



MYANMAR SPRING DIARY

Poems & Short Stories Written in the Aftermath of
the February 2021 Coup



TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	4
FOREWORD	6
<i>By a Myanmar Writer</i>	
POETRY	8
CORPSES	8
<i>ABZ</i>	
GIRL RETURNING FROM THE DARK	10
<i>Maung Yé Nway</i>	
THIS IS THE 88 REVOLUTION, BRO	13
<i>Maung Yu Paing</i>	
ABIDING BY THE REVOLUTIONARY SPIRIT	16
<i>Moe Oo Swe Nyein</i>	
HLAING THAYA	17
<i>Thitsa Ni</i>	
TO CHILDREN	20
<i>Htun Thway Eain</i>	
A YOUTH'S DREAM	22
<i>Khint Moe Khin</i>	
I AM BURNING	27
<i>Ma Ei Shu Lay</i>	
SONG OF SPRING	29
<i>Moe Eain</i>	
POETRY MANIFESTO ON THE REVOLUTION	31
<i>Paing Thit Nwe</i>	
AM I TO BLAME FOR MY LOVE-SICK SONGS?	33
<i>You Moe</i>	

STAR 44 <i>Hnin Thiri Kyet Thaye</i>	36
SHORT STORIES	38
MUSEUM OF THE STEEL SOULS <i>Ma Thida</i>	38
THE POETS HAVE THEIR OWN BANNERS <i>Maung Thar Cho</i>	42
ENTER THE PRISON <i>Moe Oo Swe Nyein</i>	45
RIVER OF T-SHIRTS <i>Lu Kha</i>	50
STRIKE THE WAR GONG, FLY THE BANNER OF VICTORY <i>Mi Chan Wai</i>	53
THE REVOLUTION <i>Pyo Zan</i>	59
DREAMING OF LONDON <i>Yu Ya</i>	61
MAY JUSTICE REIGN IN MYANMAR <i>Thaw Htet Kaung</i>	68
RA-HTAI <i>"Potail"</i>	71
WOUNDED DIARY #1 <i>Wathondaray</i>	77
GLOSSARY	80
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	82

INTRODUCTION

On February 1, 2021, Myanmar's military launched a violent coup, preventing the democratically-elected government from starting a second term and returning the country to yet another period of repressive military rule after a decade of relative openness. According to the PEN America report *Stolen Freedoms: Creative Expression, Historic Resistance, and the Myanmar Coup*, published in December 2021, "Creative artists, including writers, poets, filmmakers, painters, musicians, satirists, graphic artists, and others, have been among the vanguard of the public response to the coup, using their creative tools to denounce the coup, to defend the freedoms gained during the country's 10-year political opening, and to call for greater change. They have built upon decades of creative protest in Myanmar, from the popular and outspoken pro-independence songs of the 1930s, to the elusive but subversive poetry of the 1970s and 1988, to the mocking satire of the early 2000s."

At the time of publication, PEN America had identified dozens of creative artists who had been detained since the coup started, with many more being hunted and targeted for arrest, or forced to flee into hiding or exile. At least five had been brutally killed and many more subjected to abuse and torture. The third wave of COVID-19, exacerbated by the coup, had further devastated the creative sector, with the deaths of many poets, writers, artists, musicians, and actors, especially from the older generations.

The authors of *Myanmar Spring Diary*, a poignant collection of 10 short stories and 12 poems, reflect on the countless acts of courage and tragic losses in the wake of the 2021 military coup, and pay tribute to the Spring Revolution heroes. Their stories and poems are set against the backdrop of Myanmar's 10 year experiment with quasi-democracy, as well as the previous five decades of military rule. The poems were written in Myanmar's languages and have been translated into English for the first time.

In the short story, *The Museum of Steel Souls*, the author evokes the brutal inhumanity of the coup with keen precision and insight. "The moment I took one step, four or five guns, trigger-ready, were aimed at my heart. Their bodies were made of cold gray stone, their heads and hands from human flesh. When a human figure came into their sights, they mechanically aimed their guns. Their masked heads and ballistic helmets could only see three fingers raised upright. They had been deprived of the sense of knowing, "This is an ambulance. This is the smell of tears."

In *Revolution*, the detained author writes of the astounding courage that has been witnessed since the start of the revolution - "Our conversation didn't take long. They did their job in half an hour. The water in the steel cup, the sight of which had whetted my appetite, was splashed on the corner of the wall. Bang! The one and only door of the room was shut. Me all alone in a dark cell. I was determined I would never surrender till my last breath."

Several of the contributing poets to this collection consider the devastating impact on children, including in the poem, *Girl Returning from the Dark*, about a girl who turns five while in detention: "The brutal hands can't get her father, so what did they do? Put her mother behind bars, her sister too. And put this little child behind iron bars." In *Two Children*, the poet calls on children to be strong: "When schools reopen, on that first day, no

teaching of subjects. Your teacher will draw on the blackboard three big fingers standing upright. And each of you will come up to the front, and give a presentation, talking about your feelings and opinions. Well, then, little children, make your presentation brave and bold, with no tears in your eyes.”

In the poem, *Poetry Manifesto on the Revolution*, the author looks toward a future with freedom from fear: “If you have grown up in fear, you are a dead letter of a lifeless alphabet, a dumb tongue that knows no history. Must bury the story of a group of people who, out of fear, have become reactionaries. Without fail, we must compose the stories of those revolutionaries who had no fear of death. Freedom from fear will be imprinted on the hearts of the younger generations, a solemn promise that you can come to a new nation, with new developments, new minds and bodies, riding a brand new vehicle! Chorus: What are you going to do when the revolution is over? Chorus: When our mission is accomplished, we will go back to the public barracks, and write poems.”

Please [click here](#) to view a selection of this collection of poems and short stories on [pen.org](#).

FOREWORD

By a Myanmar Writer

The Princess of Winter has begun to fold up her veil of mist.

The people of Myanmar were looking forward to the day when the new House of Representatives - the Pyithu Hluttaw - would sit, composed of the people's representatives elected on November 8, 2020. Our people were looking forward to that auspicious day when the flaming civil war that had been waging for ages would come to an end and the Hluttaw, the harbinger of peace, would come to the fore, making amendments to the 2008 State Constitution and laying down the foundation for the building of a federal democratic state. Their votes and astounding enthusiasm resulted in a landslide victory.

Yet before the long-awaited Pyithu Hluttaw began, the Tatmadaw, spewing lame claims of voter fraud, seized power in a coup. Having survived gruesome military rule four times over a sixty year period, we are sadly well aware of the ulterior motives of the Tatmadaw towards the country and our people.

It goes without saying that the military coup was nothing more than a lame excuse - a frenzied attempt to cover a dead elephant with a dog's hide. While a man wearing military garb might feign a beaming smile, our people are not fooled; they know very well the extent to which he has already exploited our country's natural resources and riches for his own gain.

Our people cherish truth. We want to control our own destiny. We can no longer tolerate the bullies of the military regime. We no longer want to move backwards. We no longer want to grow castor oil plants - a waste of time and labor, as well as money. We no longer want to be forced to move our houses back from their former sites and to whitewash fences. We do not want to be neck deep in debt and enslaved.

I can hear the sweet song of a cuckoo, the harbinger of spring. The little bird's song wafting in the breeze is so sweet to the ear, but where are you, little bird? I can't see you anywhere.

When faced with injustice, our people never bow, even if their heads are bloodied.. They always revolt against injustice. They never cower. They always respond to inhumanity. When faced with a choice between justice and injustice, they have always chosen justice.

At first the people of Myanmar staged peaceful demonstrations everywhere. Later, they were joined by people around the world.

During the day people were out in the streets under the glaring sun and lashing rain. At night, when the clock struck eight, they beat pots and pans to drive the military devils out of their neighborhoods. Credit must go to the young leaders, born after the year 2000, known as Generation Z. We all salute this generation that was at the vanguard of our Spring Revolution, shouting slogans,

“Turn the epoch of fear upside down!”

“Uproot the fascist army!”

“Don’t go to the office. Free yourself!”

Office workers, doctors and nurses, teachers, administrators, bankers, and telecommunications staff, and even the personnel of army and police departments, threw off their military yokes and joined the Civil Disobedience Movement.

The princely mask worn by the military dictators has come off.

No cat can dive underwater for hours.

The acts of oppression, murder, torture, looting and setting unprotected villages on fire have gone on and on. The military regime has continued to commit crimes against humanity. Yet people have not cowered. People’s Defense Forces have understandably been formed by local people in local regions.

The Spring Revolution is a historic people’s revolution against dictatorship.

The people of Myanmar, including Generation Z and the people’s elected representatives have sacrificed their lives, sweat and blood, homes and property. This revolution has laid the foundation of a new phase in the history of Myanmar with a federal democratic nation and new state constitution.

If you welcome and support the Spring Revolution, and look forward to a new future for Myanmar, I am sure you will cherish the *Myanmar Spring Diary*.

May our revolution be victorious!

