for them. At one time they hinted a warning that my being stubborn could land me in solitary confinement in Camp Bonifacio. No one would want to be thrown into a solitary cell. Although the place where I stayed together with common criminals was cramped and spoke of poor conditions, it was certainly better than solitary confinement. It offered a more normalizing day-to-day set-up rather than being alone with no one to live with. In solitude, one becomes more vulnerable to loneliness. One can easily crack up. That was how I started to see the beauty of fellowship even with supposedly hardened criminals. With the inmates, we were like in a small community of our own.

In the Quezon City jail where I spent the next two years, life was not pleasant, but there was still a ray of hope. While at first I felt somewhat denigrated getting shacked up with common criminals, I learned to look and find pleasant things about them despite the reasons why they were there. I realized that the city jail is an exact microcosm of an urban poor community where all kinds of people converged. We shared life together, warts and all. I thought our lives were different with the rest of society only because ours moved behind bars.



When I first came to the city jail, I slept with the others on the cement floor. The cell was so small we had to raise our legs against the wall or bend them up so there will be space for everyone. Before jail, I developed a sleeping-and-waking routine of my own and as much as possible I wanted the least interruption in that. But with the lack of space for sleeping, my life felt like it was in shambles the first few days. It was very difficult for me physically. The inmates treated me fine. There were those who were sizing me up but, overall, it was okay. They shared hot water for coffee and I bought cigarettes for all of us.

I was miserable for about five days. Later when I was transferred to the next cell, things improved a bit. We were all political prisoners in the next cell. They were my men in underground political work. We still slept on cement floor, but at least there was enough room to stretch our legs. After one month, I was able to buy my own cubicle. That's how life in jail is, we bought everything that we needed. We were allowed to make our own cubicles. Cubicles are just partitions on the side of the cell where inmates can have a space for his own bed and a curtain for a little privacy.

The most expensive cubicle was about the size of a medium-sized toilet. There is a bed in it and a small table at the center. Payments for cubicles become common funds for the cell. The cubicle I had was not very expensive. It cost about five thousand only. The "mayor" of the cell where I stayed donated P2,000.00. I shelled out only P3,000.00 to pay the total amount. Usually, only appointed officials of the cell are privileged to build cubicles, but later on, portions of allotted spaces were also sold to other inmates. Inmates who have their own cubicles can lie down and sleep anytime they want. Those who sleep in common sleeping areas follow time rules, which is from 9:00 pm to 5:00 am. After 5 am, the quarters have to be cleaned so everyone rises up.

When Christmas and the New Year came, sadness seemed to return to my little chamber. That was my briefest and gloomiest Christmas and New Year's holiday. My children came to visit me, together with my nieces and nephews. However, visiting time was restricted to until 9:00 pm only. After that, I was left on my own with the inmates. Merrymaking outside the jail meant blasting of firecrackers. Ventilation inside the jail was poor and soon smoke filled up our cells. It was almost suffocating. I did not feel like moving around much, so I did not join the others and just lay down quietly in my cot.

When sadness seemed to want to stick around for a while, I did not let it overcome me. I avoided thinking about it. The only thing to do was to survive the moment. When six months had passed, I was also past the stage of denial. I realized that my stay in jail could be longer than I hoped it would be. There were times that I cried easily. Just watching a television scene where someone was crying made me cry too.

Soon, I came to see something redeeming in the way my life had turned. Bit by bit, I started getting accustomed to life in jail. I came to know all kinds of people and I learned a lot from them. I realized most of them have more heartbreaking stories to tell.

The mayores holding the cell where I belonged signed me up in his rancho. There were about forty of us and we were divided into groups or gangs. It was much like joining a fraternity group in school. Ranchos only serve as a group for meal privileges or arrangements. When you belong to one, you get to



eat meals prepared by the group. That means your group buys and cooks its own food. Otherwise, you settle with whatever is served from the kitchen.

While ranchos function to organize the jail's meal system, there are also inmates who form themselves in groups based on the commonality of the crimes charged against them. They are called magka-kosa. In prison, your kosa will supposedly fight to death with you. There were other political prisoners who came in ahead of me in 1995. They were already adjusted with the way of life including the typical dynamics among the gangs. They helped me feel my way around and to learn the ropes.

Life in jail also allowed managing and tending of little stores for livelihood purposes. I solicited money from friends and from the amount we raised, I donated a refrigerator for our use in the cell. We sold ice packs and softdrink beverages. It was a big help for inmates to have something to keep them busy and productive. Especially for those who have been there a long time, having something else to do other than the routine helped. They welcomed anything to forget how bored they were. My wife and two daughters visited me every week. I knew my kids did not come willingly and only felt obliged to tag along with their mom. I tried to play with them and get to know them better. I was an absentee father and my elder daughter barely knew me as her dad. It was slightly difficult to get along because she was then between pubescence and adulthood, a period typically marked by aloofness and defiance. It was just fine with me that we tried to work out our relationship mostly during the times they visited. We were there for each other despite the limits of our situation, but that was enough for me.

In detention, I found my biggest anchor in the support given among inmates. From the start, they helped me know the house rules, especially those on privileges and amenities. My fellow political prisoners, who were also my former colleagues, never knew that they were also a source of strength to me in a specific way. The truth is, they got arrested because of a tactical policy the party leadership had previously decided on. I was one of those responsible for that decision. I feel responsible for that decision which sacrificed some of my men. Joining them in prison and sharing the suffering somehow absolved me of some of the guilt I felt when ordinary members got arrested while those responsible roamed free. It was also the only honorable way to face my guilt and perhaps get rid of it eventually. Of course it was still best for all of us to be able to get out of prison. But while that was still not possible, I tried to cope by ascribing some meaning, some acceptable purpose for our detention.

Looking back to all the things I have done for underground work, I know I have done well and it was fine to retire in jail. I got my training in the context of the ideological mould of the 1970s, the height of youth activism. Anyone in that mould is a total idealist wanting to serve and make a difference in the world. Idealists give their utmost. They give their all, even extreme sacrfices. There is no middle ground. Before I took the Party oath in 1971, I also had my own moments of disquiet. I thought about it for a week. I was then only 14 years old. But when the time came, I did vow to lay down my life for the cause.

n character, I am basically an optimist. When I appraise people, I try to find what is good in them. Each of us has a gift we could offer to improve the way humanity lives, to make the world a better place. Even the worst among us can yield good things from the core of his or her person. I have that kind of attitude about people. In my relationships, I look for that goodness within the other person. I always have a space for what I can discover in them. That is one reason I don't get easily upset and impatient.

That helped me get along with all the fellows in jail despite the ghastly side of their character. Even when I was still in the underground, I have developed and honed some useful skills such as being able to listen to others talk about issues that matter to them. People have different temperaments. Whether one is devious, stern, snooty, there is always a way to hit it off right with them. There is always something positive that you can work on together. I knew that from the extent of my exposure with almost all kinds of people.



. TESTA-PCIJ

There was plenty of chance to apply my skills in jail. I did whatever part I could in helping iron out interpersonal conflicts among the inmates. When there were inmates having a tough time, I made myself available to help shore up their courage. I barely thought about my own concerns because I made myself busy helping others sort out their situations. Getting my attention diverted from my own problems somehow eased the burden. It was important to deflect stress when it built up.

Although I had that sort of training regarding people, I still saw to it that I retained some control. Even when I opened my time to others, I avoided giving them all. I made sure I was able to shut off when conditions became intrusive. It wasn't healthy to go all out. That's exhausting. I spared some of my resources for me. It was important to realize you can help others only as far as it was still within your own capacity. Beyond that, it could do more harm than good so I just had to stop. I put in the right place the helping relationships I had with other people.

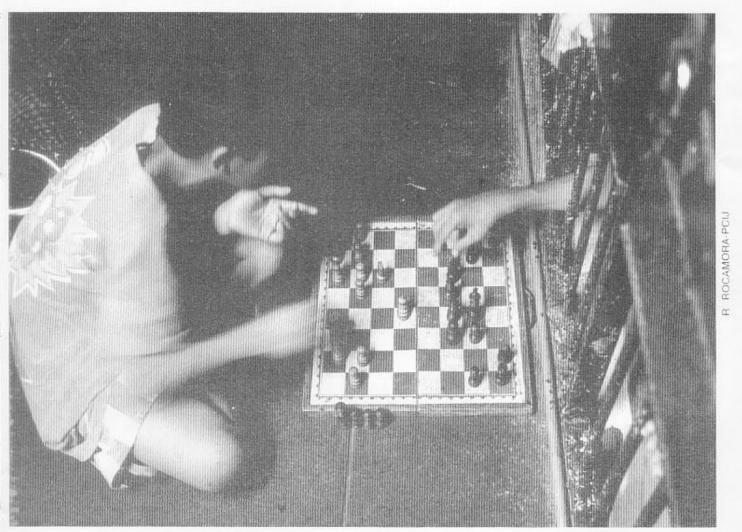
I needed support too, and I had my wife, family and friends for that. It was also nice to know that batchmates from high school were still there to sympathize and lend a hand. My classmates and I had gone our separate ways in college, and there were about 25 long years that clapsed between us. Yet they were there for me. Even those batchmates with whom I was not close in high school helped and extended their assistance.

When I stepped out of prison, my most important concern was to rebuild my relationships. I wanted to make it up to my family. My priority was to put my life back together and have some distance from my former life to rethink things. All of these years, the focal point of my life had been other people. I thought it was time that I should be kinder to myself and establish a personal life with my family. I was concerned about our economic security. My wife was the sole breadwinner at the time. I had a year to go in school and I hoped to find work in the field of policy and development research to help explore other avenues for effecting change.

By retiring from the movement, I wasn't just chilling out and putting my feet up on an easy chair. On the contrary, I was facing a dilemma. Apart from the emotional crisis of leaving my revolutionary work, I did not possess any marketable skills to live on. Yet, I did not want to sell my skills in revolutionary work. Others have done that. Not for me. I decided to go back to school. I considered it as my sabbatical from all the mess I got in. For the meantime, I wanted to study and get a job later on. By going back to an academic institution, I was also excited about catching up and picking up where I left off in college.

I consider the present a transition time, a short-term period for personal reflections and planning before I go full swing again. I am the type of person who will go all the way when I have made up my mind on something. In other words, if I finally decide to rejoin revolutionary work, I will be one hundred percent there. Otherwise, I won't be there one hundred percent also. Right now I still want to serve our people but not anymore in the way I served them before. I am now considering operating within the legal framework. Although I still believe in a vanguard party with all the elements of a revolutionary organization. I hope someday it will be possible to come up with less bloodspattering and more efficient and effective strategies to achieve the changes that people want.

I am experiencing inner changes. I think I have lost my idealist programming. I have already let go of some of my romantic beliefs about the revolution. I am now cynical and critical of both the revolutionary "ground



plans" being talked about in the underground as well as the personal motives of some people. I don't know, maybe I am just wiser now. I am in the process of discovering the beauty of a simple life. I used to be someone who will only find my happiness when the revolution has finally defeated the rotting system. I think I am becoming someone else, and going through a process that started early on when I broke up with Joma. It is a process that continues today but is still not complete. I am now capable of happiness over the small things. I believe big things come from little improvements, from very small changes.

Hope lives as long as life goes on. I admire and feel good about today's young. They are very brilliant and creative. They have that fire of idealism burning within them. They are in search of ways and means to help make better our world. It feels good to know there are still minds thinking that way. As long as we have them around, we have hope. The young can do a lot; they are good in many things. They are discovering great things to improve life on earth. And there are countless ways to do so. The revolution is quite simple, in a sense. As long as there are sincere people, people who are ready to explore new ideas, we will move on.

