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Swinging between journalism and literature

I worked as a staff writer for the *Graphic*, a weekly magazine published by Antonio Araneta, from 1969 to 1972, when Ferdinand Marcos imposed martial law on the country. I had just come from The Associated Press (AP), which had its office on Florentino Torres Street in Santa Cruz, Manila, beside the *Manila Times*.

The *Graphic* was a highly political magazine and the members of the staff were all conscious of the social injustice around us and the wide gap between the rich and the poor. Among many other topics, I wrote about landgrabbing, the flashpoints of social unrest (some of the material came from the studies of concerned Jesuits) and, during visits to the South, the feudal structure in the province of Negros Occidental.

I recall the members of a community headed by a Tagalog-speaking German priest who were being evicted from a plot of land that they—who belonged to the marginalized—had carefully cultivated and lived on. The priest and his assistant, a Miss Ramos, approached me to tell me about their condition, and I wrote of their plight. The article was titled “A Community Against the Wall,” and what do you know, the owners must have read it and decided that the informal settlers could keep the land.

HIGH BLOOD

AMADÍS MA. GUERRERO

The community members were very grateful to me, and I felt good about it. It was, to my knowledge, one article of mine that produced concrete results for the dispossessed.

I was and still am basically a writer of short stories; one friendly critic called me a social realist. The Ateneo de Manila background figured prominently in two of my stories which were personal and autobiographical, “Inocencio” and “Retreat.” But soon, as I went into journalism to earn a living, the stories acquired a sociopolitical background—“Children of the City,” “The Mainstream,” “Sakdal,” “Bulletin on the Wires,” “Red Roses for Rebo” and “Urbanidad” (published by this paper’s Lifestyle editor in the *Manila Chronicle*), and “The Media Choristers.” The latter is my most recent story, which came out in the *Philippines Free Press* a few years ago.

“The Mainstream” is about a UP woman activist who joins the underground, as does the male protagonist in “Urbanidad.” “Sakdal” is about a strike in a newspaper, a

metaphor for revolution. “Bulletin on the Wires” recreates in wire-agency style the communist politburo trials in 1950. “Red Roses for Rebo” documents in fictional form the demonstrations leading to the EDSA People Power Revolt of 1986, with the narrator offering a red rose to his martyred buddy.

On the other hand, “The Media Choristers” is set in 1972, with the imposition of martial law breaking up a newspaperman’s choral group because its radical members are being hunted down by the military.

In “Children of the City,” the newsboy ironically named Victor surrenders to the harsh life in the city as, wearily, he accepts a cigarette from his tougher colleagues “while around them swirled the life of the city ...” This story won a Palanca Award for Literature and is often included in anthologies. From time to time I meet young people who tell me they took it up in college. Well, at least, I tell myself wryly, I have written one story that will probably be remembered, a minor classic.

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* LITERATURE

* JOURNALISM