

Opening Statement:

I agreed to participate in this interview and share what I know, based on my best recollection of what happened 50 years ago from my personal perspective. I purposely asked for an outline of the topics that will be discussed from you in the hope that I have time to recall or countercheck the accuracy and reliability of my statements.

After the Diliman Commune, I felt empowered enough to change the world. Slowly, I became realistic and felt that I can change the Philippines. Finally, as you grow old and weary, I became a pragmatist and try to influence the people around me. Now, I feel that I can only change myself for the better.

The Diliman Commune had very great impacts on my decisions in life. It influenced me to take up Sociology and Bachelors of Laws (under bar) degrees to further understand society and help the oppressed. It influenced me on how to deal and interact with people regardless of race, religion age or gender. It influenced me to seek new places in troubled areas like Sri Lanka during the Tamil Tigers, Afghanistan during the Taliban and Papua New Guinea during the tribal wars. Finally, it taught me to play it forward, the benefits that I am experiencing now because of my education in UP Diliman.

I am currently handling resettlement/social safeguards for foreign funded development projects. Involuntary resettlement adversely affects the human right to decent housing. However, handled properly, it becomes a development opportunity to the homeless poor to have security of land tenure and affordable housing. In addition, it is also an opportunity to improve or at least restore the standards of living brought about by adverse economic impacts of developmental projects. Marginalized sectors are given additional opportunities and benefits in resettlement because of their disadvantaged positions in society. I strongly encourage sociology majors in UP Diliman to consider this option as one of their career paths.

Could you elaborate on a bit that you mentioned in your essay about evading the recollection of details surrounding the Diliman Commune. Why did you evade recollecting and essaying your participation in these events? And why did this trait you mention of avoiding the limelight developed in the context of martial law?

I was advised by some of my friends who were then studying in the college of law, right after the shooting incident to lie low and avoid giving any statements regarding the incident because the increasing militarization might adversely affect my studies and prevent me from graduating. I was very frustrated because he was murdered but agreed that the time was very dangerous to be involved and would only highlight and magnify my presence in the Barricades.

Shortly after I entered SDK, there were suspicions that the SDK chapter in UP was infiltrated by the military intelligence. The HQ of SDK near Sulo Hotel was under observation and we would notice certain persons loitering around Matalino Street. I took a leave of absence in the first semester of 1972-1973. The suspicions of military infiltration were confirmed when the military raids were conducted during the declaration of Martial Law with pinpoint accuracy on the specific rooms of Narra and Yakal dormitories where activists were residing.

I was fortunate to have filed my leave of absence in the first semester of 1972-73 to work. I was not enrolled when martial law was declared. However, our house was raided but the police did not know me nor had a picture of me because they were asking me where Dodoy Soncuya was.

Luckily, I convinced them that there was no family by that name. I was out of the SDK loop because of my work and it took sometime before I finally re-connect with a selected few. However, at the back of my mind, there may still be unexposed infiltrators in SDK who would know me and I deemed it very prudent to pretend as somebody else.

From that moment on, I was convinced that to survive martial law, I have to use guile, stealth, common sense and keep your mouth shut to evade arrest which was quite successful. I was never arrested during the Marcos Regime.

You said that you were largely unaffiliated before the events of the Diliman Commune. What made you join the solidarity action with jeepney drivers on February 1 that led to you witnessing the tragic shooting of Sonny Mesina by Professor Campos?

Based on my recollections, the mass action started because of the increase in tuition fees. While I was unaffiliated, I was also listening and learning from speeches of student leaders who were explaining the prevailing conditions in Philippine society. I became interested because I could see and feel that somethings were very wrong in society. With this little knowledge, I started joining the mass actions in the hope to learn more and to show solidarity to the more advanced student leaders at that time. One of these mass actions was the putting of road blocks in the University Avenue that subsequently developed into the Diliman Commune.

The drivers plying UP Campus joined the mass actions because they were also protesting the increase of fuel. Nobody was orchestrating these actions. It was a simultaneous action in response to their own grievances that were slowly burying the country.

While education in UP was advanced by the standards of that time, it still cannot fully explain why our society was in that situation. The discussion groups were more rooted and relevant compared to the explanations in the classrooms. It was time to go out of the classrooms and learn in the streets, from the masses.

In "The Death of My Unexpected Hero", you mentioned being privy to some important details of the Commune. We would like you to share some of your other memories apart from the death of Mesina which you detail in the essay. How else did you participate in the Commune?

Were you able to witness other highlights of the Commune like the storming of S.P. Lopez's office at Quezon Hall by angry students after the shooting of Mesina?

Yes, I was also there, right after the shooting. We were very mad because a professor of UP shot a student without provocation and in cold blood. I was there and I saw all of it. Campos escaped. By command responsibility, we were blaming SPLopez as responsible for the shooting. We were shouting, cursing and some paintings and furniture were destroyed. SP Lopez Face turned red. He promised an investigation of the shooting incident.