Spending one's time in jail is a tough and testing experience. In my case I had to look hard within me for the things that I considered the most basic, the most important, and I clung tightly to them in order to endure. That was my formula for survival. I just tried to simplify my situation when things got complicated. I compare that to a chess game, which is a contest of strategy. Part of the game is sacrificing one's pawns and even giving up other chessmen while retaining the most important pieces and moving them well across the board in order to win. In the same light, I had to pare down all the excess stuff that was cluttering my mind and the way I lived. I had to reduce everything to the bare essentials. I held fast to only the things that really counted to me. I just made things plain and simple.

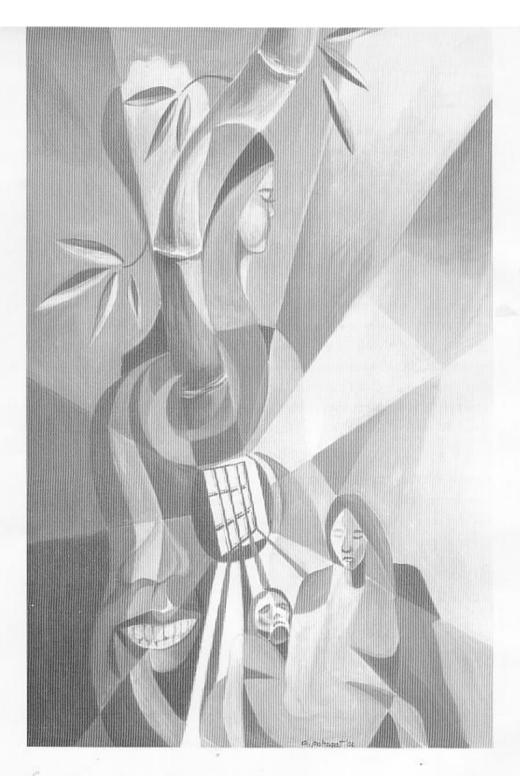
Before my arrest, that was already the rule governing the kind of life I had in the underground. In the most distressing times, I regularly applied the same technique. Even in dealing with my colleagues when I was often compelled to make even uncomfortable commitments, I had learned to back down from complications. I focused on the simplest and most important demands of circumstances. Issues will never end. Tomorrow, more will always come along.

People do not have to burden themselves with problems they don't have the power to solve. One can only look to the issues that are most essential, most connected to life, and simply draw the line. As for myself, I will stick to my relationship with my family and continue adhering to my principles. That is all I need now in order to stand up and carry on. It is also imperative to search and find myself, know who I really am and look for my own separate kind of peace.

My peace is knowing that I had given myself to a cause I believed will benefit my fellow men and that I did everything I could to be true to that belief. I don't remember having purposely damaged anyone. I tried to help those needing encouragement and support. To those whom I had disappointed because they were expecting help further than what I could possibly give, I hope they realize that everything comes to a point where it just ends because that is all there is to it. If ever I had mishandled certain situations because of my own personal weakness, that did not happen because I wanted to ruin them intentionally. I did not want harm to come to anyone. If ever I had been a part of an act against some colleagues, that was an obligation that had to be done. We only acted based on what we decided as correct at that time.

I continue to bear the burdens from my past. In my heart and mind, there is a restless part that needs comforting and quieting down. I continue to hurt for some of my colleagues who remain in prison with no obvious future beyond each day they wake up behind the cold jail bars. I suffer for them but there is nothing much I can do now. There is much healing to go through.





Sometimes we just laugh them off. Now we are able to find humor in what happened. We can tease each other. We have transformed something that used to be tragic and depressing into funny jokes. It is a sign that we have gone past our crises and are moving on. That is part of our healing.

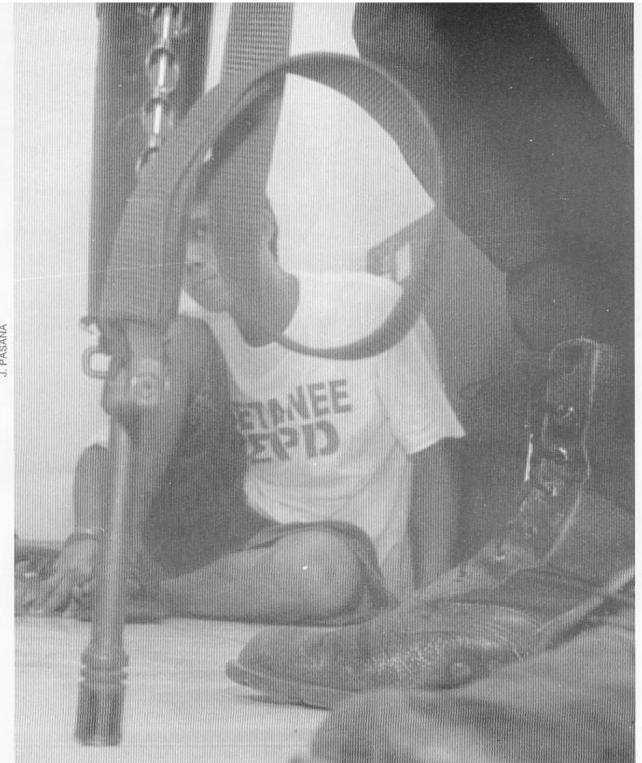


ur visitors could have been there crouched in the shadows and flitting furtively all night. Like nocturnal animals stalking and lying in wait for their prized catch, they lingered for the right time to pounce on me, like I was some wild game.

I had no premonition of what was about to happen. It was still hours before dawn cracked that day. The household members at Bagong Barrio, Kalookan including myself were fast asleep when the stillness of the new morning was rudely broken. Police agents made quick, sharp knocks at our door. At once they forced their way in even as Tiya Elisa, fraught with sleep, was still asking our unexpected callers who they were and what they wanted. They entered and rummaged around. When they found the room where I was, the police agent donning a dark-colored ski mask pointed his finger at me. That was to be the cue for the others who promptly swung their guns towards my direction. I was the one they were after. Pairs of sturdy hands and fists were soon pounding me as I rose shakily to my feet.

Early that week, members of the Alex Boncayao Brigade (ABB) had killed two cops in Bagong Barrio for extorting money from local cockfighters. The police were looking for suspects on whom to trump up charges for the killing. I was one of the leaders of a youth organization in our community at





that time. Nelson, a colleague of mine, called to warn me that the authorities were swooping down on activists in our area. Confident that I wasn't responsible for anything, I disregarded the warning and stayed home.

My relatives held their ground and tried to protect me when the police came, but the raiders and their daunting weapons were more than a match for them. I was dragged out of the house into the dark alley where two cars were waiting. Awakened by the din of commotion, some neigbors were roused from sleep. I shouted out my name and called for help. My captors warned the residents to remain in their houses. Overcome by fear, no one dared to come out.

Realizing that no help was forthcoming, I tried to resist arrest. But the police became more incensed and fiercer. They carried my slender frame quite effortlessly, gripping me by the hands and legs. They started to beat me up as soon as I was inside the car. Fear wrapped me up as we drove to an unknown destination. In between their blows and curses, they asked me to admit involvement in the killing of the two policemen. They wanted to know who else were part of the killing and how many other policemen we have supposedly chucked out. Somebody tried to strangle me when I failed to give the answers that they wanted. They said that if I didn't confess, a neighbor of mine, who happened to be a government agent, would testify against me.

We drove for hours around Manila. Finally we stopped in a secluded site. We entered a place packed with piles of softdrink cases. It was like an old warehouse. There was a kitchen and a long wooden bench. There were men guarding the place. I realized that the kitchen we had entered led to a door where the police held one of its city stations.

Immediately, my captors forced me to lie down on a wooden bench. They restrained me from all sides as they began pouring water on my face. I felt like my lungs would either burst or collapse. I tried to pluck up courage at first and struggled to withstand the drowning sensation. When they noticed I was able to bear the torture, they made the ordeal more painful by mixing crushed chili pepper into the water. They spread out a rag on my face while my head down to the neck hung limp at one end of the bench. Two of them sat on me, one on my chest and the other on my legs. Sure that I was securely pinned down, they began pouring the hot acrid mixture down on my ragplastered face. The potent fluid concoction gushed through my nostrils and into my nasal passages and the sting suffused my brain with a piercing, scaring pain. The stronger sting of the peppered water made the water cure technique many times worse. I gnashed and thrashed, but that was all that I could do. With every effort to resist, the fear in my mind increased the physical pain I felt.

When they were done with the "water cure," they brought me into another room. As I reeled towards the room, they kept punching the side and back of my body. They tied my hands and feet with wires, and then left me under a sink until daylight came. My body stayed in a contorted pose the whole time. I could not flex nor stretch a muscle. The strain felt numbing, heavy and painful. Somebody soon turned the lights out and for a while I

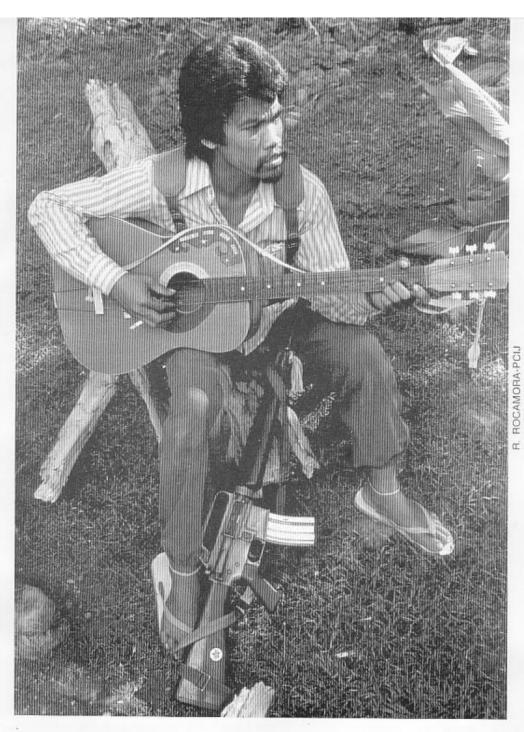
thought the ordeal had come to an end. But someone would enter the room every so often and kept on harassing me. One of them kicked me on the chest. The others came in ranting out deprayed remarks.

When morning came, the police introduced me to the media as a member of the ABB. But before that, the head of the police station took me in his office and showed me a fabricated diagram. He instructed me to tell the media my exact position in the diagram and to also pinpoint the spots where my alleged colleagues had stood as we supposedly attacked the policemen in Bagong Barrio. They wanted a whitewash for the wrongful arrest and were implicating me instead. Only with words running along the lines of their own version of the story was how they wanted things to be told to the press. In a last ditch effort, I pleaded innocence and told the police chief I could not confess to the crime. Infuriated rather than sympathetic, he grabbed a small ceramic décor that sat on the top of his table and pummeled it hard on my head. He said he would have my head chopped off and sent to my mother if I refused to do as ordered.

In the afternoon, I was transferred to another detention center in Camp Bicutan. I was taken blindfolded in a room that was freezing cold. I could hear other people in the room laughing and jeering as I entered. I heard footsteps and then the sound on the floor of someone running towards me. A loud assault cry, much like the way martial arts fighters would scream in the movies, tore through the room. That was followed by a powerful kick that landed hard on my chest. As my punishment intensified, I shut out all thoughts of names and faces of other activists I had worked with. I wanted to erase even the names of my own parents from my mind. I wanted to lose memory of any detail that would give away and thus harm anybody I know. I just focused on what was happening — the time of day, the blows, the kicks, the pain.

They took me out of the room and threw me into a dug hole afterwards. I stayed there for some twenty minutes, just waiting to die. Down at the bottom of the hole, I couldn't hear a sound anymore, as if time stood still. I tried to take comfort in the thought that when the guns are fired, that would be the end of it all. Oddly, my fears were just melting away. I waited for the gunshot but nothing came. Later on they scooped me out from the hole and removed the blindfold, untied my hands and feet, and gave me food and water. My eyes felt raw and my vision blurred from being tightly covered for long hours. I could take only very little of what was served as I was hurting all over.

In the days that followed, I experienced more acts of maltreatment. Whenever one of the CAPCOM on duty got drunk, I would get a visit in my



room any time of the day and be tousled up. Sometimes the police on duty would ask me to come near him and when I have come within his reach, he would grab my head and slam it hard against the bars.