POETRY

CORPSES

ABZ

19 July 2021

Dead bodies line up in front of the crematorium.
They follow the rules. No cutting into lines.
Not budging an inch from where they were placed.
Dead souls smelling one another,
Yet they have lost the sense of smell. They don't
know where they're from. They don't know
where they're going. They aren't sure.
Only if you turn into smoke, they say,
will you know your destination.
Like a stagnant river
flowing sluggishly into the sea,
they line up languidly
in front of the crematorium, their fists still clenched tight,
three fingers still standing upright.
Even before they breathe their last breath, the dead bodies moan,
Fuck you, Ma-Ah-La*!
Even if their souls are hurled down to hell,
they feel happy
'cause they'd be flying
to a higher plane of existence!
'Cause they know
there's no other country on earth harder,
more suffocating
even to take a breath in, than this country!
No wonder they fear
their soul being reincarnated

in the after-life here in this country.
So the dead bodies are saying goodbye to this country,
saying, never again in this country. NEVER!
The dead bodies laying there haven't budged an inch,
No chance yet to be pushed
into the flaming crematorium.
The line of dead bodies is getting longer.
To bribe the busy worker
to get a chance to be cremated first,
the zombies poke their fingers into their parched throats,
to get the pass into the after-life ASAP,
yet no coin comes out of their empty mouths.
The dead bodies cry their hearts out.
Fuck this country! Fuck you all, man! No respect
even to dead souls like us!
Then the dead bodies die another death.
They also write their wills:
Fuck you, Ma-Ah-La! Let's wait and see
what we'll do when your body dies.
Dead bodies, dead bodies
lining up in front of the crematorium.

*Ma-Ah-La: Senior General Min Aung Hlaing

GIRL RETURNING FROM THE DARK

Maung Yé Nway (Pla-Leik)

30 June 2021

Su Htet Wai is her name.
But she prefers to be called,
'Soe Su Htet Wai'
with her father's name as her surname.

She loves her father,
She loves her mother,
She loves her brothers and sisters,
She also loves her father's friends.
So cute!

The apple of her father's eye
The apple of her mother's eye
The apple of her sister's eye
The apple of her brother's eye
Loves all pretty things
All indulgent

Very often
her father is away on business trips,
short or long,
And her little heart
misses her father's homecoming

The thought of the first day of school
excited her little heart
The day came nearer
filling her heart with joy
leaving home for school
coming home from school

A child may get spoilt,
may sometimes cry
may sometimes nag at her mother
may smile, sometimes.
Innocence is a child.

Unfortunately,
justice has been bullied by injustice.
The brutal hands of the dictator,
when driven into a corner,
flung this innocent child
into the nights of darkness.

Her father, an activist out there
revolting against injustice,
flying the banner of justice

The brutal hands can't get her father,
So what did they do?
Put her mother behind bars,
her sister, too,
And put this little child behind iron bars.

At an age too young
to endure mental wounds like this
Are you fuming,
Giving vent to your feelings, little daughter?

Poor little thing, you turn five behind bars
What a pity! Your birthday got lost in detention.
Oh, how you miss your younger days!
Happy birthday, daughter.

“My little daughter, a five-year old,”
said her father, in tears -
A warrant has been issued for his arrest -
“If she should live,
and if I could live,
I would wish to meet my little lamb once again.”
Tears in my eyes,
I say, “Daughter, I’m so sorry for you.”

“Little Daughter,” said the voice of justice,
“May you be free!”
The voice of justice penetrated the walls,
And the day came when she was set free.
This little child was detained for more than two weeks.
“My tummy was always hungry!”
“I had to bathe in toilet water.”
I sighed.

“How’s your Mom?”
“How’s your sis?”
No answer.
She might be too depressed.

“How ‘bout Grandma Suu?
Is she free?” said the little child
when she was out in the open air again.
She wished
everybody would be set free like her.
Your hopes will be fulfilled soon, my little dear.

I’m afraid your mental wounds
will never be healed, my little dear.

The time will come soon
when the daybreak dispels the darkness.

Soon, with the voice of justice,
The banners of victory will be flying everywhere.
You will be happy, my little dear.

THIS IS THE 88 REVOLUTION, BRO

Maung Yu Paing

By the 88 Revolution, I don't mean, Bro,
 it's the sticker of the yellow fighting peacock,
 something that popped up yesterday,
 something you casually stick on and remove from the surface;
 The 88 Revolution is the red brand written
 by the blood of fallen students waging the revolution -
 the brand imprinted deep under the skin
 in the chests of students who have survived.

By the 88 Revolution, I don't mean, Bro,
 the long-sleeved, mandarin-collar white shirt
 that you might dare to put on in public
 when the political skies are fair.
 It is the revolution of white shirts, blood-smeared,
 when guns were fired,
 not into the air to scare away,
 but the rain of bloodthirsty bullets falling
 into the crowds of demonstrators.

The 88 Revolution is not the voice of the loudspeaker, Bro,
 promoting your own party, your own clique,
 only when granted permission for the assembly,
 but the blood-stained names of the brave
 oozing through the darkness of oppression,
 despite censorship scissors and silver ink,
 so the military regime could shut
 the eyes and ears of the people
 stopping them witnessing and hearing the truth.

The 88 Revolution was not an event, Bro,
 that took place in Varanasi long, long ago,
 but the political uprising that actually happened
 on the main road in front of your door -
 25 years ago.

The 88 Revolution is not the words, Bro,
that appeared in print in propaganda articles
by the military regime, trying to cover up
the dead elephant with a goatskin,
made-up news and stories
turning the truth upside down,
but rather news photos finding space as hard evidence
in the columns of international magazines and journals.

The 88 Revolution is not whitewashed walls, Bro,
that give false impressions
of standing intact as if nothing had happened,
but the cracked, old wall of the past
revealing the inner brickwork
bearing the seal of blood spots and gunshots.

The 88 Revolution is not a nonstop war movie, Bro,
casting fictitious characters,
but the real life battle of this country,
with the loss of a thousand lives,
under the brutal attacks of Bren Gun Carriers,
security forces, police batons, shields and tear gas bombs,
grenade bombs and rifles,
automatic firearms and bayonets,
blue prison cars and barbed wire,
and the tales of the people's defense forces, armed with petrol containers,
deadly *Gyin-ga-li* slingshots and swords,
and pointed bamboo poles and lances.

The 88 Revolution is not a crazy row, Bro,
kicked up overnight by only a group of people,
but the waves of the spirit
of the whole population of Myanmar,
overflowing onto the main roads of towns and cities
with pent-up feelings of resentment
accumulated under military boots
that never shed the skin of dictatorship
through the change of governments.

The 88 Revolution is not trash cans, Bro,
useless baskets that have been thrown away,
but heroes wiped out mercilessly
for being a deadly force larger than the army,
for being an impending threat to the dictator.
The 88 Revolution is not an outdated idea, Bro,
discarded as unnecessary,
but a frightful nightmare in the dreams
of capitalists and cronies
who have thrived on the scattered remnants disposed
by the military regime.

The 88 Revolution is not a scary ghost, Bro,
the ghost of the past to shoo out of sight, so disgusting,
out of the molded brains,
and the fear of hearts,
products of poor education and the wretched economy.
The 88 Revolution is not a history subject, Bro,
formerly prescribed, but dropped from the curriculum for no reason,
but the inscription all Myanmar people have learned by heart.
The 88 Revolution is not a thing of no concern to you, Bro,
but the homework for your lifetime
that you have to learn and practise thoroughly.

The 88 Revolution did exist,
It still exists,
And it will continue to exist, Bro.

ABIDING BY THE REVOLUTIONARY SPIRIT

Moe Oo Swe Nyein

16 June 2021

Two meals a day
Two cups of coffee a day
Two walks a day
Two baths a day
Two naps a day
Two meditative practices a day;
Looking up into the sky more than two times,
Swallowing up
my strong yearning for my family more than two times,
I express more than two times,
flinging curses at those foolhardy ignoramuses,
whose words create a din in our ears,
'This is the place that makes you do
what you do not want to do,
and not to do what you want to do.'
But they are too stupid to know
that no stereotypes ever come
out of the same mold.
The wall might keep the two worlds apart,
but the rays of belief are strongly connected.

HLAING THAYA

Thitsa Ni

If compared with the city of Yangon,
Hlaing Thaya is a suburban jungle,
where Tarzans have made their shelters,
not so romantic, of course.

Migrants from the Ayeyarwaddy Delta,
who may not have experienced the trauma of world wars,
but survived the tragedies of Nargis.
They are the upcountry nomads
who, searching for greener pastures, have abandoned
their paddy fields for employment
in city factories and industries.
So Hlaing Thaya, where migrants have settled,
is the New England of Myanmar breathing
no flavor or savor of butter.

No need to have a five-star hotel here,
but only a daybreak bazaar,
where vegetables are sold by the light of kerosene lamps.

A satellite town as simple
as a cup of instant tea prepared
with three in one, with no cream;
a satellite town, like the aggressive spikes
of a durian with no creamy seeds inside,
known for its mushrooming gangs.
Sometimes the town cleanses itself
of the vices on its sprawling body
by staging workers' strikes.

Slums and sweat,
a few morsels of rice for survival
and the strong, sour smell of illegitimately brewed liquor,
whirling smoke from factories and bloody fights -
these are the special menu of Hlaing Thaya,
not available in your civilized world.

It was the spot
where mud-phobia has turned the privileged away;
It was the humble spot
where the Hollywood star Angelia Jolie made a visit;
a lowly spot
which Daw Aung San Suu Kyi graced with a visit.

This suburban town
joined the Spring Revolution!
“Fuck you, Dictator!” Women flung curses,
men brandished their swords and cudgels,
both young and old, sharing the same blood, declaring:
“We fight all forms of oppression !”
The very first form of defense started there,
a curtain call to all corners of the country.

