27 YEARS AFTER . . .

Peach Mondiguing

December 1972

It was after Christmas. I cooked something special for my husband, his friend and myself. A commotion downstairs. We were about to sit down for lunch...the door opened...armalites pointed at us...*dapa! dapa!* (On your belly! on your belly!) I stared at the lead man, his face twisted with hatred, looking like a wild animal about to pounce at his prey... My husband, his friend and I lay flat on our stomachs. A boot heel crunched on my husband's head... *"Ano ang tunay ninyong pangalan? Saan ang mga baril ninyo?* (What are your real names? Where are your guns?)

A soldier frisked me. I was bra-less in a tee-shirt and shorts...They poked the ceilings and walls with their rifles...no guns, just a steel filing cabinet—filled with books which we have collected through the years, photographs...memories — our lives' treasures which they branded "subversive" evidence — exhibits A to Z.

After I was frisked, they allowed me to sit. I sat immobile...watching the boot heel on my husband's face. It turned like a screw after each question. For the first time, I saw my husband tremble. Was it from anger, fear or pain? I looked out the window. Ten military jeeps surrounded our UG (underground) house. The neighbors whom I have befriended were milling outside. They probably were puzzled about the military's presence in the vicinity. None of them knew we were members of

the Communist Party of the Philippines where I acted as a front. They knew me as the wife of a handicraft entrepreneur.

The men in uniform searched the house for guns. None were found. They then deposited their armalites in one of my wicker baskets lying around. There were around a dozen or so of them. They took our pictures and also of the arms in the basket. They then escorted us downstairs. It happened all too fast. We were not allowed to take anything except a few pieces of clothing which they insisted they themselves will carry for us. Our filing cabinet and all its contents were taken as evidence. I requested our landlady to take care of whatever was left behind, until someone will be allowed to get them for us...

We were escorted to a waiting armored car. My husband and I were seated beside each other flanked by two fully armed military guards. My husband's friend was led to another vehicle behind us. In front of the vehicle carrying us was another armored car. Behind us were around five to six military vehicles.

Although my husband and I were seated beside each other, we maintained silence. I was too scared to speak. I enveloped with silence the intense hatred for the men who held us as prisoners. But scared as I was, I realized that I was more scared for my husband than for myself. I could visualize what was in store for him: He was a founding member of the Communist Party of the Philippines and I know what the military would do to any high-ranking member of this subversive organization, especially now that Martial Law had just been declared by President Ferdinand Marcos.

I was then 21 years old while my husband was 24. I loved him dearly and I did not want him to suffer. I wanted to free him even if it would cause my life. From the back seat where

I sat beside him I thought: What if I go for the eyes of the driver? My fingers could gouge them out of their sockets and then I would jump out of the moving vehicle. Clearly, what I had in mind was not a feasible way of escape. There were too many of them. As my friends later told me, had I done what I planned, I would have been killed instantly on the spot: The advance vehicle and the one behind us carried machine guns which were ready to be fired for such eventualities.

I looked out from where I was. I saw that we were entering Camp Crame. As soon as we arrived we were given numbers. Then we were photographed and fingerprinted like criminals.

What was our crime? Was it a crime to want a just society and do something about it?

We were branded as subversives, enemies of the state. My husband was considered a prized catch by the military: He was a politburo member, in-charge of organizing labor unions natiowide. My offense? I was the wife of a subversive. No evidence could be presented by the military to prove the charge that I was a subversive. To detain me they invented this crime — the crime of being married to a subversive.

We were brought before the Intelligence Service of the Armed Forces of the Philippines (ISAFP) inside Camp Aguinaldo. It was already late in the day. I cannot quite remember much of what happened then, except that I was brought to a bungalow. There I met some detainees. They told me where to sleep. Later, I was whisked back to Camp Crame where my husband was then being interrogated by several generals. At that time the military was experimenting on the use of the truth serum.

They were in a room which I was not allowed to enter. They let me sit outside the door with a guard standing by me. They kept me outside the room between 8pm to 8pm the following day. I asked the guard why they were not asking me any questions and he sarcastically told me whether I knew more about labour organizing and the CPP than my husband. I kept quiet. The whole time that I sat by that door, I was awake and noticed that none of the people inside the room ever came out. I was given food which I did not eat. The evening of the second day, they brought me back to Camp Aguinaldo, where I was finally able to meet the others who were detained inside. I knew one of them very well. She was once upon a time my dormmate and classmate at UP Diliman. When she sensed that I would ask her questions, she engaged me in her body language which told me in no uncertain terms that to talk would be risky because the room was bugged. What is said could be misinterpreted or even deliberately twisted. It is the better part of wisdom to hold one's tongue. But just as I was about to consign her and myself to silence, she, when she was very sure that no one was watching us, broke the rule she wanted me to observe: She whispered to me words which in effect said that I should never admit that I knew her. If I did, she would be reinterrogated and we would have to be forced to validate each other's statements, and that would mean getting others implicated. Besides, wouldn't that make our case worse? And so I shut up and refrained from reminiscing our past. . .

I could not sleep that night. The following day, I asked if I could see my husband. None of them would tell me where he was, except that he was being kept incommunicado. I asked if I could call my family to tell them what happened. I was allowed one phone call. I decided to call my sister who was

then a nun and was studying/teaching at St. Paul's College, Manila. She was the safest person to call, since I knew that the phone was bugged. I told her where we were and for her to call my husband's parents. I told her that I was safe, but I did not know whether my husband was safe or not. I had not seen him since we entered Camp Crame.