One night, I felt despondent. I was already withdrawn for days and had refused to carry on conversations with the other detainees. Since the day of my arrest, I was never given time to wash myself even once nor provided fresh garments so I could change my already grubby clothing. Since the Colonel hit me on the head, the top and back of my head seemed to have deadened. I lost ability to control my body's balance. I felt that kind of effect more when my body shifted from vertical to horizontal position. Every time I tried

to lie down on the floor, I would somehow fall sideways. I had to lie down on my side first and slowly shift to supine position to keep myself from rolling sideways. Somehow, that was beginning to concern me. My body ached all over and I was beginning to be overcome with self-pity. I had been missing at home for half a month. I could no longer put up with the torture inflicted on me almost every day. I was at breaking point and already wanted to commit suicide.

With an improvised electric heater left unattended by the watchmen one night, I contemplated on electrocuting myself to death. I thought my captors would kill me very soon anyway. Still not found after two weeks, my chances to survive were already nil. It seemed that my relatives failed to track down the place where I was taken. I would have easily succeeded with my suicide plan had Manong Pilo not woke up and stopped me. Also a detainee, Manong Pilo was a soldier who had served in Mindanao and was arrested for illegally selling military firearms. The guards on duty were soon alerted. They took the heater away along with other items that may be used again by prisoners to kill themselves.

Before I was finally transeferred to the national penitentiary, I had been through other dark moments. At one time, I had to be put in an isolation cell together with three other political detainees. Though our political beliefs have trained us not to depend on religion, we tried to find strength by praying. I used the rosary that my mother gave me. That moment, I could not recall anymore the prayers we used to recite in the church before I was introduced to Maoist and socialist doctrines as an activist. Even so, I just said my prayers in my own words, and when there was nothing I could say, I prayed without the words. That provided us with comfort and calm. When we were finally taken out of the bartolina, we all gasped for fresh air and thanked God it was all over. Since then, I sought spiritual inspiration to hold on to during my detention. There must be a right moment in a lifetime for every person to return to an origin or a source. When I was being tortured with the water cure, I screamed in pain and fear, and cried out loud only two words: "God" and "mother".

It was my good fortune I bungled on that night in the safehouse when I planned to kill myself. Life is not perfect but it is good to be still alive. I need time to compensate for lost time and to restore especially the relationships I hold dearest in all my life.

Before my arrest, I was steadily drifting away from home and family. I stayed out of the house most of the time. I went home only to change my

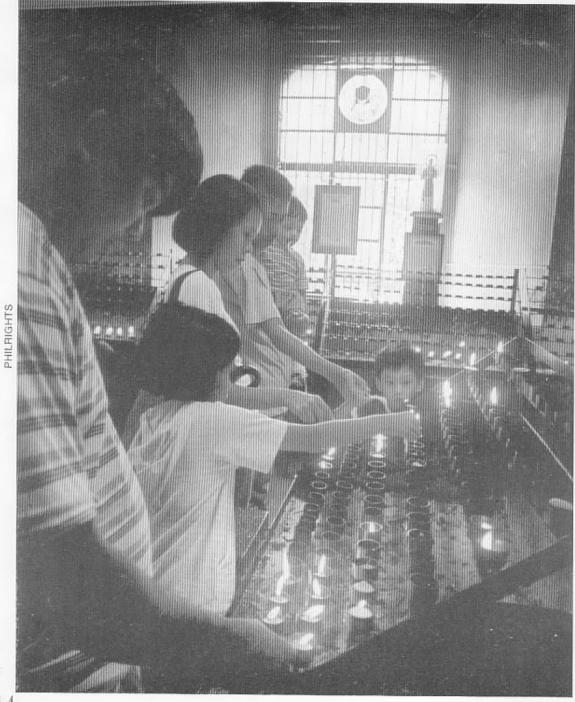


R. ROCAMORA-PCIJ

clothes and pack clean ones to take with me to wherever I went. My family did not know what sort of activities I was into. I was using various code names and strangers would come to our house looking for me but asking for someone with a different name.

An elderly neigbor once came to our house and told my mother that I was a good teacher. My mother said I wasn't a teacher. She did not know yet that the youth leaders of our organization in Bagong Barrio including myself occasionally gathered the neighbors in local meetings and discussed with them the social and community issues of the time.

My family was finally able to trace down the detention center I was taken to. I cried like a child when my mother came to see me. I noticed she had lost a lot of weight with age. That night, she looked even skinnier because of sadness and concern for me. But she seemed to beam with new life



44

when she finally saw me. She said a lawyer came with her and assured me that we will get legal help. I held her tight, unmindful of the cold iron bars standing between us.

I had gone a long way on my own when I joined the movement. Prior to my arrest I was becoming a stranger at home. But while I kept my distance, my family never really left me on my own when I needed help. Despite my neglect and shortcomings, my mother especially was there for me no matter what. She used to take and pick me up after school when I was a kid. She took good care of all her children. These were suddenly very touching memories for me that brought hope. It was for my mother and my family that I tried to survive the rest of my days in detention.

I spent five years in prison and have absorbed the way of life there. My fellow political detainees were also a strong source of hope and strength during those years in detention. Regardless of the kind of environment we had in jail, it was still possible to build cohesive ties, even enduring friend-ships. It would have been difficult to recover my sense of purpose and hope without them. When I got out, I continued going back to visit the inmates.

Before the released political prisoners could tune in to the mainstream again, they usually went to a halfway house. Some had to see crisis counselors and therapists to help them cope with the detention effects. I did not want to go through all that. From the penitentiary in Muntinlupa, I went straight home to spend with my own family the whole time I needed to adjust and come to terms with my experience. They were there for me through the pits. I preferred regaining my balance and direction with the people I could trust.

I started moving on one step at a time. There are those who would come to help, one way or another. Some NGOs welcomed torture and detention survivors who were returning into the fold and gave them temporary jobs. With whatever functional skills we still possessed after torture and detention, they made room for us within their organizations so we could start life again. Initially, I worked as a volunteer in an organization of former political detainces and their relatives. There, I helped organize the case files of victims of human rights violations during the Marcos government. The victims and their relatives needed the proper documentation to obtain reparation claims from the government. I stayed for several months in my first job.

Not long after, another organization hired me to help administer its loan cooperative project for the relatives of political prisoners. They put me in charge of payments collection. Afterwards, I became a volunteer, and later a fulltime staff, to a human rights organization supporting political prisoners. I was in some sort of a limbo in my first few months at work. I was still terrified of prisons and detention centers. I cringed at the sight of policemen. I worried compulsively that I would be arrested again. But since part of our job was to document illegal arrests, I knew I could not steer clear of the jails forever. One day, I had to go on my own to a detention center to follow a student activist who was brought there by the police. It was the first time I had to enter a detention center again after my release. I feared I would not be able to leave the place again once I stepped in. Conversely, if I shirked my job and did not push past my fear, I knew I would be haunted by a morbid terror of these places all my life.

To get in, I had to coax and somewhat made a mental dialogue with myself. I said it would be interesting to know how it will feel like to enter the place again, not anymore as a prisoner there but as a freed human rights advocate. That somehow steeled my nerves and I got out safely afterwards. The experience was like a healing balm. Later on, when I had gone back many times to Muntinlupa, that helped further loosen fear's grip on me. In time, I got used to having policemen around me and I even talked to them again. Detention centers began to feel just like any other ordinary place I know. Of course the bad memories will not compeletely go away. But they have dimmed and quited down over time.

Every time I went back to Muntinlupa these days, I would think about how I longed in my heart to get out of that place when I was still a political detainee. That gives me a comfortable perspective. I would feel some kind of overcoming. It's important to go back. When you expose yourself again and again to that place or situation you dreaded the most, it produces a desensitizing effect. Fear gradually becomes manageable.

Perhaps, some survivors will live scarred for the rest of their lives because of torture and detention. But I try to find something edifying and valuable in that experience. I want to believe that there was a meaning to everything that had happened to me. Every event must be part of the whole story. Just like a book, every page is important. When you remove even just one of them, you lose that one indispensable part that makes the message complete.

When I was still a teenager, I used to hang around with kids who robbed jeepney drivers plying routes around Bagong Barrio. Some of these kids were also junkies and thugs. Whenever fraternity brawls broke out, they were ready to get hurt and to hurt their enemies as well. Bagong Barrio was

just like Tondo. The degenerate neighborhood conditions and influences affected kids and adults alike, making them spitfires and hotbloods. I would have been another hardened criminal, save that I chose to do a good turn as a social activist. Some of my childhood companions became activists like me and died fighting for what they believed in. If we had grown up to become total villains and lawbreakers, we would have been up against not only the crooks in government but ordinary folks and fellow-victims of repression too. When we became activists, we defied the norms for a good cause, at least. That was better.



R. SANTOS-PC

My father used to be an employee in a government agency. He left to work abroad because he did not earn enough here to support our family. He was among many other Filipinos who have had to bear separation from their families and staked life, limb and their last hopes in faraway lands. Missing a father had opened my eyes to the failings of governance and the disparities in our society in general. My father had been working abroad for 25 years now and wants to come home this year for Christmas. He has grown old and frail but still hesitates to end his work there because of economic uncertainties here at home. That was one of the reasons I developed a rebellious spirit in my younger years.

My past holds a lot of heartbreaking memories. But they come handy whenever I get into a scrape. I have tasted the ultimate pain and had recovered from it anyway so why would I flinch over a little prick from life every now and then?

I am still the same person I was before torture and detention. I am basically a quiet person. I am always eager to learn. I want to spend happy and carefree times with friends. But I need to open up my life to changes now. I'm considering marriage. I want to raise a family of my own. I want to stay for good with someone who would back me up in my political work even she happens to be not a militant herself. I want to have four children at the most.

I need time to make up with my parents for the losses in our lives when I was imprisoned. But I am not quite ready yet to give up my work as an activist. It is not easy to just watch at the sidelines when you see so much poverty and hunger all around you every single day. When opportunity comes along, I want to work abroad where there are prospects to earn more money than here at home. The OFWs (overseas Filipino workers) are increasing in number across the world. That should pose a challenge to activists in the country like myself to get employment overseas and help organize and build support systems for the migrant workers at the same time. I graduated in college with a diploma in electrical technology. Maybe I can still find work in a foreign country where I can use what I know in that field.

Some of my young nieces and nephews live with us at home. They have become my inspiration. When I march in the streets with other activists in mass rallies, whether for oil deregulation or to oppose price increases, I think about the children like them. They look toward a bleak future without us grown-ups taking decisive actions now to change life's course for them.

I try to be a good example to the young people in my life now who seem to want to follow my footsteps and duplicate the things I did. My younger brother joined the same fraternity I got into as a kid. He has also joined a militant student organization in school and seems as eager to learn about the issues of the poor. As for my nieces and nephews, they have caught my interest in music. I play the guitar and spend long hours at home amusing myself and my nephews and nieces with my music. They have developed a liking for it and are now also playing.

Survivors of torture and detention need continuing support. There should be continuing opportunities for us and for those who are still in prison to get together and talk about our past. Whenever we talk about our experiences, whenever we dig deep into them for energy and strength, we move farther away from the pain. Sometimes we just laugh them off. Now we are able to find humor in what happened. We can tease each other. We have transformed something that used to be tragic and depressing into funny jokes. It is a sign that we have gone past our crises and are moving on. That is part of our healing. That is our way of dealing with our pain. We rub off courage on each other when we laugh our tears away.

Being able to face the trauma of the past by going back to it over and over again is hard work. Survivors must decide to do the hard work and not be stopped by fear. Dare to repeat the story no matter what. The nightmare will come rushing back at times. But you know they're not for real anymore. When you are able to look back and live with the memory of the pain, that is the only time you can move on. Ignored and unattended, the pain will find a way to manifest itself. It's like a stiff neck. It prevents you from looking back.

