



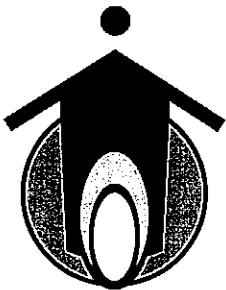
In the  
**Shadows**  
of  
**DAVAO**

Tambayan-Center for the Care of Abused Children, Inc.  
Davao City • 2004

In the  
Shadows  
of  
DAVAO

Humanitarian Center for the Care of Abused Children, Inc.  
Davao City © 2014

*This publication is dedicated to the children of Davao City,  
who live each day with courage and imagination.*



**TAMBAYAN**  
Center for the Care  
of Abused Children, Inc.

**In the Shadows of Davao**

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63 Artiaga St./ P.O. Box 81437 Davao City 8000 Philippines  
Telefax: (082) 222-1025 • email: [tambay@mozcom.com](mailto:tambay@mozcom.com)

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Photography and text: Ryan Anson  
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terre des hommes



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*Cover Image: Santa Ana police arrested three street girls for possession of Rugby glue, and locked them inside a cramped cell for two weeks before transferring them to Davao City Jail. Compared to boys, fewer street girls from Davao are arrested for petty offenses such as theft or substance abuse. Many of them, however, seek companionship and protection in gangs, which often expose their members to violence, drugs, and confrontations with the police.*

# Table of Contents

**6**

## **Bands of Sisters**

On the impoverished fringes of Mindanao's most developed city, teenage girls are joining gangs for companionship and protection. Though not always safer than the homes from which they constantly run away, gangs give their members a sense of belonging otherwise unavailable to them.



**20**

## **Behind Bars**

In the Philippines, it is not unusual for children to experience abuse during arrest and detention despite the existence of laws set up to protect the most marginalized of youth. Davao City police say they no longer arrest children. Instead, they are rescued. Yet kids continue to be slapped, locked up and charged as common criminals by a not so child-friendly system.



**24**

## **Paying the Price for Peace and Order**

More than a decade after it began, vigilantism in Davao shows no sign of abating. Child rights organizations claim that 100 suspected thieves and drug dealers were summarily executed in 2003. For family members who have lost loved ones in the extrajudicial battle against crime, the quest for peace and order has exacted the steepest of prices.



**38**

## **A Place of Refuge**

Street girls know of at least one place they can go when life at home turns sour. Established in 1996, Tambayan-Center for the Care of Abused Children, Inc. supports these teenagers by providing them with access to an array of services and a welcoming space for self-expression.



# A Humble Plea II

We hope that you listen,  
Hear the reasons behind what we have to say.  
Though you believe we are a plague to society,  
Understand we are only victims  
Of drugs and violence.

We do not force you to agree,  
With every reason that we children have.  
If you truly believe we are a plague to society,  
We ask you not to let us see,  
That you really think about us this way.  
For we are deeply hurt and pained,  
By the judgement of every person around us.

It is our humble plea,  
That you listen to every reason behind what we have to say.  
And that you would not humiliate us, accuse us of our sins.  
Instead, help us to change  
First ourselves... then our society.

*Analie Lucion, 13-year-old girl from Agdao, Davao City*

# Foreword

Human rights are universal and unconditional. They transcend the boundaries of class, religion, geography, gender, political beliefs, ethnicity, and age. Human rights are rendered more urgent if they pertain to certain groups within societies who are more vulnerable and cannot always protect themselves from abuse and exploitation. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child recognizes that children are indeed vulnerable and sets out to define special rights that promote equality and inclusion of children in mainstream society.

It is therefore a contradiction to see that in reality, children do not equally enjoy these rights. In Davao City, more and more adolescents are leaving their homes to be on the streets. Most go home daily, a few never return. Some are in school. Others have lost all hope of ever going back, but learn how to survive the dangers of the streets. Most do survive, while there are those who do not. Almost all are out there not by choice, but were driven out into the cold for various reasons.

They often endure by defying expectations of what children should be and how childhood should be lived—they are drop outs, belong to gangs, do drugs, engage in sex, steal once in a while or are involved in crime. For failing to conform, they are dealt with harshly and in many ways with heart-rending violence. Each child's story underscores a common experience of abuse, exploitation, and discrimination, and reveals how society has fallen short in its obligation to protect their rights. Though highly visible, street children are still viewed through unseeing eyes that do not want to confront and be confronted. They are not seen for who they are because they are embarrassing reminders of how society has failed them.

Yet even if they are not living up to expectations, this does not in any way diminish their entitlement to their rights as children. *In the Shadows of Davao* challenges us to face this compelling truth. This monograph, lovingly prepared and surely not without much painstaking effort by Tambayan Center's staff and the children, hopes to move us to question how we view these children and respond to their concerns. It also investigates the city's disturbing streak of summary executions which have left mothers without sons, and daughters without fathers. May the photographs and searing stories make us listen and act with compassion toward their muted cries for help. And may we realize that with children, there is always hope.

**Alberto Cacayan**  
Country Coordinator, Philippines  
Terre des Hommes Germany  
February 2004

# Bands of Sisters

**D**eep inside Davao City's Maa Cemetery, a band of girls gathers to remember one of their own. The blistering tropical sun bears down relentlessly upon heads hung in sorrow, but not even the heat can keep the members of Warshock from singing one last song to their beloved Macao.

As the remembrance ceremony begins, Cherybev inserts stolen flowers into empty mango juice cans while Che-che lays bags of spaghetti on top of their friend's cemented grave. Relatives squeeze together under a black umbrella and stand beside four girls sitting on a pile of untidy graves.

It is September 28, the Warshock gang's second foundation anniversary. No one, however, can celebrate with anything but tears.

Kebs hits the play button on a portable stereo, and "Ocean Deep" pours out of the speakers with its idyllic message of love and sacrifice, reminding everyone of the countless nights they hummed their friend's favorite tune. The song ends, and the Warshocks huddle together in front of Macao's tombstone.

"We'll miss your smile, the advice you gave to each and every one of us, and all the happy moments we had together," Jerlyn reads from a farewell note. Stooping down to the newly cut marker, she lights her eulogy with a red candle, holding the folded piece of paper over the flame until it crumbles into ashes. The Warshocks follow suit and, one by one, burn written promises to the friend whom they call "Cao." Most pledge that they will not hunt down her killer. Others vow to give up their vices. All remember how hilarious Macao could be at parties, and how tough she got when trouble came knocking.

Rarely does a girl from one of the city's 150 gangs get killed. When riots erupt, it's usually groups of boys who stab each other with broken bottles and *indyan panas* ("Indian arrows"). Yet the streets are just as mean to girls as they are to boys. Both cling to gangs for protection and a sense of belonging. But for teenage girls who have been neglected or abused, gangs provide their members with a

place of refuge otherwise unavailable to them.

"It's not surprising that girls are forming their own groups to meet their adolescent needs," says Pilgrim Bliss Gayo-Guasa, coordinator of Tambayan-Center for the Care of Abused Children Inc., a nongovernment organization that works with Davao City's teenaged street girls. "It's an expression of self-help and a structure in which they support each other. One has to be part of a group to survive the streets." Though not always safer than the homes from which they constantly run away, gangs are where identities are formed and taboos broken. They are where girls learn how to kiss, how to avoid arrest, and how to get what they want when they can't get it from their families. Drugs, prostitution, and violence may be part of their experience on the streets. Few, however, have a say in the matter when going home means facing a heavy-handed father. With no one to answer to, the world is theirs to explore, to test its limits and explode conventional norms of who a girl should or should not be.

## Shadowy Fringe

That world is Davao City—Mindanao Island's largest and most economically vibrant urban center, and a salad bowl of cultures, languages, and religions. Tempted by its robust commercial environment and much-vaunted peace and order record, thousands of economic migrants from all





*As Ann-ann reaches for a cigarette, Melay, center, bears the pain from Dodong's homemade tattoo gun as he inscribes the name of a murdered gang member on her ankle. Melay and Ann-ann belong to Warshock, one of Davao City's all-girl gangs. Teenage girls join these groups to cope with abuse in their communities, but often encounter more physical and sexual violence the longer they stay on the streets.*

over the central and southern Philippines have flocked here over the last few years to try their luck at a better future. In a region wracked by political and ethnic violence, many feel that it's the only place that offers any semblance of promise.

While some from this city of 1.3 million have been raking in the cash, many others have never seen their portion of the pie. Unable to find adequate employment, hundreds of thousands of laborers wind up living in huge squatter areas along the polluted coastline, just beyond the view of Davao's newer malls and burgeoning strips of stores. If Davao is a glittering boomtown, as the tourist and business brochures crow, then this is Boomtown's shadowy fringe.

Every night, 3,000 children roam the city's narrow thoroughfares. Approximately 10 percent are girls. As children of poor families, they grow up in communities saturated with hardship. Frustrated with the shortage of outlets for self-expression and tired of the kind of domestic violence that poverty frequently engenders, many of them leave home. Sometimes it's just for a night or two. A handful never return.

Lablab's mother walked out on her family when she was five years old. Her father regularly beat her up, as well as her older brother who was later stabbed to death by a member of the *Notoryus* gang. To escape the abuse, she joined





*After drinking rum and getting high off Rugby, Jik-jik ignores Kin-Kin and makes out with her boyfriend at their gang's hangout spot. Like most of the 20 girl members of Demonyo sa Pagasa (DSP), Kin-Kin and Jik-jik left home and found protection in one of Bankerohan's mixed gangs.*

Tropang Baog, an all-girl gang that initiated new members by requiring them to slash their own wrists and endure a barrage of slaps. For 12-year-old Lablab, it didn't matter. A little pain for a few minutes was better than a childhood of suffering at the hands of someone who was supposed to take care of her. Unlike other recruits, however, Lablab got off the hook because she knew one of Baog's leaders.

Over the next five years, she rolled with Baog, which had staked out its territory in Bankerohan's squalid market. "My friends don't hurt me," she says. "They understand, and I consider them to be my sisters." Lablab spent most of her time hanging out with the 22-member gang. Every now and then she went back to her grandmother's house to give younger siblings money for food and school supplies. In 2001, gang life got more dangerous. A girl from the Pahn group stabbed Lablab while she was pregnant with her first child, a wound whose ugly scar she says will prevent her from realizing her dream of becoming an entertainer in Japan. The 17-year-old still thinks about taking revenge. "I'm not afraid if someone tries to kill me," she says. "I'm always trying to find a way to get back at the girl who stabbed me."

From the time she was a toddler, Lablab's life has been an uphill battle for survival. Harmed by family members and harassed by a public that pejoratively calls street girls *tambays* or *buntogs*, she persevered. "People say that if you're a tambay, you're heartless," she says. "It's not true. I'm willing to give up everything for my brothers and sisters."

Gang culture is not as rough for everyone as it is for Lablab. Davao's gangs usually start out as cliques in school or in the neighborhood where they are called *barkadas*. They become more territorial once their members drop out, and eventually function as families for girls bound together by similar experiences of abuse and an adolescent desire for independence. "It's not really poverty that pushes a girl, or a child for that matter, to the street because a child can cope even if there's no food," says Guasa. "But if there's violence in relationships and no support, the tendency for children is to spend more time with peers than at home. Being on the streets offers greater freedom for children. No one sets the rules. If they get abused in the streets, they can fight back. But if they get abused at home, they can't beat up their father."

Not everyone is so sympathetic. In a city where

ironfisted public safety measures have instilled a nervous reverence for authority, tattooed teenagers loitering in back alleys provoke the ire of people who like to think of themselves as upstanding citizens. The more conservative residents don't hesitate to voice their disdain for idle-looking bands of girls whom they assume are up to no good. Filipino society generally believes they should instead finish school or help raise a big family. Girls definitely shouldn't smoke, and heaven forbid if they have more than one boyfriend. "They feel no one understands them, and everyone is there to condemn them. Society sees girls in gangs as rebellious and without morals," says Angela Librado, a city councilor and chair of the Committee on Women, Children, and Family Relations.

In 1993, Davaoños began labeling these girls buntogs, a word in the Cebuano language that refers to quails that hop from nest to nest. On the street, being tagged a buntog is worse than being called a prostitute. If they have to be labeled, most girls prefer being called a *chay*, which means "tough" or "street smart." Rine, a senior Warshock member, hates it when people shout out buntog when she walks by. "No one should be called buntog, even those who don't go home," she says. "We're not like that. We still know what's good and what's bad."

## New Recruits

Rine was 14 years old when she joined a gang named ISDA. Hooking up with ISDA—an acronym meaning Isang Simpleng Drug Adik ("a simple drug addict")—made sense to Rine because her older sister was its founder, and she longed to escape her father's daily thrashings. "I wanted to experience life as a gang member, and needed people to talk to about my problems," she would say three years later.

Rine remembers her initiation like it happened the night before. As a new recruit, she had to drink a bottle of cough syrup. "You usually get high off 10mL," she recalls. "But they forced me to take four times that amount."

She eventually gave up drugs and fun with ISDA. Rine could not, however, give up the camaraderie of friends. In a district like Agdao where family ties can break down as easily



*Warshock girls celebrate Brian's birthday with a group of boys from Diskarte and Silac next to the rocky seawall, a popular nightspot for teens living in the densely populated squatter settlement of Agdao. Agdao, home to many of the city's gangs, is also a hunting ground for vigilantes who have killed 215 people—including 18 minors—since 1998.*



*After Jik-jik gets her fix, Kin-kin inhales a bag full of Rugby, an industrial solvent commonly used by street kids in the Philippines. Kin-kin left her home in Compostela Valley Province at the age of eight, and headed toward Davao to look for work.*

as the water service, there were plenty of other groups to join. Her cousin Tata asked if she wanted to check out Notoryus, a gang composed of male and female members whose reputation for violence reached as far south as General Santos City. But when vigilantes killed several of its members living in Bankerohan, Rine's older sister warned her to stay away from that part of town.

One night, a former ISDA member named Palang suggested that Rine, Macao, and Dimple make their mark in Agdao's



*Warshock members say farewell to their friend Macao just after her burial in Davao City's Maa Cemetery. On the eve of her enrollment in nursing school, Macao was stabbed to death by a girl from a rival gang. It was the first known murder of a female in a gang fight.*

Gotamco and Santo Niño neighborhoods by creating their own group. It sounded good, but they first needed a name. Palang started calling them Warshock. "Warshock," says Rine, "means that we're the best lovers, but can be like war freaks if we're on a bad trip."

On September 28, 2001, Warshock came onto the street scene just as other gangs began crumbling in the wake of a police crackdown on youth hooliganism. Its membership grew from 18 to 31 members within months. Dimple, Palang's younger sister, became their leader and immediately banned slapping as an initiation rite. Instead, she required junior members to buy senior members a gallon of potent coconut wine called *tuba*—a small price to pay to chill with one of the more reputable groups in Agdao.



**MACAO'S MOTHER** removes a candle and a young chick from Macao's coffin on the last day of her daughter's wake. During wakes for murder victims, relatives separate a chick from its mother and place it on top of the deceased's coffin where it chirps and pecks all night, noises that symbolically gnaw at the conscience of the suspect until justice has been found.

"Even uninitiated members would say they belong to Warshock if they were getting bullied at school," says Rine. Junior members began looking up to her and Macao as leaders after Dimple left for Japan to work as an entertainer. They gathered at their new spot near Santo Niño's barren seawall almost every night to talk about pressing issues regarding parents and boyfriends, or smoke a little weed if someone had extra cash. Though Dimple often telephoned to check in on the group, Rine and Macao made decisions about how much money to spend at discos and where to hide if the police caught them hanging out after the city's 10pm curfew.

## Bloodied Streets

As Warshock's reputation grew, so did its visibility. Cops from Santa Ana, the largest population zone in Davao and home to more than 80 street gangs, intensified their operations against warring bands of youth armed with *chakornos* (brass knuckles) and *sumpaks* (homemade guns). Warshock girls did not normally fight in the riots. They left that up to the SRB (Special Rose Brothers) and CIA (Choy Innocent Angels) boys who promised to protect the Warshocks if they got swept up in the ruckus. During one fight in 2001, police swooped down on the rioters and picked up Rine along with several other gang members. It was her fifth arrest. "I was held for so long because the police saw my tattoos and cigarette burns," she remembers.

Nothing, however, prepared her for the night Macao was murdered. A year had gone by since Gena fought Macao at a disco. Tension seemed to have eased between Warshock and another gang from Bankerohan. It was time for another party. Palang decided to invite Gena and her friends to a *despedida* (going-away celebration) for her younger sister Dimple who was scheduled to fly back to Japan the following day. Since the Warshocks would be losing their leader for the next year, most of them met up in Bankerohan where they shared a few rounds of beer at a videoke bar. By midnight, the two groups had begun exchanging stares. Ready for a rumble, they stepped outside. Within minutes, one of Gena's friends pulled out a 10-inch knife and fatally stabbed Macao and wounded Rine.

News of the city's first girl-gang-related murder jolted the teenage underworld. After Macao's funeral, five Warshock members waited a day or two before getting their fallen leader's name inscribed on their bodies. It did not matter if Dodong's tattoo gun was homemade and used red ink from a Bic pen. Macao was their precious Macao, and deserved to be memorialized-gang style.

## Lopsided Leadership

There are not many groups like Warshock in Davao. Most girls get sucked into gangs simply because they have



*Love-love, left, struggles to talk to Dimple as Amor mimics their conversation using a broken cell phone. Dimple, Warshock's founder had called from Japan to ask about Macao's funeral, and to find out how her friends spent the money she sent for the gang's second foundation anniversary celebration. Dimple still acts as Warshock's leader even though she lives in Japan.*

boyfriends who are established members. In many of the city's mixed gangs, the guys call the shots. They decide the date for parties, how much money everyone should chip in for alcohol, and who to send to the frontline during riots, says Taba, a founding leader of Hostage. For the most part, boys use girls to attract new members. "The girls are here pretty much for our pleasure," says Taba. Though the girls can advise each other on matters of the heart, he and three other founders have the final say about cash and turf.

