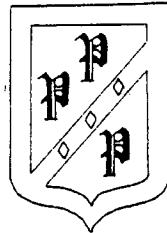


*Caught
in the
Crossfire*

*Best Wishes
Georgie Payne*

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Publications

"Yes, she's fine," he answered, walking quickly down the hall, "Let's go get Sis."

As we strode to Mrs. Baker's fourth-grade room, I began to notice other parents in the hall. All of them certainly seemed in a hurry. Why, there went Carole's friend, Rosemary, with her mother toward the front door.

Carole was standing by her seat, reciting to the class. When she saw Dad and me, my sister's eyebrows went straight up in surprise, and a little worry frown crinkled the space between. Dad stepped into the room and said something to the teacher, while I motioned for Carole to put away her books. She, too, was excused from class.

Back down the hall Dad set a quick pace. "Let's go home now," he said. "Mother is waiting for us."

When Dad used that tone of voice, it was best not to risk a sharp look by asking questions. So Carole and I rode home quietly in the backseat of the company car. But we whispered back and forth to each other.

"What could be so important as to bring Dad, himself, to fetch us?"

"Why couldn't he have sent one of the servants?"

"Wonder why he isn't at work today?"

"So many other kids were leaving school, too!"

"Something very unusual is going on."

In this way we spent the time on the short ride home. Our home in Manila was a spacious apartment that took up half of the second floor of a three-story building. The address, 1034 Indiana Street, was in the district of Malate. It was an old, lovely part of town where such buildings as ours were sparsely scattered among stately homes which dated from Spanish colonial days. Most of those estates were surrounded by carefully kept formal gardens and enclosed by stone or wrought-iron fences. The owners usually kept large, ferocious dogs to deter sneak thieves.

As Dad pulled up and parked in front of our building, the Doberman next door came rushing up to the fence barking

Dad's attention was diverted for the time being. Carole and I edged around to the side of the crowd, so we could see ahead. The guards were pushing the two along, yelling and punching them with the butts of their guns. The natives, whose heads were covered with sacks, must have been terrified; they couldn't see where they were going, or when the next blow would fall.

When the frightful scene reached the main gate, the victims were tied up near the guardhouse. Then the beatings got underway in earnest. It seemed every Japanese guard in the camp wanted his turn at beating or kicking the hapless men. The victims soon appeared to be unconscious, crumpled up on the pavement like discarded toys. If one rallied enough to move or moan, the guards descended on him again.

"Come on, girls," Dad took us by the arms, "we can't do those poor fellows any good by standing here watching." He steered us away from that horrible setting, but it did not leave my mind.

Later, in the afternoon, when I could get away by myself, I felt drawn back to see how the men had fared through the heat of the day. The crowd had dwindled to only a few silent people. If the Filipinos were not already dead, I fervently hoped they were unconscious, as the guards committed one last, unspeakable act. A garden hose was held over the mouth of one man, so that he was actually being filled with water, like one would fill a thermos. Then, with a devilish shout of glee, a guard jumped on his stomach.

Sobbing, in a state of shock, I ran from there as fast as I could. I ran all the way to the Father's Garden. I sat down in a quiet corner, where Dr. Foley held the Protestant church services. The garden seemed to be a safe place; it offered refuge such as a real church would.

It was in this very place on Easter Sunday, 1943, that Carole and I were baptized by Dr. Foley. During the peaceful and safe course of our prewar lives, Mother and Dad didn't seem to feel there was any hurry to have us baptized. Caught in the crossfire of war as we were after Pearl Harbor, they