Never have they tasted the surplus value theory,
yet they chewed betel, and spit out their philosophy,
“Death is a bad thing, but living dead is worse.”
If you say, “The powerful always defeat the weak”,
remember a parable in the Bible:
There would then be no chance for David
to defeat the warrior Goliath.

A revolution with no role for the proletariat
is like a bird with broken wings.

The poster cries out:
If I get killed,
The guy behind me will chop you down.
Here flies the black flag!
These people have stood with justice.

This summer has borne
endless stories of heart pangs,
yet the whole forest will be filled
with their flourishing blossoms.

To these people,
death is nothing,
There is no blooming flower on earth
that has a cowardly heart
that falls to the ground.

TO CHILDREN

Htun Thway Eain

8 May 2021

The time has yet to come
when the national flag should fly
over the flag post in the school compound.

When you have passed
the subjects you are taught,
“This is the bomb,
this is the bullet,
this is injustice,
this is the dictator,”
then you may all go back to your classes.

Optional subjects like
“Time of your own,
space of your own,
stream of your own,
light of your own,
freedom of your own” -
Enter “of your own” in Google Search,
then, if you feel free to join
the flow of your own -
you may go back to your classrooms.

Children,
remember
every blade of grass, when trodden flat,
struggles to rise again.
Remember
no rivers flow
straight into the sea.
When you have an opportunity to know
which is black, which is white,
after you have left behind
this moment of being stuck up,
your path of the future will be perfect!

When schools reopen,
on the first day,
no teaching of subjects.
Your class teacher will draw on the blackboard
three big fingers standing upright.
And each of you has to come up to the front,
and give a presentation,
talking about your feelings and opinions.

Well, then, little children,
make your presentation brave and bold,
with no tears in your eyes.

A YOUTH'S DREAM

Khint Moe Khin

12 August 2021

Never did I expect
These things would happen.
Never did the thought enter my mind:
These things would happen.

When I got up that morning,
there, in front of the house,
Father was sitting gloomily;
Mother, always active and energetic,
was moping in the kitchen,
plucking tender roselle leaves.

A calm after the storm?
Too early to have domestic tensions.
The domestic weather today is not fair,
I had to go back to my bed, cowering.
Why, I said to myself,
Why did I wake up so early this morning?
Well, I must get this stuff out of my head.
A few moments, I hoped,
would bring peace to the family,
and Father and Mother would be on good terms again.
Oh, that TikTok I played last night
I must post it online.
No! What the heck! No internet connection!
Out of my bed I sprang,
And timidly approached my father,
querying him about the internet connection.
He looked at me with sorrowful eyes.

He waved at me to come closer.
With a slow, heavy tongue, he said,
"All internet connections have been cut."
Cut? What does it mean?
I looked baffled.
"Mother Suu and all the top leaders," he said, gritting his teeth,
"have been arrested, Son."
Sorrow and resentment spelled out clearly on his face.
Seeing my father's clenched fists,
I clenched mine, unawares.

I left Father alone.
I went over to Mother.
Looking very much distracted,
cleaning rice,
her back shaking back and forth,
Is she crying?
When I saw tears in her eyes,
tears welled up in mine, too.
"Mother, I've got the news from Father."
Mother: "Son, when we were young,
we suffered a lot
from the brutalities of dictatorship.
I was glad
your generations were enjoying the early fruits
of a good political system.
But the wretched men made a damned come-back!"

The sight of my father's clenched fists
and my mother's tears
stirred blood in my veins.
That was February 1, 2021,
the day our country was hurled
into a pit of darkness,
the climate of our country was not fine any more.

The movements began in Mandalay,
then in Yangon,
then in Monywa in Upper Myanmar,
then in Myeik and Dawei in Lower Myanmar.
Movements were launched!
Movements in every nook of the country!
People out on the road. Me, too,
joining the demonstrations every day.

Gun fires in Nay Pyi Daw and Pyinmana!
Dispersing the crowds!
Gun fires in Mandalay and Yangon!
Gun fires in cities!
And the arrests of demonstrators!
Bloodshed of our people!
And torture of our people!
Oh, bloody hell to dictatorship!
So merciless, so mean!
Our young blood stirring
Come, Nemesis, formerly a failure
in Father and Mother's generations!
Our generations must not fail
to put an end to that damned dictatorship!
The climate over our country
now torn apart so severely.

In my teenage years,
the word I often heard was:

Peace.

Yes, Peace.

P

E

A

C

E.

No more wars!

Yes, no more wars!

N

O

M

O

R

E

W

A

R

S!

Stop the wars.

Yes, stop the wars!

S

T

O

P

T

H

E

W

A

R

S!

Words so familiar to the ear!

Never did the thought occur to me:
Wars knocking at the door!
Wars coming soon!
Preparing for the wars
that the people look forward to.
I strongly wish
I was already eighteen.

I AM BURNING

Ma Ei Shu Lay

1 May 2021

Amid the roar of slogans in the air in Hledan,
My boyfriend stirred my blood.

“Wear your backpack,” he said.

“Put on your cap.

Put on your long-sleeved cotton shirt.

Chant a line calling for justice.

Join the crowd on the road.”

Yes, following his heart,
abiding by his words,
he has joined the crowd.

Sometimes, his pals are there with him,
sometimes his new friends,
sometimes his old friends,
all marching in unison.

Sometimes, he marches
from Hledan to Sule, Pansodan,
then Mahabandula Park and to the space facing the city hall,
my old haunts
there he marches without my company.

His words touch me deep-
the words he said to me during the revolution:
“If you are with me,
I’ll be holding your hand.”

In Pansodan, he recites poems,
plays guitar and sings songs-
This is the support he could offer.
No, he did more than that:
He gently breathed life
into a song in praise of the revolution,

composed poems
out of his yearning for Mother.

More than 300 miles apart
He goes on with his creations,
marching with a backpack on his back
marching to launch an armed revolution.
My heart is burning!

His journey is getting rougher
He's now in the 'liberated zone'
while his brother's been arrested,
his house was ransacked,
and his cash and personal belongings were looted.

My heart is burning!
But he cares nothing
But he has jotted down his lyrics, his notes
and a few words.

In fact, danger is at hand.
But he has no fear,
still in the corner where he finds himself
struggling for the success of the revolution.

Now the army trucks are coming!
My heart is burning, burning, burning!

SONG OF SPRING

Moe Eain

28 February 2021

(In honor of fallen heroes)

This Spring sees our hearts
echoing back the voices of the revolution.

One gunshot is enough
to agitate our hearts marching along the roads.

With zest and zeal
towns and cities roar with thunder;
out on the roads come
hundreds of Gorky's mothers.
People's banners flying in the air
Our youths' strengths rising in tempo

With no dilemma, no break,
Spring defies the military dictatorship,
the strong revolutionary spirit astride on its back.

No time to yearn for anything
Spring with leaves falling in the air;
out of his throat, he vomits
crowds of demonstrators
for the cause of the revolution.

The Spring Revolution
pounding his chest hard
challenging the military dictatorship,
every time he pulls out the dagger
stabbed in the back
with all forms of injustice;
Generation Z sings the song louder,
"We don't want a military dictatorship!
We don't want a military dictatorship!"

The Spring, with blood stains,
hears the din from the beating of pots and pans everywhere.
Must free ourselves
from the darkness of despair and dangers!
Must march on and on,
day after day,
the journey of Spring
with no surrender,
until we win the goal.

Oh, Spring!
With the overflowing voices of the struggle,
you are the Spring of all our people.
This revolution must be a victory!
Yes, a tremendous victory!

POETRY MANIFESTO ON THE REVOLUTION

Paing Thit Nwe

No more verses,
the lines exploited for the sake of their military power.

The subject of our poetry
Must be: how we had to steal
for a breath of oxygen, for free access.

No more discussions
about lost love.

Must write about how hate originated,
and how hate ended.

No more hearts to sing
our national anthem.

Must soak our chests with ink
to write how our fathers, brothers,
uncles, comrades,
were detained in pools of blood
packed inside the blue prison car
like swine, like stray dogs.

As long as he lives,
man has hope.

If not hope for yourself,
hope for your wife,
your parents,
your relatives, your country,
for wiping out injustice,
for fallen comrades.

Where there is no hope,
fear reigns.

If you have grown up in fear,
you are a dead letter of a lifeless alphabet,
a dumb tongue that knows no history.

Must bury the story
of a group of people who, out of fear,
have become reactionaries.

Without fail,
we must compose the stories
of those revolutionaries
who had no fear of death.

Freedom from fear
will be imprinted
on the hearts of the younger generations,
a solemn promise that you can come to a new nation,
with new developments, new minds and bodies,
riding a brand new vehicle!

Chorus: What are you going to do
when the revolution is over?

Chorus: When our mission is accomplished,
we will go back to the public barracks,
and write poems.

AM I TO BLAME FOR MY LOVE-SICK SONGS?

You Moe

9 February 2021

Footsteps in front of the house.
Is Mother coming back?
We look forward to seeing you again.

We're worrying about you, Mother.
I can still hear your voice:
"Wash your hands.
Stay indoors.
No need to pay for the electricity bills.
Here is some pocket money.
When going out, wear a mask.
When the vaccines come,
the first priority goes to so and so."
Oh, Mother, we all miss you.

Now, there on the road,
where you are out of sight,
we are the locomotives
driving our own carriages.
Heroes come to the fore
when faced with the challenge of life.
Am I right, Mother?