I don't have any regrets. They will only hold you back from moving on. Other survivors wallow in deep remorse and get stuck in it. I just focus on the good things that came out of the experience. I know there is a purpose. But you discover the purpose only when you begin to tackle your problems. Come to think of it, there were no real losses. You still get something out of what you gave away in torture and detention.

I am like a bamboo. Bamboo is pliant. It bends when strong wind blows and knocks down anything on its path. It bends so it would not break. It's strength lies in that quality. I am like that, too.





When you have dared to move on and had gone beyond extremist politics and paradigm, you realize that the most simple things in life are the ones that sit at the heart of the true revolution: family and self. When you give your utmost to these two, you are also able to wage the revolution right at the center of things.

come from a family of revolutionaries. We fought the dictationship of Ferdinand Marcos during the grim years of martial law- a time of great disaster for human rights, and a gateway as well, in the history of our country for winning the people's war. My siblings have suffered torture and detention in each one's time. My husband, Rico, was also a radical activist and he underwent the same experience upon his arrest in 1998.

Torture has been a part of the military's standard practices for arrested dissenters. But some go through worse times than the others. One of my family members was arrested, detained and tortured more than once, while the one most severely "grated" of us narrowly came out alive from his own ordeal. Beyond the martial law years, our family continued to work for sweeping reforms through extra-legal means as injustice and oppression in the country remained.

I am an activist, too. I had been involved in the revolutionary movement long enough. I somewhat retired in 1995 to work full time in a more legitimate environment where I continued serving the revolutionary cause in my own terms. I had a different fate from the rest of my family in the sense that I did not experience arrest and detention. But even so, I consider myself a survivor for at least two reasons. My first reason is based on my belief that those who suffered torture as well as those who did not are equally survivors. They are both survivors in their own right. My being a survivor has to do with having risked as much and devoted as many years as the others did trying to overhaul the status quo. I am also a survivor for the second reason that members of my family, my own loved ones, were the ones who had faced and bore the harm. Needless to say, I shared their pains and strained with each of them through their dark times. That way, I have survived with them.

My experience of survival, for the most part, meant being an indirect victim and a fellow burden-bearer to another person in my family. I played this role again when Noel, my brother-in-law, was arrested and tortured in 2004. I accompanied my sister, Sonia, the whole time she had to stand by her husband in Camp Aguinaldo until his release after close to a week. We stayed at the camp for as long as we felt it was necessary to do so, to prevent the military from having a free hand in torturing Noel and the rest of the group that was captured along with him. We kept tight guard of the situation together with our lawyers, some representatives of a local NGO for political detainees, and the relatives of some of the other suspects who were arrested. We failed to get results on the first day. It was strictly a part of military SOP (standard operating procedure) to hold their ground and not to concede to any of the demands of the relatives. We felt heartbroken but we were determined to save Noel and the rest, so we came back the next day.

I knew that torture in its most vicious forms were committed like it was a normal and expected consequence when one gets arrested for political charges during the days of martial law. But I still felt shocked when I saw the victims of torture finally allowed to come out of the torture chambers. They were livid; their bodies and faces were covered with patches of blue and purple from repeated and very severe blows. They all looked feeble and sleep-less. One of them was bound in chains like a dog. Another slumped almost lifelessly on the floor and already looked lame from the beatings. I have never openly cursed or uttered profane language in all my life. But when I saw the trampled bodies of those people, I swore fiercely to myself in anger. I was completely overwhelmed with sympathy for them. That day, I shed tears for people I didn't even know because, somehow, I knew their pains.

My sister and brother-in-law were lucky to have been spared from physical torture unlike the rest of the arrested people. But the stress of mental and emotional anxiety they felt was perhaps just as intense. While Noel and his companions were kept in a room for the interrogation, we stayed nearby and heard screams emanating from the other side of the walls from time to time. Worried for her husband, my sister would rush to the door and bang it hard with her fists. She shouted warnings to the people inside to stop assaulting the detainees at the same time that she issued threats of legal action. The prisoners who were taken there without company of families or relatives were the ones most badly beaten up. They were taken into separate rooms and once confined there, no one else knew what brutalities were done to them.

Our lawyers took steps to fasttrack the procedures for the detainces' transfer to the provincial jail. We wanted to take them away from the ISAFP (intelligence service), which has been strictly enforcing the government's ironfist policy against suspects arrested and tagged as terrorist operatives. Under such policy, the military has been inclined to exploit the anti-terrorist mania and political offenders like Noel could be easily linked to terrorist operations and pinned down with less legal question. The ISAFP being unopposed, detainees will be charged as common criminals, without distinction as to the nature of their offense and lacking the protection and recognition given them by the country's Constitution. We were made to understand that the revival of torture in arrested subversives was a natural consequence of new developments in national security. I was totally aghast. I knew that war, threats of war, or any condition causing national instability could not be used as justification for torture, under any circumstances. In fact, there is no possible justification for torture under the Constitutional Bill of Rights and international statutes recognizing human rights.

When my husband, Rico, got arrested and stayed in jail, we went through the difficult times together. He had to deal directly with the conditions in prison while I stayed close and provided moral support. My biggest pressure was the economic side of surviving. I had to be resourceful to provide for all our family obligations including the pleas for help from other inmates that came our way every once in a while. But with so many friends, we managed to survive. Even through the times of scarcity, there was always a source of help that would open up and find their way into our hands. Largely through the bigheartedness of friends, my children were able to continue their studies. There was always something too that could be shelled out for Rico's provisions while he stayed in prison and until he got out.

The most serious decision we ever made was regarding Rico's plans in post-detention life. Rico got released in 2002. It was a big question for us whether he wanted to go back to revolutionary life or not. Rico was already mulling over the range of possibilities including retiring like me. But he took time to consider other options once he decided to return to main-stream life. I urged him to go back to school and continue studying. He was third year in college when he left school to join the movement. He wanted the same and so we planned together how to do it. At the outset, we knew I had to be the one to make the extra sacrifices for a while. I would be working solo for the means to sustain my family's education. But we also agreed that in the long term, that arrangement will serve its purpose and we would then be able to help each other financially. It would be just like investing time and effort to Rico's college education, in addition to our daughters' schooling.

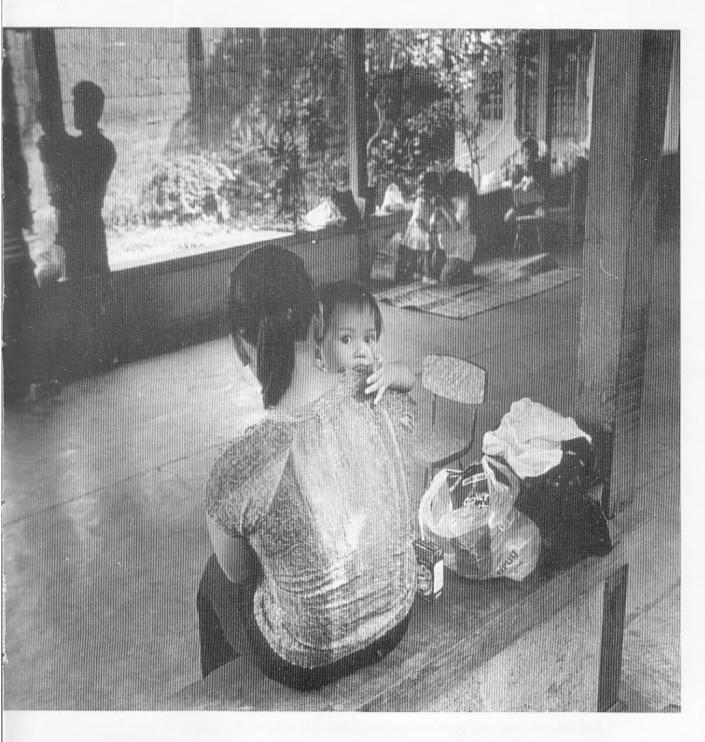
One thing very positive in our relationship that helped us survive together has been an open and constant communication. There was never a time that situations bogged down because we failed to communicate. We tackled every problem, especially those concerning the children. If there were difficult adjustments that had to be done at all, they were largely in relation to Rico's relationship with the children. He had to make the bigger adjustments. I think he exerted his best to do that.

Rico and I have survived many things together. We owed that to putting honesty in our relationship right from the very beginning. We have clearly defined our parameters and goals. We knew the things that were most important in our relationship. We knew what we had to do to protect them. One of the issues we took care to sort out and agree on was respect for each other's personal growth and beliefs. At some point in our life as partners, we remained being individuals too. Rico and I once belonged to different groups in the rejectionist spectrum but that never was a problem. When we had differences, we tried to hold on to our sameness. We survived that because we respected each other's independence. It was good we saw that issue in the same way. Otherwise, it would have been difficult. Once you get locked on the basic issues, you just start to erode and lose the basis for staying together.

Regarding our children, there was a lot of reaching out to do. Being the one that bridged my husband and daughters to each other, I took pains to introduce Rico to our children. I told them about his fine traits, especially the ones I liked best. I let them know who he is as a person, the way I knew him. But Rico and I had to define the scope of my own role. I did not want to overdo it as their go-between. I helped them connect to each other at the onset of the process but my role had to end somewhere along the way. Where my role ended, Rico had to take up the rest of the work. It was all up to him



S. YABAO-PCIJ



what steps to take to get close and re-establish the bond with his children. It wasn't hard for their relationship to jell in time because there was one hobby they shared and really squared with: computers and tinkering. They chimed in really fast because of their common interest in both software and hardware. While Rico became very engrossed with his computer tinkering, the children were able to keep up with him. They easily dovetailed into each other's worlds.

Rico and I did not treat the children like they were too young and immature to understand. We have defined specific ways to deal with them as co-equals. We encouraged them to voice their opinions and to criticize constructively anything of relevance to us as a family. Theresa and Sandra have indeed developed critical and questioning attitudes, which are very positive. Rico and I realized we are also learning a lot from our children.

To regain our family life, we never did anything out of the ordinary. We just made full use of the day-to-day conditions that could facilitate the work of reaching out and strengthening the relationships. Somehow, we sort of jibed together, particularly in the stuff that appealed to our common curiosity. Like when we found out that Theresa wanted to try out some sports like billiards, the rest of the family also tried to learn it. We taught each other until we could already play double or as a team. We challenged and played against each other and rallied whoever won. Sandra soon nurtured an interest in soccer so we always went to see her games too.

Other than the adjustments we have made in general, I am not very sure if there are any more specific issues that have to be resolved. I don't really know if Sandra and Theresa take well the idea that we are not exactly normal as a family in terms of economic roles and functions. In this regard, their father is still not able to take the lead role regarding that concern. If ever this bothered the children, there hasn't been any articulation of such problem from either of them. It is never manifested in the way they have been relating to their father. The only basis for such possibility is the fact that they automatically come to me specifically for their financial requirements. But even so, the children could see their father is doing his best to help even just with the little money he could make for the time being. With the earnings he gets from his part-time job in computer repairs, Rico would always find a way to save up and buy simple things like Internet cards that he knew would delight his daughters.

I make it clear to Theresa and Sandra that our family went through a difficult period. Our own experiences have formed a different background for all of us, which is not necessarily the same with what other families have. The girls do not have any problem accepting that. They know that whatever role arrangements we have now, these are only temporary and that we are abiding by them like an important investment for each one's future. We told the children Rico and I have to secure our education now and get sufficient jobs later on so we would not lean on them when we get older. We are preparing at present for the time ahead when we are already graying and advancing in years. It is up to them to help us if they wanted to, but we do not want to



J. PASANA

remain their responsibility forever. It is up to them as well to help other members of our extended family. I helped send to school some of their cousins but I am not really passing on the responsibility to them. They have the liberty for other options.