Tina heard about Hostage from a neighbor soon after the group's establishment in 2000. Although it already controlled much of Boulevard's Piapi market area in Barangay 22, the gang wanted to expand its 40-strong membership. "They need sisters," Tina's neighbor had told her. "Sisters" or "wives" were euphemisms for girlfriends. So she joined, and became Hostage secretary as well as Jun-jun's girlfriend. Being part of the first batch of members and having a Hostage boyfriend also exempted her from undergoing the gang's belt-whipping initiation ritual.

In the two years that she was an active member, Tina claims the boys took pretty good care of her. Though not from their barangay, she always knew where to go to find a place to sleep, food to eat, and people who could get her off the hook if she got arrested. If they did catch her, Tina says, the *tanods* or community police would hit her on the head with truncheons. Last year, she decided to distance herself from Hostage and moved in with her new boyfriend in Isla Verde. "I'm tired because it's too painful for my body," Tina says.

Though new girl recruits expanded the gang's hold on territory and gave the boys something pretty to show off, Taba says they could sometimes be difficult to control. In fact, he partially blames them for causing the protracted



*Oliy argues with Robelyn, the leader of Batang Rugby Girls, over who gets which half of the last cigarette at one of their hangout spots above Bankerohan's fish market.*

conflict between Hostage and its archenemy from Barangay 21, Wangbu. Jubel, another Hostage member, adds that girls ignited fights when they gossiped or traded accusations over who stole whose panties. After triggering an argument, they usually melted into the background while the boys fought it out. In the early days of the gang war, boys from both sides would grab their butterfly knives and indyan panas if word got out that something had happened to one of their

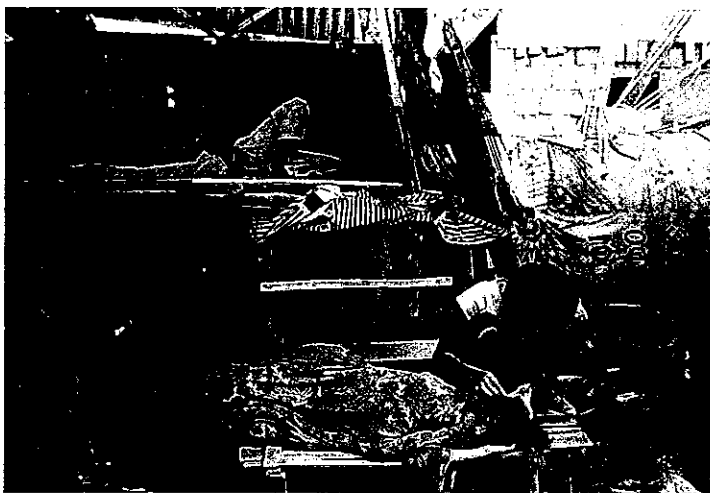
women, and rush off to engage the enemy. By 2002, Wangbu and Hostage were fighting for the sake of fighting. Girls delivered "love letters" which invited the rival gang to a brawl on the beach. A Hostage member died during one of the riots, and the mayhem eventually became so chaotic that neighborhood officials ordered the two enemies to iron out their differences and sign a peace pact.

Hostage began to disintegrate soon after it made peace with Wangbu. The boys were getting older and had to work while some of the girls got pregnant or were trafficked to Manila or Cebu for prostitution. Most of the remaining Hostages agree, however, that they just got tired of the violence. "We were supposed to support each other, not fight," Jubel says.

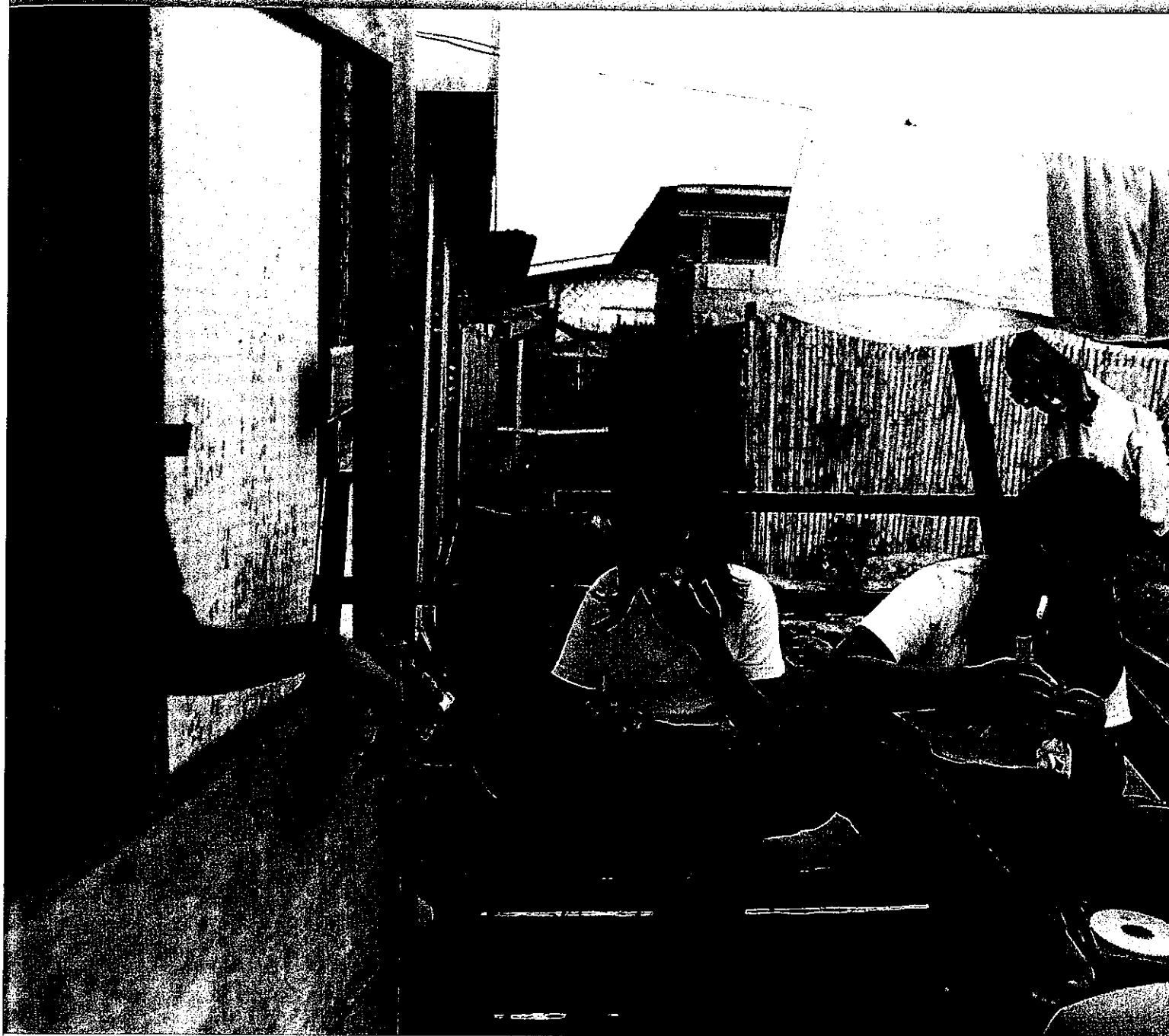
### **Hanging Out**

Birthdays rarely make for new memories in Warshock territory, especially when there's no money for beer.

It is in moments like these when friends are particularly useful. Unfortunately for Melay, her friends are flat broke. Frustration sets in as she prepares herself for another gift-less party. At least her parents are not fighting tonight. Empty



*On another idle afternoon, Oliy picks lice from Joy's scalp at their house near the Pagasa section of Bankerohan. Many of Demonyo sa Pagasa's girl members ran away from home and now live entirely on their own in this tiny shack next to the Davao River. Male members of DSP take care of the girls' food and clothing needs, and sleep with them on the second floor of the gang's cramped house.*



*Warshock girls send text messages to friends during Melay's 14th birthday party. Although they did not have money for food or beer, the Warshocks followed their tradition of keeping vigil at the birthday girl's house all night long.*

pockets, however, do not stop the Warshocks from finding a reason to hang out. And there's no way Melay's gang would violate the tradition of keeping vigil at the birthday girl's house, even if there's no space for sitting in the two-room shack.

The last time there was cause for celebration, they had money.

Two days after the Warshock's second foundation anniversary, a package arrived from Japan containing P5,000—almost US\$100. They knew it had to be from Dimple who periodically sent the gang money for special events. Half of the cash went to Rosemac, Dimple's boyfriend and founder of an all-boy gang called Diskarte, and half went to the girls for the food, liquor, and marijuana. That afternoon, Rosemac bought a cellphone,

which he allows the Warshocks to use when Dimple calls from abroad to talk to them about boyfriend and family problems. And Ann-ann bought several kilos of fish which they shared at the seawall before heading off to another beach to get high. Although the videoke machine broke and an old friend told everyone she got pregnant by a Korean tourist, it had been a night to remember.

This time, however, nothing has arrived from Japan. So, like most other nights, the girls sit back and hope someone else will foot the bill for their fun.

The hours pass by, and Annie, Amor, Rine, and Melay wait impatiently for the boys to show up. Rine pulls out the gang's single birthday gift for Melay—a marijuana joint mixed with a little tobacco—and re-rolls it. Amor shuffles



*A group of gang members spend another day of confinement at the government-run Pag-Asa Home for Girls after they were rescued from a local brothel. Tambayan Center estimates that 80 percent of street girls engage in some form of survival sex during their adolescent years.*

through a stack of Siakol CDs, anticipating that someone will bring a stereo system.

As the sun dips behind Mt. Apo, treacherous black clouds form above Davao Gulf's murky waters. The girls grab a thin blue tarp and erect a flimsy canopy outside a neighbor's house. By the time the boys from the Silac gang arrive, a torrential downpour begins hurling sheets of rain on top of hundreds of rusty tin roofs and uncovered heads caught in the open. Fierce waves pour over the cracked seawall, dousing any chance of using a stereo on dry ground.

Melay realizes it is up to her to save the night from utter disappointment.

Seeing that the Silacs failed to bring alcohol and that the monsoon rains have just drenched their spot under the tarp, she digs up a few small bills saved from selling apples with her father to buy the beverage everyone wants. It doesn't matter that it's her own party because she is the only Warshock who can every now and then afford such temporal luxuries. And since she is also the youngest junior member of the gang, Melay knows that the senior members expect it of her.

She had redeemed her own 14<sup>th</sup> birthday. Yet Melay could not stop thinking about her older sister Inday whom she wished was there. "I thought she would come home to drink with us," she says. Melay had just visited Inday earlier that afternoon at a shelter for rescued street girls, hoping that the City Social Services and Development Office might soon release her from protective custody. Not yet, the shelter's house parents told the younger sibling and other Warshocks who went to visit two of the gang's members. Maybe by Christmas. Their reunion would have to wait.

### **Flesh Den**

Only a few days earlier, the two sisters were singing songs together at Jogger's, a popular entertainment spot for girls from the Warshock, Wangbu, and Sunlovers gangs.

For months, women of all ages from different parts of town had flocked to this obscure city block where even police from Santa Ana Precinct knew that the bar on the corner was selling more than just beer. Like Melay and Inday, half of the 15 girls who regularly spent time at Jogger's only went there to be with



their gangs or buy cheap barbecued meat. The pimps, known on the street as *bugaws*, controlled the other half. Peer pressure from her gangmates and an empty pocket ultimately pushed Tisay into a world from which she almost did not escape.

Several months ago, Tisay had grown weary of fighting with her parents. "Even if I didn't do anything wrong, they'd always yell at me," she says. In September 2003, she left home and moved in with some friends from the Sunlovers gang. Tisay's friend Wendy soon brought her to Jogger's where many Wangbu members were engaged in prostitution. At first, she just watched the pimps hustling other girls. She preferred cuddling with Cherybev, her Warshock girlfriend. It wasn't long, however, before she noticed that many of her peers began showing up for "duty" wearing designer shirts and perfume. "I saw my friends with new things, and I got jealous," she says.

After Tisay moved to a one-room hovel with two pimps, she says they forced her to work all night beside Joggers' smoky meat stand. "They told me to help them look for money for rent, and said that I could buy lots of nice stuff if I did this," she recalls. The pimps, usually young gay men, sold her to local residents for P500, and to foreign customers for three times that amount. Each negotiation favored the pimp who demanded 50 to 60 percent of Tisay's cut. Some men took her to the city's upscale establishments, including the luxurious Marco Polo and Apo View hotels. Others drove her around for a while before paying for a "shine" (masturbation) or sex in their car. Still others treated her to a fancy dinner just to talk and listen to her problems.

Tisay's worst experience, however, happened with the very men assigned to protect children like her. One late night, two policemen stopped their mobile patrol car on a street where Tisay and a friend from Wangbu had gone to work. The plainclothes officers told the girls to get inside. Assuming that they had been arrested for breaking curfew, they climbed into the back of the car. As soon as they arrived at the station, the men took the two girls to one of the investigation rooms, locked the door, gave them P400 and forced the girls to have sex for hours. They finally managed to escape by squeezing through a small hole in the station's wall after pretending to go the bathroom.

In mid-November, a multi-sectoral task force raided Jogger's and placed Tisay and 10 other prostituted children in a government-run shelter called the Pag-Asa Home for Girls. After a month of counseling, Tisay looks forward to re-enrolling in Santa Ana High School when she is released. "When my mother kicked me out, I wanted to prove to her I could stand on my own. But I realized I can't," she admits after confessing her nightmarish ordeal to her parents. Although she is beginning to internalize the extent of her exploitation, Tisay hesitates to acknowledge that the policemen raped her. "I was always shy to say no if a customer already paid," she says.



*Teenage girls look for customers outside Jogger's, a bar that prostituted children as young as 14 years old. Police and members of the city council and business bureau raided Jogger's in early November 2003, arrested several pimps, and took 11 girls into protective custody. Girls on the streets face dangerous circumstances that boys rarely encounter, including unwanted pregnancies and sexual exploitation.*



*Rine waits to get a tattoo of Macao's name on her leg while Inday examines her waistline at a friend's house in the squatter settlement of Agdao.*

## Sex for Survival

Survival sex is widely practiced in gangs. They are where girls first learn how to indulge their adolescent concepts of love. And sexual intercourse, if it comes to that, is not necessarily consensual. Male gang members often manipulate girls and convince them to use their bodies as bargaining chips for protection or other necessities like food and cigarettes. Pure physical contact, whether or not it involves violence or an exchange of goods or cash, is equated with emotional love. Eventually, when a girl's self-esteem deteriorates to an all-time





*Marielle, left, and Jik-jik watch Annex Two slash her wrist behind a neighbor's house on the banks of the murky Davao River. Although sometimes done to cope with emotional abuse, self-mutilation is also used as an initiation rite for new DSP members.*

low, and she starts to believe that she is nothing but a buntog, then giving a blowjob to a taxi driver will not surprise anyone if it is the only way to survive in a city that chastises her. "Many of them think they are damaged goods and that there is nothing else to be thrown away. It's like a form of internalized discrimination," says Tambayan Center coordinator Pilgrim Bliss Gayo-Guasa.

Guasa estimates that more than half of the 875 girls whom Tambayan has assisted experienced their first sexual encounter as a result of force. Quite a few were raped by family members. About 80 percent of them later fell into the hands of pimps who preyed on their vulnerable situations. Though gangs are not necessarily a gateway to prostitution, the closeness of their relationships, coupled with desperate economic needs and the persuasive psychology of abuse, make the choice to try it out that much easier. If they do make that decision, it exposes them to the kinds of reproductive health issues that boys do not even think about, including early pregnancy and greater susceptibility of infection with sexually transmitted diseases or HIV.

The increased prevalence of child prostitution and trafficking has alarmed an array of local and national child rights advocates. It is thought that there are as many as 100,000 prostituted children in the Philippines, according to a national organization called ECPAT (End Child Prostitution, Child Pornography and Trafficking of Children for Sexual Purposes). Attorney Anjanette Saguisag, ECPAT's coordinator in Cebu City, says that many girls from Davao are promised jobs by managers of *casas* (brothels), recruitment agencies, and sometimes by parents or aunts, but end up getting trafficked for prostitution in Cebu and Manila. In the Philippines, particularly in Davao's disadvantaged communities where the average family of six lives off P150 (less than US\$3) a day, making money is a responsibility that extends right down to the youngest child. Relatives will often convince girls that working as a "Guest Relations Officer"—the Philippine euphemism for bargirl—is the only way to help out.

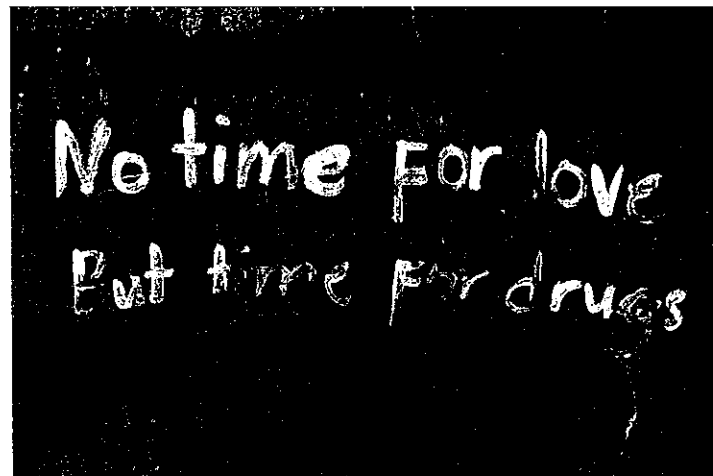
City councilor Angela Librado argues that more needs to be done to teach girls about reproductive health and the risks of prostitution. Current public school curricula, for example,



*Inday restrains Fe's arms as Long-long threatens to slap her after getting drunk and arguing over stolen shoes and a popular TV sitcom called "Meteor Garden." Although important for survival, gangs are not always hospitable to girls, particularly mixed gangs such as Demonyo sa Pagasa whose male members often project their leadership through violence against weaker members.*

should be revised because they do not address taboo subjects like sexuality. "There are many people in the community who don't understand them or don't explain to them the changes in their bodies," says Librado. "They go out at night because they haven't gotten the answers from their teachers and parents."