If you could see
the smart younger generations,
you'd be beaming.
After every demonstration,
these disciplined, young minds take care
so no rubbish is left on the assembly ground.
How active and energetic
this IT generation is like the scouts!
I am so pleased,
tears welling up in my eyes.
Whenever their slogans reach our ears,
we feel ashamed
of our aborted mission.

Mother's mind
is that of a Zen Buddhist:
Man may come,
Man may go,
yet her mind is always at peace.

The way she mediates whirling storms
Is like the breeze flowing through flames;
Half of her body is burning,
while the other half is smiling at the world -
She never shows her burning body.

Anyway, take care of yourself, Mother.
You don't need to worry about us.

Now our young people are out on the road,
singing the song in union,
"Till the world perishes";
Standing on the other side of the barbed wire,
our youth sing the song, "Now the time has come, blood brotherhoods!"
and the world listens to their voices.

When night falls,
as the clock strikes eight,
people young and old beat cans, pots and pans
and chase away the military dictatorship,
and even the world starts to notice.

Disciplined,
we stage peaceful demonstrations,
yet, if necessary, we are prepared
to respond more fiercely .

We all know
what, on your return, you would say first;
We look forward to the day
when you would deliver your speech,
full of loving kindness,
and join hands in the revolution.

Footsteps in front of the house.
Is Mother coming home?
We've been expecting your return, Mother.

STAR 44

Hnin Thiri Kyet Thay

On August 10, 2021,
 stars jumped off highrise apartments
 on 44th street in Yangon!
 These stars had a future of their own,
 but they let it go,
 and jumped off down to the ground!
 Yes, they jumped off clear!
 Poor Mother Star!
 She was big with a Baby Star.

Down to the ground they jumped,
 yet their souls didn't go down. Their souls flew upwards,
 soaring into the sky,
 with noble spirits.
 The hearts that survived saw
 their souls flying high!

Lifeless bodies
 to our ordinary eyes;
 Yet these bodies have left a fragment of history.
 They were not foolhardy;
 They were not reckless;
 Their jump was not done thoughtlessly.
 They
 jumped
 for the
 safe future
 of those who survived.

The blood of those who survived,
 They stirred - even before their last breath.
 Their lives were gladly sacrificed
 for the sake of the unity of those who survived.

We must salute these unsung heroes,
who flew up, up to the sky.
Never will the Spring Revolution
disappear with the wanton wind. Never!
We must stand united,
we must organize
so our fallen heroes,
starting from February 1
to the present, have not died in vain.

For the brighter stars of our younger generations,
for a future free from military dictatorship,
for the fallen stars to feel elated
at the sight of our free, beautiful country
our blood must never cool down,
never cool down,
yes, never cool down.
Never!

The goal of the revolution is not that distant.
We will join fearlessly,
playing our own part,
we will honor the falling, falling stars.
Their choice must never be ridiculed
for these young souls were what you would name.

SHORT STORIES

MUSEUM OF THE STEEL SOULS

Ma Thida (Sanchaung)

(1)

EXHIBITION ROOM 1

A smoke bomb must have exploded in here. Its strong smell and thick smoke almost choked me. I couldn't see anything inside the room clearly. The dark columns of smoke curled up to the ceiling, and then back down to the floor. I could only make out objects up to three feet away.

My goodness! As I peered through the dark clouds of smoke, squinting my eyes so I could see what lay ahead, I tripped over something on the floor. I fell, but the object didn't move. I looked down quickly. My eyes stung.

Oh, there you are! A woman's white slipper soaked in blood. Quite a light slipper, but sticky blood had dried under its sole. So, though I tripped over it, the slipper was as firm as a hammered nail. The Myanmar basic education women teachers I know usually wear this type of slipper. It symbolized, therefore, a teacher joining the Spring Revolution till she breathed her last breath. I turned around, looking down at the bloody slipper, stood upright, and bowed to the owner, who I imagined was a school teacher in a green and white school uniform. My eyes no longer stung, but the smell of smoke had not dissipated. Maybe my nostrils had gotten used to the smell.

On the white wall I could clearly see a pair of glasses, which I thought would not cost much. They belonged to a man, a school teacher, who had devoted many years of his life to education. His soul was not able to take his glasses to the after-life, but, on his behalf, the museum had accepted his blood-stained glasses as an exhibit for posterity. For the exhibit caption there was a map showing the birthplace of the deceased owner of the glasses, in honor of his noble service. This map was different from the one displayed beside the woman teacher's white slipper. My eyes no longer stung, but I felt tears welling up. The smell of smoke! Does it come from outside? Or does it come from inside my body - from an organ which might have been burned? The cloud of smoke almost blocked my throat.

On the wall next to me appeared one blurred image after another. My eyes strained through the cloud of smoke to see them, as though they were farther than their actual distance: tattooed letters on a poetess's forearm spelling out her blood type; a poet in the vanguard holding a fluttering banner; the lifeless body of a poet whose organs had been mutilated and who wrote the lines, "I will live with a clear conscience until my last minute"; a worried lad pushing a wagon carrying a wounded body; a little girl behind a thin, makeshift shield to protect

her from the cloud of smoke; a young man, who, taking the cover of a fiber shield, tried to carry the body of his wounded brother ... 10 or 20 images, one after another. The dam of my eyelids broke, and tears flowed down uninterrupted. I could now tolerate the smell of smoke.

Bang! Something dropped from the ceiling right on my head! Sticky liquid flowing from my forehead down over my glasses. Nothing but red in my vision. The thing that dropped down on my head didn't roll off. I turned my head to the right. A mirror was waiting. "My goodness! A motorbike helmet on my head!"

Now the wind from nowhere began to blow very strongly. Strange! The wind was blowing, not on the lower part of my body, only the upper part. I could hear the strong gust of wind blowing. The smell of smoke was blown away. Now a smell reminiscent of clinics and hospitals invaded my nostrils. The strong wind hit the helmet on my head like the brutal butt of a rifle so many times that I almost lost my balance. My glasses were smeared with red liquid so everywhere I looked was red. The wind was blowing on the upper part of my body. Should I sit down so that I feel better? Yet I stood still on my feet as though fossilized. Now, the stringent smoke of gunpowder filled the air.

"Everything is gonna be alright. Come here, and wash your face with coke." I heard a young woman's voice. Her voice was sweet, clear and very decisive. I headed in the direction of the voice. To my astonishment, I discovered it came from the map of Myanmar next to the caption on the wall - from the thoughts of a mass of people of different ages, races, religions, birthplaces, sexual tendencies and orientations, and everything else. "Everything is gonna be alright!" Then, the backwash from the deepest core of my heart must have blown away the helmet from my heart right up to the ceiling. The smell of gunpowder was getting stronger. But I neither sat down nor stood still, as if anchored firmly. I must move, I must move forward. A new exhibition room was waiting for me.

(2)

EXHIBITION ROOM 2

The strong smell of tears! Who would argue that you can't smell tears? I became accustomed to all sorts of smells in the exhibition room I just visited. No wonder I could now distinguish one smell from another. So I can say that this exhibition room is choked with the pungent smell of tears. The room, filled with the smell of tears, was so suffocating you couldn't breathe properly. Yes, before you enter this room, you must sign an agreement that your life is at stake, and you are required to cover your face with an oxygen mask, hooked up to an oxygen tank, so that you can see everything in this exhibition room, and are blessed with the chance to take a good breath. This oxygen mask, if you are lucky, will serve you well until you leave this room. Yet the flow of oxygen could stop at any time. This you must know, and you must accept the terms of agreement before you enter this room: when the oxygen stops flowing, the air through the tube could cause breathing problems, even doing harm to your life. So, you must be convinced that it is a great blessing if you do not lose your sense of the smell of tears. The smell of tears would be the meal you nibble at; and if you do not make any mistakes taking steps, with the oxygen mask over your face, you would not miss your Spring goal.

The challenge was there, ahead of me. The moment I took one step, four or five guns, trigger-ready, were aimed at my heart. Their bodies were made of cold gray stone, their heads and hands from human flesh. When a human figure came into their sights, they mechanically aimed their guns. Their masked heads and ballistic helmets could

only see three fingers raised upright. They were deprived of the sense of knowing, “This is an ambulance. This is the smell of tears”. Their hands looked stone dead, ready to pull the trigger and shoot at anything, animate or inanimate, the moment they heard a puff of the wanton wind. The hospital behind these stone-sculptured soldiers was only thirty or forty steps away, but I turned around, never to go there. The hospital seemed miles away.

I came to a long corridor. There I saw a long line of shadowy figures, seated and standing, with hundreds of oxygen cylinders, large and small, in a long line. Once again, the intolerable smell of tears rose up in the gloomy air. The sounds of hard breathing and groans, high and low, rose, then exploded, then paused and thinned, and then got louder. The hard confused breathing blasted my eardrums!

Dark gray clouds floated down from the ceiling, introducing a new scene. In the wink of an eye, an invisible hand pushed those people, and their bodies fell to the ground. At that very moment, the long line of oxygen cylinders also fell and, alas!, were transformed into stretchers for carrying corpses. Right before my eyes, those thousands of sorrowful eyes, looking almost hopeless, turned into motionless, stony eyes.

I lost the heart to skim the captions. I just wanted to leave right away. Why the smell of tears? Why the hard breathing? Why such a moving scene? I didn't want to know why. These baffling questions had numbed my desire to find out why. Is there anything more to find out? What would more messages bring to me? Just gruesome scenes of misery. Would there be anything else on earth to bring but a huge shame, a terrible disgrace to humanity?