The family knows I am not having an easy time as sole breadwinner. Rico is always sympathetic but he has his own kind of reasoning about what we face at the moment. He just sticks to the fact that we have agreed to pinpoint our priorities and how we planned to do them. If there are hitches, they will be momentary and will eventually pass when we have reached our targets. He tries to simplify our lives and tells us not to make problems out of situations when there is little that can be done about them for now. He believes many of our problems don't get solved overnight and will take time and patience to overcome. He is cool and keeps himself within bounds. That way he keeps his peace. In his own modest ways, he tries to lessen my load. He saves up and scrimps on his own needs. Lately, his semestral fees in school have been practically coming from his own reserve. He tells me not to bother with his tuition fees anymore and to make allotments just for Theresa and Sandra.

We take our life one day at a time. All have agreed to accept the fact that it would be really quite difficult for our family until Rico and Theresa are finally able to graduate and finish their respective college degrees. When we have clinched everything and pushed our plans to the hilt, then things will improve. Sandra will then be the only one needing support for her studies. Eventually, I can also return to school for my masteral degree.

I don't want to think about anything that could possibly block our plans. I don't want to entertain negative thoughts or fears of potential stumbling blocks. While we are still working toward our dreams, it would not help to look at the limitations. I have adopted the mindset that we have the faculties, whatever it would take, to make happen our plans. There will be trials and difficulties, but we will get by. Rico once said that our only problem is money, which is the most simple of problems. Money problems will always have solutions. There will be doors and roads that will open up to lead us towards answers. Others who have money are beset by other kinds of problem. Their problems are more complicated.

We are happy in general terms. As to the future, our security is in doing whatever we can now. We do not want more than what is enough. We have no obsession with getting wealthy. I have always been alert and wary about what material possessions could do to my character. I believe there is a big relationship between social staus and consciousness. I don't want to spoil my character with so much money and material goods. There is the risk of getting very attached to your wordly treasures, to luxury. You lose yourself. Whatever is enough for the family will do. If there is a little more, we will gladly share them with others.

We have tried to teach our children the moral values behind the choices we make in the family. Without pre-empting their own judgement, we make them understand the circumstances we faced and the life perspectives held and pursued by each one. Whether they accept our point of view or not is beside the point. It is more important that they are able to absorb good values and a positive interpretation of life regardless of the difficult times on our chosen paths. We hope that these are the fundamental things they could hold on to as they begin to choose their own personal directions later on. We tell them they cannot live for themselves alone. They have to help others the same way that they need other people to fufill some other needs in their lives. Someday, they could work as professionals and engage in careers of their own choice. Their lives could be very different from ours. But even in their chosen field, they could still serve with the skills and capabilities they possess towards civilizing and humanizing life in this world. The issue is always how and for what purpose to use each one's talents.

Perhaps part of growing is when you begin to see things differently from the way you used to. At this point, I don't see myself spending one hundred percent of my time in political work. I don't believe that positive changes can now be made only in the sphere of the socialist agenda. When you have dared to move on and had gone beyond extremist politics and paradigm, you realize that the most simple things in life are the ones that sit at the heart of the true revolution: family and self. When you give your utmost to these two, you are also able to wage the revolution right at the center of things. We need to devote time to take care of our families and to nurture our own personal growth.

There are inevitable pains when one begins to make important adjustments specifically in outlook in strategies and interpretation. There are the pains of feeling separated from your old self and from the origins of your beliefs. For some time, I also hurt over having gained some kind of liberty, of breaking away from my family's long-held concepts of how to bring about our dream of development, and the social reforms indicative of such. I want to think that I am not going up against the family tradition. Up to now, my brothers and relatives still give their lives and time altogether to their brand of political work. I would like to believe that I'm not going against the tradition. My work now in an NGO requires that we provide services to communities. That way we strengthen and empower the mass base. We engage with both the local and national government agencies because that is part of the job. We operate in the legal mode. Over the years, we have achieved a lot. Work in the communities has its multiplying effects.

I don't think our work in the NGOs has less beauty and brilliance because we are supposedly safer in what we do and more comfortable where we work. Actually the issue regarding security is not at all true. I will always respect the family's continuing revolutionary tradition and each one's enduring beliefs. I admire their sense of commitment and discipline. I continue to honor that in my own way.

I still believe in radical changes. But while now is not the time to make them happen because conditions are too erratic, there are other ways to carry out changes. We can move forward with every little or big step we make. There is always a positive implication to whatever you can share in terms of knowledge, skill, time and talent. Actually when you talk of implications, there is nothing that is considered small. We are trying other paths but that doesn't mean we have renounced the goal.

I have a stronger, more positive, and more tolerant outlook now. There is now much storm and strife in what used to be a people's movement. I take

them as openings for improvements and for replacing strategies with more competent ones. I still believe in the revolution and the popular causes it embodies. I never doubted or abandoned the basic tenets. We are only looking for new ways to wage them given the peculiar conditions that continue to unfold not only domestically but also in global terms. Despite the mistakes, there is so much more we could do. The revolutionaries must strive hard to consider re-inventing the revolution in such a way that the interpretation of issues would not be constricted and limited to the point of view of a few cadres. Some of the misunderstandings come not from defects in ideas but from the attitude of the leaders who tend to translate them in a very parochial and fanatical way.

The revolution is still very much valid up to now. Injustice grows each day that we sit frittering time away and letting the grass grow under our feet. It is impossible to do an overhaul of the system without the military aspect of it. There is always a cost to it in terms of human lives. Precisely because of



that huge cost that the military solution must be deferred until it is needed as a last and only one remaining resort. I believe in human rights including the right to live as much as I believe the rationale for a hardline and more radical means to overthrow the system. But there is now the need to balance out and qualify my beliefs. The kind of work that I do now which involves helping to rehabilitate war-torn communities teaches the importance of saving lives. Maybe that is one reason why I am now for radical and sweeping changes that mitigate shedding of blood at the same time. If only each one of us would break out from our own fundamental laziness and begin the reforms in our attitudes and practices, the sum total in terms of societal effects could be staggering. The need to give up lives may not at all be necessary when we have shed our depraved and corrupt selves instead.

feel more whole as person now that I have survived difficult times. My significant relationships are stronger and I have a clearer grasp of my bearing in the larger society. My family would always be at the focal point. But the concentric circle just ripples on and on outwardly to others. I realize that my self-identity and the meaning of every stage in my life unfold always in relation to my relationships. Indeed, life is meant for sharing with others. When you have survived the great stresses of storms together with the people in your life, you realize that it is only when you are a part of other people that you become whole as a unique person.

I plan to pursue higher studies because when I grow old, I still want to be able to contribute to community. I want to remain useful and to put in every last drop of my blood to help make better life for the human race. When I have learned more from formal education, I can continue in my own small way to teach what I have learned to others and thus multiply the benefits of my education. I dream about teaching in a university and of trying my talent in social research projects. I am sure boredom and stagnation will fast kill me if I stopped or become idle. One's real task is to contribute to humanity's progress by continuing to grow as an individual and to continue to share his/her gifts as a person.

I may be not as wounded as the other survivors I know but I have had my own time of struggle in my own dire straits. I get my healing from doing things for other people. I experience empowerment when I am able to listen to people I know who feel distraught. It feels good when I could come up with good advice or just a caring opinion about one's lot. When there is an opportunity to help and I know I am able to respond to that, my coffee cup is



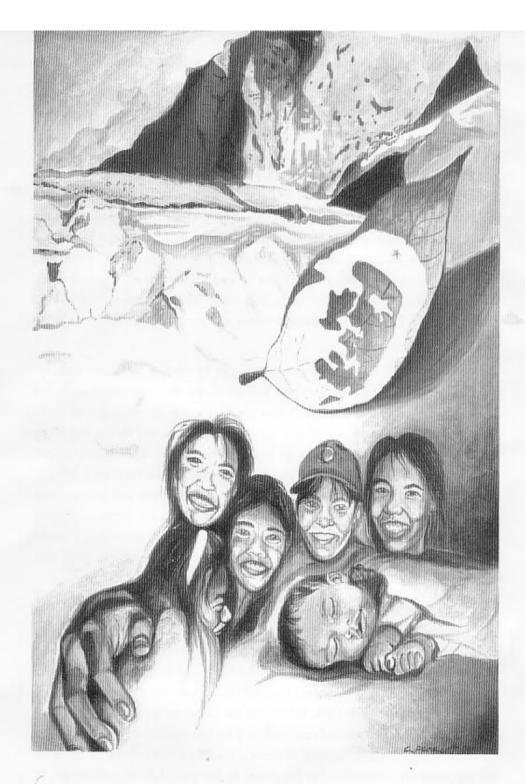
somewhat refilled. My cup seems to run over with joy and contentment. People are always the ones who come to me and not the other way around. That is the stamp of my relationship with the people in my life. I blossom and thrive in that. When I come home at the end of the day, I would tell Rico about the day's transactions- the persons I have met, things we talked about and how I provided comfort as usual. He would tease and comment that my cup is again overflowing. Among smokers, that is just like getting a high from nicotine. Listening helped me realize that each one has a burden to bear. People's burdens are either lighter or heavier in relation to the other person's own experiences. The problems are easier or more difficult in relation to their problem solving attitudes, too. I have stopped comparing. I try to be thankful for what I have as well as what I don't have.

When I went aboveground in 1995, that was the year I was surviving many things in my life including going through a personal transition and facing the possibility of Rico's arrest. It was also during that period of survival that growth in my life had seemed so enormous. I joined an NGO and then a private firm from where I gained a lot including broader perspectives and new skills. The challenges increased my coping abilities and likewise boosted my self-confidence. Plenty of doors opened and there were loads of opportunities coming my way. It was a tug of war in some way because I had to make choices including some difficult ones. But whatever my decisions were, they later brought forth very important lessons and gave me the drive to work harder.

I needed to learn many things in order to survive including forbearance. I used to be very impatient and wanted things my own way. I agonized
just like other wives did when Rico was arrested and detained, but that experience was worth my salt. When you know you can't control things and there
was only so much that you could do as a person, that has a tempering effect.
Following through Rico's court case proved to be a task that tried my patience. I was at my wit's end complying with the procedures and pushing our
lawyers to make shortcuts. But my lawyer would always say I am suggesting
the impossible and that we were not gods. If I were the one in charge, I would
have wanted a swifter way. I would have done something decisive even if that
had to be a drastic action.

There is a reason behind every crisis. Once we know this, we work harder to learn from every problem. I can only be thankful that the pains I had to go through and survived did not include the loss of a loved one through death. I have prepared for the worst to come, but if that had been the scenario, the grieving process would have taken a longer time before it can be possible for me to bounce back. When one has prepared for the worst possible event of death, having a loved one back in your life and even very much alive, is a most wonderful gift. As long as there is life, there is the hope of recovery and regeneration from whatever happened in the past. Life is a challenge, in big and small scale. Problem-solving situations would never stop. It builds character and it pulls us closer to the real meaning of life.

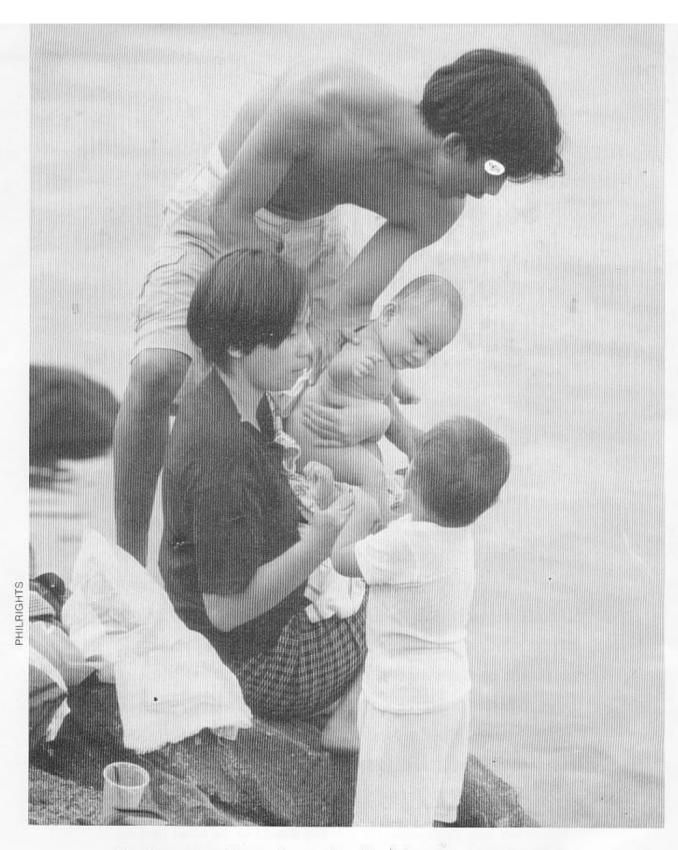




Whether we remain in the movement or move on to safer ground, we will face our own share of difficulties. Our homework is to draw inspiration from each experience and to rise above them. We can always reshape and recreate our lives based on what we have learned. We can always choose what to leave behind and what to carry with us toward the future we want.

