Saturday - February 22, 1986

Eden and I were just preparing for bed. I was adjusting our mini radio on the headboard of our bed looking for station Radio Veritas. We have been tuning in on this station ever since Cory Aquino bought the eight to nine slot to broadcast to the Filipino people. When the dial of the radio hit 846, the number of truth, the sound that hit us was that of Minister Juan Ponce Enrile’s voice making an appeal to the people. He was speaking rather laboriously in Tagalog (his Ilocano accent was very strong): “…we are appealing to the Filipino people and to the entire world to help us. We are right now here at the Ministry of National Defense building and we are prepared to die. Mr. Marcos had planned to have us and members of the Reformist Movement picked up together with the members of the Opposition Party. We believe that Marcos is no longer the legitimate president of the Republic. His forces are out to kill us and we are prepared to be killed.” In the background could be heard a lot of voices of reporters asking questions, some speaking in whispers, telephone ringing. There was an air of urgency. The urgency of the messages being aired reminded me of the shortwave station (BBC) over which my father used to listen to clandestinely during the early part of the Second World War. The next voice was that of Vice Chief of Staff Lt. Gen. Fidel Ramos saying “We have decided to sever ties with Mr. Marcos whom we no longer acknowledge as our president. We are calling on everybody to help us. We need the people’s support now!” Then Enrile again “Please come to Camp Aguinaldo and help us. We need you!” They spoke alternately citing the reasons for their decision to break away from Marcos. The main one of which is their reliable information that Marcos had ordered the arrest of all leaders of the Opposition party and of the Reformists (the military officers who initiated the reform of the Armed Forces of the Philippines). They also cited the rampant cheating Marcos employed in the recently concluded snap presidential elections.

For several minutes, Eden and I could not talk. I guess we were both thinking of the worst. I did not find any piety in me. I did not pray. I could only think of our son Noel, who, earlier had gotten my permission to use our car to go to a party at the Greenhills area. It was then around 9:30 p.m. and he was not yet home. It was only at this point that I prayed several times to God to make Noel tune in to Radio Veritas so that, when he hears what is going on, he would go home immediately. But I had my misgivings because I know that he never tuned in over the AM band. It turned out, as I learned from him later, that he and his group did tune in over Radio Veritas, but they did not consider the situation serious enough as to merit their breaking up their party and go home. Finally, Eden and I found our voices. Her first reaction was “My God! Ben what is happening?” Then, “Where is that boy?! (meaning our son, Noel)”

Then, the voice of Butch Aquino came over the radio requesting his ATOM group to join him at the Isetan Department Store in the Araneta Commercial Center in Cubao. This announcement was repeated several times. Then came the voice of his eminence Jaime Cardinal Sin issuing out a call for all Filipinos to come to the Camp Aguinaldo Area to support Mr. Enrile and Gen. Ramos. You can just imagine my feeling then. Here we were known activists and yet when the call for real action came we could not move. My reason for not going out was my concern for our son Noel. I just had to be home in case anything untoward should happen.

At around 1:30 the following morning, Melo Fernandez and Mar del Castillo came to the house asking me to go with them to Camp Aguinaldo. I had to excuse myself citing the fact that my son was not yet home and I did not know what time he was coming home. Melo and Mar went to Camp Aguinaldo and found a few hundred people already assembling at EDSA in front of Camp Aguinaldo and Crame. They came back around 5:00 a.m., Sunday. In the meantime, Noel came home at 3:00 in the morning. It was only then that Eden and I were able to sleep, albeit, listlessly. At 5:30 in the morning…..