(3)

Exhibition Room 3

The clean fresh air emanated a sweet fragrance. The beaming light was bright and calm. At the entrance were rows of many, many slippers of different sizes and shapes, neatly laid out on the floor. A three-cornered card on the floor read: when dispersed by gunshots during the Spring Revolution, many who fled were barefooted, so people in the neighborhoods collected and arranged the ownerless slippers in such an efficient manner that, if fortune should favor them, the owners could come back to claim their slippers and put them right back on. I was gazing at the slippers, pleased with the efforts, when I saw glittering silver and gold wings flying down from the ceiling. The wings gently alighted on the respective slippers. What was going to fly up to the sky was not the winged slippers, of course, but the butterflies of the noble souls of those people, who had hearts of gold to show empathy to their fellow human beings.

I stood before the rows of slippers and bowed. When I looked up, I saw a smiling, young woman holding a basket of boiled peas around her waist. What an inviting smell wafted from the steaming, boiled peas! My mouth watered. She smiled, but her eyes revealed a bit of pride. A caption on her bamboo basket read: During the Covid-19 pandemic, the prices of commodities have skyrocketed. This young hawker of boiled peas, sensing what could happen to food prices, sold her gold ring, invested in bags of peas, and sold boiled peas to her customers at normal prices. Thanks to her lack of greed, the price wasn't raised.” Impressed by her noble mindset and laudable motives, I embraced the statue of the young hawker by the shoulder. “During the Spring Revolution,” said her clear recorded voice, “those who have sacrificed their lives outnumber the audience capacity of this museum. We have simply done what we could for our people.”

All the walls, ceiling and floor of the next section were crammed with certificates of honor for CDM heroes and Spring Revolution donors. Among them, a homeless, mentally ill man who made a donation of 30,000 kyats to a charity fund to purchase oxygen! On the wall filled with certificates, a transparent embossed screen of teardrops floated, much like animation slides. Hours passed, but the images went on and on: 22222 strike, thanaka strike, drivers' strike, flower strike, Tumbling Kelly strike, inanimate objects strike, and many, many more. Images of the Ministry of Railway Service workers, who, adopting the lives of CDMs, took their belongings and left their barracks; striking people lying on railway lines to stop the railway service; religious leaders who begged soldiers to shoot them instead of the demonstrators; people preparing food and oxygen inside religious buildings for the Spring Revolution demonstrators; vehicles and staff of nonprofit organizations bravely sacrificing their lives for the people, doing their part to the best of their abilities; a Buddhist monk who offered banana bunches to a Muslim during the pandemic when food supply was a problem for all; a young Muslim staff member, covering her head with a shawl, vaccinating a Buddhist monk; the staff of the People's Police Force and the army. The bursts of images continued.

On the floor, in the corner of the hall, by my right hand, there were dented pots and pans, iron rods, tin sheets, and tin boxes, large and small, with captions listing the owner's house number, name of street or road, town, township and division. A red spotlight was hovering over these iron and tin wares, and as the spotlight fell on a particular object, an aggressive cacophony rang out - strikes of hate and resentment. More red spotlights! Then a tumultuous roar of hard strikes against the iron pots and pans, as though the hall was hit by lightning and thunder.

(4)

The compound of the museum was a cool, shady glade. Each tree growing there bore the name of an honored hero. The stories of the heroes were displayed on the tree trunks. The letters of each name were an embossed piece of art. Not only the names of individual people, but also towns and villages that had bravely resisted and taken up arms during the Spring Revolution. The trees also bore the names of people living abroad who had contributed to the revolution, along with the names of their respective cities and countries. These little steel butterflies, bearing names, performed their duties on behalf of the heroes, throughout the glade in the compound of the museum. At an exit with no re-entry, a small lottery house welcomed visitors. Unlike all the other lottery houses in the world, this one offered two choices to ticket buyers: If you win the lottery prize, are you going to take away the prize or are you going to donate it? Surprisingly, the majority of ticket buyers ticked the box: "Donate". Thus, they chose the destiny of the revolution, not their own destiny. Now I was leaving the museum.

After I read the sign at the exit of The Museum of Steel Butterflies, I made a solemn promise with strong determination. The sign at the exit said: "Make a promise that you and your next generations will ensure a museum like this will never exist in the future."

THE POETS HAVE THEIR OWN BANNERS

Maung Thar Cho

9 August 2013

(From his book “May the mountain ranges go straight. May the broad rivers flow”)

(1)

“A cock on wings finds no place to touch the ground” is, of course, a common figurative expression among our people, and I might have casually used it in my writing and conversation, as in “The city was so crowded that even a cock on wings found no place to touch the ground”. It means, “so excessively crowded, so jammed with people.”

I must admit that in my daily social life I have never found myself in the kind of large crowds where a cock on wings could not find a place to touch the ground. Of course, festivals like the Shwedagon Pagoda Tabaung Festival, Taunggyi Fire Balloon Festival, Bagan Ananda Pagoda Festival, spirit propitiation festival to the north of Mandalay in Taung Pyone, Union Day celebration at the Kyaikkasan Ground, and the Yangon Thingyan Festival are very crowded with holiday makers, but this figurative expression does not apply in these cases.

People out in the streets and on the roads during the 88 Revolution. Bar Street, Lewis Street, Anawrahta Road, Sule Road, Bandoola Road, Merchant Road, 33rd Street, 34th street - well, to make a long story short, let your cock fly onto any road or street in downtown Yangon, and I assure you that that poor cock fluttering its wings in the air will be in despair, finding no place to touch the ground! Shoulder to shoulder, back to chest, waves of dark heads in the sea of people, the demonstrators in full swing!

1988. The city where a cock on wings found no place to touch the ground.

(2)

August, 1988. There were rain showers for a few minutes, then it stopped raining, just like in August 2013.

The demonstrators, who had suffered for years under the one party military dictatorship, were jammed into the Upper Block of 33rd Street. Poets were standing on the four or five steps of an apartment, cotton bags slung over their shoulders. Flag! Yes, a flag! We need a flag! Voices flew around, discordantly. Who’s gonna draw the design of our flag? Saya Di. Who else could it be? Yes, Saya Di! Yes, the designer of our flag!

Yes, I remember that Ko Myo Nyunt, nicknamed Artist Maung Di, was then requested to draw the design of the flag for the Myanmar Poets Association. A white pennant against a red rectangular background. It was August 24th, when the 8/88 notification announced that the curfew had been canceled.

I wrote in my notebook: Maung Tha Cho, Ya Mon and Nay Seint donated 140 kyats for the Myanmar Poets Association flag. I went to North Okkalapa Market to buy two yards of red and white cotton and paid a tailor to sew the flag. The following day, I rushed to 33rd street, the rendezvous of poets and writers. I tied the flag to the top of a bamboo pole, and raised it high into the air. There, the red and white flag in Saya Di’s design fluttered in the breeze! Amid the hurrahs and clapping hands, the flag of the Myanmar Poets Association fluttered in the morning breeze.

Yes, together with the people, the Myanmar poets marched under the banner of the Myanmar Poets Association.

“Should civil war break out, the culprit is nobody but the MSLP*!”

“Should civil war break out, the culprit is nobody but the MSLP!”

It was the late Poet Maung Yan Paing’s slogan. But his slogan wasn’t a hit. No ears heard it. Thus, the Myanmar Poets Association slogan sounded strange. Whether strange or familiar, we didn’t like it. “Ko Yan Paing,” I said, “no more of your slogan, please.” He seemed to agree with me. The following day, we changed our slogan.

“If you want democracy, be disciplined. Be united.”

“If you want democracy, be disciplined. Be united.”

This was the new slogan, from Poet Ko Aung Way. In the city where all the streets and roads were packed with demonstrators, in the main current of history, flowing like a giant mass of water hyacinths, we marched on and on, flying the flag of the Myanmar Poets Association.

(3)

The Myanmar Poets Association flag was new. The country had been in flames since the RIT student Ko Phone Maw was shot dead on March 13, 1988; the incident led to the massacre at Tada-phyu (White Bridge) on the bank of Inya Lake on March 16th; the arrests at Yangon University campus on March 17th; the bloodshed at Mye Ni Gon on June 21th; U Ne Win’s resignation as Chairman of the Myanmar Socialist Lanzin Party on July 25th; U Sein Lwin assuming power on July 27th; U Sein Lwin resigning from the post on August 12th; Dr Maung Maung becoming the new president of Myanmar on August 19th; the Tatmadaw, the military regime, taking over on September 18th. Starting from 8-8-88, there were quick political shifts, and when the whole country was staging strikes at Shwe Kyi Aye teashop near Sule Pagoda, poets and writers gathered to form the Myanmar Poets Association.

A proposal was made to elect Poet Nay Thwe Ni as the chairman, but he declined. “My fellas,” he said, “I think younger generations should be entitled to take this role.”

Then we all urged Maung Sein Ni to take the chairman position. And he accepted. Then, a proposal was made to appoint me as the vice-chairman, but feeling I was not entitled, I declined. To summarize, the Myanmar Poets Association was comprised of poets. Previously Myanmar poets had joined the music, zat pwe theater performance and film association that also included writers and artists.