In the meantime, a few programs and an assortment of laws exist to help girls cope with the dangers inherent in street life. Scores of them go to Tambayan's drop-in center to get a cheap meal, attend seminars on STDs and talk about issues they face in their gangs and homes. More than 100 of the city's 180 barangays have activated their respective Barangay Councils for the Protection of Children (BCPCs) which monitor cases of physical and sexual violence. In 1992, the Philippine government signed into legislation Republic Act 7610, a law that protects child victims of grave sexual abuse and penalizes establishments that prostitute or traffic minors. Incidentally, ECPAT's Saguisag says that since RA 7610 was passed, not one bar or brothel owner in the Philippines has been held directly liable for prostituting children.



*Old graffiti on the wall of Tambayan's drop-in center reveals where some gang members place their priorities. Not all of them use drugs, but given that no one sets the rules on the street, many teenagers love the independence and freely explore their adolescent curiosities.*

## Dodging the Davao Death Squad

Surviving Davao's underworld sometimes means staying at home. Rine's shack in Santo Niño, however, isn't the most peaceful place to be. Every now and then cooking pots fly, fists start pummeling flesh, and tears stream down the face of younger brothers who don't know why their father is hitting their elder sister. But Rine says she can handle the punches if means staying alive.

A few weeks before Rine was stabbed in Bankerohan, her mother received a warning from a man whom she suspected of being connected with a vigilante group known as the Davao Death Squad (DDS). "Your daughter needs to stop what she is doing," the man threatened. "She should stop hanging out and coming home late at night. If she doesn't, she'd better hide, or else..." He didn't have to finish the sentence. Rine's mother knew what the dot-dot-dot meant. She decided not to tell her daughter about the frightening ultimatum until after she had recovered from her stab wounds.

Rine now believes that her name has been placed on the order of battle, a list of infamy that has haunted the urban poor for the last several years. Like other potential targets of the DDS, she belongs to a gang, has been arrested numerous times for curfew violation and drug possession, and recently popped up on San Pedro Police Precinct's radar after getting stabbed. This concerns both Rine and child rights organizations like Tambayan Center and Kabataan Consortium Inc., who suspect that city officials and police not only coddle the motorcycle-riding hitmen, but supply them with names of child offenders to mark for liquidation.

Rine doesn't want to become part of the burgeoning casualty list. She moved in with Dodong, Santo Niño's tattoo artist, with whom she feels more secure, and rarely hangs out with Warshock in public places.

Young people like Rine never know when they may take a bullet in the head just for being a poor kid in a gang. "Before, it was easier to join a gang because we didn't have to fear being killed," says Rine. "Now it is dangerous. I'm afraid because I didn't do anything wrong, and now I might die for no reason."



*After marking their gang's territory with the tag, "Warshock: Still Alive, Die Hard," Ann-ann and her cousin Mac-mac enjoy a sultry afternoon on Agdao's beach. Like most members of Warshock, Ann-ann dropped out of school due to a lack of resources, and headed for the streets to be with her friends. Like any typical girl gang in Davao, Warshock is slowly breaking up as the girls get older, become pregnant, or are trafficked to Manila and Japan for prostitution.*



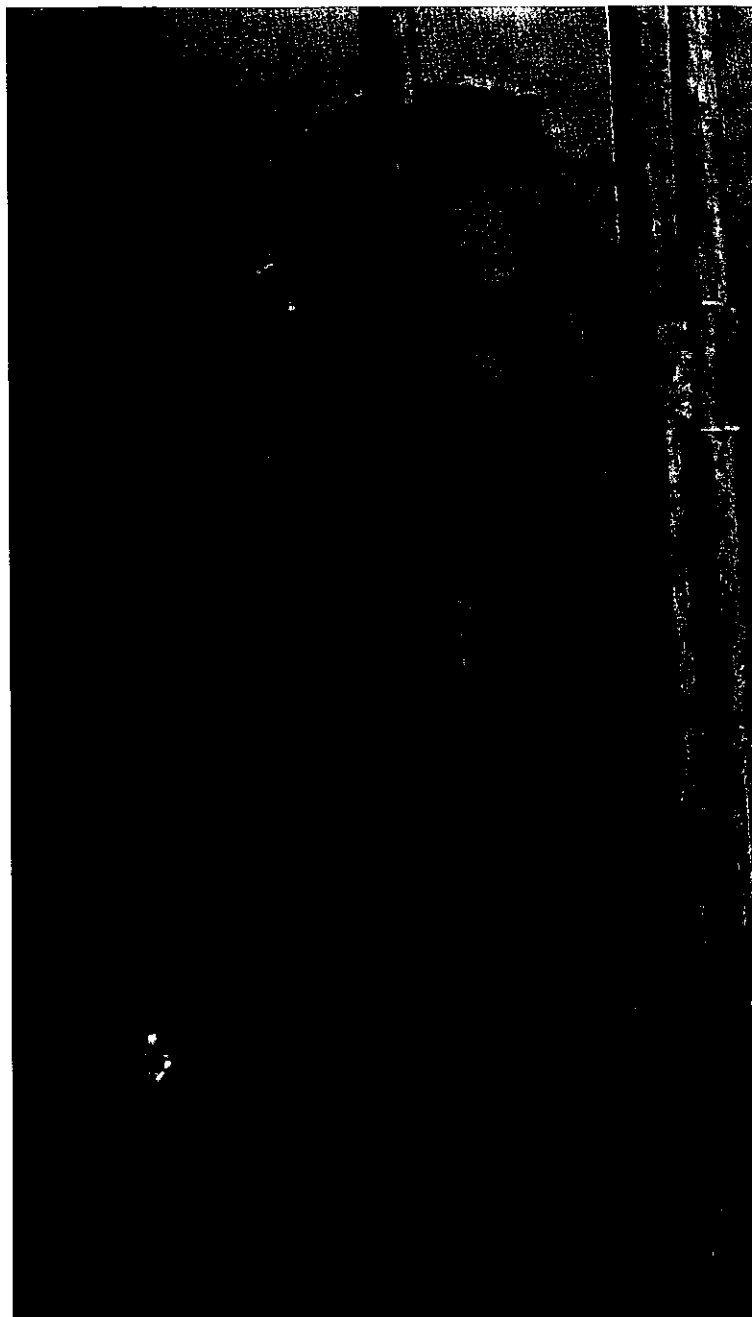
# Behind Bars

**I**t's rush hour in Agdao, and the public market springs to life after a drawn-out lull in business. City residents flock here in droves to buy cheap fish and even cheaper flowers. Second-hand clothes dealers rake in the coins from garments sold on rickety tables while restaurant owners serve beer to exhausted laborers. Everyone has a job to do and a place to go.

For out-of-school youth, the bustling commercial center offers plenty of opportunities to have fun, and even get into a little trouble. Some evade the watchful gaze of their mothers and sneak off for a smoke. A few of the more daring kids look for cell phones to snatch or food to steal. Others find a secluded corner in which to sniff a bagful of intoxicating fumes from Rugby-brand glue.

"Kebs" didn't feel like getting high tonight. But her friends from the Bikil Gamay Bigay gang wanted to hang out a while longer. Since there was nothing else going on, she decided to stay. Vendors had already started to pack up their wares as customers trickled out of the market. With less cover to shield them from observant eyes, they decided to relax inside an unlit jeepney. One of the boys later got out of the vehicle and began sniffing glue in full view of exiting shoppers. An off-duty policeman spotted him from across the street, and moved in for the arrest. Unfortunately for Kebs, she happened to be standing right next to the boy with the plastic bag. The 17-year-old says the plainclothes cop then hauled her and her friends off to a nearby precinct without reading them their rights or explaining the charges. But that was after he slapped her and warned all of them not to run or else face the vicious bite of his dog.

In compliance with Philippine law, the Women and Children's Protection Desk officer contacted the girl's parents the following morning, but they did not have bail money at the time. "She needed to learn her lesson," her mother had admitted later. Kebs was on her own. She spent the next three weeks locked up in a cramped, 10x15-foot cell. Santa Ana police transferred her to Davao City Jail where she stayed for another 10 days. Frustrated with the snail-paced judicial

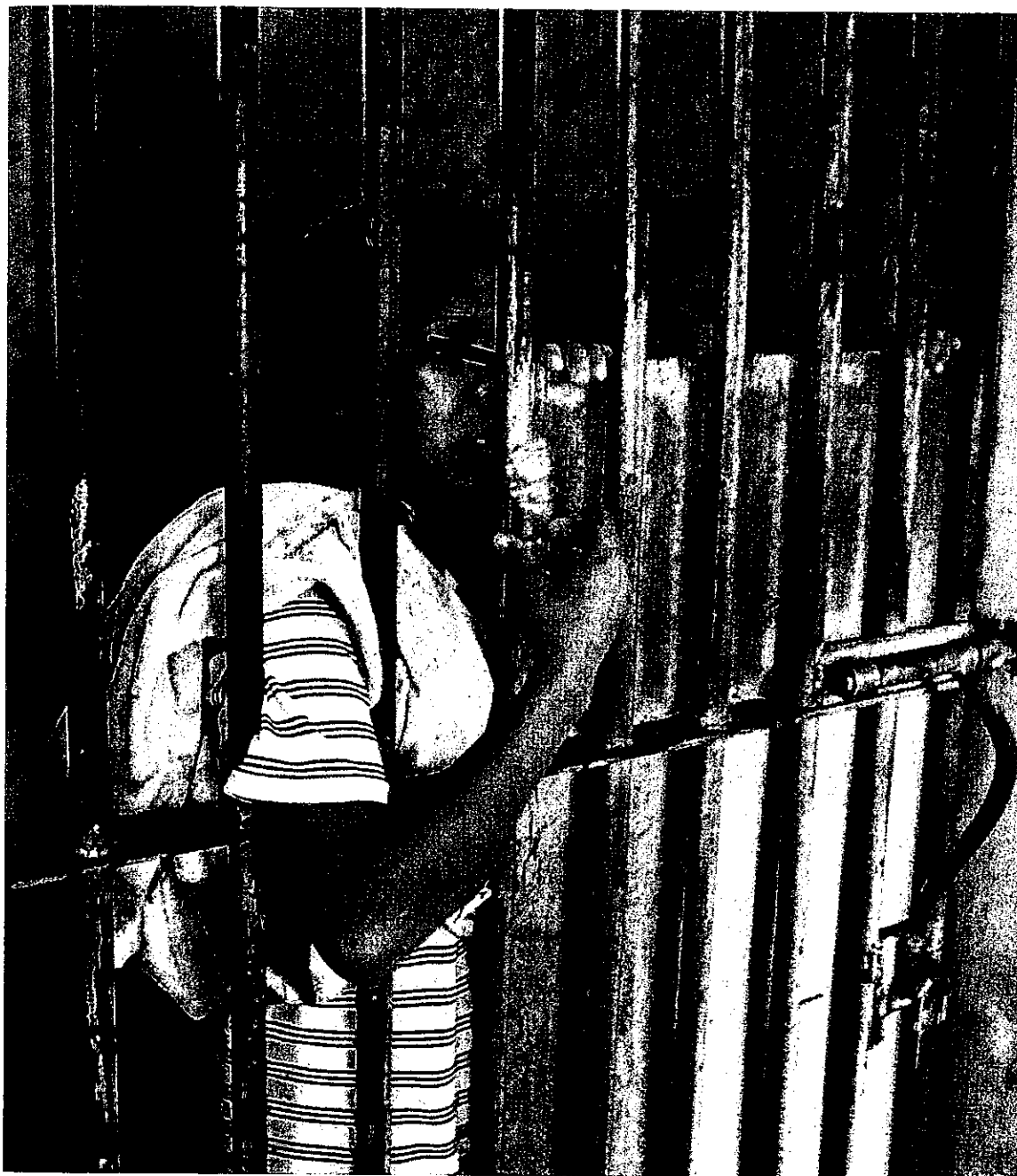


process, Kebs's father decided to scrounge up enough cash to pay the expensive P8,000 bail bond, and secured her temporary release.

Kebs is still not sure why the police detained her for so long. It was the boy, she says, who sniffed the Rugby—not her. She does know that she can't get into trouble again. If police arrest her before the final hearing, both she and her father will end up doing time back in the city jail.

According to national and international legislation, Kebs should have been treated differently.

In Davao though, it is not unusual for minors to experience abuse during arrest as well as endure extended periods of detention despite the existence of laws set up to protect for the most marginalized of youth. "Children are the most vulnerable," says Attorney Alberto Muyot,



*Police arrested Inday, right, and several other gang members for possession of Rugby, and confined them with older women in Santa Ana Police Precinct's squalid jail cell. "As a matter of convenience," says Attorney Alberto Muyot, UNICEF's Project Officer for Juvenile Justice, "detention, which should be the last resort, has become the first resort of police." In stark contradiction of international child rights legislation, only seven of 12 precincts in Davao have separate cells for minors, and fewer still have extra resources with which to purchase food for detainees. According to a 2002 study conducted by Save the Children (UK)-Philippines, more than half of every 10 child offenders in Southern Mindanao suffers from sexual advances and psychological harm while in the custody of government authorities. Most of those abused while in custody were girls.*

UNICEF's Project Officer for Juvenile Justice. "They're the easiest to arrest and get extrajudicial confessions from. It's so easy to make them symbols of crime."

Police say they no longer arrest children. Instead, they are rescued. Yet the process is the same. Police still round up kids for the smallest of infractions, fill out a

blotter and haul them off to court depending on the charges. Upon release, they carry the stigma of being an ex-convict back to their communities, a label which Muyot says gravely affects their development as young people.

Some improvements have been made in judicial procedures and approaches to law enforcement. The national government created the child and family courts in 1997 so that civil and criminal cases involving minors could be handled more effectively. And gone are the days when storeowners handcuffed teenage shoplifters and displayed their photographs in malls. Yet Davao City has a long way to go in applying an adult-oriented justice system more sensitively to children in conflict with the law.

### **A Rosy Surface**

Compared to other major urban areas in the Philippines, the streets of Davao are fairly safe. The overall crime index is consistently low year-to-year, and fewer minors were arrested in 2003 than the year before. Many people from this southern Philippine metropolis feel at ease walking around town at night, knowing that motorcycle-riding vigilantes deal harshly with lawbreakers.

The city government also takes great pride in how well it cares for its children. In 1994, local legislators signed into effect the country's first children's welfare code, an ordinance which emphasizes the importance of access to education and nutritional services, prohibits the sale of tobacco to minors and even punishes entertainment establishments that allow students cutting

class to play video games. Davao also won the coveted "Most Child-Friendly City" prize in 1999 and 2000 for initiating the most programs for children. Although it failed to win the award a third time, the city government continues to invest in its young people. City Planning and Development Coordinator Mario Luis Jacinto says it allocated 19 percent of its P1.95 billion budget for new schools, nutrition posts, shelters, and other social services in 2003.

In addition, each police station has a Women and Children's Desk officer, and drug offenders now have the option of going to the P27-million rehabilitation center in nearby Bago Oshiro, a giant remodeled facility which was inaugurated by no less than President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo.

### Slipping Through the Cracks

There is concern, however, that many children are slipping through the cracks of lofty social programs and legal frameworks that look better on paper than in practice. Seven minors are currently on death row in Manila,

According to Vilela, most children in conflict with the law are boys between the ages of 10 to 15 who commit mainly petty offenses, the most common one being theft. Many of them are first-time offenders. Police rarely arrest girls for robbery. Instead, they are usually picked up for possession of volatile substances. Citywide, the number of children in conflict with the law is actually dropping. WCCD records show that in 2000, police arrested 1,418 minors, 616 of whom were brought in for property crimes. The WCCD only reported 460 arrests during the first 11 months of 2003, 144 of which were made for theft. Volatile substance cases are also down except in Agdao where the incidence of Rugby use among girls is on the rise. Arrests for curfew violation fluctuate every year. Vilela estimates that an average of 300 children break the curfew rule every year, which means that police are constantly chasing kids for simply being out on the street at night.

Dodging cops is sometimes the only activity that keeps jobless teenagers busy when the sun goes down. Many fear

going home if it means confronting an abusive parent. So they stay out, and risk arrest by doing so. If they do get rounded up, the conditions in which they are

*"Children are the most vulnerable. They're the easiest to arrest and get extrajudicial confessions from. It's so easy to make them symbols of crime."*

—Atty. Alberto Muyot,

UNICEF's Project Officer for Juvenile Justice.

deprived of their internationally sanctioned right to life. Amnesty International also criticized the Philippine government for overlooking the routine practice of detaining children before trial as a first rather than a last resort.

This kind of deprivation of liberty, says Nonoy Fajardo, UNICEF's Child Protection Officer for Mindanao, is a clear violation of the United Nation's Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Beijing Rules to which the government signed its commitment. "There is a huge gap in the enforcement of international laws and local ordinances," Fajardo observes. "Most of these (ordinances) are adult laws that are being applied to children." And in stark contrast to national and international recommendations, the Philippines has yet to create a separate juvenile justice system.

As a result of the country's lack of political will to live up to the documents it signed, Davao City police say they are obliged to keep "rescuing" kids as young as nine years old for violating the city's strict curfew ordinance, sniffing glue, or engaging in petty theft. They say they are just doing their jobs. And it's the law. "Whether we like it or not, there are children committing crimes," says Police Senior Inspector Royina Vilela who is the head of the Women and Children's Concerns Division (WCCD).

detained clearly fall short of international standards. Only seven of 12 precinct jails contain cells for minors. In order to separate the sexes, boys are often locked up with adult offenders while girls are kept with older women. District precincts don't have enough money to provide food for detainees, and Davao City Jail's juvenile welfare unit frequently houses up to 80 boys and girls. The jail's warden, Captain Simeon Dolojo Jr., admits this happens to be twice its ideal holding capacity.