I finally saw him after four days. He looked gaunt, his eyes sunken, his hair dishevelled. Anyone looking at him would know that he was dazed and totally exhausted. I asked him what happened. He said that he was interrogated for four days without rest. He did not tell me anything about what happened to him, except that he held out for three days without divulging anything that would incriminate anyone in the party. It was a party rule for anyone caught not to give out information for at least three days so that all party members known to the arrested member will have time to leave their respective UG houses.

January, 1973

People who were branded as subversives started to pour in, get interrogated and then brought elsewhere. Usually, they only stayed at ISAFP for one or two days. There was a time when there were more than forty of us – we called ourselves, Club 1081. Our food was catered to us, and we would have our lunch in the camp grounds, just like we were having a picnic. One young guy, a lawyer and a UP graduate, who claimed to have been one of the presidential legal advisers and was charged a subversive because he brought a gun inside a restricted building, entertained us one evening. He was dressed all in white, complete with necktie and boots, and he went to the middle of the grounds, looked up at the sky, which was star-studded and started singing..."Starry, starry nights..."

We were getting restless...there were no books/newspapers around, nothing to read nor anything to make us cerebrate. We had no written materials to pore over, nor did we have writing materials. Although there was no policy about not allowing us to write nor discuss anything political, we did none of these things. We knew that we were being closely watched, and so avoided anything that could be used against us.

The women were segregated from the men. At mealtimes, however, desegregation took place. And that was when we talked to the men.

After lunch there was not much to do. Boredom became very real. It was a terrible punishment. There we all were doing nothing. For this reason, we, the women, brainstormed about what we could do to make our hours in captivity productive. Dismissing cerebral activities as dangerous, we agreed to occupy our time by doing traditional women's work, like sewing, crocheting and knitting. Imagine us women, most of whom were captured in the mountains doing political and medical work, used to carrying and dismantling high-caliber rifles, demurely sewing/knitting/crocheting like we were in a convent school! It was the height of irony. But we had to do something that we could be allowed to do, rather than go crazy.

To save our sanity we came up with a list of materials that we needed and gave our request to the ISAFP commander. He granted our request. Not only were the materials sent to us. He sent us a sewing machine to boot. I suspected that our captors were nice to us because we were one of the first batches of political detainees under Presidential Decree 1081. We were their showcase to the world that the military was far from being abusive. In fact, military men were kind and just.

One of the detainees, a PGH doctor who knew how to sew, volunteered to teach those who wanted to learn. Some did. Others and I took up crocheting. I was able to crochet a purple skirt with a matching blouse during my two months in captivity.

We had a baby in our midst. The baby's mother was pregnant when she was captured. She tried to escape by rolling down the ravine, but she was not able to and she was cut, bruised and bleeding when she was caught. She gave birth prematurely in the military hospital. She named her baby Marlo, for martial law. We took turns taking care of her baby, a reprieve from monotony. It occurred to me that the military imprisoned only the political activist in us. That part of us which patriarchal culture produced, and which we started to subordinate to what we considered to be the more important role of a woman at that time, was "liberated" by the military. Once more we were made to privilege domestic roles: We sewed, crocheted, mothered a baby, etc.

A woman joined our "club". Her story was enough to demonstrate to one and all how much more pleasant it was for women like us to act out roles intended for our gender. This woman was captured while on her way to attend to some medical emergency. According to her, a cocked gun was pointed at her temple while she was being interrogated. She was also a witness to an event she could never forget: Some sympathisers were questioned by the military. They were told that they could go after the interrogation. They did. They were shot one after the other as they were leaving the place. The military had an airtight explanation for the former's execution: They were escaping, weren't they?

March, 1973

I was released late in March for humanitarian reasons, but I was ordered to report twice a week to Camp Aguinaldo

for two years. During this time, I was under constant surveillance. I spent these years taking care of my baby, Camille, who was then one and a half years old. (Luckily, two days before we were captured, I brought her to the house of my parents-in-law).

My release from the military detention camp did not set me free. I found myself in another prisonhouse. Being a former detainee and practically under house arrest even after release from my captors, I was barred from getting employment. It was terrible.

January 22, 1975

I was home in Baguio then, eight months pregnant with my second child when I heard the terrible news. I was informed that my husband was shot on his way home from evening school by an unknown assailant. (He had been allowed to go home sometime in 1974 and had gone back to school, but still had to report to the military once a week). He died on the spot. According to the military, he was ordered to be assassinated by the Armed Citizen Partisan— a city based counterpart of the CPP-NPA.

It will be his 24th death anniversary on January 22, 1999 and until now, I still cannot believe that he would be ordered summarily killed without his case being thoroughly investigated by the Communist Party of the Philippines. Many party members sought amnesty, were released and did not return to the movement and yet were not killed. They were allowed to live and now enjoy emotional support and material comforts and have become professional activists, capitalists and so on. Some are back to teaching. Had my husband lived, perhaps, he too would now be teaching or writing which was his academic training/profession even while he was

fully engaged in helping free this country from the shackles of global imperialism and monopoly capitalism.

My husband died when he was only 27. My daughter, Camille is now his age. Her younger sister is 23. She has never known her father. They have been asking me a lot of questions, which remained unanswered, because I do not have the answers. I continue however to believe in, and struggle for the basic principles of social justice, equality and national democracy which my husband and I have always believed in and live for.