On August 22nd, poets and U Win Khet constructed a stage for writers and artists in the Yangon Civil Hospital. It was Ko Aung Gyi of Myat Lay Magazine who carried cables, microphones, loudspeakers, and so on. I acted as the announcer. I can still recall the members’ names: U Win Khet, the woman comedian Ma Than Shwe, the academy award-winner Aye Aye Thin, the lawyer Maung Ko Yu, Min Thein Kha, Maung Lin Yon (Shan State), and a Buddhist monk. Actually, the stage was just a makeshift one: the poets themselves pushed and rolled the square-shaped, rusted iron water tanks, and made a platform for the speakers. Then, accompanied by poet Maung Thaw Ka and actress Khin Thida Tun, our idol Daw Aung San Suu Kyi took the stage.

It happened that I exchanged words with a tall movie director. After that, we moved out from under the Writers and Artists banner, and established our own association, the Myanmar Poets Association.

(4)

Now the poets had their own platform for their own voices.

No personal attacks or critiques. No support for those looters of the country's assets. No acts of terrorism. Why should our choice be a democratic state? These should be the guidelines for our speeches. So the poets came out onto the stage and delivered their speeches and recited their poems.

Saya Tin Moe, Saya Maung Swan Yi, Min Thit, Ma San San Nwe (Thayawaddy), Ko Aung Way, Maung Sein Ni, Zaung Htet, Min Htet Maung, Yamon, Nay Seint, Khin Lun, Ko Aung Zin Min, Ko Nyi Nyunt, Ko Yan Paing, Saya Maung Moe Thu, Saya Maung Thaw Ka, Myint Oo Oo Myint, Maung Di, Min Thaik Mon, etc.

In the August rain, we found a corner under the building eaves and unwrapped the charity meals for our lunch. Then we went to the platform to give a speech, based on the assigned rotation, and then got lost in the stream of demonstrators along the main roads, among poets and writers flying their own banners in the air.

(5)

When I switched on the radio at 4pm on September 18, 1988, they were broadcasting military marches. It was only in 1989 that the Berlin Wall fell; it was only in 1990 that a revolution got underway in Mongolia; it was only in 1991 that a revolution happened in Cambodia; it was only in 1992 that the Thai revolution started; it was only in 1999 that democratization took root in Indonesia. We Myanmar people started out earlier, in 1988. Sadly enough, however, as the lines in Maung Chaw Nwe's poem, "Shades of Sorrow" describe:

*We set out earlier.
Yes, we set out early,
Yet we got late.*

How sad our efforts have turned out to be! Though we launched political changes earlier than any other country in the world, we are still late, we haven't reached our goal. But who caused the delay? Those who caused the delay must be the culprits in our history.

*Myanmar Socialist Lanzin Party

ENTER THE PRISON

Moe Oo Swe Nyein

The Spring Revolution on Pansodan Road

The other day I came across a statement posted on Facebook that March 27th would be the red-letter day of the Spring Revolution, and on that day, writers, artists, designers and everyone working in the art field would be out on the roads demonstrating. But I wasn't told when exactly it would happen.

When the people of Myanmar launched an armed revolution against the fascist Japanese it became known as Revolution Day, but in the 1980s, General Ne Win, founder of the Myanma Socialist Lanzin Party, changed it to Tatmadaw Day. Tatmadaw Day falls on March 27th, a red-letter day, a holy day in the calendar of successive military governments, from the State Law and Order Restoration Council and State Peace and Development Council to the military regime ruled by military coup leader Min Aung Hlaing. So I assume that Tatmadaw Day is the day when, from their own point of view, military dictators feel proud of themselves as the great saviors of the state. I assumed they would stage an extravaganza in Nay Pyi Daw, but a few minutes later I discovered I was wrong.

As I left my house that morning, things weren't going well. Security forces were on stand-by at the short-cuts of the main roads. So I had to go another way around, avoiding familiar lanes. As soon as I got off the bus in the downtown area, demonstrators who had been there earlier were eager to start. But there were barely 30 people. With no discussion about plans, we set out on our mission. After a five-minute walk past the traffic light on Anawrahta Road, Pansodan Township, people in taxis turning onto Pansodan Road from Maha Bandoola Road shouted in warning: "They're comin'! They're comin'!" Right after, I caught a glimpse of two Toyota Double Cubs belonging to the military dogs over there! One vehicle turned onto Pansodan Road while the other one drove past Lewis Street, and blocked Anawrahta Road. (Later, I learned that two trucks also came along, carrying about 50 military policemen.)

All the demonstrators were dispersed. From the east platform of Pansodan Road, we fled to the north. Some took refuge in nearby apartments, some took a shortcut from Anawrahta Road to 37th, and fled to Bogyoke Road. Some got arrested near the traffic light. Those who took refuge inside a condo were also arrested. None of the apartment owners opened their doors, so two got lost, and as they ran over to Maha Bandoola Road, one got arrested and the other one escaped. The one who got arrested zig-zagged while running so he could evade the gunshots, but the poor guy tripped and fell. Four or five military dogs stormed in, and kicked and hit him hard. He fearfully succeeded in covering his forehead with his hands. If the rifle butts had hit their mark, he would have been bruised and bloodied.

On that day, demonstrators were arrested on Pansodan Road. They were taken away to the police station, 16 in a FAW, and the last one in a Toyota Double Cub. Before we reached the police station, everyone, except the girls, were brutally hit - the very first taste of the military forces' tortures. The guy who had been taken away in the Double Cub suffered the most: he was brutally assaulted; worse than that, the police were grateful that he had 300,000 kyats in ten thousand notes in his pocket, and it goes without saying that they gladly swiped the money.

When he was dragged into the police station, he was handcuffed from behind, and once again, brutally hit by the police officers, one after another, just for fun. The batons flew over the back of his neck, calves, and soles.

They discovered tattoos on one of the men they arrested. Looking at the tattoos, the military dogs, probably feeling jealous, or assuming he must be a bad sort, also brutally hit him. At the traffic light, while trying to arrest a demonstrator, someone's car hit one of the military dogs, badly injuring him, and then took off. The military dogs blamed the demonstrator, venting their anger and saying, "That was a hit and run. One of us suffered. You were the cause! Take this! Take that!"

Shwe Pyi Thar Interrogation Center

The peaceful demonstrators, who opposed the injustice of the military coup, were brutally hit and then arrested. The station master with three stars on the bars of his police uniform sarcastically said to the last demonstrator arrested: "Here comes the leader!" Then the station master personally listed his belongings on the search form, and took photos of him and his belongings. The arrested demonstrator then had to provide biodata to a police officer with two stars: age, occupation, education, address, etc.

After all these interrogations, the 17 demonstrators who were arrested got into a prison car. Only then did we know who we were: 11 men and 6 women. Some people knew each other, but many were new faces. We introduced each other: poet, fashion designer and other professions, including three married couples.

While we were waiting in the prison car, six tiffin boxes appeared, bearing the name of one of the detained. But since we were all both physically and mentally exhausted, we showed no interest in the meals. We were fretting about being able to contact one of our family members or a friend. Thanks to the driver of the prison car, we were able to make contact with our family. Those who forgot the phone numbers of family members called their friends.

Some of the family members who could manage it arrived at the police station, but didn't manage to see their sons or daughters in person. Only from a distance. When the military dogs were gone, the family sought help from the policemen on duty to buy things for their sons and daughters. Water bottles and snacks appeared in the prison car, slippers for those who had lost theirs, but no medicines for hypertension as there were no nearby pharmacy shops.

It was only when we became a bit more relaxed that we began to share the meals. But we were all worried about what might happen to us, so we didn't have much appetite. The family of someone who was freed today sent eight meal boxes containing pilaf, but the policemen lied, saying the station master had generously made the donation.

Around 1pm, the prison car left the police station. We expected to head straight to Insein Prison or the Shwe Pyi Thar Interrogation Center. But the car drove to the Northern District police station on Myoma Kyaung Road, Dagon Township, where all of the arrested demonstrators were assembled. The station was already crowded with demonstrators detained in various townships. Some had already been in jail for seven days, while others were only arrested on the morning of the 27th. Some had heads wrapped with white bandages or bandaged hands, and others, bandaged legs. Some had been hit by the police car; some by the butt of a gun; others were shot

point-blank with rubber bullets - all sorts of injuries. The district police station jail had a brick water tank with a toilet, so we were able to wash ourselves there. And we shared the snacks with others.

At about 5pm, seven prison cars drove to the north of the city, accompanied by point duty security cars. We drove along Pye Road, and as we passed the Sawbwa Gyi Gon traffic light, I knew we were not heading to Insein Prison, but to the Shwe Pyi Thar Interrogation Center. And I felt I was about to be hurled into a new life experience.

Two Nights and Three Days in the Interrogation Center

Night 1

While driving along Pye Road and passing the Wireless Bus Terminus, the engine of one of the prison cars stalled. The detainees from that car were added to the other cars. The cars turned into Lawka Dam road, and drove on. Later I learned that it was called Nga Kan Road (Fish Pond Road). The sun had already set. It was a bumpy road. So bad! The prison cars could not drive into the camp. We had to walk about a mile. We could have taken the Shwe Pyi Thar No. 4 Highway straight into the camp, but maybe they wanted to punish us. Walking on the bumpy road, I felt feelings I couldn't describe of being pushed into the heart of darkness.

We had 20 in our batch, in a long line of more than 140 handcuffed detainees. With one hand behind our heads, we walked unsteadily, like cattle being herded back from the pastures at dusk, in hovering darkness. We had to avoid the uneven ground, holes and mounds. If those ahead of us happened to step into muddy ponds, the next people could avoid those traps. If there was a space between the batches, the security men, armed to the teeth with guns and bayonets, berated us: "Hurry up! Hurry up!" Some detainees were even hit on the back. I could also hear the threat: "Ya wanna take the bayonet, huh?"

