

## HILAO, Liliesa R.

Posted on October 17, 2015

From the day martial law was imposed by President Marcos in September 1972, Liliesa Hilao began to wear black as a sign of mourning, because, as she wrote then in her diary, “Democracy is dead.”

Barely six months later she herself was dead, in the first reported case of a political detainee’s death under martial law.

A talented young woman with many friends and extracurricular activities, Hilao garnered honors all through her school years; she was due to graduate *cum laude* with a degree in communication arts in 1973. But although student activism was at its height by the time she entered college, she didn’t join rallies or shout slogans. Besides, she had asthma and allergies that prevented her from being more physically active.

At the same time, she had a strong sense of justice and a mind of her own. This was expressed in the thoughtful essays she wrote for the student paper at the Pamantasan ng Lungsod ng Maynila (where she was associate editor); some had titles like “The Vietnamization of the Philippines” and “Democracy is Dead in the Philippines under Martial Law.”

One evening in April 1973, drunken soldiers barged into the Hilao



family residence in Quezon City, looking for Hilao's brother, an engineer. They were members of the Constabulary Anti-Narcotics Unit. When the young woman insisted that they produce a search warrant or an arrest order, the soldiers beat her up, then handcuffed and took her away. She was brought to Camp Crame, headquarters of the Philippine Constabulary (now the Philippine National Police).

There a brother-in-law, an army officer, was able to see Hilao. She told him, and he saw for himself, that she had been tortured. But he was unable to do anything. The following day her older sister Alice was called to the Camp Crame Station Hospital. Lilirosa's body bore visible marks of severe torture, and even sexual abuse. She was already dead.

The authorities claimed that Hilao committed suicide by drinking muriatic acid. Officials at the highest levels declared the case was closed. But no one really believed that the military had nothing to do with her death.

Because of the tragedy, several members of the Hilao family had to leave their home to avoid arrest and detention, or worse. For years, they were aware of being under military surveillance.

At the graduation ceremonies held two weeks afterward by the Pamantasan ng Lungsod ng Maynila, a seat was kept vacant for Lilirosa Hilao, who was still conferred her degree, posthumously and with honors.

And in Bulan, Sorsogon, where she was born, the municipal council named a street after her in 2001.

This entry was posted in *Martyrs and Heroes* and tagged *Bulan Sorsogon*. Bookmark the *permalink*.

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← GONZAGA, Mary Virginia

A street named after Liliesa →

## INFORMATION

**HILAO, Liliesa R.**

**Birthday:**

March 14, 1950

**Birth place:**

Bulan, Sorsogon

**Date of death or disappearance:**

April 5, 1973

**Place of Death or Disappearance:**

Camp Crame, Quezon City

**Desaparecido?**

No