On the second day, did you take part in the defense of the campus as the PC and Metrocom assaulted the main barricades in front of Quezon Hall?

I was in Vinzons hall beside the entrance from Katipunan which was also barricaded, First, a QC police contingent tried to clear the road blocks, however, stones rained on them and they retreated. In their second attempt, a small heavy equipment loader was used to try to clear the road blocks. Molotov Cocktails rained and again they retreated including the loader.

After this incident, Metrocom personnel tried to enter the same gate. Again, Molotovs and some pillboxes rained but they started shooting. Majority of the students retreated to the front of Education building and then in front of the former BA building.

There was a helicopter hovering above the campus, giving the military instructions on how to enter the campus. Rockets (Kuwitis) fireworks were procured and we hastily placed the shrapnel components in Pavilion 1 (Chemistry). Some students went to the roof of the Palma Hall with Kuwitis and aimed and fired at the helicopter. Every time the Kuwitis exploded we were cheering. After sometime, it went away, presumably after being hit by an improvised shrapnel. One of the brains behind this contraption later became a chancellor of UPD.

By that time, some students "borrowed" archery sets from the PE department. Some students were shooting arrows while others were able to improvised slight shots armed with pillboxes as their projectiles. A classmate since high school carrying two Molotov cocktails was running towards the military. The Molotov he was carrying was hit by gunfire, luckily, it did not burst into flames.

Some students tried to get guns (spring field rifles and some machine guns) from the ROTC armory to defend the campus from further intrusions by the military. However, the firing pins were nowhere to be found.

At this time, the military was able to penetrate the campus and assembled in front of Vinzons hall. They undertook mopping operations and arrested some students who were cornered inside the building. However, the continuous harassment of the students forced them to withdraw for the night.

Also on the same day, there was the police invasion of the Kamia and Sampaguita dorms. Were you able to witness or hear of this?

I was stationed between pavilion 1 and 2 at the back of Palma Hall. We were trying to sleep but suddenly, we heard an explosion and saw a burst of flames in the direction of Sampaguita Dorm. We ran towards the flame and learned that the military tried to penetrate the campus perimeter through the golf course at the back of the dorm. We heard commotions inside the dorm and saw several students arrested and taken into custody.

We later learned that there were several drums of fuel at the back of Sampaguita hall which were the source of fuel for our Molotov cocktails. The drums were hit by tracer bullets of the military and they exploded.

On the third day, were you able to join the mass assembly called for by S.P. Lopez at the A.S. Steps? Were you able to see the visit of Senators Aquino, Laurel and others in the barricades?

I was stationed in front of Vinzons Hall before the sunken garden. Suddenly there were murmurs that some food had arrived. I saw Senators Aquino and Benitez talking to students near Vinzons Hall. Some of their companions were giving food to the students. I just ate because I was very tired to listen to the conversations between some government officials and students.

Did you take part in the takeover of the DZUP studio or the UP Press? Did you hear the DZUP broadcasts by the students or encountered the Pulang Bandila newspaper put out by the communards?

I was not part of the takeover of DZUP but we heard the Ilocano songs and the audio tape of dove beams being broadcast. I was part of the response when DZUP was attacked by the “Ablan Boys” in the hope of silencing the broadcasts. We ran from Palma Hall to Engineering where the antenna was located. We saw that the tower was already leaning aside, which we later learned was destroyed by tracer bullets. I also saw a student injured because while running with a pillbox in hand, he tripped and the pillbox exploded in his hands.

Were you privy of the decision-making during the Commune? Could you describe the atmosphere and activities in the barricades that you manned?

I feel that there was no dominant group that was making the decisions. Rather, these responses were ad hoc responses addressing particular situations. There are some students who were assertive and influenced other students to follow. I still believe that it was a simultaneous expression of the frustration to what was happening in the country. However, I am still wondering where the funds for logistics came from.

We were sleeping in the main barricade areas beside our Molotov Cocktails made from empty soft drink bottles and filled up with gasoline with a topping of oil for longer burning. The bottles were sealed with wicks made of rags. You shake the bottle, for the gasoline and fuel to mix and then light the wick and throw.

It was really admirable when different stakeholders in UPD came and defended the campus. There were also UP staff and workers, drivers, workers working inside the campus, ambulant food peddlers and neighboring communities (Different Housing Areas, Crus na Ligas, Daan Bakal, Balara) who all participated in solidarity with the students.

During the Commune, the atmosphere was very tense especially at night. I think many students cannot sleep and just took catnaps because attacks by the military were launched at night. Unfamiliar noises would rouse resting students into action. Food and cigarettes were shared even among strangers. The interpersonal relationships during the Diliman Commune were extraordinary. Suddenly, people cared for other people on things which were previously taken for granted like food, personal well-being and safety. We were eating what available food we had, there were times when our food consisted of “toron”, banana cue, chewing gums, and water.