Philippine penal law states that if police do not file a case within 12 hours of bringing in a child for a light offense, he or she must be released. Though police generally tend to file cases on time, says WCCD head Royina Vilela, there are delays in releasing children because of a heavy backlog of work in the Family Court and lack of coordination among agencies and parents who take children into protective custody. On average, it takes two to three weeks for a judge to issue a court order for the transfer of detained drug dependents to either the Bago Oshiro rehabilitation center, or the city jail where they may serve a six month-to-two-year sentence. Before that happens, a minor has to sit on the filthy floor of a precinct cell. Parents can file arbitrary detention cases against police officers if they feel their children have been locked up illegally. No one ever has. "They don't dare to," says Vilela.

Carlos Zarate, president of the Integrated Bar of the Philippines-Davao chapter, believes that the practice of arresting minors not only harasses them. It also erodes their trust in authority since they feel like they are being hunted down. He adds that children should not even have to enter the criminal justice system if the local government truly delivered on its promise to provide holistic programs that address their social and recreational needs. "Children as they are, their main purpose is not to commit crimes. If it happens, then the burden of asking why they committed crimes should be on the shoulders of society rather than the child."

Times are indeed tougher for youth. More and more children are running away from home to escape relationships torn apart by domestic violence and economic desperation. There are now twice as many children on the street than there were in 2000. Hundreds of them find protection among the city's 150 youth gangs. On uncertain streets, gangs are necessary for survival even though they may bring their members into confrontation with the law.

Some city officials and child rights advocates argue that children shouldn't be penalized for wanting to belong to a group, especially when they have nowhere else to go. "Gang formation is not a punishable act," says Angela Librado, chair of the City Council's Committee on Women, Children, and Family Relations. "But there's some kind of war being waged against children in gangs. It's not the best approach."

San Pedro Precinct's Chief Inspector Matthew Baccay believes that renewed police action against gangs is necessary for public safety. He says most of the snatchers in the city's commercial center are organized in gangs whose members can be as young as eight years old. "Gangsterism," Baccay explains, "is a form of criminality. It's a major problem."

Not everyone agrees that gangs are such a threat. For many street children who do not qualify for government-run school programs, gangs serve as alternative families in which members take care of one another's needs, says Pilgrim Bliss Gayo-Guasa, coordinator of Tambayan-Center for the Care of Abused Children, Inc. Tina, who belongs to Hostage, says gangmates give her food or help her evade police if she's seen on the streets past curfew. Instead of spending the night in jail for a less-than-petty offense, she can go back home because her friends take care of her. "It's very clear that the government sees street children and children in conflict with the law as merely an issue of criminality," adds Guasa. "They don't understand that minors are into drugs and crime because their needs haven't been met."

Of equal concern is the increased number of children who have been summarily executed by anti-crime vigilantes. Since 1998, local child rights organizations have documented the

murders of at least 18 minors under the age of 18. Many of them had been arrested for drugs and theft or were implicated in gang-related activities. And unlike reduced sentencing laws for minors, local death squads don't view age as a mitigating factor. If they break the law, they pay the price with her life—whether they are children or not.

## Signs of Improvement

Though the unbridled streak of extrajudicial killings points to the more extreme weaknesses in Davao City's justice system, most children who get into trouble are given a second chance. But part of the problem is that in order to get that second chance, they are being processed through a criminal justice system set up for adults.

The Juvenile Justice Group, a nationwide consortium of child rights organizations that was established in Cebu City, has been lobbying for a separate juvenile justice system since 1999 when it began helping to draft the proposed Juvenile Justice Bill. The bill would raise the age of criminal liability from nine to 15. It would also expand the reach of diversion (out-of-court settlement) programs to apply to crimes carrying sentences of six years and below instead of the current six months and below. This means that two-thirds of crimes usually committed by minors would not have to pass through formal court proceedings, says UNICEF's Juvenile Justice Officer Alberto Muyot. And an entirely new court with separate procedures tailored around the circumstances of young offenders would lighten the load in the current child and family courts in Davao, adds Judge Paul Archangel, who tries up to 20 cases each day.

Police are also trying to sensitize their methods of dealing with minors who test the limits of the law. Precinct chiefs recently signed a memorandum of agreement with local shopping mall owners to divert property crimes outside the courts. Instead of being tried and sent to jail, child offenders are asked to compensate storeowners by paying for the value of the item they stole. "It's not only the police who have to work," says WCCD chief Royina Vilela. "The barangays have to work as well as social workers. We want the community to identify the problem and create their own solutions."

Aside from promoting alternatives to detention, child rights organizations and law enforcers are working together to advance principles of mediation and restorative justice on the family and barangay level through the Katarungang Pambarangay (barangay justice system) and the Barangay Council for the Protection of Children (BCPC). More than 100 of the city's 180 barangays have active BCPCs, community-based organizations that promote the socio-economic welfare of children and handle cases of physical and sexual abuse.

"Real comprehensive development can't happen in jail," says Muyot. "It can only happen in the family."



# Paying the Price for Peace and Order

**A**fter a long day of painting cars, Rogelio Garzon Jr. was looking forward to a day off. The scorching October heat had seared the energy right out of him, and it was time for a nap.

Rogelio snoozed for a couple of hours in his family's shack before getting up to buy a few smokes. By 10 o'clock, a nicotine fit sent this lanky 17-year-old back to Jen-jen's store to refill his pack. Since it was approaching midnight, he didn't expect to bump into anyone. But a night would not be a night in the sprawling neighborhood of Agdao if beer remained on ice. As Rogelio was buying more cigarettes, some friends sitting in a dim alleyway spotted him and insisted that he share a few rounds of Red Horse with them.

It was late, too late to be safe in Davao City. But Rogelio couldn't refuse a drink, especially one from his close friends.

After emptying their twelfth bottle, Rogelio popped open another beer. Already tipsy, he didn't notice two shadows emerge from the dark corridor behind the dingy San Vicente Ferrer chapel. When he heard the first shots though, it was too late. His friend Wilfredo Sampaga slumped over, covered in blood. Another burst of gunfire rang out, and this time, it was Rogelio's turn to scream. Not waiting for the killers to finish their job, he hobbled toward the nearest doorway, grasping his wounded leg, and quickly began looking for a place to hide. A volley of bullets whizzed past him as he crawled inside a neighbor's chicken coop to wait for the inevitable. But it didn't come. Instead, his friends caught one of the shooters as he tried to flee, and began beating him to a pulp behind the bullet-riddled shrine.

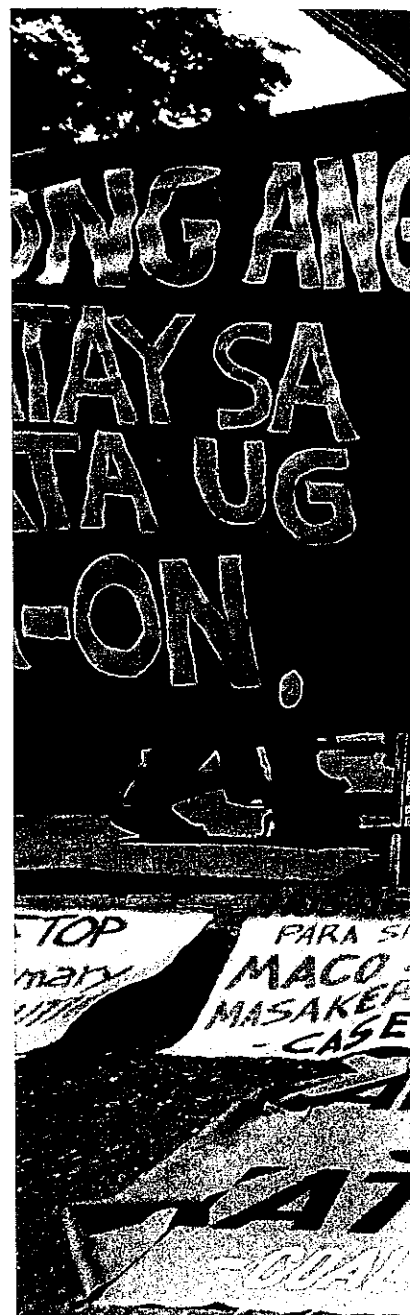
Rogelio is fortunate to be alive. Unlike scores of other targets, he is one of few who has survived a deadly spree of vigilante killings which have haunted this southern Philippine city for the last decade.

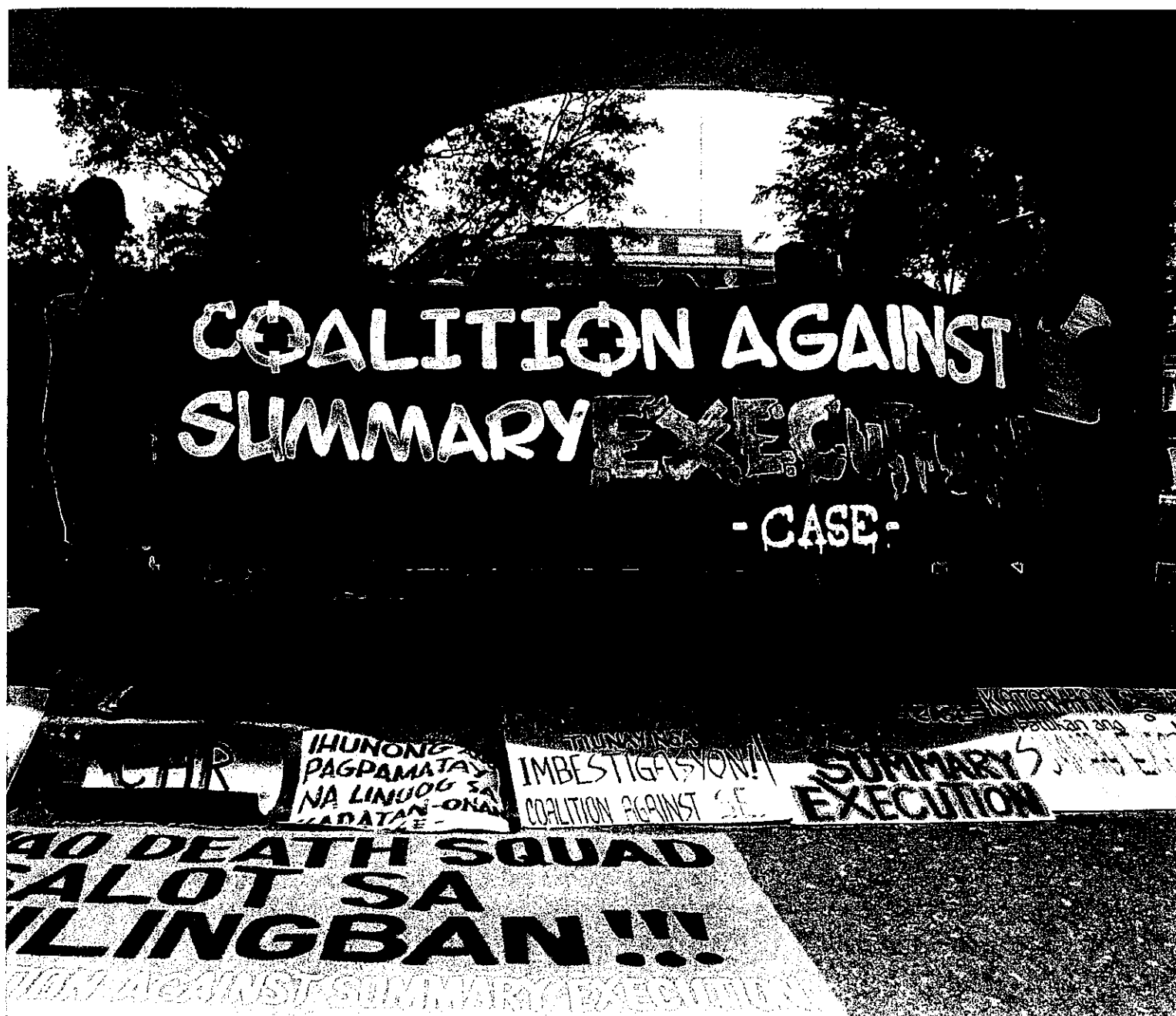
Since 1998 when local human rights organizations began documenting the spate of unsolved murders, more

than 215 people have been summarily executed by killers thought to be members of a shadowy group called the Davao Death Squad (DDS). Records from Kabataan Consortium Inc. and Tambayan-Center for the Care of Abused Children Inc. reveal that 18 of those killed were below 18 years old. Many of the victims were former street children with criminal records or ties to gangs. Almost all came from squatter settlements lining the city's coastline and grew up on dangerous streets where they later died, most often at the hands of motorcycle-riding hitmen. Police and city authorities deny the existence of an organized death squad and attribute the murders to drug and gang wars. Yet only two killers have been arrested, and a large part of the city remains gripped by fear.

## Discipline in Davao

In the conflict-ridden island of Mindanao, Davao City shines as the region's flagship metropolis. Flickering lights illuminate highways laden with new shopping malls and the latest American-styled fast food chains. Once tormented by kidnappers and more recently by terrorists who bombed a major airport and commercial wharf in 2003, Davaoños are enjoying quieter streets where they can walk without much fear of getting injured or robbed. And a sizeable part of public, including local government officials and police





Teenagers and child rights activists gather outside city hall to protest the unbridled streak of vigilantism that has gripped Davao City for the last decade. Human rights organizations argue that city officials have done nothing to curb the murders of poor people caught up in a world of crime, and allege that some law enforcers are even coddling the killers. By the end of 2003, 98 people, most of them suspected thieves and drug dealers, were summarily executed by the infamous Davao Death Squad (DDS).

chiefs, candidly argue that a few dead criminals, even young ones, help keep it that way.

"In a civilized society, you have to instill discipline," says a senior city tourism official. "When people will behave, then such a thing will stop. But if they don't want to change, then better they get killed so they stop being a menace. If it's not being done, I couldn't walk alone on the streets."

While the number of casualties this year pales in comparison to Thailand's swelling list of 2,000 executed drug suspects, they are enough to raise the alarm

among human rights advocates who believe that the city government is behind the murders. After President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo ordered national law enforcement agencies to enhance their anti-drug operations in mid-June 2003, 15 people were killed in Davao within the next two weeks, most with the same modus operandi—two men, armed with .45-caliber guns, targeting their prey on DT Honda motorbikes. By the end of December, the number of summary executions climbed to 98, a figure that nearly doubled the total number of victims over the last six years.

Mayor Rodrigo Duterte acknowledges that scores of

murders have taken place under his watch as the city's chief executive. But this does not faze the man, whose critics call the "Dirty Harry of Davao." "I don't vie for the award for the most peaceful city," says Duterte. "If all the dead guys are criminals, then fine. I'm happy about it."

The mayor consistently maintains that Davao is a dangerous place for those who cross the line. "If in the process of enforcing the law you have to kill somebody," he says, "so be it. It's either kill or be killed. Maybe you can count your existence not in days but hours if you're a criminal."

At the same time, Duterte, who is President Arroyo's Special Consultant on Public Order and Security, is just as quick to deny any collusion with the killers. He does confess, however, that guns-for-hire may have taken a cue from the series of warnings he gave young offenders and gang members during his weekly television show in 2001. In December 2002, two weeks after Duterte warned Alex Buenaventura on the air that their paths would cross one day, gunmen shot the 19-year-old soon after his release from San Pedro Precinct. "I admit that a lot of people were killed because of my pronouncements. But it doesn't necessarily mean that I ordered the killings," Duterte insists.

Duterte's police chiefs also shrug off similar accusations even as child rights activists point to their deliberate lack of interest in solving cases. With only one conviction in the last half-decade, policemen have little to brag about. Openly untroubled by more than 200 unsolved murders, San Pedro Precinct's Chief Inspector Matthew Baccay attributes the latest round of vigilantism to rivalries among drug syndicates. Drug pushers, he says, ask for an early death as soon as they start peddling their product. "Who is dying? It is the criminals who are dying, not the law-abiding citizens," says Baccay. "They chose to put their lives in danger. It's their own fault."

Lauding city hall's no-nonsense, anti-crime strategies, Baccay adds that Davao's P852,000 daily security fund has benefited business and residential communities. "If you want economic progress, you have to lay down a peace and order situation that will bring in investors. And that's what we have in Davao."

Not everyone swallows that kind of formula for stability. To say peace and order exists while vigilantes brazenly mock due process concerns a few Davaoeños who

do not believe in the legality of street justice. "What is most disturbing is that it is not even taken up as a peace and order issue. They say it is one way of crime prevention, but summary execution is in itself a crime," says Pilgrim Bliss Gayo-Guasa, coordinator for Tambayan Center.

## A War Against the Poor

Like Guasa, Bernardo Mondragon, coordinator of the child rights group Kabataan Consortium Inc., believes city officials cannot wash their hands that easily. He explains that the systematic killing of poor youth and the lack of arrests among wealthy drug lords mirror the government's failure to protect people's rights to survival and a decent living. A good number of families who come to Davao in search of better futures migrate from depressed areas in the central Philippines or Mindanao's strife-torn conflict zones. Many wind up settling in dense shantytowns where hopelessness gnaws

ruthlessly at the ties of community, and temptations for breaking the law abound. Many young people turn to stealing or selling drugs just to get by, habits which unfortunately make them targets of the death squad. "I don't condone criminals,

*"If in the process of enforcing the law you have to kill somebody, so be it. It's either kill or be killed. Maybe you can count your existence not in days but hours if you're a criminal."*

*—Davao City's Mayor Rodrigo Duterte*

but the way it's being addressed is anti-people. It's practically a war against the poor," says Mondragon.

Clarita Alia's three sons spent most of their short adolescent years hanging out in the dank markets of Bankerohan, a gang-ridden part of the commercial business district. Clarita, who hauled vegetables in a wooden cart to feed her family, had little to give her boys a viable alternative to street life. None of them graduated from elementary school. Richard, the third of her eight children, joined the aptly named Notoryus gang that market vendors knew would not hesitate to rob or kill anyone. Police arrested him more than ten times on charges ranging from theft to rape and even murder. Rumors began circulating around Bankerohan that policemen had marked Richard for termination. Clarita told him to be careful after a cop from San Pedro warned her that "he would fall." His fate appeared to be sealed.

On July 17, 2001, an assassin buried a long hunting knife into his side. He was 18 years old.

