

# SILENT

# WITNESSES

(MGA TAHIMIK NA SAKSI)

Stories from the Survivors of Martial Law





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# SILENT WITNESSES

(MGA TAHIMIK NA SAKSI)

( STORIES FROM THE SURVIVORS OF MARTIAL LAW )

Images by  
Renz Baluyot

Stories retold by  
Gigo Alampay



This book is dedicated to our children.

So they may learn and never forget.

We think children can and should read  
the stories, but parental guidance  
is recommended.





Beyond my individual torturers, I hold the Marcos dictatorship responsible for institutionalizing the patterns of abuse and atrocity. I want my children and grandchildren to read, at the right time, what their own father suffered. I hope they get a more intimate and personal sense of this period of our history, and learn its lessons so that it may never happen again.

*Higit pa sa mga indibidwal na nagpahirap at nanakit sa akin, sinisisi ko ang diktaduryang Marcos. Nais kong mabasa ng aking mga anak at apo, sa tamang panahon, ang paghihirap na naranasan ng kanilang ama. Umaasa ako na magiging mas taimtim at personal ang kanilang damdamin tungkol sa panahon na ito ng ating kasaysayan, at matutunan nila ang mga aral nito upang hindi na ito muling maulit.*

While on my way to bring my carabao to pasture, I met a group of soldiers who asked why I had allowed rebels to sleep in our house. Before I could answer and deny their accusation, they began beating me up and it took me five months to recuperate. I just kept silent all this time because everyone knew that anybody who complained would simply be killed.

*Habang dinadala ko ang aking kalabaw sa pastulan, may nakasalubong akong mga sundalo at tinanong nila ako kung bakit ko pinapatulog ang mga rebelde sa aming bahay. Bago ko pa masagot at matanggihan ang kanilang bintang, bigla nila akong kinuyog at inabot ng limang buwan bago ako gumaling. Nanahimik na lang ako nang matagal na panahon dahil alam ng lahat na papatayin na lang ang sinomang magsusumbong.*





I was placed in solitary confinement for months, and during that time, my family never knew where I was or what had happened to me. Our children suffered the most as they were deprived of material support, and paternal care and guidance. Later, when I was tried, and even though the case - no case - ever prospered, their classmates treated them as though I was a convicted criminal.

*Binartolina ako nang maraming buwan, at sa buong panahong iyon, hindi man lang alam ng pamilya ko kung nasaan ako o kung ano na ang nangyari sa akin. Ang mga anak namin ang pinakanaghirap dahil nawalan sila ng sustentong materyal, at kalinga at patnubay ng magulang. Noong nililitis ako, sa kasong hindi naman umuusad, trinato sila ng mga kaklase nila na parang mga anak ng kriminal.*





They admitted arresting my son and bringing him to their main camp. At the camp, one of the officers told me that he was sent home on the same day he was taken there. To this day, I have not yet seen my son.

*Inamin nila na inaresto nila ang anak ko at dinala siya sa kanilang kampo. Doon, sinabi ng isa sa mga opisyal na pinauwi rin siya nang araw ding iyon. Hanggang ngayon, hindi ko pa nakikita ang anak ko.*

Worse, while I was being tortured by the Philippine Constabulary, they would also go to my wife who was working in the market, to ask for money in exchange for my freedom. After I was released, I found out that we were already bankrupt, and had lost our shop in the market. My mother-in-law had to take us in while I recuperated from the torture.

*Ang mas masakit pa, habang pinahihirapan ako ng Philippine Constabulary, pinupuntahan pa pala nila ang aking asawa na nagtatrabaho sa palengke, at hinihingan ito ng pera kapalit ng aking kalayaan. Nung ako'y nakalaya, nalaman ko na wala na kaming pera, at wala na rin ang tindahan namin sa palengke. Nakitira na lang kami sa aking biyenan habang nagpapagaling ako mula sa pagpapahirap na dinanas ko.*





I boarded their jeep and was immediately blindfolded. They started to slap me, asking me questions and forcing me to admit my involvement in the underground movement. When I refused to answer, they placed bullets between the fingers of my right hand and squeezed it very hard.

*Sumakay ako sa dyip nila at agad nila akong piniringan. Pinagsasampal nila ako at tinanong, pilit na pinaaamin na kasapi ako sa mga rebelde. Nung hindi nila ako mapasagot, naglagay sila ng mga bala sa pagitan ng mga daliri ko sa kanang kamay, at saka pinisil ito nang madiin na madiin.*



I don't know why, but he suddenly struck me with the butt of an M16 rifle. I fell to the ground, and he hit me again, harder this time. He told me to admit that my son had joined the New People's Army, or else he was going to shoot me.

*Hindi ko alam kung bakit, ngunit bigla niya akong hinampas ng kanyang M16. Bumagsak ako sa lupa, at hinampas niya akong muli, mas malakas pa sa nauna. Pilit niya akong pinaaamin na sumanib ang anak ko sa NPA, at kung hindi ko raw ito aaminin, babarilin niya ako.*

First, they blindfolded me. Then they started asking me questions, and for each one, there was an accompanying blow to a part of my body. Then, they used my back as their ashtray.