There was also close cooperation. Students who I knew came from warring fraternities were now manning the barricade, together with the nationalist groups. There were no individual organization to speak of. They formed lines, transferring the chairs and tables from the classrooms to the streets. They took very active part in the defense of the campus. In fact, a member (Delfin) of the Vanguard Fraternity (ROTC) was shot by the military. I think he was in wheelchair for life.

Did you take part in the tearing down of the barricades during the 9th and last day of the Commune? What was the general sentiment of the studentry during this time? How did you assess the experience of the Commune during that time?

No, I was not. My participation was for the first four days. I figured that UPD has sent a message of defiance and cries of real academic freedom for students to emulate. We have ventilated national issues like poverty, militarization, social injustice and the dream to become better. Internally, the lessons learned was to organize and reach out to other sectors and to be

ready for the next encounter. To do these, we have to be more aware and critical on what was happening.

The general sentiment I think was that the students were in a position to act as a catalyst for real change. The students, majority being supported by parents, can concentrate in opening the minds of other sectors of society to analyze and advocate real change. If there is unity, authorities will be forced to listen.

There was some consensus that students should now go out of their classrooms, learn from the masses and conduct discussion groups with peasants, workers and other marginalized sectors of society to explain the structure of Philippine society and the reasons why it is next to impossible to reform the society from within.

From being uninvolved, you mentioned the Diliman Commune influencing your decision to join the SDK and protest actions. Could you elaborate on your involvement in activism after the Commune?

I applied with SDK and attended discussion groups (DGs) and teach ins. I was very active in attending mass actions including marches to the US Embassy, confrontation on January 26 in front of old Congress where I was truncheoned by the police and was slightly injured; the storming of Malacanang on January 30, 1971 where a commandeered firetruck was rammed against one of the gates of the palace. I was again nearly killed in front of the old Shell House in Roxas Boulevard when a military group sprayed the marchers with Armalite bullets. I was able to dive to the pavement and the bullets cracked the concrete wall, around 2 feet above from where I laid. My companion was wounded and was brought to the hospital.

I participated in a march that passed in front of Feati University in Quiapo. A crazy security guard of the school threw a pillbox from the top of the building and hit a student marcher on the head. He was dead on the spot, his brains scattered around the area. We were all traumatized when we saw the body almost decapitated. We retreated and entered Philippine College of commerce (PCC) campus (Now PUP) to regroup and continued our march, angrier than ever.

I established solid contacts in the squatter areas where the most marginalized urban dwellers lived. I became acquainted with the gangs, their tactics and strategies. I was accepted as one of them. When I re-enrolled in UP during Martial Law, I would later develop these contacts to elude arrests, get information and was quite handy in some of my sociology subjects especially deviant behavior.

I was sleeping in the picket lines of workers who were on strike, partaking of the food they had, eating rice, tomatoes and salt and if it was a good day, we would have canned sardines. I went to the rural areas and learned from residents the real problems, their frustrations and aspirations. I saw the real meaning of exploitation. I saw that political power comes from the barrel of a gun. These immersions among the masses taught me that society will not by itself permit changes. Reforms are palliative remedies that addresses the symptoms and not the disease. The change should be able to overhaul the existing structure.

These are the experiences after the Diliman commune and the survival skills that I acquired as a result of my immersion which are very relevant that help me survive martial law, and later in my life.

What do you think is the significance of the Diliman Commune today? How do you see that historical experience after fifty years?

After the Diliman Commune, some of the campus personalities armed themselves, went to the mountains and fought the government because they cannot accept the inequality, callousness and brutality of the Marcos regime. It started the process of widespread political analysis of Philippine Society.

The generation that experienced the Diliman Commune I think are more critical in their thinking of Philippine society. My generation contributed a lot of names in the Batayog nang Kagitignan Monument. They were kidnapped, killed and murdered because of their beliefs that the country deserves more than what were given and available, its citizens, the master and not slaves of the government.

For those surviving, I believe that these experiences influenced them to be more understanding but also more critical, benevolent but steadfast during oppressive times. Many of my generation can fully understand situations wherein farmers and laborers toil endlessly but were still poor. How do we explain mothers and fathers leaving their families to work abroad? How do you explain girls becoming prostitutes in order to live?

The Diliman Commune is our version of the Cry of Pugad Lawin, the start of the Philippine revolution that ended Spanish rule but was hijacked by our new American masters. It started a very significant movement of politicizing the oppressed. It re-ignited a revolutionary movement that is still with us, the success or failure now rests on the coming generations.

After 50 more years, the players in the Diliman commune should all been dead. What remains is to document and propagate the lessons that we can derived from this experience. It is important that exercises like these be continued to further document the Diliman Commune because after 50 more years, all the eyewitnesses will be gone, only documents will remain.