Christopher and Bobby, Clarita's other sons, also got into trouble with the law. On October 20, 2001, a man stabbed Christopher to death close to the place where

Richard had been killed. Bobby's life ended in a similar way in November the following year. In September 2003, Clarita evacuated her remaining son Arnold to a secret location after receiving a warning that he would be next.

Born into an atmosphere of stifling poverty, Clarita Alia's sons were sacrificed in the name of peace and order. "I sometimes think that because of what has happened in our lives, the little ones were compromised," says Clarita. "Only one person committed a mistake, but a lot of people were affected. If Richard committed a mistake, he already paid for it. They killed him. What kind of persons are they if they want to make the whole family pay for it? That is so unfair."

Clarita regularly visits Wireless Cemetery where her three sons are buried in cement coffins, one stacked on top of the other. Christopher's second death anniversary just passed, but his gravestone remains unfinished. And local carpenters recently stole wooden beams from the tin roof that Clarita

built so she could visit her sons at all times, even in bad weather. "I don't think about anything else but going to the cemetery," she says between tears. "I tell them all my pains. I plead with them to help me solve their cases, and pray that even one person will

come forward to testify as a witness. It hurts until now. They will not give me justice because I am poor."

Clarita tried going to the Commission on Human Rights to open an investigation and collect victim's compensation. She got neither.

Attorney Alberto Sipaco Jr., regional director of the Commission on Human Rights, claims his six-person team looked into the Alia brothers' deaths as well as half of the summary execution cases this year. Reiterating the standard police line, Sipaco explains that the consistent lack of witnesses hampers thorough investigations. Most people are too afraid to talk, knowing full well that informants have eyes and ears in every corner of the city. If they do come forward, the national government has no comprehensive witness protection program waiting for them. "There's not much we can do to put them (witnesses) in safe quarters. Our resources aren't enough, and there are too many who deserve it," says Sipaco.

Despite the environment of impunity in which the killers seem to operate, Sipaco argues that the justice system

still works. "We are a government of laws. No one is above the law," he says.

Nonoy Fajardo, UNICEF's Child Protection Officer for Mindanao, disagrees. He says city officials can be faulted for their lukewarm stand on the extrajudicial killings of minors and blurred interpretation of the law. "It's a clear deprivation of their basic right to life and a violation of their right to due process. We shouldn't lose hope in children, even if they've crossed the line," says Fajardo.

No concrete proof has surfaced connecting individuals from City Hall with the DDS. Yet the police force's lackluster response, coupled with the issuance of threatening reprimands to offenders, lead many to speculate that cops, politicians, and businessmen are in cahoots with the killers. Whether or not the city government is directly responsible for the murder spree is a matter for courts to decide—but the judicial system itself is on trial for many Filipinos. As far as the urban

poor are concerned, says Mondragon, city leaders are guilty of involvement simply because they have done nothing to stop it.

*"[Summary execution] is a clear deprivation of their basic right to life and a violation of their right to due process. We shouldn't lose hope in children, even if they've crossed the line."*

*— Nonoy Fajardo, UNICEF's*

*Child Protection Officer for Mindanao*

### **A Breeding Ground for Killers**

That so many people tagged as undesirables are dying with such

little outcry speaks of vigilantism's historical appeal. As early as the 1970s, the corpses of slain criminals were displayed at the city plaza to warn Davaoeños of the severe consequence that comes with breaking the law. By the mid-1980s, counter-insurgency operations against communist guerillas sparked a period of urban warfare that exaggerated the culture of violence among the local population, says Father Amado Picardal, a member of the Coalition Against Summary Execution (CASE), and priest at the Redemptorist Church where a 20-year-old man was gunned down just before the New Year. "The idea of extrajudicial killings is in the mentality of the police and military. It started during martial law, and people grew up thinking that criminals have no rights," says Father Picardal.

Little is known about the origins of the city's most infamous death squad. However, residents point to Rogelio's neighborhood of Agdao as the birthplace of organized death squads. Since the darkest days of martial law, its grimy alleyways have served as breeding grounds for killers. Communist revolutionaries and pro-Marcos

counterrevolutionaries fought over territory and ideology, each trying to foist its own set of principles on the minds of the urban poor. The communist-backed Sparrow Units, which the New People's Army (NPA) trained as assassins, bumped off drug dealers, corrupt cops, and government informers while the pro-government *Alsa Masa* (People Rising) attacked anyone who empathized with the Left. Daylight executions on both sides occurred with such regularity that by the late 1980s, residents dubbed their community "Nicaragdao" after hearing about similar counterinsurgency violence in Nicaragua.

Ruled by the law of the gun, Agdao evolved into the Philippines' first urban battlefield. Apathy became a byproduct of the tit-for-tat violence. Little did the communists or government agents know that their respective militias set in motion a cycle of vigilantism that the city has yet to contain. "They're now trying to stamp out the evil in society," says Picardal. "It's like a cleanup. In terms of right and wrong, they think they are doing right."

### Contracting the Young

Ten to fifteen years later, some of the Sparrows lost interest in the movement and dropped out. With no work and a stained record, their experience as accomplished assassins grabbed the attention of people who liked the idea of swift, lethal justice.

An ex-NPA soldier, who claims to have organized the first batch of killers in the mid-1990s before the local media began calling them the DDS, says that the current group of hitmen is composed primarily of rebel returnees. Like NPA rebels who surrender to the government, self-confessed drug dealers also find themselves in fragile situations that are easily manipulated by those handling the killers, says the ex-NPA member, who does not want to be identified. Both need money, and finding mainstream jobs is difficult because of the stigma attached to their former careers. And both need protection from people who know about their tainted past. Becoming a contract killer is one way to get cash and security.

"Joel" used to be a petty thief and drug user. When he joined a gang in 2000, he started dealing marijuana. A year later, Joel's friend stopped by his house and asked him to help take out another drug dealer. The job paid more money than Joel could earn selling pot for a month. For Joel's friend, killing someone for P10,000 was a tempting bounty. He knew of other teenagers who were paid only P500 by handlers suspected of working for the police or city government. But for Joel, the idea of taking another person's life didn't sit so well. "My conscience couldn't bear it," Joel remembers three years later.

It was a choice that may have spared his life.

Joel continued dealing drugs, but by the beginning of 2003, his business started to draw the attention of neighborhood officials. He received several warnings from the barangay captain, agents connected with the Philippine Drug Enforcement Agency (PDEA), and the local precinct, which Joel discovered had him marked as No. 5 on its order of battle. Finally, a close friend who had been assigned to murder Joel advised him to surrender to the PDEA or end up like many others, listed and now dead.

Joel didn't hesitate. Later on that year, he surrendered to the PDEA in exchange for a P2,000 monthly stipend. Joel now reports to PDEA officials everyday to reassure them that he is clean, and to make certain his name doesn't get passed on to the DDS. "You're lucky if PDEA arrests you," he says. "But if the DDS gets there first, it's goodbye."

### Lists of Infamy

Just as a series of warnings tend to precede an execution, so does the listing of names of alleged criminal personalities. Both Joel and the ex-NPA member say corrupt "assets" or informers from the PDEA supply DDS members with the identities of drug pushers from the agency's order of battle, a hefty list containing 1,206 names. PDEA's regional director, Superintendent Wilkins Villanueva, denies this and insists that names are given only to precinct commanders who screen them for accuracy before taking action. Precinct commanders also compile their own watch lists that are based on intelligence gathered by the Barangay Anti-Drug Abuse Council (BADAC), a community-based organization led by the barangay captain who assigns neighborhood residents to look out for suspected shabu (methamphetamine hydrochloride) dealers, gangsters, and robbers.

Bernardo Mondragon, coordinator of the Kabataan Center, a consortium of child rights organizations, observes that listing names based purely on suspicion is dangerous. "You can be innocent, but if somebody has an axe to grind against you, you become part of the list," says Mondragon. "That's a crazy way of curbing criminality."

### The Cost of Discipline

Rogelio believes he was targeted for offenses he did not commit. On Oct. 6, 2003, it didn't matter. His would-be killers heard he was a troublemaker, and decided to appoint themselves as his judge and executioner.

Like the late Alia brothers, Rogelio comes from a poor family. He dropped out of school at 15 to help his father paint public passenger jeeps and private cars. One night

in 2003, a group of drunken men attacked Rogelio and a friend and stole their pedicab. The two boys returned with a knife to seek their revenge. After a chaotic brawl, one of the boys' attackers ended up dead, although neither Rogelio nor his friend is sure who stabbed the victim. In August 2003, a local drunk accused the 17-year-old of stealing his wallet, and informed neighborhood watchmen who later decided not to file a case due to lack of evidence. The following month, another neighbor told a policeman that the teenager raped his 47-year-old live-in partner. A week before the boy was shot outside Jen-jen's Store, the same policeman went to a crowded videoke bar where he announced over the microphone that Rogelio was a rapist.

Rogelio's mother thought the rumors were serious enough for him to attract the attention of dubious informants, and warned her son not to hang out with people like Wilfredo Sampaga who had served prison time for a homicide in the early 1990s.

The warning came too late. Doctors tell Rogelio that he may not be able to return to work for one year. "I did not do anything wrong," said Rogelio one afternoon in November while resting his bandaged leg. "I don't even know him (the suspect). I did nothing to him and yet he shot me. I am angry, angry."

Rogelio's mother, Segundina Garzon, wonders how the family will get by. After her son was shot, he spent a month in the hospital recovering from his wounds. The family racked up huge medical bills, and considered pawning their house to pay off the debt. "Everyone I approached for money had no money to give. I am always sad, thinking about how we can recover," says Garzon. "Until now, I worry. It has been rough. What they did to us was unforgivable."

The Garzons' colossal financial burden is no doubt stressful. But the hardest consequence of Rogelio's botched execution is coping with the fear that his killers may return to finish the job. Edwin Alcosoba—the hitman caught and beaten up by Rogelio's friends—recovered, was charged with frustrated murder and released on bail. One of Alcosoba's relatives told Segundina that the man's family often goes to sleep hungry, leading her to believe that someone more powerful acting as his handler paid a sizeable chunk of the P198,000 bail bond. She now thinks suspicious men watch her house regularly, waiting for the right time to strike. As soon as Rogelio can walk and go to the bathroom on his own, his mother wants him to flee Davao City. "It is only Rogelio who caused all these troubles and all these fears," says Garzon. "He is the only one who is a target. I fear that something will happen to him here. He has to leave."

## Voices from the Living

For politicians clamoring to give investors a shiny impression of a town worth doing business in, the deaths of young people seem to be an acceptable cost of maintaining public safety. But for family members who have lost loved ones in the extrajudicial battle against crime, the quest for peace and order exacts the steepest of prices.

More than a decade after it began, vigilantism in the name of security shows no sign of abating. Blood runs through every corner of Davao—from Toril's rugged farmlands to the musty markets of Bankerohan and San Pedro's congested streets. Meanwhile, mothers continue to bury sons, and girlfriends grieve over the loss of boyfriends. Children grow up without fathers while law enforcers sit back and let it happen.

Those who survived their fallen relatives push on, sometimes with hope, always with pain.

Segundina Garzon knows she is fortunate to have a son whom she can watch grow into a young man. Three other women of strength and courage—Clarita Alia, Justine Key Buston, and Margarita Pelayo—had that sacred honor stolen from them. Memories of Richard's back massages, Christopher's kindness, and Bobby's taste for coffee come to Clarita Alia in a cloud mixed with fondness and agony. She dreams of owning a piece of land, but can't tear herself from the market where her sons took their first, and last, steps. Justine Key Buston is raising three children, the first of whom does not have a father. Leoven Tayo, Joy's former boyfriend and founder of Notoryus gang, was executed in 2000. Only 16 when Leoven was killed, Joy wishes that the father of her first child would have made better decisions. Margarita Pelayo, an ethnic Bagobo woman, finds it hard to look at her son Jimboy's photograph. Like the Alia boys, Jimboy was stabbed to death at a very young age. His picture, stashed away in a dusty box in the family's one-room stilt home, reminds her too much of the sorrow she longs to leave behind.

Though each has suffered differently, all four mothers want justice for their fallen loved ones—even if it is a long way off. Their grief is leavened only by their faith. Their words on the following pages tell of the real price of peace and order in Davao—sometimes an impossibly high price, not only for the victims but also for their families.





## Clarita Alia

**E**very week, Clarita Alia walks the short distance to Wireless Cemetery where she visits the graves of three of her sons who were murdered by vigilantes. Richard, Christopher and Bobby, all of whom had been arrested in the past on various charges, were stabbed to death in the span of a year and half. Bobby, 14, the last child to die from the Alia family, was murdered on November 3, 2002. "I don't think about anything else but going to the cemetery," says Clarita. "I tell them all my pains. I plead with them to help me solve their cases, (and pray) that even one person will come forward to testify as a witness."

It was still light when it happened. Christopher and I were sleeping, but after some time, I woke up and went out of the house. I didn't understand myself, but I was feeling apprehensive. I asked Christopher what could possibly have happened and he said that he didn't know since we were sleeping and we were just inside the house. I told him that I was feeling apprehensive about Richard, and suggested that we go and look for him.

After some time, around 4:30, some barangay officials who had previously harassed me passed by. I felt that they were laughing at me. This made me more nervous. I told Christopher that I have a bad feeling about something. Christopher suggested that we go and look for Richard in Marfori. When we got to the tomato stalls, I asked if we could rest a bit. This was where Joachin said to me, "Clar, it is your son." I asked him what he was talking about. He didn't elaborate but he insisted that it was one of my sons. He went on to describe that the boy was wearing white corduroy pants and a black t-shirt. I told him that Richard didn't have white corduroy pants and that his black t-shirt was in the house. Joachin continued insisting and told me to see for myself.

I started to get really scared. I asked Christopher to come with me. I told him that whatever has happened, I

will not be able to take it alone. We called Arnold and we all went together. When we got there, there were a lot of people. I told Arnold to see who it was since it was already getting dark.

I felt my whole body shiver and go cold. Christopher held me close and restrained me from getting near. He feared that I would collapse. I told them to see who it really was. When they saw the face, it was Richard. His face was slightly deformed from being beaten and he had wounds on his body. I started to cry. Arnold told me to control myself. They dragged me away. I told them to get Richard and that we should bring him to the hospital. Maybe he could still be saved. It took some time for the mobile patrol to arrive. It was around 6:30. It was very dark when they got there.

What I remember most about my sons is that they enjoyed going to discos and hanging out in the streets. They would tell me, "Ma, there will be a disco tonight. Would you like to come with us?" I would tell them, "Maybe you'll end up having a riot again." So I went with them. They never told me not to go with them. They would even ask me to dance.

They were also affectionate and were not ashamed to show it. Every small thing they did, they would always come and tell me about it. They liked to hug me and would often play jokes on me and tease me. They would also say, "As if you are not a *chay*,"—especially my Bobby. I would be gone for a short time, and there he was. He would find me in the market's coffee stalls and would ask me to buy coffee for him.

Christopher was also like Bobby. He would always ask me to buy him coffee. But he was more reserved. Just don't provoke him or else you'd get beaten up. I used to sleep outside on my cart since our house was too small. Every time Christopher would look up and see the cloudy sky and hear the thunder, he would say to his other siblings, "Come let us go get Mama. Let's push her cart so that she will not get wet." They would push me in my cart to a place where there was shelter from the rain.

I feel as if I see my sons everywhere I go. Every time I see the table where they used to sleep, my heart breaks in two. Sometimes when I'm tending my cigarette stall, my mind suddenly goes blank. People call my attention, but I don't hear. I would be thinking about my sons. I will never forget them since they died in the most difficult of circumstances.

I want those who killed my sons to be arrested. Why does it seem impossible for them to conduct an investigation? Until now, I feel angry towards them. They are not humans. They didn't know how to show compassion to my sons. They were still very young. They are big cowards. They took away my sons.

How can I forgive them when they have not been arrested? They did not show remorse over what they did to my sons. Every time I see them, the butchers, freely walking around Bankerohan, I feel the blood rush up to my head. I want to stab them right through their necks.

They will not give justice to me because I am poor. It is very clear that they will not conduct an investigation. This has been going on for a long time now. When Christopher was still alive, I already filed a complaint. It was very clearly stated in my complaint that there were threats that they would kill my sons—one by one. But I am poor. I plan to ask help from Tambayan and Kabataan so that I can also join CASE which will support me in solving the cases of my sons. This will not only be for myself, but also for the many other victims. My sons were not the only victims of these people. There are more. They should be stopped.

This is the reason why I made Arnold leave, so that he will not be dragged into this. He might be the next. I worry about my grandson if something happens to Arnold, if he loses his father. I sometimes think that because of what has happened in our lives, the little ones were compromised. Only one person committed a mistake, but a lot of people were affected. If Richard committed a mistake, he already paid for it. They killed him. What kind of persons are they if they want to make the whole family pay for it? That is so unfair.

I don't think about anything else but going to the cemetery. I tell them all my pains. I plead with them to help me solve their cases, that even one person will come forward to testify as a witness. I'm hurting inside until now.

I remember my sons every night, and imagine that they would come back. I sometimes look at their photographs. My grandson, Christopher, looks a lot like Richard, especially his eyes. I think that God gave me Christopher who looks a lot like my sons. He has filled in my loneliness. Even if I am sad about what happened, I find joy in him, especially at night. I enjoy playing with him and he teases me back. During times when Christopher is with his mother, I go out. But there's no one there to spend my money on, no one to love. I have a hard time sleeping since I am alone. I keep on staring at the roof. But even if my house is just a small hut, I don't want to leave it. All my children grew up in that house.





## Margarita Pelayo

**T**wo years after Jimboy Ali's murder, Margarita Pelayo still doesn't know why her quiet, 15-year-old son was executed. Margarita had thought he simply watched parked cars at Jollibee. A couple of weeks before he was killed, however, she says a policeman tried to recruit Jimboy to steal cell phones. Perplexed by a slew of unanswered questions, Margarita continues to wrestle with feelings of anger and helplessness. "It seems hard for me to forgive since my son is already dead," she says. "Maybe if he didn't die, I could forgive them. I want them to pay like my son paid with his life. They should also be killed."