Sunday - February 23, 1896

Eden and I took off. We passed by for Didi and Menchu. Didi turned out to be stranded in Iloilo City where he delivered some paintings. So, only Menchu came with us. We went directly to Camp Aguinaldo via Daang Cainta and White Plains. I avoided EDSA because I surmised the traffic was heavy in that direction. True enough, we never reached EDSA. Instead, we ended up at the Santolan gate of Camp Aguinaldo. I was a bit disappointed because there were just perhaps around five hundred or so people milling about the vicinity of the gate. Menchu found a companion, a co-teacher of hers. All the while we were listening over Radio Veritas. After sometime, I told the girls that since there was no action at Santolan, we might as well go to vicinity of Radio Veritas which was then also being barricaded by the people because of some threats of being raided by loyalist troops of Marcos. At the Radio Veritas, we found a phalanx of students manning the barricades. We were able to get as far as the main gate of the station. The girls and I then had lunch… some sandwiches which Eden prepared. There was not much action there either. So, around 2:00 p.m., I decided to go back to Camp Aguinaldo. This time, I got caught in the maze of roadblocks and traffic. We reached EDSA and the entrance to White Plains subdivision after more than an hour of maneuvering in and out of the side streets. The entire width of EDSA at this point was barricaded by people sitting on small sandbags and there were also some vehicles parked along and across EDSA. Menchu and her co-teacher detached themselves from Eden and I. She had to call up her children to assure them that she was all right. At about his time, an announcement was made by somebody on board a Fiera with a PA system that a column of tanks and marines were approaching from the direction of Guadalupe Bridge. At first, I thought “How corny can this guy get… the marines are coming?” It sounded just like in the movies… However, after a while, a motorist coming from the direction of the tank column confirmed the Oritgas-EDSA intersection! So, the announcer on board the Fiera began making appeals for heavy vehicles to make a dash to the Ortigas-EDSA area to barricade the intersection. Menchu and her co-teacher, Eden and I jumped into our Lancer and off we went bell-bent-for-leather (as they say in the movies of Reagan) in the direction of Ortigas and EDSA. When we reached the intersection, several buses were already being parked across EDSa to form a barricade. People began scrambling on top of the buses to get a better view of the oncoming tanks and marines. I got atop a bus, a JD, to take some pictures. But before this I left Eden and Menchu and her co-teacher at the Tropical Hut restaurant at the corner of EDSA. A couple of helicopter gunships were flying over us and this got Eden into a crying spell. I myself became apprehensive because the crowd was beginning to thicken and the gunships could wreak havoc among the people with its M-60 machine guns and its rockets. Anyway, I told Eden to stay under the eave of the restaurant (as if that would give her some protection!). Now, as I was aiming my camera at the lead tank, I noticed that it was right into an empty lot which was not barricaded! I jumped down and ran to the Fiera with tha PA system and informed the announcer that the tanks could get thru to Ortigas in the direction of the Meralco because that part of Ortigas was not barricaded. The announcer then got his PA system working. People, including me, ran for the unguarded portion of Ortigas. We immediately formed a line abreast across Ortigas with our back toward Meralco. There is a wall along this side of Ortigas and as I stood kapit-bisig with women at my left and men at my right, I found myself in the middle of Ortigas. And then, I saw hovering atop the wall on our left was the turret of the lead tank! I wanted to take pictures, but the people linked with my arms were starting to pull from one side to the other such that I could not raise my arms to take a picture of the tank. Suddenly the lead tank broke thru the adobe wall, it turned right along Ortigas racing right toward us!!! I tried to pull back but I could not move. Cringing my neck around, I could see a mass of people behind me, solidly linked by the arms! I took a peep at the bottom of the tank to see if I could squeeze myself underneath it should it decide to crash over us. Strange as it may seem no, I did not feel afraid; I just calculated how I could get out, just in case! A few meters away from us, the tank suddenly swerved to the left crossing the island and stopped right up the wall on the opposite side. As it crossed the island, it spilled off a lot of oil on the pavement. The succeeding tank’s tracks skidded uselessly over the oil spill and stopped right in fron of us. The third tank stopped alongside the second one facing us also. After a few minutes, an officer came up front. It turned out to be Gen. Tadiar, one of the most vicious loyalist officers of Marcos. After surveying the situation, he ordered the engines of his tanks cut off. I then moved over toward his position to take his picture. He was surrounded by vicious looking marines with armalites and sub-machine guns. Suddely two matrons broke thru his cordon of security men and hugged him simultaneously. Both ladies were crying and talking to him. I ventured nearer to take pictures. As I was aiming my camera, I felt something sharp prodding at my stomach. Looking down I saw the point of the barrel of an armalite at my stomach. I instinctively shoved off the soldier holding the gun at me, saying at the same time “Pare, wala tayong dapat pag-awayan!” The soldier, young, around twenty, was glowering at me with empty eyes. A sergeant-looking soldier, much older than he, grabbed him with both arms and pulled him away from me and the crowd that had by this time gotten around me. In my nervousness, the pictures that I took of this incident turned out to be duds. I forgot to adjust my camera, an old Kodak that needs adjustments for every setting. A few more minutes and the ladies hugging and pleading Gen. Tadiar broke off and together with another lady and a young man formed a crying circle. I could not control myself and joined them crying too like a broken-hearted lover, frustrated and despairing. After this, I rejoined Eden and Menchu. I felt drained of all my energy. Thence, we decided to go home. When we arrived home, our son Noel and Elena, our eldest, were not home. Noel had gone with some friends and Elena with her own group of friends to the “war zones”! We decided to catch some sleep and rest. Elena left word that she would be at Channel 7 where her friends were. This gave Eden and I another thing to worry about, because we have heard over the radio that this station was under siege by loyalist troops. However, Eden and I were not able to attend to her immediately because our own group this time had scheduled another “assault”.

