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# The FilAms

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What FilAms  
learned  
About themselves  
from the pandemic

**Cynthia  
Barker**  
Filipina mayor  
in the UK

**'Lion at Heart' author Kai Hayes**  
Her life-changing journey toward personal growth

# The Marcos Dictatorship and the irreparable damage to a family

BY JOEL DAVID

**T**he Quimpos achieved fame (or notoriety, depending on one's perspective) for having had several of them participate in the anti-dictatorship movement during the martial-law regime of Ferdinand Marcos. Since the only genuine opposition during most of this period was provided by the outlawed Communist underground, the Quimpo family, by its association, underwent dramatic upheavals, acute heartbreak, and occasional but still-too-rare moments of grace that would appear almost fantastic had the book been announced as a fiction. The fact that these events actually happened, related by the individuals who directly experienced them, provides the reader with a sense of how irreparably damaging authoritarianism has always been for our particular national experience.

I remember how, as a student at the state university, I could always rely on the fact that my smartest classmates would be sympathetic, if not involved outright, with student-activist causes – in sharp contrast with the situation I later observed as a teacher. “Subversive Lives” provides a panoramic chronicle of how the militarized dictatorship, profitable only to foreign and mercenary local business and religious interests, upheld the worst legacies of colonial education and magic-patriarchal morality: backward thugs armed, fed, and protected by the machinery of an irredeemably corrupted state were allowed to wield life-or-death mastery over the very people in whom, by virtue of their capacity to exercise discernment, creativity, and determination, the future of the nation would have resided.

The Quimpo children, in this respect, may be regarded as representative of the country's best and brightest, had they emerged in another place, another time. Starting out as stereotypical overachievers, the only source of pride of their financially distressed parents, they grew up just when the storm clouds



Activist Susan Quimpo holds a copy of ‘Subversive Lives: A Family Memoir of the Marcos Years,’ which she co-authored with brother Nathan Gilbert Quimpo. She passed away on July 14, 2020. Photo: Philippine Daily Inquirer

of tyranny were gathering: having moved to a cramped apartment near the presidential palace, they were initially witnesses, then active participants, in the increasingly violent protest actions then taking place in their neighborhood.

One of the most powerful dramatic undercurrents in the book is how the Quimpos’ parents coped with the spectacle of several of their children giving up their scholarships, then their bright futures, by moving from school dropouts to wanted figures, hunted down and tortured by the military. One of the sons recounts his reconciliation with his father at the latter’s deathbed, and his story suddenly breaks free of the storytelling mode, addressing his father

in the present as if he were still alive, and as if no reader would wonder: “Talk to me. I’m your son... Why don’t you express all your heartaches, disappointments, and frustrations?”

The siblings never shake free the realization that the paths they chose were not what their parents had hoped for them. If their parents lived long enough, they would have seen that the Quimpo children had been able to attain impressive career trajectories, covering several continents and participating in impactful projects (of which the book serves as group memoir) that would have been the envy of the more privileged families with their utterly predictable and vision-impooverished choices.

Even the sister who had opted for life as an Opus Dei numerary found inevitable parallels between her Order and the fascist system that her siblings were struggling against. The story of the retrieval of their brother’s body is hers to tell, and one would probably wind up smiling, in the face of the long-anticipated tragedy, at how she had managed to muster enough reserves of strength to confront and intimidate the military officers who felt like aggravating her and her grieving female companions, just for the heck of it. When, famished after the confrontation, one of them mistakenly brings one too many orders of Coke and the driver of their vehicle innocently asks who the spare bottle is for, then they turn toward their brother’s body and cry all over again, I could not help turning as well toward the best moments in Pinoy cinema, where our film-authors are so casually able to incite these tender combinations of humor and warmth amid overwhelming sadness.

The book ends with a controversy that has shaken up, and continues to do so, the Philippine revolutionary movement. The Quimpos who were then still involved were major participants, and express the opinion that the leadership they challenged had taken on qualities of the dictatorship that they had fought against and (in a sense) succeeded in ousting. “Subversive Lives” is sprawling, occasionally meandering, sometimes indulgent, and necessarily open-ended. It is also gripping, heartfelt, insightful, and forward-looking, so much so that the aforementioned “flaws” would be a small price to pay for its still-rare literary largesse, just as the Quimpo children’s rebellion has made the country’s journey to a more meaningful present a trip for which we as their witnesses ought to be grateful.

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**Melissa de la Cruz Studio**  
To create content for Disney

**Donald Trump**  
His world according to his niece

**Dr. Emilio Quines**

Reminisces about his wife, the dreamer

Photo by Miguel Braganza