It was Tuesday. A boy came here around 7:30 in the evening, and knocked on our door. I was already sleepy.

He said "Nang, Nang!"

I said, "what is it?"

"Nang! Jimboy-he was stabbed."

"Where is he now?"

He said that Jimboy had been taken to San Pedro Hospital. I quickly went out of the house. I didn't know that I was wearing my shorts with the seams turned out, but didn't care what I looked like. I was so shocked that something had happened.

When we arrived at San Pedro Hospital, he was already gone, dead. They said the doctor couldn't revive him anymore. I saw the wounds at his back. They had been stitched. I saw four, but they said that only two were fatal. I cried so hard that I couldn't stop. My chest felt so heavy. I prayed that he would still be alive.

My son had been looking after parked cars in Jollibee. On the night that he was killed, he was eating his packed supper near Jollibee. Somebody approached him. It was a policeman. He said, "Boy, be careful." This was the same policeman who asked him to be a cellphone snatcher. But my

son didn't go along with him.

Right after the policeman left, a man on a motorcycle arrived. The man got off and grabbed my son on the neck. Those who saw what happened said that my son was begging the man, "Kol, that's enough. That's enough Kol." But the man stabbed him again. My son was able to break free and tried to run, but he was again stabbed in the back. His friends, who had the same work as our son, tried to help him. My son was begging them, "Please help me!" A second man on board a motorcycle then got off, pulled out a .45 caliber pistol, and pointed it at the others.

One of my son's regular customers went to Angel Funeral Parlor and brought us a can of biscuits. He said that my son was a good boy and did a good job looking after his car. He said that our son should not have been killed.

You see, before Jimboy was murdered, he had been detained at the San Pedro Police Station, but was later released. They said that my son was sniffing Rugby, but my son was not really into Rugby sniffing. He was only looking after parked cars. One of those who was arrested implicated my son, but actually it was him who was sniffing the Rugby.

After he was released, Jimboy told us, "Ma, the police told me to snatch cellphones." I told him, "Don't do what he says! He would just want to have a hold over you."

When I went to fetch Jimboy to bring him home, a boy asked me when I reached the plaza:

"Nang, nang, where is Jimboy?"

"I don't know. That is why I am looking for him."

The boy I met in the plaza went on to say, "Nang, nang, Jimboy is one of those who will be killed." I don't know that boy. He just approached me from nowhere. I don't know why he said that Jimboy will be killed. I was surprised since he was just recently released. He didn't do anything wrong. I was puzzled why somebody would want him killed. The boy didn't tell me why. He also said that Bryan was already released so that he could kill Jimboy. I said that Bryan was not released yet. It's like a conspiracy. But after two weeks, that's what happened.

I am confused about who killed him. People said that there were two men on motorcycles. I think they were the DDS. I think it was because of intrigues, intrigues with the others from work. My son was not from this place. He came from the province, and was new at Jollibee. And then there was one of them who became resentful since Jimboy had richer customers. He started to make up things about my son. And then the police became involved.

He didn't even have earrings. He didn't have anything unlike other young people who have tattoos. He had no enemies. I asked Jimboy many times if he was a member of a

gang. But he insisted that he was not. He said that there was nothing he could get out of being a gang member. He said that he just looked after parked cars at Jollibee. What was important for him was that he could eat.

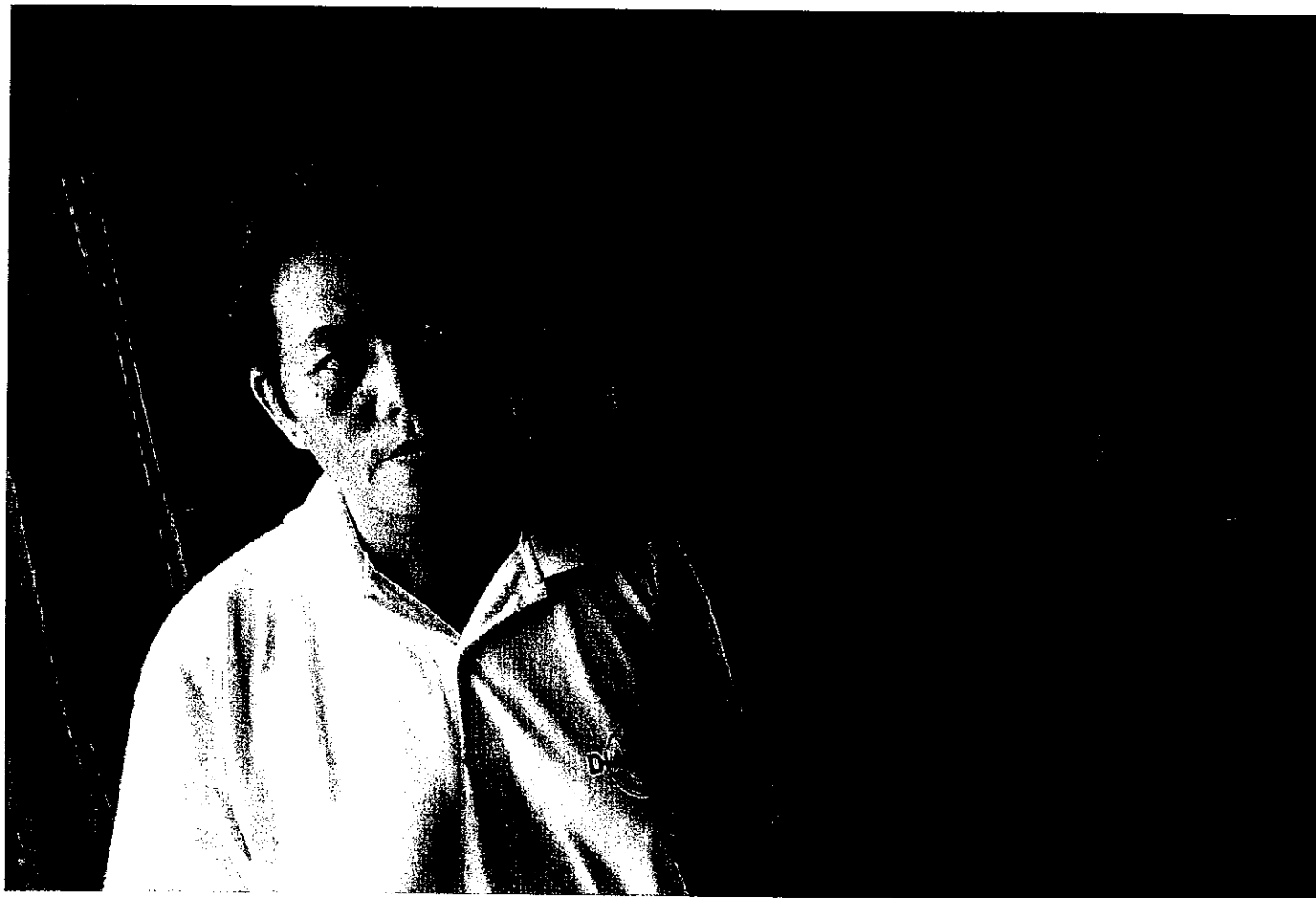
He was the quiet type. Sometimes when we scolded him, he would not answer back. When my eyes got infected and swollen, he cooked porridge and fed me himself. He was better than his older brother. He loved me. Every time he earned money from watching parked cars, he would give it to me. Other children would not even think about helping their family. He wasn't like that. He would tell me, "Mang, take this P50. This is for my younger sisters' allowance. Give them P20 each." That boy always thought of his younger siblings. That is why I do not understand why this happened, why he was killed. He wasn't a bad boy. I will only forget him when I die.

I sometimes go to the cemetery. I go there to cry. I went there on All Souls' Day. Even if I cannot do anything else I still go there. I light a candle for him. He looked like his father—both of them were tall. I hide his photographs. It is very painful.

I feel a permanent sense of loss. All my thoughts are on him. In fact, when I get sick, I frequently think of Jimboy. I also feel that I am more irritable now. Sometimes when I wake up, I still think he is here. My husband would ask me what is wrong, and says that I am losing weight even if I am eating enough. My thoughts are always on Jimboy, even when I am eating.

It seems hard for me to forgive since my son is already dead. Maybe if he didn't die, I could forgive them. I want them to pay like my son paid with his life. They should also be killed. I ask, "What kind of persons are they? Why would they kill my son when he did not do anything wrong to anyone?" Even if we talk about a person who has committed a crime, there is such a thing as justice. They should have asked what crimes my son had committed. They should not have killed him when he didn't do any grave crime.

What I want is that we will get justice for Jimboy, and that there would be people who will help us, people who can point to who killed him. All I ask is that somebody would testify, but nobody will come forward. There is nothing I can do now. There are no more witnesses. All I can do is cry. No one would want to testify. It's pitiful. He was killed like a chicken. I feel that my son's life had no value. It was a senseless death.



## Segundina Garzon

**O**n Oct. 6, 2003, two gunmen shot 17-year-old Rogelio Garzon Jr. and his friend Wilfredo Sampaga at a midnight birthday party in Agdao. Both survived the assassination attempt, and are slowly recovering from their wounds. Rogelio's mother, Segundina, is not entirely sure if her son was a target, but admits that he had rubbed shoulders with the law in the past. "Maybe they will come back and finish him off," Segundina says. "What I want right now, when Rogelio can manage to walk on his own, when he can go to the comfort room on his own, is to take him to some place far away. I fear that something will happen to him here."

We were already asleep when a neighbor woke me up. I was told, "Day, get up! Something happened to your son. Hurry! He is wounded! Maybe he got hit. Maybe he could still be saved." I was shocked. I told them that I didn't want to go. I was scared that I might find him already dead. But they insisted and my husband forced me to go outside.

We went out to look for him. We were told that he was at Atok's. We did not find him right away. We got lost even if we knew where Atok's house was. We were still disoriented from sleep. We went to Atok's but he wasn't there. We found him in the Chapel. He was already standing when we found him, but he was half-carried by Weng-weng and the others. We then brought him to the hospital.

Aside from that, I don't know what actually happened. I was asleep. I did not even hear the gun go off even though our house is near the place where the incident occurred.

Before the incident, I never thought something like this would happen. In fact, the day before, I went around asking for advice from my friends about what I should do with my son. I was worried since I learned that he was included as a target to be killed. I am confused because

people said that he was a target. But later, they also said that he was just an innocent bystander. And what is their basis for wanting to kill my son? I cannot remember anything serious that he could possibly have done. Nobody complained, except for that rape case reported against him.

My son confessed to me, saying, "Ma, I will not lie. I have tried using marijuana, but I have never bought marijuana for myself. I have used it only when I am drinking with my friends. When we are in a group, everyone has to smoke." They say that the effect is the same as when you drink. So all of you have to smoke. If you refuse, your friends will not like it.

If he is truly a user, instead of having him killed, they could test his blood to find out if it's true. I also find it very unfair. Like I said before, there are others who I have seen using marijuana with my own eyes. They would say to me, "Good evening 'Nay." And I would reply, "Good evening to you too. Uy, Dong, why are doing that? That is not good." Why were they spared? Why is it that those people did this to my son? It's that easy. That means that they just select those who do not follow the tune of their hand. These are the ones who get sentenced. But they spare those who follow what they want.

But I pity him a lot now because of what happened to him. Sometimes when he feels bad about one of us here in the house, he is only able to show his anger and hurt after a few drinks. It is hard for a mother. No matter how bad your child is, you cannot help but take care of him. I could never turn my back on my son. I feel sad whenever I see how big his wound is.

After the incident, a lot of things changed. The course of our lives changed. Now we are constantly faced with problems. These days, every time you need something, you need money. We do not know where to get money for the medicines the doctor prescribed. I wanted to have our house pawned, but no one would take it. Everyone I approached for money had no money to give. We went to our relatives to borrow money. But they are hard up themselves and could not lend us much. I did not allow my husband to work anymore. If he works, no one will look after my disabled child. I had to be in the hospital, and he had to help me secure money which we could use for our expenses. I had to give up my small store since no one can attend to it. We are deeply in debt and dependent on our second child who is the only one earning right now. We are so hard up. We don't even have money to buy charcoal. Yes, I am always sad, thinking about how we can recover. Until now, I worry. It has been rough. What they did to us was unforgivable.

We are more angry with those who ordered Rogelio killed. Alcoseba and his companion were only carrying out

orders. If you ask who gave the orders, we do not know. We do not know who is behind the incident. Now, it seems as if they have washed their hands of any accountability for what happened.

Some said that it is better if you are active in the revolutionary movement in the mountains because if you did something like that there, you have to go through a long process. A survey is conducted to find out if you are really guilty and deserve to be liquidated. With them, it is different. I have seen how they do things based on my experience with my son. Of course, I am in a better position to know what my son has been up to.

I am apprehensive that when Alcoseba gets well he will get back at those who helped beat him up. What if they come back? But Rogelio wasn't with the group who beat up Alcoseba since he went off to hide. Those who helped beat him up should be careful. For sure, he will get well.

I have completely lost trust in people around me. We don't know who they really are, with whom they are connected. It is unsafe to talk carelessly especially since our house is a place where people hang out.

For me, what is right is that we should fight back by filing a legal case. But my family is against it. Rogelio also said to me, "I have caused all the trouble. I will leave so that we can get back our normal lives, we can return to work, so that we will have peace again here in our home. If possible, take me away from here. That is all I ask. Don't file a case."

I feel that we should really fight for our right, but what we are seeking right now is a return to our peaceful lives. I always wanted Rogelio to finish high school. It will be sad if he cannot finish. He cannot get a good job. This is my plan that he can finish high school, but not here. If he stays here he will continue going out with his *barkada*.

It is only Rogelio who caused all these troubles and all these fears. Maybe they will come back and finish him off. What I want right now, when Rogelio can already manage to walk on his own, when he can go to the comfort room on his own, is to take him away to somewhere far. He is the only one who is a target. I fear that something will happen to him here. That is the best thing to do. He has to leave.



## Justine Key Boston

**A** former member of Bankerohan's Notoryus gang, Justine Key was 16-years-old when her boyfriend Leoven Tayo was gunned down by motorcycle-riding hitmen in 2000. Before he died, Leoven took on the name of his idol and star of the hit movie "Notoryus", Victor Neri, and established Davao City's most feared street gang. When he started bringing home stolen goods, Justine Key, who was pregnant at the time, asked her boyfriend to find another way to take care of their financial needs. Victor did not get a chance to change. Killers from the Davao Death Squad later murdered 12 other Notoryus members. Justine Key eventually left the streets, found a new boyfriend, and is trying to be a responsible mother to her three children. "If I can go back, if I can change anything, I would have wished that he didn't do those things. That was my dream," she remembers. "It's true that Victor had no education, but he loved me very much."

Victor died in 2000. I was 16-years-old.

I learned about Victor's death on the night of October 19<sup>th</sup>. My uncle had asked him to change the casing of the bike since he said it was Victor's fault that it got destroyed. Victor asked my permission to go, but I said no. He said that he had to go to Grabahan. This was around 8 o'clock in the evening. He said, "Joy, I will be back by around 10 o'clock." It was already 12 pm, but he was not home yet. By this time, I started to get apprehensive. I heard the chickens crowing outside. There were also white cats running around. And then a chicken went inside our room, and stood facing our son. I started asking myself what this all meant.

My uncle saw what happened. He said that Victor was drinking water when somebody warned him, "Don't run!" The man then took out a gun and aimed it at Victor. Victor got out his icepick, but was shot when he started to run. He still tried to get away but it was already difficult. When he fell at the Shell station, the man finished him off with a shot to the neck.

He died around 2 am. I went to Grabahan at around 10 am with the hope that he was still alive. His aunt told me that he was at Davao Doctors' Hospital, but said that she was sure that he was dead. I cried so hard. At first, I

# A Place of Refuge

THE  
FEDERAL  
GOVERNMENT  
OF CANADA





*Since its establishment in 1996, Tambayan's drop-in center has sought to rebuild a sense of community and self-respect among girls who have been victimized by psychological, physical and sexual abuse. Gang members living in Davao's larger squatter settlements in Agdao, Bankerohan, Boulevard, and Isla Verde come here daily to eat a warm meal and seek refuge from dangerous streets.*

**W**hen Ilyn Dumancas met Do in 1996, it was almost impossible to talk to her. "She was very aloof and shy," Dumancas remembers.

Over time, this street-smart teenager slowly opened up. Do was nine years old when she first ran away from home. She had asked her father for one peso, but instead of giving it to her, he got angry and hit his daughter on the head with a glass. "It was hard because my father was always gambling, always drinking, and had lots of women," recalls Do. "When there was no money he would beat up my mother. If he had money, he wouldn't give it to us."

So as not to incur her father's wrath, she went to one of Davao City's largest markets and began earning her keep by shining shoes or washing plates for restaurant owners. At ten years of age, Do was a working girl. In her spare time, she hung out with her friend Joanna, and the two smoked cigarettes when their mothers weren't looking. She later joined the One for All gang whose territory spanned Agdao's bustling public market, and got a tattoo imprinted on her forearm that read *Anak sa Ginoo* (Child of God).

When her parents fought, she fled to the PTA soccer field to sleep under the bleachers. But nighttime brought its own set of risks. One evening, a group of boys grabbed Do as she was leaving a movie theater, dragged her to the familiar soccer field, and took turns violating the frightened 12-year-old. The memory of being gang-raped still haunts her. "I have this fear about something. I think it comes from the fact I was told not to tell the police. But I did," she says.

Hungry and in need of a place to stay, Do decided to accompany Ate Ilyn to Tambayan's Drop-In Center where she ate a warm meal. Little did she know that her role as Tambayan's first contact would spark an unprecedented commitment to helping teenage girls survive the street with their dignity intact.

Seven years later, Tambayan continues to support hundreds of other girls like Do who periodically leave home to escape physical, sexual, and psychological violence. Born into abject poverty, few have the opportunity to complete their education or work in places other than the informal labor market. Many join gangs for protection but encounter more abuse at the hands of their peers or policemen who often see them as groups of vagrants waiting to be arrested.