Monday – February 24, 1986

At 4:00 a.m., Melo and Marie Fernandez dropped by to inform us that we were to gather at the residence of Norma Reyes and together with the Lansangs (Robert and Nes) we were to form a convoy to assault Camp Crame, or, rather, provide a hand in protecting said camp. From the Reyes residence we proceeded via Ortigas-Rosario Bridge turned left on Rodriguez Ave., right along Julia Vargas Ave. and on to EDSA. At the corner of EDSA and Julia Vargas Ave. we discovered together with a few other barricaders, the tanks, or remnants of the cavalry of Gen. Tadiar of the previous day, bivouacked on an empty lot. After ascertaining that the tanks were not moving on, and after the Fernandezes’ and the Lansangs’ indecision as to where to head for, I decided to leave them and together with Eden and Norma as my passengers, headed for Camp Crame via the rear streets avoiding EDSA which was already barricaded at all intersections. We ended up at Horseshoe Drive at the rear of Camp Crame. We joined a group of young barricaders praying the Holy Rosary. After completing the Holy Mysteries, someone with a blaring transistorized radio called our attention to a newscast that Marcos had left the country. There was at first some misgivings, but after the repeated newscast there broke out a cheering from the barricaders who turned out to be charismatics and they started singing lively songs/hymns. Over our car radio, however, we heard of a group of barricaders having just undergone a tear-gas attack somewhere in the vicinity of the rear of Camp Aguinaldo and assistance was being asked to man a red cross center situated at the parish church of Mons. Pagulayan somewhere along 12th street near Santolan on the other side of EDSA from where we were. So, off we went to the indicated center. However, I missed the site and instead we ended up at the Santolan gate of Camp Aguinaldo. When we came out of 12th street along Santolan, we alighted and walked towards the gate of the camp. On both sides of us were one company each of soldier. One was a riot company wielding truncheons and shield and the other was a fully armed group. Both companies of soldiers were sandwiched by, on the EDSA side, the ATOM group of Butch Aquino while, on the Katipunan Road side, by a non-coalesced group to which we belonged. A huddle was in progress between some civilians and the company commanders. After approximately half an hour, the soldiers were convinced to enter Camp Aguinaldo to surrender to the men of Gen. Ramos. Cheering and clapping wildly, the civilians accompanied the soldier as they entered the camp. The soldiers were then offered the food contributed by the people which had been stockpiling at the gates of the camp. And they partook of the food ravenously. It turned out that they have not eaten since Saturday evening, the start of the revolution.

Not too long after, Mons. Pagulayan set up a make-shift altar near the gate and proceeded to offer the sacrifice of the Mass out of thanksgiving. After the Mass, we went home to see to the needs of the families. The Fernandezes and the Lansangs, it truned out, ended up at EDSA in the vicinity of the V.V. Soliven bulding and they missed the fun that we had at Santolan.

It was also in the wee hours of this Monday morning that the transmitters of Radio Veritas in Meycauayan, Bulacan was raided and destroyed by Marcos loyalists. June Keithley, the now celebrated radio announcer, had disappeared from the airlanes for quite sometime and the Filipino people were at a loss as to what was happening. It was like being in the midst of the proverbial calm before the storm being deprived of the voice of truth! However, this darkness did not last ,long for some private individual volunteered his own private transmitter (apparently a ham radio or something) and June Keithley resumed broadcasting underground, i.e., not identifying her location lest the loyalist forces find her and…..