*Una, piniringan nila ako. Tapos ay pinagtatanong nila ako, at ang bawat tanong ay may kasamang suntok sa isang bahagi ng aking katawan. Pagkatapos, ginamit nilang ashtray ang likod ko.*





One of the soldiers unzipped my pants  
and lowered them.

Although I wanted so much to hide the  
fear inside me, I could not help crying  
out loud.

I prayed.

*Tinanggal ng isa sa mga sundalo ang  
pantalón ko.*

*Pilit kong itinatago ang takot na  
nararamdaman ko, ngunit hindi ko  
napigilang sumigaw.*

*Nagdasal ako.*





Blindfolded with my hands tied behind my back, I was made to kneel and told to say my last prayers. I was given one last chance to confess a crime I didn't commit, and when I kept silent, I felt the barrel of a gun press against my temple as a man counted down, "three, two, one." I swallowed hard at "zero", and heard a click.

*Habang nakapiring at nakagapos ang mga kamay sa likod ko, pinaluhod nila ako at sinabihang magdasal na. Binigyan nila ako ng huling pagkakataon na umamin sa isang krimen na wala naman akong kinalaman, at nung nanahimik lang ako, naramdaman ko ang dulo ng isang baril na nakadiin sa aking sentido habang may isang nagbilang, "three, two, one." Napalunok ako sa "zero", at narinig ko ang isang lagitik.*

— POSTSCRIPT —

It has been more than 30 years since the fall of the Marcos regime. Time can dull memory, rendering it unreliable.

*Was it truly that bad? Did it even really happen?* As time passes, revising history becomes easier, and the chances of history repeating itself is ever greater. Indeed, even as children, we quickly learned to try to avoid repeating early missteps lest we get hurt once again.

Reading the affidavits of survivors of atrocities committed by the Marcos regime, and then distilling them into three-sentence stories was traumatic and jarring, but also felt surprisingly meditative and timely.

So retelling these tales was never a question. They remind us of a shameful and horrific past that can quite easily happen again, if we forget.

Still, one of our concerns in coming out with this book was the possibility of it being read, without context, especially by a child. How will he or she react?

We asked some survivors of Martial Law abuse to read these stories, and they too, more or less unanimously, shared the same sentiments – it is important to tell these stories, but the effect can be traumatizing, and without the context or guidance, all the readers will be left with are frightening images.

Less clear was what to do. Some suggested that we include longer narratives to explain each story. Others surmised that we can trust the child to come up with his or her own reflections. Children are exposed to a lot of horror and violence these days, one survivor told us – on the Internet, on TV, in the movies, in practically all media. We can try to shield especially the very young, but, while context is important and ideal, it simply cannot always be present.

In the end, we decided, for better or worse, to keep this book only to its barest essentials – the stories themselves.

We trust that parents and teachers holding this book can and will provide context and guidance, as we are sure they would want to when their children hear about similar horror stories happening even today. We hope they can use this book as a starting point for a meaningful conversation about a very sensitive topic, as well as a tool for imparting empathy and a deeper appreciation of history.

We want to emphasize, too – all these stories were based on experiences of survivors. Despite the odds, they *survived* to tell these tales. This book then is also a tribute to the resilience of the human spirit.

Memory is an underrated but extremely important thing. We remember and learn from the past, because we want our children to lead better lives than us.

**GIGO ALAMPAY**

*Executive Director*

The Center for Art, New Ventures and Sustainable Development  
www.canvas.ph

**ADDITIONAL READING**

This book, obviously, does not even begin to capture the full picture. These are only fragments of stories, shared in the hope that readers will be inspired to embark on their own independent learning.

If you wish to learn more about Martial Law in the Philippines, here are some books that may help.

***Days of Disquiet, Nights of Rage:  
The First Quarter Storm & Related Events***

by Jose F. Lacaba

***Dekada '70***

by Lualhati Bautista

***Gun Dealers' Daughter***

by Gina Apostol

***Isang Harding Papel***

by Augie Rivera

***Killing Time in a Warm Place***

by Jose Dalisay, Jr.

***Marcos Martial Law: Never Again***

by Raissa Robles

***Not on our Watch: Martial Law Really Happened.  
We Were There.***

edited by Jo-Ann Q. Maglipon

***State of War: A Novel***

by Ninotchka Rosca

***Subversive Lives: A Family Memoir of the Marcos Years***

by Susan F. Quimpo and Nathan Gilbert Quimpo

***The Conjugal Dictatorship of Ferdinand and Imelda Marcos***

by Primitivo Mijares

***The Jupiter Effect***

by Katrina Tuvera

***Tibak Rising: Activism in the Days of Martial Law***

edited by Ferdinand Llanes

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