

Duty to Country

Filipino Veterans Recognition and Education Project

Interview Transcript: Sonia Delen

Please Note: Due to a machine-automated transcription process, there may be errors in this transcript.

Sonia Delen [00:00:05] My dad, as I remember when we were kids. Every night we would have dinner and at the end of dinner, we would be gathered around him and he would tell us stories about being a soldier, a guerilla. So as far as I remember, I could remember, is that at the time when there was a Japanese occupation in the Philippines, young men were recruited to be guerrilla soldiers to fight alongside the Americans. And he was one of them. He has really his leadership skills. And so he's one of those young men, that they would really entrust to lead other, recruit other men, young boys in the barrio of Conde Labac. And he comes from two different barrios, and he was able to recruit members also to fight with them. One time, they were, I think in camp in Isla Verde island, which is an island next to Batangas City, and Batangas is a coastal town. And they were able to, they learned that there were Japanese in a nearby town where they were huddled up in a well. And so his men gathered the ammunition and then moved to pursue them. And they were able to capture the Japanese. What they do when they capture the enemies, they would disarm the Japanese. And then, you know, the commanders will be handling them. But those are the kinds of things that I would hear from them, being camouflaged in the barrios. As you know, the barrios where we were is mountainous. And so they would be doing what he had termed as hit and run. So they tried to hit and then, you know, run for cover and to the point where what they needed to do was to protect the people of where they were, away from the Japanese.

Sonia Delen [00:02:24] He did have some stories about other skirmishes, other fights, but mostly it is of them pursuing the Japanese or being able to get to where the people, you know, they were trying to protect the people too. Well, then again, yes, he's always been a born leader. I have known my dad to be well one, he was a principal of the school and continued to serve the people. So I can imagine him to be one of those really strong and really, you know, fierce person. Batangas being known for berraco, berraco means fierce. So he has those qualities of being disciplined, following orders, being a leader and a follower himself. And so those are the things that I you know, I remember when he was fighting, he's also an advocate. He was fighting for the soldiers to get their pensions. So even after the war and when I was already, you know, a young girl, there will be soldiers, guerrilla soldiers in our house gathering. So they will go to Manila to apply for their pensions and really follow their pensions. So it never stopped even when he was a guerrilla. And then later on he was fighting for their rights or, you know, to be able to get pensions, because at that time, not everybody was able to get pensions, especially from the remote towns of Conde. I remember very well, you know people will come because he's a teacher and most of the soldiers are farmers from our town. So they look to him. He understands documents and way to do the application forms and all that. And at that time, not everybody knows how to apply for pensions.

Sonia Delen [00:04:38] And so I remember this very, very well. In many of my, when I'm asked to speak or even in the books that I have written, I would always look at my dad. I will always refer to my dad because my dad has opened our home as a community center. I remember at age nine when there will be farmers, you know, asking for help, getting their land deeds done and all that. In the same way, so that's the way, I can really see him, how he was when he was younger, you know, being really good, doing good for the community. So, yes, he would bring them over to Manila, apply for their pensions. Well, I'm really very thankful for the Filipino Veterans Recognition Program. I know General Taguba. This is a very meaningful day for all veterans, the Filipino veterans and other veterans too, because then you can see that the U.S. Congress is recognizing the service that they did. It's been a long battle. And so that day was absolutely very significant to the lives of the veterans and to the families like me and to those who have not been recognized before. So I was, in October 2017, my dad and I traveled to Washington, D.C., and with my sons also, who was with the Army and another son. And it was a family affair where we really rejoiced, celebrated the soldiers because we have been fighting for them for so many years, you know, all those years, and the 75 years of rescission. It is really, they need to be recognized and they are part of the U.S. history, not as much as being the Philippine history, but they are also part of the U.S. Philippine history. And they have a place in the U.S. And so the Congressional Gold Medal is very, very important to be given to those who really served. It was history in the making. It's about time. They deserve it. Well deserved. And it's something that I really feel that I'm rejoicing because for the longest time, they have not been recognized. So I was ecstatic. I'm very thankful, grateful for the work of all the people who, you know, led to the actual awarding of the Congressional Medal. I've always referred to my dad as my role model. And again, as I mentioned in many of my works, in my speeches, when I make my remarks, when they ask me why I am involved in many of my activities, I look to my dad and his service to the community. So I would say that things that I learned about my dad, his legacy for me personally and for the other people is pro bono. I've never knew what pro bono means. I mean, it was a word that was ever used when we were young. But again, he is a teacher who would work all day and then open our home to the farmers, to the soldiers, to fight for things that they need because he knows more about documents. So then he'll provide free service to these people. His legacy is community service. Being noble and being disciplined, being a leader and a follower. So those are the things that I learned from my dad that I carry on. And that's how the community, the schools, the students look to him. Those are the things I have learned from my dad, a beautiful one, which is doing service, doing, you know, for the greater good of the community. And being an advocate, a strong advocate.