By the look of things, I knew my arrest was impending. In 1989, the government toughened up its campaign to capture left-wing militants and suspected guerillas operating in Metro Manila. As they cracked down on State enemies, the military spared few suspects. Many activists and community organizers have begun falling into the hands of the authorities one after the other. Most of those arrested were very young radicals whose sense of justice amidst unjust times was being tried and transformed into rage and resistance against those who held the reins of power.

When they finally came for me, they arrived in the hours between daylight and darkness. Their heads and faces were hidden beneath woolen masks like malevolent ghosts afraid of recognition. When they burst into our house, they promptly jerked and thrusted their long heavy guns toward me. I was snuggled fast asleep on a couch in the sitting room and woke up surprised even as news of recent arrests have foreshadowed that instance. The rest of my family were also roused from sleep and at a loss from shock. From where



I lay down, the raiders easily tugged and hauled me out of the house. They shoved me into the cold air of the outdoors as I struggled against both the drowse in my head and the dread in my heart.

It was 3:00 in the morning. As we stepped out, it became obvious that the police were zoning our neighborhood and had rounded up all the male

residents. I was among those herded out in the dark. We were made to stand in line on one side of the street. There were about fifty of us. A man wearing a ski mask soon emerged from the shadows. He scanned our faces one by one as we stood and waited nervously in a single file. When my turn came, a man peering from a car yelled "positive." They hurriedly set me apart from the rest and at once locked me in handcuffs. They forced me into a waiting car.

I failed to recognize immediately the man who gave me away. I noticed however that he walked with a bad limp and was almost being carried by the police agents so he could move around. I was still thinking who the squealer was until he sat in the car with me and spoke in a voice I remembered well. It was Jun.

For several months, Jun and I had worked together teaching grassroots empowerment and self-reliance in poor urban communities. Jun was bigger and more muscular in built than me. He had a sun-tanned skin and he talked with a full voice that equaled his physical strength. He was one of the few young colleagues I knew who spoke fluently and powerfully as a community worker. But at that moment, haplessness had replaced that image. He looked just battered and bruised. From his appearance, I knew he had been forced to come clean. We were able to speak to each other in hushed words inside the car. I told him not to say anything more to his torturers. I assured him my relatives would call a lawyer to negotiate for our release as soon as possible. I told him help would come our way.

The car carrying us was soon moving but it stopped along the way and some of the policemen with us alighted. They set foot in another community in Sampaloc where they arrested another young male suspect whom I recognized as also an associate in organizing work. He was in the same circle of persons I worked with together with Jun. Satisfied with the day's harvest, our captors proceeded to a private safehouse in Bicutan.

Someone wrapped a cloth around my eyes as we entered the building. In a few minutes, I was standing in that room, like a rabbit that had stumbled into a den full of ravenous wolves. Every one who came in asked questions, punched, slapped, and kicked. Different voices spoke to me. When they failed to make me confess with just the brute force of their hands and feet, they used other things to hurt me.

With live bullets inserted between my fingers, they tried to crush the bones of my hands as they kept on with their questions. They wanted me to own up the killing of a certain Coronel Santiago. From the bits and pieces of what they had said, I learned that the slain officer was connected with the Judge Advocates Government Office (JAGO) and was ambushed by the Alex Boncayao Brigade (ABB) in Galas, Quezon City.

When still they could not get me to admit anything, they removed my blindfold and prepared to set me up for Russian Roullette. One of them slid a single bullet into a .38 caliber handgun. He spun and locked the wheel cartridge, aimed straight at me with one swift movement and fired pointblank. Perhaps the cartridge stopped at an empty chamber and missed the one that was loaded. The gun did not fire. I sat there still alive but too dazed to move or say a word.

For a time that seemed interminable, they played the Russian roulette on me. All the while, death was clinging at the fingertips of my torturers who pulled the trigger as they would with a toy gun. They took turns spinning the cartridge and firing. Depending on chance, I could be lying on the floor and bathing in my own blood in the next few minutes. The time it took for that entire ordeal seemed to grow longer and the pain in my mind became more unbearable each time one of them pulled the trigger that never actually fired.

We stayed in that cramped room where the smell of fear and agony rising from my body and drifting through the small space seemed to have whetted the appetite of my tormenters. The punches, kicks and slaps continued. At one point, somebody made me stand in a corner of the room. He walked to the opposite end and suddenly sprinted towards me with a flying kick. He attacked me twice. My head reeled in terror but, alas, I did not pass out.

Shortly, a certain Coronel Mariano entered the room. He ordered the others to stop and to leave me alone. He said he was taking over. Then he began asking me questions. When he failed to get the answer that he wanted, he took me inside a very filthy toilet. The bowl was already filling to the rim with waste. The walls were sullied and pasty with grime. I felt sick with nausea.

Col. Mariano ordered me to sing the national anthem and to recite the people's pledge to the motherland. He was obviously amusing himself and treating me like I was a plaything. He asked me to sing other patriotic tunes especially the ones we sang in protest rallies. When I continued to defy his instructions, he kept me longer in the toilet where the stench was becoming unbearable. Suddenly unable to pull his punches any longer, my tormentor grabbed my head and forced it down towards the bowl. However, he did not push it all the way into the muck. He abruptly stopped when my face was just a breath from touching anything. He dragged me out of the toilet, furious at



having to end that torture episode empty handed. But without any confession from me on the killing of Coronel Santiago, they were not quite ready yet to stop.

Afterwards, they brought me face to face with Jun. I sat on one side of a table and he was on the other side. They had removed our blindfolds. They had been eavesdropping through a listening device in the car the day I was taken from the house. They mocked and taunted us about our being colleagues in the movement.

"Were you together in killing Coronel Santiago?" someone asked.

Perhaps tired of the beatings, Jun was already going along. He readily said, "Yes."

"So you know each other?" one of them faked surprise as he pursued the questioning.

They challenged both of us to throw the first punch on the other to prove which one was tougher. They egged Jun to hit me. While he was supposed to be already wobbly and dazed from the beatings, Jun still had strength to slap me hard. I hit him with force too. I thought that if I didn't, I would only be confirming what our torturers already knew—that Jun and I indeed worked together. And that would make us more vulnerable to their schemes.

From what I heard, some torture survivors have said prayers for help in their darkest moments. When my time came, I did not go as far as really praying to a God for help. In the first place, I did not know how. But the possibility of the truth about the hereafter, when the body had died and whatever is left of it supposedly crosses over to another realm, did pass through



my mind. I did not pray the typical way. But, yes, I considered the chance that a supreme being might indeed be real. I knew I wasn't a perfect person, but I wasn't so bad either. If God does exist, he would have known that. He would have known my heart all along. He would have known all the things I had done in my lifetime. If God were right there watching me, I knew he would have taken me somewhere nice if I had died.

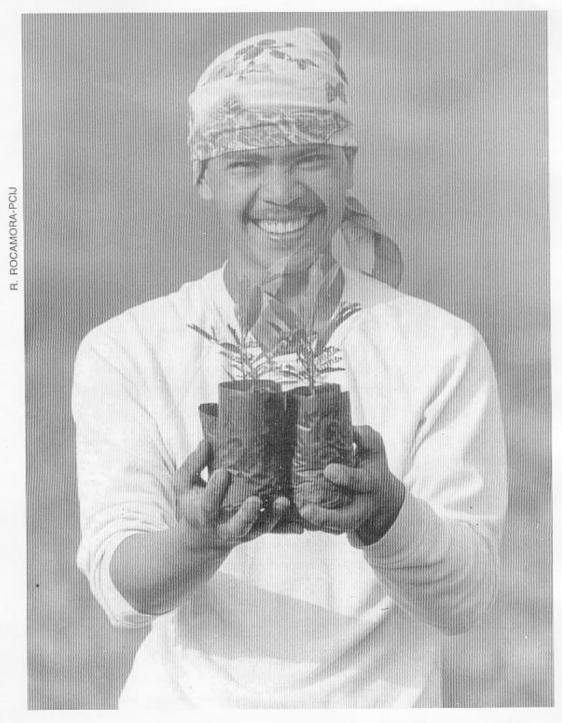
The jail is not an easy place to be in. Torture-like conditions are in effect in more reserved and controlled forms. During torture, there are no problems beyond the moment to think about anymore. Death is the nearest truth. But in prison, torture-survivors get all the time to think about problems and the hardest part is having to deal with them. The one good thing that offsets feelings of wretchedness in jail is the team spirit among the political detainees. When I entered jail, I knew no one there and felt totally ruined and alone. But the political detainees who got there ahead of me became my friends and they soon looked after me like a real brother.

We tend to think it is sameness that brings us close to each other. In prison, that is also true but it is respect for differences that is more important. Among the political prisoners, our political convictions are perhaps the only things we had in common. Apart from that, we were widely different in personal backgrounds and in the character they had shaped in us. But that did not prevent us from weaving an atmosphere of comradeship among ourselves. Over time, we were drawn further towards that bond as we continued sharing, through carefree and sometimes introspective talks, the bright as well as the gloomy side of our past and present lives.

The one good thing in being a political detainee among common criminals was being able to use what I had learned in organizing. During our time, we worked out ways to pacify the parties hostile to each other. Whenever we organized events, we invited them all and even the rival gangs agreed to come together on some occasions as co-sponsors for common activities. We wanted some kind of a truce among the groups so that there could be peaceful coexistence for everyone. We organized small discussion groups wherein they shared opinions about issues like the death penalty which were very relevant to them.

I was still in jail when my family had split up. My mother had left the country to work abroad thinking that more money might help to expedite the appeal for my release. With my mother away, however, my father decided to live with another woman and soon had a new family. My brother and only

sibling had also started his own family. Shortly, my girlfriend left me too. My fellow political detainees were the ones who tried to cheer me up and helped me get back on my feet during the lowest points of life in detention. In jail, problems opened the door for friendships. It became just normal and automatic for us to help and encourage each other in times of difficulty. What I wanted most was to get my family back together.

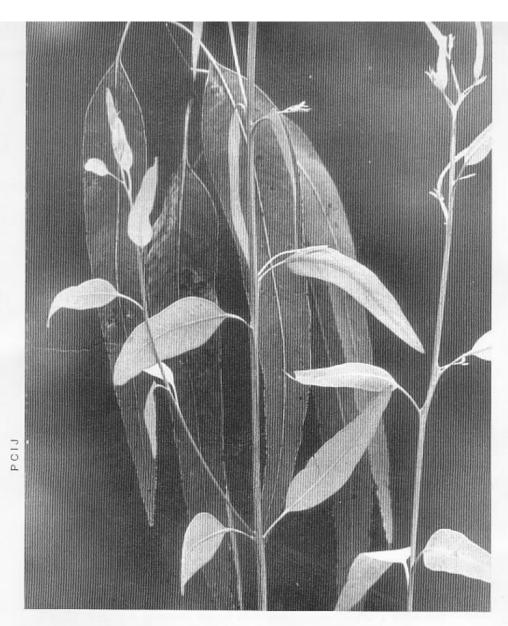


When I got out of prison in 1993, I didn't know how to start over again. Healing took time. Like most survivors, unstructured time after jail life was holding me back. When my mother learned about my release, she sent me money so I could start a small business. I went into buying and selling card-board boxes, which was what we did as a family to earn a living before I got arrested. I was moving on bit by bit. At some point, my life seemed normal again. Even as each of my family members had preferred to live separately, we tried to keep the family relationships intact. We made ourselves available to one another especially when one of us needed help. They were still there to help me go on with my life. When my mother came back to the country, she had to move in with me for a while. After some time, she went to live with my brother. Much later she went home to our province in Leyte and stayed there for good.