We arrived at the Shwe Pyi Thar Interrogation Center around 7pm. Some were boxed on the ear as they entered the jail. The jail was 25 feet wide and 120 feet long. When we got inside, our handcuffs were removed, and we were ordered to assume a seated position in groups of five, with hands clasped behind our heads. The military dogs that had accompanied us on security duty had already left, and it was the first time we heard the cold command of the interrogation center, like the omen of the shrill caw of a bird: "Face forwards! Head down!" As we had been brought to a new setting where fear ruled, we were all trembling. Not a word came out of our mouths. First, the detainees were counted. Then, we had to sit upright in two rows in groups of five, face to face. We had to share one meal box containing a chicken leg, the size of a coin. The major on duty made a joke, saying, "Now you're like sweethearts, sharing a two in one dream. Ha ... ha ... ha ..." But his joke fell flat. None of us laughed.

After dinner, the interrogations began in the jail. A member of the military affairs security staff and a detainee were seated on opposite sides of a small plastic table. (There were seven or eight tables like this.) Some officers sat on a higher seat, asking questions from Olympian heights so that, when the detainees didn't answer, they could hit them. All the detainees under interrogation had to sit face down. If other detainees looked around, they would get hit. You had to tolerate the officers' curses, and your fellow detainees being hit or kicked. If you wanted to pee, you had to wait your turn. Of course, there was more than one toilet. They just wanted to get you 'programmed in the system'.

Then it was one of the poets' turn. He was doubly blindfolded, and was taken away into another room. When he came back, he 'introduced' us as the members of the Poets' Group, and then we were all subjected to interrogation simultaneously right there in the jail. The interrogation lasted about an hour. Strangely enough, the officers didn't hit or strike or curse the poets. I wondered why. Each of us was ordered to provide brief biodata, including our occupation, and what happened on Pansodan Road on March 27th. Who was the leader? Who provided the funds? These were the questions they wanted us to answer. Sometimes they probed into more detail. Mostly, they closely observed the tone and behavior of the detainees under interrogation. One striking comment from an officer: "Long hair is the style of every artist. Am I right?" "Well, the bohemian type is the way we live," I heard one of my fellow poets reply to that query. The officer had made a correct observation as three or four of the Poets' Group were long-haired.

The interrogation dragged on till 2am! Even then, their interrogations weren't finished. I wasn't struck with anything during the interrogation, but bang! Every time the jail door was flung open, every time we heard the cold command to face forward and to drop our head, we were haunted by unknown feelings of fear: *Are they going to take me away? Or are they going to take him away? With my head completely covered with a dark hood?* I dozed off at times, but that first night was truly a frightful nightmare.

Night 2

None of us got a good sleep the previous night because of the ill-omened voice of command: "Face forward! Head down!" I could doze for only a few hours. Then, a wake-up order from nowhere would wrench me out of my sleep with blinking eyes. My head was swimming, my mind was unclear. My whole body ached as if it had been beaten hard. A simile came to my mind: "Painful like being held tight by the hand and hit hard."

When I stood up to go to the toilet, my aching legs waddled. After the toilet, I thought about washing my face, but how? There were two types of water in this jail: four or five 20-liter water bottles for drinking, and the water gurgling from the tap of the toilet. Both smelled of chlorine. Maybe both came from the same pipe. Being cornered, I made a decision. I washed my face with the water from the toilet.

I had so-called fried rice decked with a fried half-egg for my breakfast. I still felt tired out. I could not eat my breakfast very well. Just half the plate of rice. Must eat to live, must sleep to live, so that I could face what was coming!

The previous night I was overwhelmed with fear and terror. With the scattered rays of morning light, I began to observe what was around me. The one with bandaged hands and legs, who had been hit by the police car in Kamayut, had frequent fits or some other illness, so the policeman on security duty was often informed. There was a man there with a bandaged head, with brown rings around his eyes. I learned that he was from Thanlyin (Syrian). I also saw a drunk, a crazy guy, busy tying and untying his rope. I learned that he lived in Kamayut. How did he get arrested? Well, he left his apartment to buy a cheroot, was mistaken for a demonstrator, got arrested, and was thrown into jail. He was nicknamed the rope-untying monk by his fellow jailors. In the middle of the previous night I had heard something: Was someone being taken out for interrogation? Or was a new detainee being thrown in? The jail door shut. A weak voice whimpered: "This son wanna go home." He was hit by the fist of a security

military dog, and thrown through the bars with a volley of curses. He seemed a bit hurt. On the following morning, I discovered that it was that rope-untying monk. In one corner of the jail I saw a father and his son. The military dogs broke the five locks of the double doors of their house in South Okkalapa, and arrested them for no reason. In fact, the father knew nothing about the political movements, and his 28-year-old son was autistic. The previous night, the young autistic man stammered his name and the name of his parents, but nothing else. For that, he was hit mercilessly! Yes, only reckless, merciless acts had taken place behind bars.

The detainees in this jail had been arrested for no reason: some were arrested while taking a walk in the street; some got arrested while having tea at a teashop; some got arrested after eating snacks and coming back home; some got arrested while going to work; some got arrested for peeping outside. It was like smearing a bamboo pole with tons of shit and then moving it from side to side to catch whoever came your way. The military dogs, serving the military dictators blindly and doggedly, were behaving as if it was a festival of arresting people, young or old, for no reason. So brainless, so disgusting!

One of the poets was taken out a second time for interrogation around 11am, after his lunch, but he was not yet back even though the sun had set and darkness had fallen. A young medical student attending Final Part II at the University of Medicine, was arrested in North Dagon. Though he was taken away for interrogation in the morning, he only got back when it was getting dark. The only thing we found out was that these two men were taken away with dark hoods covering their heads and were being subjected to interrogation at the notorious Ye Kyi Ai Interrogation Center. Other than that we knew nothing, so we felt anxious and fearful. The hearts of those who remained in jail were filled with fear about who would be the next victim.

In the afternoon, 70 more detainees arrived. That means there were about 200 in this jail. Since the space between the jailors had narrowed, we had to lie down back-to-back. Every night we heard the usual volley of curses from the officers, which might be interpreted as the jail melody: "Are you the person who chopped up our comrade?" "Are you the fellow who shot our policemen with a slingshot?" Quite miserable! Terrible!

Two nights and three days in Shwe Pyi Thar Interrogation Center. It felt like forever. Even if we would be charged and sentenced to years of imprisonment, we would rather be transferred to prison. That would be a hundred times better than staying at an interrogation center. I didn't want to drink water smelling strongly of chlorine. I had lost my appetite for the rice scattered all over, which didn't look nutritious at all - only a small chicken leg the size of a coin. Far from taking a good bath, I had no chance to clean my face and hands, so my body stunk, and after two sleepless nights, my confused state of mind must have transformed my miserable figure beyond my inward eye.

The moment they heard a policeman call out their names, all of the jailors eagerly raised their hands and shouted their fathers' names. They showed no interest in the list of those to be freed or the list of detainees to be transferred to Insein Prison. What they really wanted was a chance to be freed from this spot. No compassion or empathy here. No wonder none of us wanted to stay here another second, another minute. We were only looking forward to the blue prison car.

RIVER OF T-SHIRTS

Lu Kha

27 March 2018

(From “She-Monkey of the Ancient Times and Essays”)

I am a young man getting along in today’s T-shirt culture. As you know, everyone loves wearing T-shirts. Even those who don’t like T-shirts might buy a T-shirt as a souvenir from a tourist attraction they visited. I also put on those kinds of tourist T-shirts, but most of my T-shirts have pictures of my idols or my favorite quotes. Naturally, when I meet people who aren’t used to the T-shirt culture, they often question me about the pictures and quotes. Some are trying to catch up with the times, while others, far from getting acquainted with literature, poetry, music and politics, are struggling to survive.

One day I was wearing a T-shirt with a sketch by the classic composer Ko Maung Maung when somebody surprised me by asking, “Who is this dude? A keyboard player?”. He had looked at the portrait of Che Guevara on my T-shirt and said, “Oh, it’s Min Oo the actor!” Another person looked at the portrait of the singer and composer Khin One, and asked who the Japanese man was. One day I was wearing a T-shirt with the fighting peacock emblem of the students’ union, which was mistaken for the NLD logo flag. So I had to explain over and over again. It got worse later on. The hammer and sickle logo was mistaken for an oil and lubricant company logo, and when I visited a motorbike workshop, I was stunned when asked: What about the quality of the oil?”

In 2005, a friend of mine had a rare copy of a photo of Sayagyi Thakhin Kodaw Hmaing, the great poet of the post-colonial period, and great patriot and father of world peace. It was of an old man in a seated position, a big betel casket sitting before him, with his hands placed on his turned-up leg, 2 feet x 3 feet in size, and hung on the wall of his sitting room - a place of pride in his home. Every visitor coming to his house saw the big photo, and was curious to find out who it was, “Is it your grandpa?” “Is it your uncle?” It got to the point where he could no longer stand it, and he moved the big photo away from the public eye, and hung it on the wall at the head of his bed. His real-life story made me remember an incident in the book, *People, Years, Life*, by Illya Ehrenburg: after reading *War and Peace* by Leo Tolstoy, an ethnic Dane peasant asked Ehrenburg a probing question: how much money had Tolstoy received as an honorarium for writing such a thick book. Well, how about the people of our country? Sad stories only.

