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This world demands the qualities of youth: not a time of life but a state of mind, a temper of the will, a quality of the imagination, a predominance of courage over timidity, of the appetite for adventure over the love of ease. . . Moral courage is a rarer commodity than bravery in battle or great intelligence. Yet it is the one essential, vital quality of those who seek to change a world that yields most painfully to change. . .

Like it or not, we live in interesting times. They are times of danger and uncertainty; but they are also more open to our creative energy than any other time in history. And everyone will ultimately be judged on the effort they have contributed to rebuilding society and the extent to which their ideals and goals have shaped that effort. . . Each of us can work to change a small portion of events, and in the total of all those acts will be written the history of this generation.

It is from numberless diverse acts of courage and belief that human history is shaped. Each time a person stands up for an ideal, or acts to improve the lot of others, or strikes out against injustice, he sends forth a tiny ripple of hope. And crossing each other from a million different centers of energy and daring, those ripples build a current which can sweep down the mightiest walls of oppression and resistance.

— Senator ROBERT F. KENNEDY
Day of Affirmation
Cape Town, South Africa
June 1966

Preface

“What is it in the DNA of a young boy from Bulacan that tells us the Filipino is worth dying for?”

A LEADER CROWNED his speeches with such questions, after reminding audiences that the fastest way from a speaker’s lips or a writer’s pen, to another’s heart, is through stories.

With them he celebrated the sacredness of the ordinary. He paid tribute to heroic acts of simple Filipinos who have made and continue to make a difference: those he knew, encountered, touched, and who touched him. He sought to honor them by passing their lessons on to audiences that were usually in the grip of despair, indifference or cynicism, and that made all the difference.

This book is something he would have wanted to complete if he were still alive today. Like the legacies of many leaders past, this is one that goes beyond his own life. It points toward a multitude of others—who are among us, living simple lives with passion, consistency, and hope. Citizens who are redefining heroism and what it means to be a Filipino: with each quiet deed, one after the other, from the grassroots to overseas, all of them in our midst.

As one of his staff members, one of the things I remember is how he taught us to write everything down. As he liked to say, “Memory is treacherous.”

So a group of friends decided to sit ourselves down and put this book together. What started as a shapeless idea became a snowballing e-mail potluck among friends and loved ones, traveling the *aether* to marshal our passions, ideas, stories,

connections, and leads. With this, we set out to do justice to that legacy.

In selecting these individuals for the book, we were firm that this was not an end-all, be-all list, but a starting point. With this initial stab, we endeavored to find that deep reservoir of heroism that quietly thrives around us. Just like the idealism one tries to nurture, the criteria we forged was unstintingly simple: we chose to write about people who were living lives of concrete action, meaningful results, and enduring integrity. We also wanted to write profiles that captured a cross-section of vocations that define the Filipino—educator, entrepreneur, athlete, activist, artist, contract worker, scientist, student, sibling, parent, partner, and friend. All of them defining democracy and citizenship through their own lives, their own reach toward others. We have found that in a nation with few leaders and too many politicians, often the simplest forms of patriotism can be the most effective.

To stay true to the spirit of the book, we wanted to share the stories of people who were relatively unknown, or at least deserved to be known to more citizens of our country and the world. To this end, we wanted to declare a personal interest. We either know, or know of these amazing souls; and in wanting to learn more about them through this project, this knowledge and effort transformed us irreparably. Every time these stories were repeated and shared with others, they became even more inspiring to both listener and teller. We wanted to share that experience, that unbridled power of example. Because our nation is first and foremost a storytelling culture, we trust that this knowledge gives immediacy to our narrative. And this, in turn, lets us write truthfully about them in a personal, accessible, and hopefully more powerful manner.

We live vicariously, and then by our own hand—word and deed. Where we think our leaders have failed us, the lives of these individuals point out another way and humbly invite us to do our share. Unlike the Kennedy book whose title we drew inspiration from, these profiles are about *ordinary* people making an *extraordinary* difference by their lives and actions. Because these range from a lifetime of random acts of kindness, to programs that are showing the way to eradicate poverty and uplift our sense of nationhood, many of us will find companions in each of these living stories.

“A nation reveals itself not only by what it achieves, but by whom it chooses to honor,” Kennedy himself said. These *kababayans* are but a fraction of the heroes in our midst. We can find so many more to embrace and emulate, if only we have the sense to seek out and recognize them—over and above what society tells us is popular, great, and possible in this age of mistrust and misplaced values. And maybe these examples can help rekindle that spark of heroism within ourselves so we can all come together, and in our own little way help our nation really get on its feet again.

Bringing together these stories of true Filipinos, for all to see, has changed us. We trust it can do the same for those that meet them through this book.

To paraphrase a poet, we are approaching a time where history and hope can rhyme. These fellow *Pinoys* have lifted their voices, and on their behalf we extend an invitation to join that chorus.

This book is dedicated to Raul S. Roco, who showed us that the Filipino is worth living for.

Araw ng Kalayaan
June '07
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