On our way home from Santolan , we dropped by Menchu’s place to check if she had any news on Didi and to have our usual coffee (imported kasi yong kanyang coffee, remember?). We heard over the radio at her place that the news about Marcos having left the country was false and that Marcos had just appeared over television. Disgusted and downhearted, we went home to have lunch. In the afternoon at 3 o’clock, we again met at the residence of Norma Reyes. This time we were again in a convoy of three other cars. We again mounted and “assault” only again to be separated from the two other cars. Kasi mahina magmaneho kaya naiwan ko. Anyway, we went to Channel 7 to check on our daughter Elena’s situation. We learned that earlier, while they were inside the studios, the loyalist troops of Marcos invaded the premises. It was a blessing that the troopers sent them all out of the studios instead of the usual practice of these troopers to take advantage of their prisoners. Satisfied that Elena was in good hands, Eden, Norma and I went to the neighboring Channel 4 which, in contrast to Channel 7, had just been liberated by Reformist troops from Marcos’ troops. There was some palabas by the actors, entertainers, and whatnots at the front of the studios. From there, we proceeded to Camp Crame to check on how the people were taking the new twist, i.e., Marcos still very much in. The area along EDSA between Camps Aguinaldo and Crame was full of people. It was already dark and the area was a carnival sans ferries wheel, lindy-loop, big tops, and the like. It was just a sea of people praying, talking, laughing, walking, sitting, sleeping (on the pavement), coming and going. Where was no hint whatsoever of trouble. It was a most Filipino way of showing love without seeming to care for his neighbor. Everybody was there for a purpose – to fight for his and his neighbor’s life if and when exacted; and yet no one seem to bother about the man or woman next to him on that long stretch of concrete pavement. Some hotheads even reacted as if it was an ordinary day of heavy traffic for vehicles and the usual “git-gitan” was commonplace among drivers. We went home around 9:30 p.m. tired and hungry.

Tuesday – February 25, 1986

At 4:30 in the morning, we woke up Maricar, who up till today was always left behind at home to “man the fort” together with her Lola and Tita. However, she had insisted on coming with is today at baka daw maubusan siya ng action. After a light breakfast, we proceeded directly for Channel 7 to look for Elena who has not come home since yesterday when we last met. When we arrived at the vicinity of Channel 7 her friends informed us that Elena was just around probably having breakfast in one of the eateries nearby. So, we decided to go to Camp Crame for some action. Since Monday morning, Enrile had transferred his headquarters across to Camp Crame to join Gen. Ramos because it had turned out, inside Aguinaldo itself, a battalion of Marcos loyalists manning a battery of howitzers had their cannons zeroed in on the Ministry of National Defense building and were only waiting for the orders of Gen. Fabian Ver to shoot! However, since we entered the vicinity of Channel 7 an hour earlier, more barricades have been put up and I could not find a way out of the maze of streets. And I am not familiar with this part of town. I wound up along Morato and the first intersection (at Sct. Borromeo) that I came up to was in the process of being barricaded with cars by a group of teenagers. Upon inquiry, I found out that the huge transmitter tower of Channel 9 along Panay Avenue that could be seen from the middle of the intersection was harboring 2 to 3 snipers of the Marcos loyalist soldiers. Sporadic gunfire from automatic rifles could be heard. I told the young barricaders that we should move farther down Sct. Borromeo and form the barricade at the next intersection at Madre Ignacia St. We all mounted our cars and rushed at the said intersection. The five to six vehicles occupied the entire width of Sct. Borromeo St. All the while Eden was crying because of the excitement, fear and whatever, what with gunfire and the headlong rush of the vehicles headed straight for the tower! How foolish it seemed now our actions were at the time, but all that I thought of was…”we have to do something…contribute some action to the cause…” When we reached the Sct. Borromeo-Sct. Tuazon intersection, the firing had ceased. No one stopped and we crossed the intersection. Halfway between Sct. Tuazon and Madre Ignacia St. along which the Channel 9 tower could be more clearly seen, firing from the snipers resumed and all of us drivers, in unison, stopped our cars to beat a hasty retreat backing up towards the intersection of Sct. Borromeo and Sct. Tuazon whereupon we parked our cars and alighted. We all forgot to form a barricade. Instead, everyone sought cover behind electric posts, coconut trees, cars and whatever we could find along Sct. Borromeo St. At this intersection, a corner was occupied by some squatter shanties. Eden who was crying openly, was brought by some squatters who took pity on her, into one of their shacks. Eden promptly knelt down on the earthen floor and started praying the rosary. All the while gunfire could be heard in a staccato regularity. Maricar stayed close by me as I sought shelter behind one of the parked cars at the same time sniping back at the soldier with angry stares. This was around 7:00 a.m. One of the men, a member of the squatter family that took in Eden, informed me that half an hour earlier, a man was shot in the head by one of the snipers as the man ran across Sct. Borromero St. to seek cover behind a coconut tree just 10 meters in front from where we are. True enough as I ran from my cover to the tree in front, I saw the blood of the hapless victim spilled on the ground. The sniper must have picked him off as he peeped from behind the coconut tree.