I worked in an NGO and had another romantic relationship. It was good for a while, but it did not last. It was the second time that I had to nurse a broken heart and it was quite difficult to handle. There came a point when I felt there was no one who wanted to help me work things out anymore. My colleagues in the NGO and my activist-friends were busy minding their own business. Although I needed help badly, I did not expect other people to be the ones to solve my own problems. I just wanted to open my heart to another person. I needed a sounding board. I needed another point of view besides my own. I felt more alone than ever and thought of quitting my work with the NGO.

But after a while, some colleagues began showing concern. They began listening. They offered advice. Some extended support through small sums of money to tide me over, others gave their friendship. Realizing other people's effort to help solve my own problems made me think twice about quitting. Finally, I gave myself another chance to go on with my work in the NGOs. I tried to sustain my passion for helping organize urban poor communities so that more people can have the benefit of security over their land. I also started to entertain new relationships. Now, I have a wife and children of my own.

There is still plenty of work to do now. I owe my freedom to the efforts of human rights organizations, which campaigned against the torture and imprisonment of people espousing radical political beliefs. I think, all released political prisoners should reciprocate the efforts that took us out of the jails. There is a need to revive and intensify the campaign for the release of other activists who are still in prison today. There must be away to stamp out the practice of torture and to break the cycle of impunity. During our time, the efforts were more alive and bustling. There were more sectors sup-



porting the campaign. The impact was greater. Releases came in succession because of that. Even while we were in prison then, we contributed much to compel government decision to release political prisoners. But of course, coalition work was always crucial.

We will never run out of things to do in the movement. The errors and the eventual breakup have delayed if not weakened the movement, and these have to be addressed swiftly. Concrete actions that will help the movement recover are now a pressing need. It is important for all cadres and even ordinary citizens who have opened their minds to social responsibility to do whatever is possible to help revive the movement. Organizing and education work remain as the key steps to counteract the decline and prevent the movement from further losing ground.

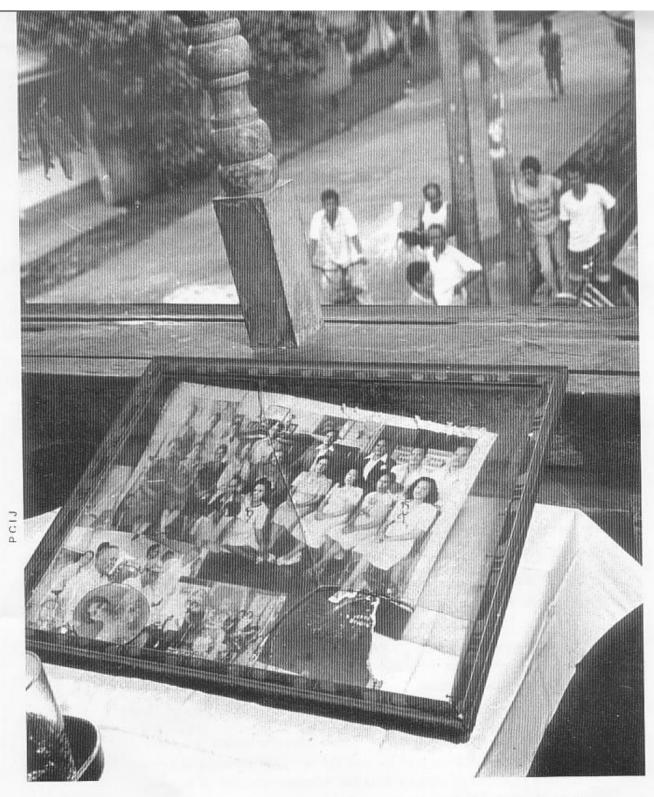
Nevertheless, I believe that the conflicts have paved the way for useful realizations. Among some political groups, the family has now been restored to its proper place as a basic unit of the social organization, and for that reason, the groups want to strengthen it and give it first priority. Those who now espouse the family are focusing on giving balanced time between personal and political concerns. Unlike before when partisan interest was supreme and unquestionable, more and more colleagues are recognizing the importance of intellectual independence. The recognition of human rights as a framework for advocating change is another result of the initiatives to rethink the doctrines. Within this new definition, the revolutionary individual is entitled to think and reason more freely. The movement has evolved from an aging force into a regenerating social activism with a humanist standpoint. We have also begun speaking out and carefully filtering our interpretation of party concepts so that democracy in its true sense would govern our beliefs

There are many things to learn from torture and detention. You cannot let the pain go to waste. You have to dig deep into the experience and find the lesson. I understand myself better now after torture and detention. I have a stronger identity. I have acquired a braver stance towards life. There are good as well as bad things that happen in prison life and there are always good things to learn from both. I harness the good things and always find anchor in them as I work through the big and small knots that happen in my life everyday. Torture and detention have enriched my work as an activist and as a family man too.

When you have survived a difficult crisis and were still able to bounce back and take control of your life, that's big deal. That gives you the will and grit to go on. It is all a matter of attitude. Surviving means acceptance of the consequences and fortitude to see good things even in unpleasant things. If torture and detention are the woods and forests we have to go through in helping society to become better, then we should be ready to go through them. It is not painless but even if one were to die, it will be a good death.

When you are lucky enough to remain alive, you become wiser and a bit more efficient with living your life well. Problems will go on for as long as we are alive regardless of what we do in life. Whether we remain in the movement or move on to safer ground, we will face our own share of difficulties. Our homework is to draw inspiration from each experience and to rise above them. We can always reshape and recreate our lives based on what we have learned. We can always choose what to leave behind and what to carry with us toward the future we want.

I am now determined to keep and preserve my family life. I have realized that the role I have in society is very much entwined with my role as



husband and father. They go together and are mutually reinforcing. I have realized that anyone who wants change in the larger society should also work for them at home. At the same time, one who works for the good of humanity helps create a good life for every family in this planet. When this became my new guiding principle, I somehow managed to resolve my big issues.

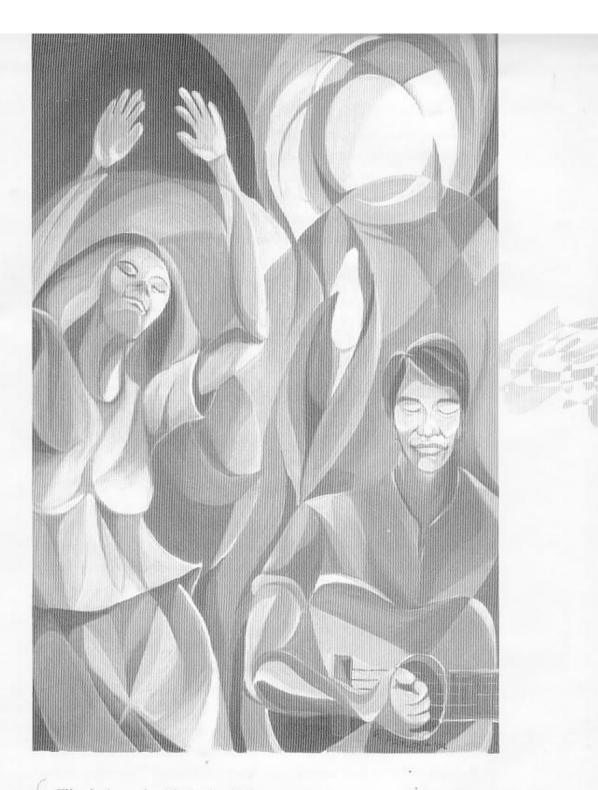
I want to grow old with my loved ones just like any other ordinary person. I want to be a grandfather who has spent his years well and will retire

in a modest house located in an idyllic place and where there are signs of abundance like plants and fruit-bearing trees around it. I want to be able to tell good stories to my grandchildren. I will not die a rich a man so the only legacy I could hand down to my family and their offsprings would be the perseverance I had set forth in my entire natural life as one who had shared time and self to help other people. Taking care of my family and raising them well would have been enough to look back to in my twilight years. But when I think again, that doesn't seem to be the way things must happen in this world, which can only be saved by compassion and care for fellow humans. When I think about the people in dire need, or the poor folks in the cities who live in squalor because of poverty, I know I need to do more than bring home food to the table for my family and contentedly watch my children grow.

We all have a vision of hope. Mine is scene where a happy but quiet celebration at home in Leyte is taking place. We are in an ancestral house. My parents are there together with my own family and our relatives from both sides. The generations meet and mingle in that momentous event. There is plenty of food to eat and stories to share. It is a picture of abundance and peace. It is some kind of a reunion where everyone has come to for no specific occasion but just to celebrate fellowship and the joy of belonging to a family. This is only a personal vision but perhaps it can be a close representation of the collective hope we hold for the future- a time for peace and reunion with those we left behind as we departed from the ordinary and beaten road and took the path of the revolution. Families must be able to spend time together. They must be secure in their togetherness, and happy in a simple but adequate life. That is the succinct picture of all our revolutionary aspirations. If only government would begin truly taking care of the people through sound policies, that would redound to the wellbeing of the families

I have no regrets. I think I have gone over the hump in relation to the past conflicts in my circumstances and political beliefs. I just needed time to go through them, to find answers and learn the lessons. I continue to work towards stability.





The lush garden that sat at the top of the mountain, which rose high in the clouds at the fringes of the village, is indeed only a legend. For in truth, the real garden of hope and healing rests in the goodness of your hearts.

ABALM is an "aromatic medicinal oil or ointment derived from the sap of spicy, fragrant plants usually of the mint family." The concoction of resin products to make balms for therapeutic purposes is an ancient technique based on the belief of the earliest healers that nature keeps its own reservoir of antidotes for every human sickness. In this book, balms denote almost anything that had been significant and remarkable to the survival and healing of those who suffered torture and detention, including its often hidden afflictions.

In our time, it will take a painstaking search through the vast wilderness and in the deepest recesses of uncultivated, rarely visited, and out of the way places on earth, to track down oil-producing saps to make our balms. Likewise, finding the metaphorical balm for the healing and soothing of the soul is a task that faces torture and detention survivors as they follow the trail forward to their own personal peace.

But as in all the processes that every human being goes through in the grand mosaic of existence, the journey forward to peace is not easy and pain-free. The challenge of accepting the pain, going through the pain, and working through the pain, calls on every survivor equally and invariably. But the courage to choose, to take a risk, to fail, and to triumph, is in each one of us, too. It is a gift from the great cosmos, along with love, hope, friendship, poetry, and all other things of great wonder and beauty, that all may know the secrets of life and of how to live.

It is presumptuous of anyone, including the writer of this book, to describe in his or her own personal words the way forward which survivors of torture and detention have taken, much more write a conclusion on their healing. The way forward will always be a story that unravels right in the mouths of the survivors themselves, an experience that rules out the judgment and opinion of outsiders, for the simple reason that we are all just seekers of truth and wisdom in this planet.

The way forward is not a physical road; it is an inward path leading to the purpose for our being. The way forward never ends. It is a continuing journey. It is a task in progress.

The following story is only a humble attempt to capture in language and its symbols the survivors' continuing effort to heal. It does not contain the answers to our deepest and most disturbing questions on survival. It simply wants to impart a message of courage and hope.