In contrast, Tambayan views girl gangs as starting points for empowerment. "The fact that children are forming gangs is an expression of self-help," says coordinator Pilgrim Bliss Gayo-Guasa. "We see our role as helping children to strengthen their survival skills." Premised on a child-rights perspective, Tambayan believes that all youth should be given the freedom to participate

and express themselves. Nor should they have to suffer abuse by authority figures. And rather than trying to replace parents, this organization encourages them to take more responsibility in raising their own children. Meanwhile, if a girl feels that her mother and father aren't living up to their obligations, she knows where to go find a place of respite and care.

### Something from Nothing

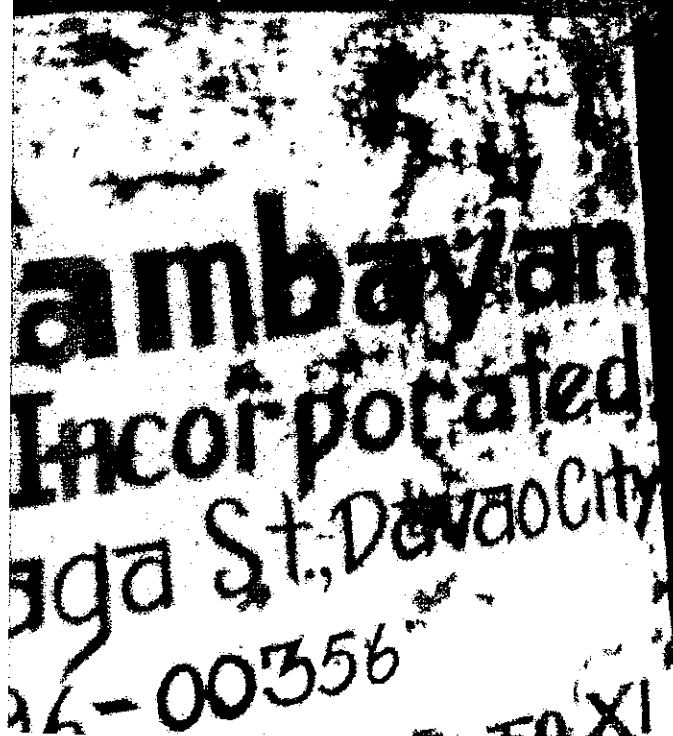
When Davao's daily newspapers ran stories about the buntog phenomenon in 1995, Editha Ong Ante-Casiple was surprised to read about groups of teenage girls reportedly exchanging sex for food. Could the buntog crisis, she questioned, be related to street children's issues? Casiple did not wait around for the story to become yesterday's news. She called Ruth Lehmann and Sister Cely Fonacier, two former colleagues from the Children's Rehabilitation Center, to see if they wanted to do something to help.

With no money or office, the three child rights advocates set out to look for these so-called buntogs and determine why they gravitated toward the streets and what could be done to assist them. After linking up with the City Social Services and Development Office, they began to meet girls working in public markets, some of whom belonged to newly-formed gangs such as Chay Innocent Angels. When funding arrived from the Netherlands-based Sisters of Charity congregation in April 1996, the three women established a drop-in center where girls like Do could stop by for a few hours and take a break from the hazardous rhythms of the street. This lively daytime home became known as Tambayan, a Cebuano word which means "hangout."

The new team soon realized that more girls needed to be reached. They hired a few street organizers who spent several nights a week roaming around the dangerous neighborhoods of Agdao, Bankerohan, Boulevard, and Isla Verde, looking for girls and asking them about their parents and dreams for the future. At first, seeing young children smoking and staying







*Above: Tambayan's gates are always open to girls like Mei, left, Ann-ann and Rine who say they feel safe coming here to express themselves and learn about ways to cope with life on the streets.*

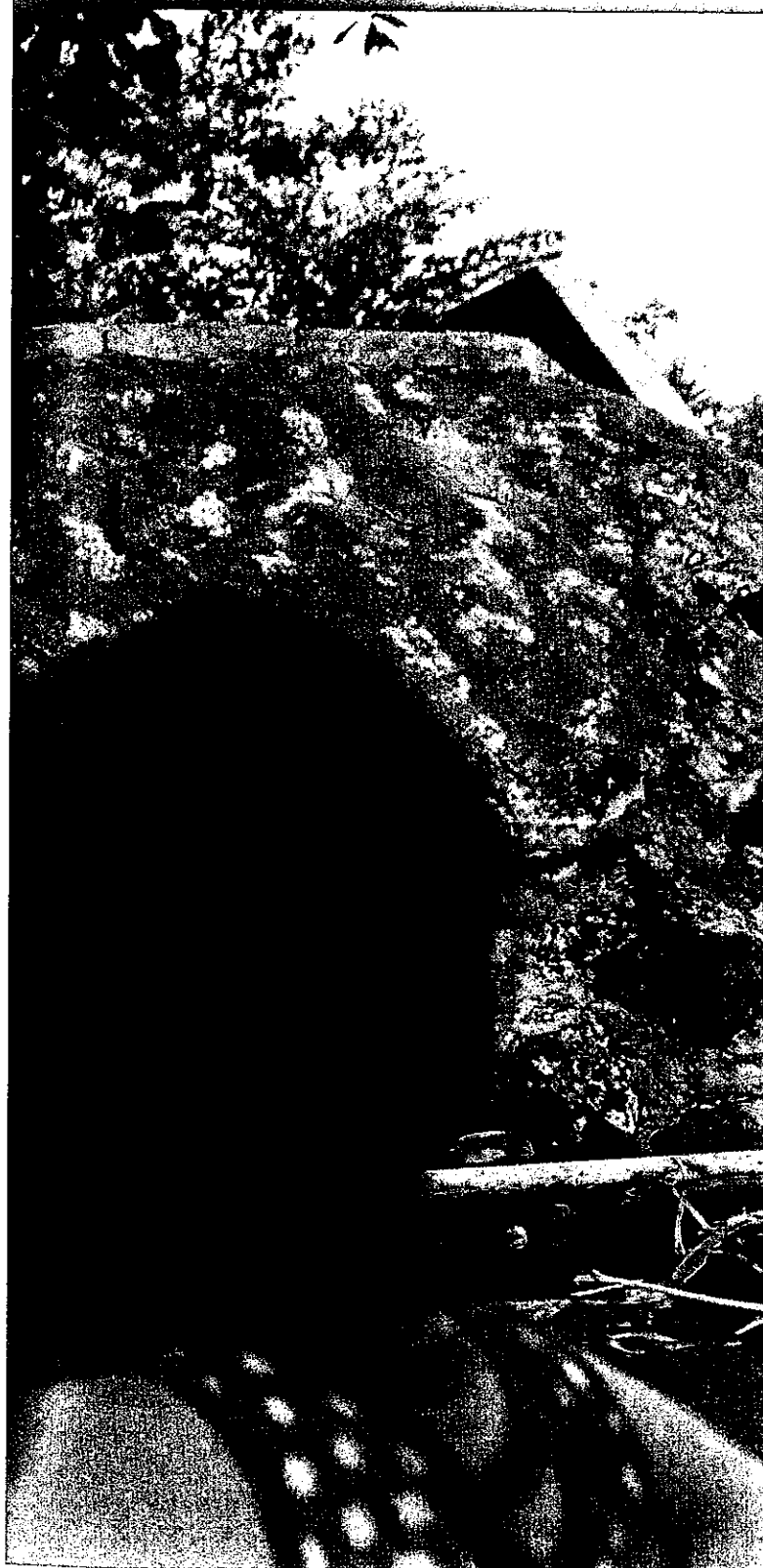
*Left: For Diskarte member May-may, left, and Tata, the bond of friendship is one of their only allies on unforgiving streets.*



out until the wee hours of the morning surprised Humeira Guerrera Morales who had previously worked with rural farm kids. After many “hangout” trips and many more conversations, she changed her biases and accepted them for who they were. Other organizers learned that many of them had nowhere to go if life turned sour at home, and no way to pay for prenatal checkups if they got pregnant. And everyone knew that they could not rely on the city government since the majority of its street-kids projects catered to males.

Aware of the acute lack of services, Tambayan added a series of its own programs tailored around the girls’ needs which included basic medical care, counseling sessions and legal advice, and lectures on reproductive health issues. In 1997, the organization created an alternative school. However, networking with children who belonged to Davao’s growing number of street gangs remained Tambayan’s driving force.

Within the first two years of operation, teams of dedicated street organizers met 600 children, half of



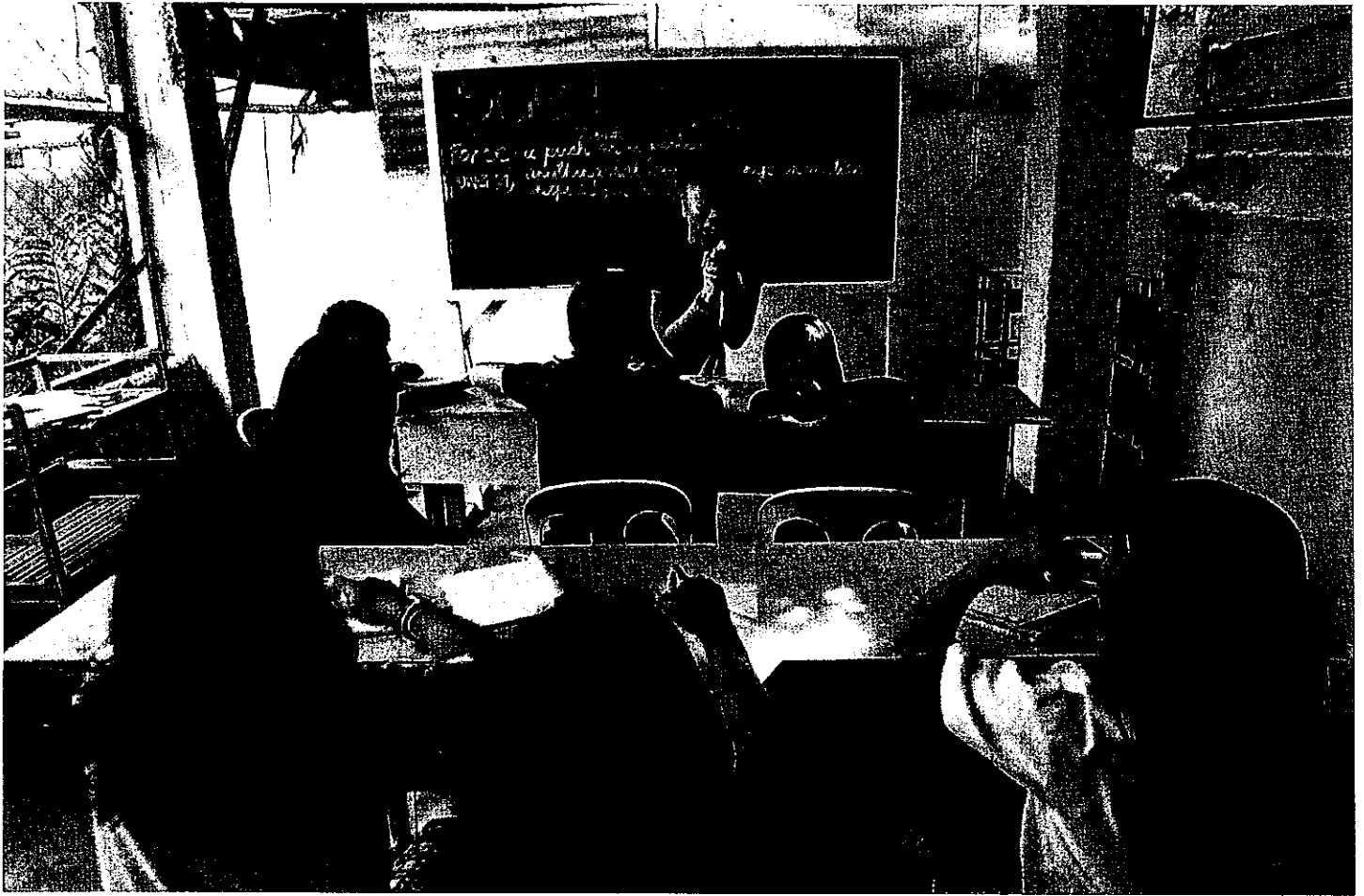
*Sarah Villarias asks Lovelyn to extinguish her cigarette during a team-building exercise at Mergrande Beach Resort. In keeping with Davao City's ordinance against smoking, girls are not allowed to smoke during any of Tambayan's activities.*



*Janice, right, and Bing watch Mei wash graffiti off Tambayan's Freedom Wall which had been used by gang members as a tapestry for self-expression. The staff decided to give the drop-in center a paint job, and provided another space for girls to write poetry and the names of their gangs.*



*Do, a young woman who was gang-raped at the age of 12, polishes a pair of boots at Tambayan's drop-in center. Assuming that of all of them are into prostitution, Davaoeños frequently call many of Tambayan's contacts "buntogs" or "shine girls," an offensive term derived from motions made during the act of masturbation. Do, however, does not make money this way and instead, shines shoes to make a living.*



*Mary Antonette Villanueva, Tambayan's volunteer teacher, shares a lesson about gravity with a group of students at the Alternative School. Established in 1997, the "Alt School" offers classes in mathematics, science, and English as well as prepares girls to re-enroll in public school.*

whom were boys. In fact, working with boys tended to be easier because they were the heads of many of the gangs and therefore the crucial entry points to girl members. "With girls, you really had to do legwork," says Casiple. "Sometimes we'd have to go to their houses and wake them up." More socialized to think about their futures, boys demonstrated enthusiasm for activities that would get them away from mundane labor in scrap metal yards. They also proved to be reliable bodyguards for the staff in tense situations.

### **Building Trust**

Today, mobilizing girl gangs to become agents of positive change is a challenging job. Alma Doysabas, a veteran Tambayan street organizer, sacrifices her weekends so that old contacts remember lessons about the dangers of Rugby, and new contacts learn about their internationally protected rights. She spends so much time in Agdao that the Warshocks affectionately call her "Alma Chay" and don't hesitate to invite her for a sing-along at the local videoke bar. She politely declines, but seizes the opportunity to remind them of upcoming craft

workshops or seminars on trafficking.

Earning their trust wasn't easy. It took six months for Warshock and Hostage girls to begin sharing private moments of their lives. "Though they showed me nice attitudes, in the back of their minds, they still wondered who I was," she says. Soon, Doysabas spoke their lingo and played the guitar with Warshocks at Agdao's seawall night after night to reassure them that she was their friend, and wanted only to stand up for their rights to life, education, and participation. Being "true to your word," this organizer learned, is the golden rule of the streets.

Though building meaningful relationships with the girls has its rewards, Doysabas admits that disappointment comes with the territory. She laments that after two years of working with Warschock, its members continue to depend on her to initiate non-gang related activities. "It's frustrating, but not a reason to stop," says Doysabas. She hopes that one day, it will move from being a gang gripped by vices to more of a self-help group whose members can identify and tackle issues affecting them as individuals, and as a unit.



*Warshock members play an icebreaker at Lantaw Bukid Resort before sharing feelings of grief and anger toward Macao's killer with Tambayan staff. A month after their leader was murdered, the Warshocks decided to spend their group's second foundation anniversary at a rural resort processing their deep sense of loss.*

## Respite from Danger

Back at Tambayan, class has ended. Within minutes, beats start kicking and songs are flowing. Volunteer teacher Mary Antonette Villanueva thumps a drum with chopsticks as a troupe of Hostage and KID girls march into the cramped Alternative School, pompoms poised for action.

"*Nandito ang Tambayan*," (Tambayan is here) yells Mei. "*Ohhh grabe*," (Oh great) the group chants back. It is only their second day of cheerleading practice. Yet they nail down Mei's impromptu rhyme as if it were their own. Never mind that the popular "Otso-Otso" song now has a new twist. At Tambayan's Drop-In Center (DIC), the gates to self-expression are always wide open.

For gang members who have nowhere to go during the day, the DIC offers a place of refuge where new friends are made and respect is learned. Far from being a silent, convent-like shelter, Tambayan's flagship program exemplifies the organization's participatory approach to working with street girls. "We see street children as survivors, and don't believe that institutionalization works for all children," says Guasa.

This means giving girls a safe space where they can go

without locking them up. Everyday, teenage members of Hostage, Wangbu, Warshock, and several other gangs stop by to take a bath, eat a meal, wash laundry, and crack jokes with gangmates. Some stay until 6 pm when the center closes for the night. Others drop by for an hour to talk to Ilyn Dumancas, the center-based therapist, about rape cases pending in court. All know they are welcome to be themselves.

An afternoon at the DIC, however, is not all fun and games. Girls take turns delegating chores to one another. Floors are swept and garbage cans emptied by 5 pm. In addition, they design a menu every week and designate cooks from among themselves to prepare simple meals. Knowing that Tambayan discourages free handouts, gang members pay one peso per meal and two pesos for laundry soap or a toothbrush. If they break the no-smoking, no-stealing rules, the girls know it means temporary suspension. "You need to be flexible and control your temper," says Dumancas who plays the delicate role of disciplinarian and counselor.

Neither does the staff allow the girls to call them "Mama." Their relationships are based on partnership, not

dependency. The teenagers instead refer to adults as *ates* or "big sisters," a term of endearment that signifies trust. Ate Ilyn reciprocates their trust by giving them money to purchase groceries for the center, funds they must liquidate as soon as they return. And all gang members meet once a month to discuss enforcement of the rules, some of which the girls developed themselves, or address conflicts that sometimes flare up at the DIC.

Do feels much more at ease here than at her home under the bleachers. "It's peaceful and nobody nags me," she says. "In our house, you get scolded for every mistake you make. If Tambayan was not here, I'd just be struggling on my own driving a *trisikad* (a pedal-driven sidecar)." When she doesn't work during the day, Do spends her time cleaning the floors or shining other girls' shoes. "I think the other children look up to me as an elder sister, and I think I have their respect," says Do. "Sometimes they play pranks on me, but I know it's just a joke." But when the laughter ends, few girls will challenge Do when she asks them to turn down the radio, stop vandalizing the walls or show more respect to the *ates*.