As I was preparing to return to Eden and Maricar whom I left with the squatters, I noticed an armored vehicle along Madre Ignacia St. maneuvering for a vantage position to shoot at the snipers of the loyalist troops. However, the armored vehicle’s gunner could not elevate his machine gun properly because the sniper’s position halfway up the transmitter tower was too high and the machine gun on the armored vehicle could not be swiveled high enough. After watching this scene for several minutes I remembered seeing inside the compound of Channel 4 a contingent of Reformist troops. I went back to the car and together with Eden and Maricar, I rushed to Channel 4 and spoke to a major manning with his men the gate of the compound facing Jusmag. I told the officer the situation pointing out to him that the armored vehicle was useless and so were several reformist troopers around the fence of Channel 9. I suggested that snipers or marksmen fo the reformist troops be assigned to battle the snipers situated on the tower of Channel 9 instead. Whereupon, the major communicated this information to his superior located inside the premises of Channel 4 thru their two-way radio. The conversation went something like this: Major: “Sir, we have received reports that the snipers up the tower of Channel 9 are still firing at civilians.” Colonel: “Sino ba ang mga taong nadiyan sa 9?” Major: “Sir, mga tao ni P-----g i-----g Abadilla, sir.” Colonel: “Mayroong dalawang marksmen ditto. Palalabasin ko. I-assign mo diyan.” A little later, two reformist troopers came out lugging an armalite rifle each. One even wore spectacles and I had doubts about his abilities. Anyway, I said to myself “I have done what I could do. So be it.”

Over the car radio, an appeal as being aired for barricaders to proceed to the Delta Circle along Quezon Ave. to prevent a team of tanks (actually a tank and an armored vehicle and a six-by-six full of soldiers) was on its way to Channel 9. Marcos needed this TV station very badly inasmuch as Channel 4 the regular government station was already in the harnds of the reformists and Channel 7 was not manned by its technicians although it was still in the hands of the loyalist soldiers who invaded it. And Marcos needed a TV station for the coverage of his supposed inauguration as “president” of the republic. The transmitter tower of Channel 9 also relayed the transmission of Channel 2 and 13. So off, we went to the Delta Circle. When we arrived there, vehicles were already being arranged to barricade the intersection. There was a priest overseeing the entire thing. I believe he was Bishop Bacani although I never got to ask his name during our conversation over the Channel 9 incident earlier. Meanwhile, Eden and Maricar bought some Jollibee sandwiches from across the street. After maybe one hour and the tanks had not shown up, I began feeling restless. Then the announcement over the radio came: The tanks are hauled up at the Amoranto Sports complex along Roces Ave. When Eden and Maricar came back with the sandwiches, I told them we were going to Roces Ave. When we arrived at the site, we found Roces Ave. full of people on both ends. The onlu space clear of people were where the tanks and the truck of soldiers were located. (All the while Maricar kept on insisting that we went where the action was.) While a foreigner priest was negotiating with the tank commander, we took our lunch of sandwiches while watching the proceedings. Then the tanks began to maneuver, turning around towards Quezon Ave. I told Eden and Maricar to get in the car and I also turned our car around. When the tanks sped towards Quezon Ave. we rushed ahead. Upon reaching Quezon Ave., I placed our car across Quezon Ave. together with some other cars lest the tanks turned right towards Delta Circle. When the tanks turned left towards the Welcome Rotonda the cars followed the tanks closely escorting them wherever they may be headed. Our headlights were all turned on speeding with the tanks. And those tanks could ran fast! We were going seventy-eighty KPH! I did not know tanks could go that fast! It turned out that the tanks were going back to Malacañang! When we reached the intersection of Forbes-Sta. Mesa-Aviles, there were a lot of people lining up the street taunting the soldiers of Marcos manning the barbed wire barricades. And some of the people started pelting the tanks with stones and rocks. The foreigner priest who negotiated for the tanks to retreat admonished the people. We then turned around and went back to Delta Circle to inform the barricaders there about the retreat of the tanks. I again talked with the priest whom I later found out to be Bishop Bacani (but I still am not too sure about his identity).