IN SEARCH OF BALMS

ar away, over rich green mountains and across deep sparkling oceans, rests a charming village without a name. The sun would bless the village during the day and the moon shone at night like doting, gentle guardians to a child. Both sunshine and rain visited the land dutifully all through the years, watching every plant grow to fullness and every living being born to safety and sufficiency. Well cared for and loved by nature, the village soon grew very sturdy and strong and its riches became more plentiful. The people were happy and healthy.

The day came, however, when the peace and abundance, which gently embraced the life of the village was suddenly broken by a fierce storm. Heavy downpour swelled the rivers and soon flooded the roads. Howling winds brought down the houses and the people fled with noth-

ing but the sandals on their feet and the clothes on their backs. From morning until night, the storm ripped the village apart and left little else in its path to sustain the villagers in their hunger, and to comfort them from their loss. A deadly virus followed and quickly spread too. It struck one person after another, sowing fear of a fierce epidemic that could fast demolish the whole village unless cure was found as soon as possible.

Weary and on the verge of defeat, the villagers gathered together to talk about the crisis they were facing and to call each one to task. The meeting had gone halfway through and would have ended too soon because no one said anything that held promise of cure for the virulent virus that had plagued the others.



The oldest man in the village finally stirred from where he had patiently stood listening while the others droned on with their speeches. Tentatively, he cleared his throat before asking to be allowed to speak. When he was permitted to do so, he ambled his way at once to the spot where his fellow villagers could hear him loud and clear. He began speaking about a long forgotten legend about a lush garden that sat at the top of the mountain, which rose high in the clouds at the fringes of the village. "It is full of magical plants," he began. "The most verdant one sitting next to the bed of yellow ferns holds beneath it the balm we need to cure our sick. But to get there, one has to go through a deep, dark forest at the foot of the mountain where, legend also says, heinous demons dwell and molest anyone who was brave enough to come through," the old man said under his breath.

The villagers went home disheartened. The men were especially distraught. No one wanted to leave their sick to find the enchanted garden and to obtain the strange balm. For them, these things existed only in the figment of an old legend and in the dreamy head of the stooping old man. No one wanted to leave his family behind or to venture on the road for a dubious journey. No one was ready to take the risk. On the other hand, the attack of the virus had been turning from bad to worse. Until something was done to stop its further havoc, the only other fate that loomed ahead the village was permanent defeat, and endless days of mourning for the unburied carcass of the villagers' fallen hopes.

When the sun began to peep from the east the next day, courage had returned to the village. All the men from the households had decided to go and search for the magical balm. They quickly bid their fellow villagers farewell, packing no provisions but the sad tears of their families and friends, and hushed prayers of protection for the long journey ahead.

But as they were about to set forth, the oldest man in the village appeared to them again. "There is another road out there that you can take," he said. "It is a small bumpy road that rolls along the outer ridges of the forest into the other side of the mountain. If you take that road at the edge, it will lead you to a sleepy town far ahead northward where you can decide to settle for good and start new lives. Go and escape. Leave this sick village if you wish. Although the magic balm is the only cure, there is little chance that it could be brought back from the top of the mountains through the treacherous trails of the forest. Save yourselves. The road at the edge will lead you safely away from here."

The men fell silent with what they had heard. But shortly, the old man spoke again. "Those among you who will enter the forest to look for the



healing balm must look into your heart's memories and find the happiest treasures there. When you have reached the darkest pits of the forest, your most noble thoughts and purest wishes will be the torch that will light your path and the potion that will comfort your souls. For your own good, find the strength within you." As he said these, the old man fumbled into his tattered cloak and brought out an old scroll parchment. "If you lose your way, you must use this. Take this parchment for it contains a map that will show unto you the pathways to every destination." Having said this last cryptic message, the old man turned his back and slowly walked away.

And so before all the roosters in the village had stopped crowing with the coming of daylight, the men of the village began to march onward for their quest. For hours on the road, they went without a word to each other. In truth, some of them had given up the will to go on in the journey. They grumbled in their hearts for the fate of the village and the thought of fleeing burned fervently in their minds. When noon came, half of them had turned to the road that led to the outer ridges of the forest into the other side of the mountain where the sleepy town awaits them with a safe future, and half a life. Deep in their hearts they mourned for their choice. Meanwhile, the other half of the men from the village continued to plow through to the forest. The sun had sunk over the mountain slopes and dusk was veiling the earth with darkness when they finally reached the grand threshold of the forestlands.

Inside the forest, the men from the village admired what they saw. In the fading rays of the sun, the forest dazzled with unspeakable beauty. Huge primordial trees soared above their heads like wrinkled giants in garbs of golden brown and bright green. Exquisite rocks and boulders jutted out from the ground. Plants and animals of all kinds moved and breathed everywhere in friendship and peace with every living thing. The sounds that they made echoed through the rich vastness of the woods like one shrill voice of nature proclaiming their right to exist. Every creature in the forest was throbbing with a cause. In their simple way of life, they calmly and firmly nurtured and defended the spaces where they stood and in doing so gave quiet tribute to the majesty of life. For a while, the men from the village embraced the bliss of oneness with the things of the forest and went cheerfully on their way.

When evening came, however, the rulers of darkness ascended from the depths and swiftly took control of the whole forest. The winds began to moan and sigh mournfully among the trees, and the spirits of destruction hovered restlessly in the air. The demons of the forest, which the old man had spoken of, had risen from their tombs to hunt for their prey. And when they saw the men from the village, they whipped and lashed their thorn-covered tails and spewed out black fire from their ugly cavernous mouths. Their knifelike claws tore deep into tender human flesh and their thick viscous tongues licked the warm blood that oozed and trickled down from gaping wounds. When their feast was over, they rubbed their stomachs and picked up some spoils as they headed back to their eerie hiding places before sunrise of the next day.

The men from the village were left in the remains of the gruesome assault. Many of them were killed and many more were wounded. It was worst for the few who were taken away. But those who survived were not any luckier. Some had lost a limb; some had lost more. But alas, all had lost their hearts in great fear. For many days they grunted in pain and groaned in their grief. They were hungry, weak and dying. The search for the balm had come to naught. And the yoke of defeat weighed down upon them.

Finally, they all agreed that the only other way for them to go was the path back home to their village. But they knew that even the journey back would be tough. They had lost their way in the thick forest and their fear of the demons marauding at night was dashing their hopes and crushing their grit. As they brooded over these, they remembered the scroll parchment, which the old man had urged them to use in the event they got lost in the forest. It had been tossed aside when the demons attacked but they found it at once among the bushes. As they rolled it out on the ground for all to see, they were surprised and at the same time disappointed to find sketches of scenes and images reflecting the happy life that used to be in their village, instead of the weird brittle map the old man had given.

At the sight of the beautiful imprints on the parchment, the men of the village were filled with longing and love.

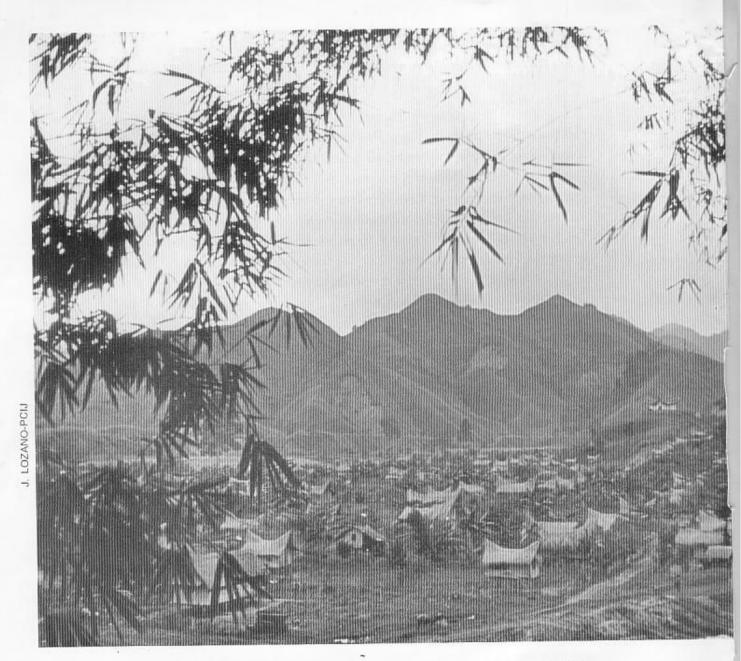
They thought about their children, their laughter and their joy, and the pureness of their innocent passion for life.

They thought about their wives, the gleam of light in their kind smile, their warm affection, and the wonder of the bittersweet taste of their absence.

They thought about their friends and neighbors, and how in the times of caring and companionship, great stories had been woven among them in laughter and tears, triumphs and defeats, births and deaths.

They also thought about the splendor of the forest and the deep true morals they evoked, about unity and justice, dignity and freedom, goodness and peace. They marveled about life, its cup of joy and sorrow, its purpose and its meaning.

As they held on to their kindest and purest thoughts, the men of the village suddenly felt nourished and revived again. They rose to their feet, buckled on their gears, took a long deep breath, and headed back with no fixed direction towards the village. Without the map to lead them out of the forest, they followed instead the footpath where the soft shaft of sunlight gushed downward through the foliage above their heads and the sound of the birds and crickets humming and buzzing along the way. Wherever they sensed the good signs, the men of the village went. And where they went, the demons surprisingly never followed again. They traveled on and on for days



until at last, when sun and moon had met towards dawn, they reached the outskirts of the village, into the portal of dear, dear home.

The men strode watchfully ahead and exactly at daybreak they had finally set foot on their village. "What had happened?" they suddenly exclaimed in chorus, as they caught sight of their children and their wives, their neighbors and friends, teeming down in the streets and calling out to them. They looked at one another in both bewilderment and gladness as the whole village were dancing and cheering happily to welcome their return. They went closer and saw that everyone looked hale and hearty despite the terrible squall and the nasty disease that had swamped their shores. Even those who were once



dying are now up and well. "Could anyone have fetched down the magic balm from the mountain tops?" they all asked wordlessly in their wonder.

Hardly had they uttered the question than, strange to tell, the oldest man of the village came forward to them once more with his erstwhile stoop, and now with something else, which was a wide and knowing grin.

"You have done as you knew you must," he began again. "And for your love and courage you have earned the gift of healing for our village. The lush garden that sat at the top of the mountain, which rose high in the clouds at the fringes of the village, is indeed only a legend. For in truth, the real garden of hope and healing rests in the goodness of your hearts. A long time ago, this village was once cursed for its laziness to grow in wisdom and purpose, by the deities that guarded the truths of this world. The gods decided that tragedy shall befall our people at an appointed time and the cure will be in a beautiful garden which only our finest men and women will be able to find. But in their mercy, the gods have planted the garden with the healing balm within the hearts of each one of us. Only the fruits of pure love such as kindness and courage shall kindle its power. And now you have brought home the balm of life. You have risked and given so much, and for doing so you have unleashed the full might of its gifts. Come, claim your lives back and live them in peace. The curse has been lifted; we have been set free."

When they heard this, everyone in the village began to rejoice. In the days that followed, and in the many years further on, the people of the village worked quietly in the

morning and sang and danced at night to celebrate each day that brought more blessings in their homes and new hopes in their hearts. They continued to serve each other in love. And they always thanked God for another day that was lived well and looked forward to the next day's dawn. Life for the village was still never perfect. But it was better, far better than surrender.



The word Balay, in many Philippine dialects, means house, shelter or home. That is how we envision the people that we serve to regard us their partner that works for psychosocial and development relief and rehabilitation.

Since its founding in 1985, it assists survivors of organized political violence, including torture survivors, political prisoners and traumatized persons displaced by armed conflict and violent demolitions.

Aside from providing counseling services to torture survivors, Balay holds jail visits to provide direct service assistance to political prisoners, and assist their relatives in seeking justice for their detained kin.

Balay supports the campaign to ban torture and punish its perpetrators. As a member of the United Against Torture Coalition (UATC), it is part of the civil society initiative for the enactment of an Anti-Torture Law.