Aside from making crafts and cooking food, girls can choose to attend classes three times a week at the Alternative School. Established in 1997, the "Alt School" offers lessons in math, science, and English so that contacts who have dropped out will be prepared to take the Philippine Equivalency Placement Test if they decide to re-enroll.

Though only ten girls regularly show up for class, Mary Antonette Villanueva, a volunteer teacher at the Alt School, tries to make her lessons relevant to their experiences on the street. It's not uncommon for the students to start out discussing theories on gravity and end up talking about the risks of smoking. "Even if they forget for a time what I've taught them, I believe they'd really remember at least something we learned together. It's better to do something than nothing at all," says Villanueva.



*Inday tests her vocabulary with a game of Scrabble while other girls rehearse their sports festival cheer inside Tambayan's Alternative School.*

## Weighing the Impact

In addition to spreading the word about its programs among adults, Tambayan involves children in a variety of its advocacy campaigns.

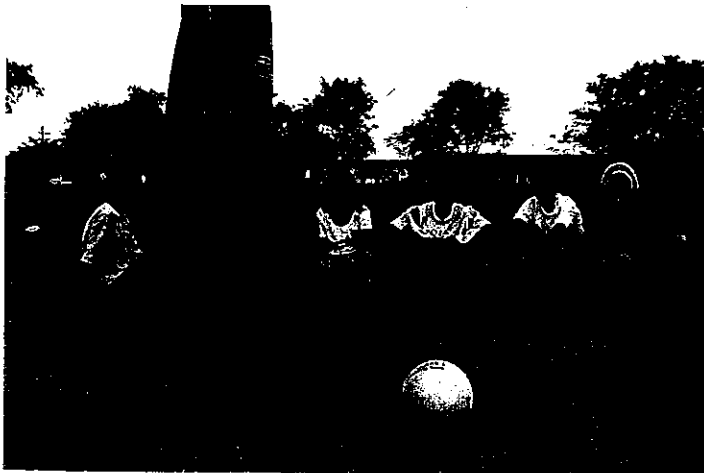
Jubel, a 16-year-old Hostage member, had been arrested numerous times for drug sniffing and violating curfew. She says some of the arresting officers slapped her or hit her on the head with truncheons. During one of Jubel's many spells in the cramped precinct jail, she wrote a letter to the Department of Social Welfare and Development on pieces of toilet tissue to plead for her release since her parents could not find her birth certificate to prove she was a minor.

After hearing Jubel's story and countless other narratives of abuse during arrest and detention, Tambayan intensified its effort in lobbying for a separate, more child-sensitive juvenile justice system. In 2002, the staff brought Jubel to the National Workshop on Street Children and the Juvenile Justice System in Markina City where she met scores of other young people who encountered similar violations. The summit gave her a chance to articulate just how hazardous the streets of Davao can be and what children face when they come into contact with the police. After the first day of discussion, she realized that she was not alone. "Most of us had been slapped and spoken to with hurtful words. We're all called buntogs and told that we always get into trouble," she says.

Lawyers and social workers attending the small-group discussions helped Jubel better understand her rights and



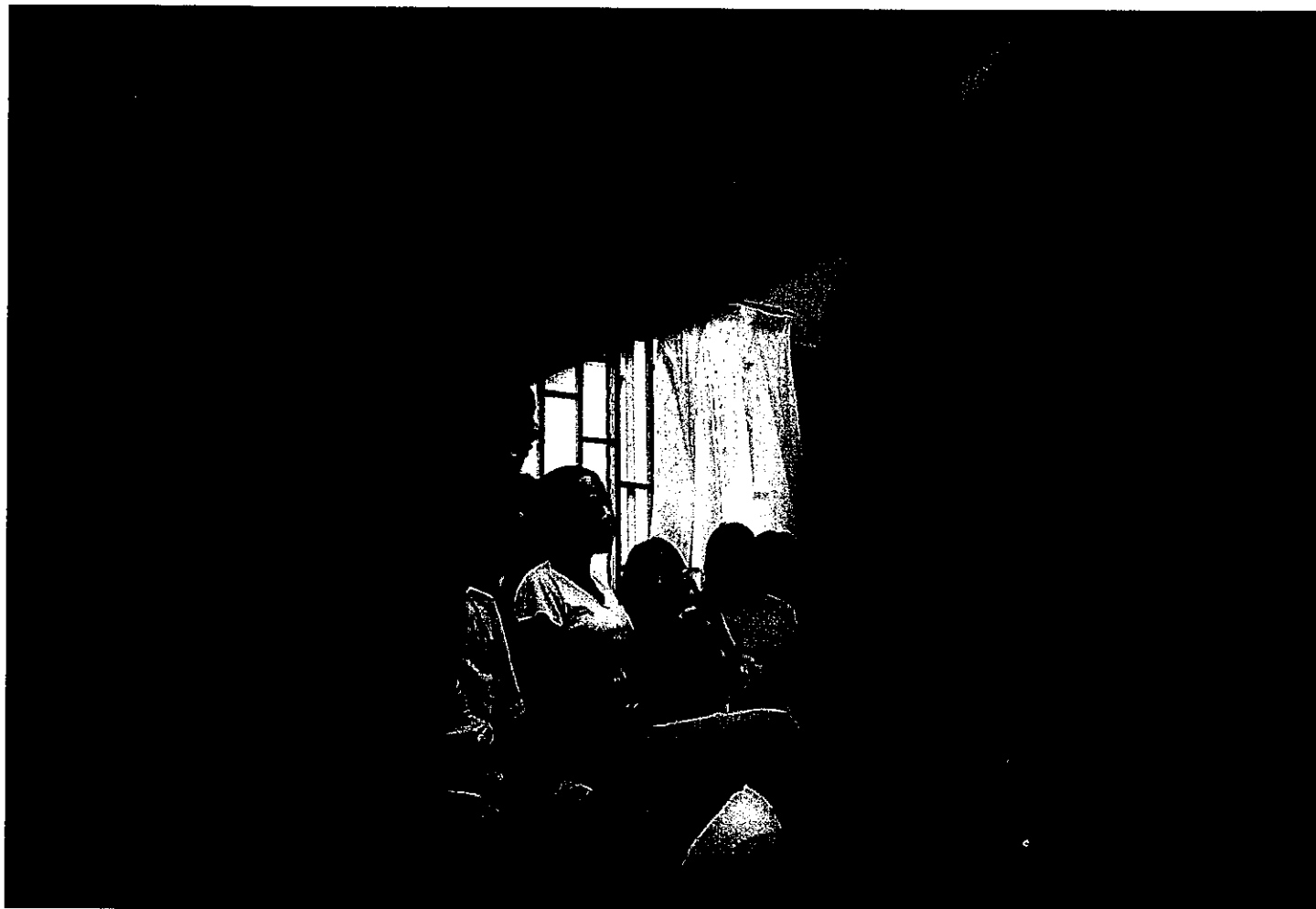
*After discussing the recent murder of a Warshock member, girls from KID (Kabataan Iwas Droga) hang out at a playground on Shrine Hills.*



*Normally pressured by their peers to play basketball, Warshock and Wangbu girls reticently watch a soccer demonstration for the first time. Aside from providing educational classes and reproductive health services, Tambayan invites girls to try out athletic and artistic activities as alternatives to drugs and prostitution.*



*Warshock girls establish house rules and outline their goals for the future during a three-day retreat at Lantaw Bukid Resort. In addition to offering temporary respite and counseling services, Tambayan organizes gangs into self-help groups so that girls will learn how to tackle issues that affect them individually and as a unit.*



*Girls from an assortment of gangs ask questions about sexually transmitted diseases during a reproductive health seminar at Tambayan.*

clarified proper arrest and court procedures. "I learned that we have the right to an education, and the right to be free," she says. "We shouldn't be arrested. We should be made to understand what we did wrong and given a second chance to change ourselves."

Tambayan also assisted Jubel in far more personal ways. While attending a workshop about sexually-transmitted diseases (STDs) in April 2003, the 16-year-old felt a sharp pain in her stomach. She was only seven months pregnant, and did not expect to go into labor so soon. Within minutes, Jubel delivered her baby twins on the floor of the comfort room. Center and street-based therapists rushed the infants to the hospital, but both of them died after a few hours. Three months later, tragedy struck again. Jubel's mother died of breast cancer. As always, Tambayan's vigilant street organizers reached out to comfort the grieving teenager. "Even if my mama is gone, I think of the staff as my mothers. When I have problems, I know there are people I can talk with," says Jubel.

### **A Weathered Issue**

Morales, a street organizer since 2001, says the most

complicated aspect of working with teenage girls like Jubel centers on reproductive health. Try as she may to convince them otherwise, many of her contacts from Agdao and Boulevard continue to be sexually active and exhibit little compliance in taking birth control pills or STD treatments if the need for medication arises.

"We often ask why it happens over and over again," says Morales. "It's a really difficult issue. You can give them all of the information, but you're not in control, especially when they go back to their communities." Morales explains that once they leave the office, peer pressure from friends kicks in and may blur any recollection of what they learned about the risks of early pregnancy or preventing infection from gonorrhea. Sex is a fact of life on the street. And since some of the girls' first sexual experiences were not consensual, they believe that there's nothing else to lose. Self-blame, she says, leads many down the dangerous road of prostitution.

Tambayan estimates that more than 80 percent of its contacts engage in some form of prostitution on either an occasional or full-time basis. Peers or relatives recruit more than half of them to work in Cebu, Manila or Japan, and at least 50 girls get pregnant each year. Aside from its



obvious medical consequences, prostitution also weakens the gang structure as a potentially constructive form of social association. Within two years of joining a gang, many members become mothers and settle down, or meet someone through their gang or community who sends them off to another city with the promise of a great job. "It's a reality that our organizing work is threatened by how fast girls can recruit other girls for trafficking," says Guasa.

Contrary to public opinion, Tambayan does not encourage sexual activity among its young partners. Nor does the staff go from alleyway to alleyway handing out condoms. What they do is recognize that most of them are already sexually active even before coming to the DIC, and give them information about how to protect themselves both physically and emotionally. Early pregnancy is not grounds for rejection from participating in the center. "It's very important for the girls to make decisions regarding their own bodies," says Guasa. "It's not enough to just give them the right information. They also need support services after they make their choice."

### Lessons Learned, New Directions

Over the last seven years, much of Tambayan's work has been based on trial and error. As Davao City's first organization catering exclusively to the needs of adolescent girls, there were no clear blueprints to follow. Mistakes were often learned the hard way, but this did not discourage the child rights advocates from pressing on with their mission.

In 2000, the staff thought it might be a good idea to select one representative from each gang and train her as a peer facilitator. However, the plan backfired and jealousy set in. While the tension eventually eased, the staff realized that inappropriate interventions can create unwanted hierarchies within tightly-knit groups of children.

Today, courage and creativity serve as the key ingredients for moving forward from past errors. Aside from expanding its advocacy campaigns on the sensitive issues of juvenile justice and summary executions, Tambayan is focusing more attention on the roles of communities and parents in supporting children.



*During a break from a seminar on grieving, two girls make out inside a chapel at Lantaw Bukid Resort. Many street girls hook up with one another because they feel it reduces the risk of rape, pregnancy, and emotional stress, three realities that they face in relationships with boys.*

After police and city legislators rescued 11 of Tambayan's contacts at a bar called Jogger's in November 2003, the staff invited the girls' parents to a series of discussions in order to help them understand why their children were selling their bodies. "Myrna" attended one session at Shrine Hills and listened to her daughter Inday explain how being broke, the compelling influence of friends, and the frequent arguments at home drove her to Jogger's. The two reached an agreement that Inday needs to inform her mother about where she goes and who she's with. "I even tag along with Inday and her friends if I am not sure what they are up to," says Myrna. However, several weeks after the 16-year-old was released from protective custody, her mother says that she went back to her old routine. Yet the mother of seven says she won't give up.

In addition, representatives from the organization regularly meet with local residents to help sensitize them to the girls' situations and provide neighborhood officials and policemen with information on the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. Ongoing community consultations enable staff to further explain to barangay leaders that setting up a shelter would limit the opportunity of making adults such as parents, civic groups and the government more accountable for how they treat children and respond to their needs. In addition, they reaffirm the organization's belief that prostitution represents one of the worst forms of sexual abuse and exploitation. As hard as they work though to eradicate discrimination, Davaoños



*Joy Alconaba, right, a street-based therapist in Bankerohan, implores ex-gang members from Anak sa Notoryus and Tropang Baog to avoid further violence during a conversation about Macao's death. A member from one of these groups had stabbed Macao after getting into a fight with Warshock girls. Although many of them have left the streets and are raising their own families, Tambayan maintains regular contact with older girls who have "graduated" from its programs.*



*Above: Girls from several gangs groove out to techno beats after a long day of first-aid training at High Ponds Resort.*

*Right: Sarah Villarias, a street organizer from Tambayan, encourages Ivie, left, and Lorelie to break the ice and have fun with other gang members during a team-building exercise at Davao's Mergrande Beach Resort. Although some gangs are more cohesive than others, most of them function as substitute families for girls whose relationships with their own parents and relatives have been strained by violence.*



still tag the girls as buntogs without morals. "The hardest thing to change is the public's attitude," Guasa says.

Though at times filled with setbacks, connecting with people like Myrna points to how more and more parents are trying to shape the future of their own children. "What will we do with the children if adults aren't aware of their role in meeting their needs? Tambayan can't be there all the time," says Guasa. "At the end of the day, the children will go back to their communities." Even if they do return, the



organization maintains its ties with older contacts, and will march ahead with its information drive among new girls, parents, and the larger community.

Mala, an older contact, eventually returned to her family in Bankerohan after spending years away from home hanging out with friends from the Tropang Baog gang. She had grown weary of using shabu with other girls, and decided to participate in some of Tambayan's activities such as a script writing and theater arts workshop in which she acted out

her own experiences of abuse. Mala now sells vegetables in the market with her mother and sister. Although she battles symptoms of pulmonary tuberculosis, the 17-year-old dreams of lending a hand to other people in need. "I want to be a social worker. It's my time to help others," Mala says. "But we'll see if Satan has different plans for the future."

It's a very tentative hope, and darkly qualified—but it's still more than many girls can say for themselves on Davao's streets.

# Acknowledgements

Tambayan-Center for the Care of Abused Children, Inc. wishes to thank the many children, organizations, parents, and members of various gangs who graciously supported this project and believed in its goal of affirming the lives and rights of adolescent street girls in Davao City.

Tambayan followed strict ethical standards while preparing this publication to ensure that the rights of the children and adult participants were guaranteed. Consultations and validation activities were conducted to map out the project's key objectives with all those involved. Names of children were coded to protect their identities, and all photographs and stories were used with informed consent. We owe them our sincere gratitude for trusting us to document them in difficult circumstances, and for suggesting specific ways in which their stories could be shared more sensitively. We acknowledge the risks they have taken by allowing themselves to be interviewed and photographed, and want to thank them for showing great courage throughout the entire process.

Tambayan is also deeply grateful to the survivors of Davao's summary executions for re-opening painful wounds so that others might understand their suffering, and their hope.

Tambayan hopes that the images contained inside *In the Shadows of Davao* dignify their individual struggles as well as portray them in a way that is both accurate and respectful.

Interviews of girls in gangs, their parents as well as the four women whose loved ones have been summarily executed were translated from Cebuano into English. Tambayan staff applied careful attention to this process in order to preserve the meaning and nuances of their spoken words. All other interviews were conducted in English. The drop-in center staff and street-based team members translated interviews and helped the photographer to gain the trust of the girls and learn more about the structural context of their lives.

Tambayan thanks Juliet Oculam for transcribing audio interviews, Keith Bacongco for translating conversations with gang members and their parents, and Yasmin Z.I. Quitain-

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We sincerely appreciate the assistance given by several child and human rights organizations including, Kabataan Consortium Inc., Kabiba–Alliance for Children's Concerns, Kaugmaon-Center for Children's Concerns, and Coalition Against Summary Execution, in facilitating interviews with the participants.

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# In the Shadows of DAVAO



Photography and text: **Ryan Anson**  
Copy Editor: **Jose B. Dalisay, Jr.**  
Picture Editor: **Lisa Botos**  
Design: **Ige Ramos Design Studio**

Beneath the official optimism and behind the commercial bustle of Davao—one of the Philippines' largest and fastest-growing cities—lies the dark and unexplored reality of its gang life, especially that of Davao's all-girl gangs. Driven out of their

homes by poverty, despair, and abuse, these gang members seek solace and support in each other's company. But often they find something more, something they may not have bargained for—drugs, sex, violence, and prostitution, even death.

Photojournalist Ryan Anson immersed himself in the life of several of these girl gangs, and chronicles in this book their many aches and sometimes joys—and, just as importantly, the path back to hope through the doors of Tambayan-Center for the Care of Abused Children Inc.

*Back Cover Image: Ignoring the volley of pellets whizzing over their heads, Warshock girls spend time chatting and smoking cigarettes with a group of younger street boys near Agdao's seawall. On the impoverished fringes of Mindanao's most developed city, teenage girls are joining gangs for protection and a sense of belonging.*

**Tambayan—Center for the Care of Abused Children Inc.** is a child rights organization working with adolescent street girls in urban poor communities in Davao City. Established in 1996, Tambayan, which means “hang-out” in Cebuano organizes girls in gangs to strengthen their inherent capacities to survive and broaden their options to live a more meaningful life of their own choice. Tambayan works in partnership with the girls by supporting their inherent rights to participate in taking action on issues that affect them. Capability-building programs and services are provided through the drop-in center, therapy and counseling, education, Alternative School and medical and legal support. The organizing work with the families, male peers in gangs and barangay officials and community-based organizations is geared toward enhancing their capacities to respond to child rights issues and concerns. This is in recognition of the important role of other sectors of society in fulfilling children's rights. In addition, Tambayan undertakes social and policy advocacy on child protection issues, confronting adolescent street girls, namely, abuse and discrimination of children in the streets, child prostitution and trafficking, juvenile justice, and summary executions.

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