From there we went back to Channel 9 to check on the progress of the Reformist snipers’ actions versus the snipers of Marcos’ loyalist troops. This time we managed to get thru to Timog and Panay Avenue but no farther, because of the traffic. Eden stayed inside the car. Maricar and I went on foot along Panay Avenue. We could hear the exchange of fire within the premises of Channel 9. I learned earlier that one of the loyalist snipers had been shot. Another was wounded and was accompanied down the tower by another companion. After some moments of apprehension, we saw a priest approach the gate of Channel 9 with his arms raised. Just like at Roces Avenue, Panay Avenue was full of people a both ends. Only the front of Channel 9 was clear of people. The priest was allowed by the soldier to enter Channel 9. A couple of minutes later, the priest emerged and signaled for assistance. Two men with red cross arm bands joined him and they entered Channel 9.

A few minutes later, the companions of the priest bought out a wounded soldier and deposited him with the other red cross members who were with the crowd. Then the priest and the two red cross men re-entered the premises of the TV station. Then a helicopter gunship come out of nowhere and the people started clapping and cheering. The helicopter circled the transmitter tower menacingly. All this time firing inside the premises of Channel 9 was going on sporadically. Later we saw the priest and his two companions winding up the stairs of the tower holding big red cross flag in front of them. The helicopter made a couple of passes around the tower. Then, the helicopter gunner fired his M-60. At first I thought that he was firing at the tower and we were very apprehensive for the safety of the priest and his two companions. But apparently the gunner was shooting at the building of Channel 9 and I saw the answering fire from the building. A barrel of an armalite was protruding from the bushes around the building spouting fire at the helicopter. The helicopter made five or six turns around the tower and every full round the gunner would fire his M-60 at the loyalist troops. All the while the priest kept on his way toward the platform midway up the tower where the apparently dead loyalist sniper was located. After inspecting the dead sniper, the priest came down. Everytime the helicopter would fire, the people along Panay Avenue would disappear. After the firing, they would reappear. Then the helicopter flew off. The loyalist troops of Marcos must have been so jarred by that helicopter attack that it did not take long before they sent out feelers of surrendering. We went around to the area where we were earlier this morning and found out that the snipers of Marcos sprayed the spot where we were standing early that morning. The people in the squatter area pointed out to us the marks left by the snipers’ bullets on the walls of the houses along Sct. Borromeo. I felt my hair stand on its end when I learned of this, for had the sniper thought of firing at that spot that early morning, Maricar and I could have been hit. God must have been with us that day more particularly!

From there, we proceeded back to Channel 7 to check again on Elena. We were not there long when the loyalist soldiers guarding Channel 7 gave up too. Women were requested to line up the exit route of the soldiers who apparently requested for this arrangement for fear that the menfolk would harm them when they came out. We did not wait for the final exit of the loyalist troops. Instead we decided to return for home.

Later that evening, I was viewing TV Channel 4 were some interviews were being conducted when the announcer said that Gen. Ramos was to go on air to make some very important announcements. A hint was given that negotiations between Mr. Enrile and Marcos was ongoing. When Gen. Ramos appeared on TV, he spoke about some inconsequential matters tehn he smiled and gave a hint that Marcos indeed left the country.

The end came. News of Malacañang being stormed by the people; news of a big column of tanks coming from Camp Aquino in Tarlac being strafed by helicopters of the reformists and turned back; of the presidential helicopter being destroyed on the ground by the reformists; of Malacañang having been strafed by reformist helicopters; all these news items which we only heard about were confirmed.

It is the end of the 20-year rule of a dictator who not only raped and pillaged our country but almost killed a nation economically and politically. But one thing that he could not do was to quell the God-fearing spirit of a great people – THE FILIPINOS!!!