Of course, we should not blame them for not knowing this and that. For how many years have our people been struggling to make both ends meet through the epoch of darkness? No wonder these people have lost touch with what’s going on in our own country, as well as with what’s going on out there. There are many, I assure you, who do not know the name of the current president! For more than 10 years, at a state primary school in a far-flung area, a blue signboard bore the faded letters, The Socialist Republic of the Union of Myanmar (NOTE: It’s been years since we’ve adopted socialist policies). I was amused to recall what a politician coming from abroad told me: the administrative system of a European country, which has been running - I can’t remember for how many months - is so remarkable that the citizens do not even know the government exists. Well, if that’s so, our people are far superior to those citizens, aren’t they? Just a joke.

Our T-shirts give us a voice. Today, demonstrating is not as hard as in those days, but it still has its own complications, and banned, obscure or ambiguous definitions. You see, just put on a T-shirt, and it's a piece of cake to demonstrate your social or political beliefs with no need to stage a strike. You can cherish your T-shirt and publicly display your belief on the front or back. So we are T-shirt lovers: "Defy the so-called laws!" "Abolish the 2008 Constitution!" We have the human right, the freedom of expression, to disclose our likes and dislikes without impinging on the rights or freedoms of others. Even toddlers express their hunger for breastfeeding. No wonder we young people put on T-shirts: the logo and words imprinted on our T-shirts are not merely logos, not merely words.

As for me, a T-shirt is a symbol of my own social or political belief; a T-shirt is a slogan; a T-shirt is my own flag. It's out of the question for me to hold a flag and wander about, crying slogans in a singsong manner. But I can put on a T-shirt and tour the world. Right? A T-shirt speaks a lot, a T-shirt dreams a lot. You might not chip off and sculpture a new world by wearing a T-shirt, but you can at least express your own life story.

You can pour your bottled-up feelings and resentments of the whole period, as well as the images of your heroes and idols in politics and art, representing the whole epoch in history, onto your T-shirt. Then you can go from street to street, cross roads, gaze at birds vigorously fluttering their wings, flying against the wind. Yes, with a strong belief, with love, our T-shirts disclose the foibles and needs of the whole period.

The logos and words on the T-shirts young people are wearing these days are richly varied: Let flowers bloom instead of bullets; Stop the war now!; Peace is ✦; Save the Ayeyarwaddy; Save the children; "Stop oppressing the media; The Anniversary of the 8888 Revolution"; M.E 1300 Revolution Anniversary; The Day of the Fascist Revolution; "The human right of freedom"; the Hammer and Sickle logo; Do we have to eat the Signboard Mein Main?; World Poetry Day; Strike by students, education colleges, etc. Thus, the "River of Youths" T-shirts have been wildly popular - a simple symbol, laying down silt and soil. As tributaries, you and I are welcome to join this river.

Well, you need not hesitate to pick up a T-shirt, put it on and go out into the street, but choosing a T-shirt expressing your social or political beliefs is not as simple as that. Young people struggle over a number of choices in their daily lives. What are the things they have gone through? What is their real-life story? What are their dreams and beliefs? Who is who's idols? A person's social life usually molds his or her social convictions. Since even a pure white shirt devoid of any political or social beliefs represents the common Myanmar saying - A basket needs a hem to look neat and tidy; a human being needs clothing to show his or her social status - your T-shirt will definitely reveal your personality.

I have a very, very large collection of T-shirts with logos, sketches and words. Since I am a T-shirt lover, a young man with so many heroes and idols, a guy who has so many words to converse with you, I could wear a different T-shirt every day for many months: Thakhin Kodaw Hmaing, Thakhin Aung San, Thakhin Ba Hein, Salai Tin Maung Oo, Che Guevara, John Lennon, Htoo Eain Thin, Khin One, Poet Maung Thin Khine, and other idols, the logo of the Central Yoma Poet's Group, Kyauk-se Ayeyarwaddy Poetry Group, and many, many others. I have a T-shirt with a sketch of Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, which I have adoringly donned during these hard times.

You see, when you wear your favorite T-shirt, you definitely feel safe and secure. Your body wearing a hopeful T-shirt looks so fresh, so energetic. Faced with those people wearing T-shirts expressing a threat, “Eat until you’re full (before you get killed)!”, I felt satisfied that revolutionary heroes were wearing T-shirts bearing the words, “Do we have to eat the Main Signboard?”. To respond to an act of injustice, as a youth who is not yet able to push for real change, taking refuge in the shelter of a T-shirt bearing your personal political convictions of course gives you a feeling of digested food, a kind of satisfaction.

Take a look at the T-shirts young people are wearing if you want to discover their current feelings. The River of Youths’ T-shirts have been selling like crazy. Though T-shirts do not go skin deep, our T-shirts are our skin, our flesh, and our banner. A T-shirt is our voice hurled into the air, like the age-old statement that newspapers are the voice of history. Today the T-shirts we young people are wearing are the voice of our current times, the written expressions of our contemporary history.

STRIKE THE WAR GONG, FLY THE BANNER OF VICTORY

Mi Chan Wai

22 June 2021

“Only when you encounter the pressure of the storm, do you know the value of an anchor.”

The pressure of the storm? The storm from nowhere was so strong, so merciless. Followed by whirlwinds, wanton winds, shooting arrows of rain, and thunder and lightning.

All of a sudden, the storm broke. It was February 1, 2021. Bad news, shocking news! We unwillingly had to accept unwelcome events. I received a message from a friend of mine before daybreak. The mountain lying calmly for years made terrible landslides and rolling avalanches.

With the lame accusation that the NLD had committed election fraud, the Tatmadaw carried out a military coup.

“Is it true? Is it really true?”

The event so hard to prove became a harsh reality. I had to accept it. I staggered and almost lost my balance. Panting heart, fumbling about, feeling abstracted, searching for an escape, finding no room to stay, the unrelenting destiny broke through uninterrupted, like the cracked walls of a dam. Feeling restless, and resentful. Darkness fell all of a sudden, as though a thick heavy curtain was drawn.

Gone! Everything’s gone! A social infrastructure, built and sculptured through hardships, already taking shape, was now demolished! The tower of the future was blown away!

‘Myin-Kho-Si is’ a common term among seafarers, “A kind of feeling that rises up after witnessing a shocking incident or hearing a piece of terrible news.” Now I felt it. After making contact with my friends, and hearing them affirm the harsh reality, I was swimming, with a panting heart, in a sea of Myin-Kho-Si.

Our people couldn’t afford to waste time feeling shocked and sorrowful. A couple days later, uprisings broke out here and there, decrying the detainment of President U Win Myint, State Counsellor Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, writers, and many heroes of nonprofit social welfare associations.

We ignited our own engines. We joined the uprisings, playing our own roles, and we all were out in the streets demonstrating.

“Democracy! Our Cause! Our Cause!”

“Free our leaders immediately!”

“Don’t go to the office! Unyoke yourself!”

“Our revolution must be victorious!”

Days followed days. Slogans stirring our hearts, three fingers raised in the air, our fists thrown into the air, marching feet on streets and roads.

And the dictator proved to be a really brutal dictator, getting wilder, at large. Who the devil gave the guideline, "If you want to change the epoch, shoot the people in the head!"? Ironically true. Mya Thwe Thwe Khaing, a young woman demonstrator in Nay Pyi Taw, was shot dead in the head.

"The military education General Aung San taught you:
Don't murder your own people!"

With the roar of slogans, the people's revolution gained momentum. Like a beehive disturbed with a stick, people from every town and city came out into the streets and onto the roads to demonstrate in defiance of the military dictatorship. And more reckless detainments. More lawless arrests. More rules and regulations of the military dictatorship. Passers-by were restricted. No crossing bridges. They broke our legs. What could we do - like people being separated by a river with no suspension bridge?

Then it happened.

"These guys are lawless. They'll arrest you, they'll run wild. Since we're now living on the main road, we should move somewhere safer and more secure."

This was the outcome of our family discussion: we would have to move to my daughter's house, hidden away from the main road. Are you sure you are now safe and secure, I asked myself. In my house, there are only me and my husband. So, if I had to take refuge in another house, I would have to make arrangements for preparing meals for my husband. No more food stalls in the neighborhood. So I planned to prepare meals at my daughter's, and send the meals to him.

Food and diet are important for a person suffering from diabetes. But who would send the meals since it was not safe to go downstairs?

Maung Maung, my daughter's husband, offered his help. It was 11am. So I prepared the meals in a tiffin box, and sent him to the house on the main road. Soon after there was a loud gunshot. My daughter was standing by the window.

"Mum! They're coming! They're coming!"

I had already heard gruesome stories that soldiers rampaged living quarters, but that was the very first time I ever experienced it. In the wink of an eye, both mother and daughter found themselves hiding in the bathroom. Because the 'bullet-proof' bathroom was built of bricks, we thought it would be the safest place in the house. Yet though we felt secure in the bathroom, my daughter remembered something.

"My hubby! My darling!" she said, "My Gosh! Did he manage to get to Father's? Woe is me! God forbid he be in trouble!"

My daughter was overcome with worries about her husband. I also had burning worries about my son-in-law.

“My God! Where could he be?”

He would be safe if he manages to get inside our house by the main road. God forbid! He might not come face-to-face with the soldiers!

“Knock! Knock! Knock!”

“Mum, he’s there at the door. Must be Maung Maung, my hubby!”

“Stay there, daughter. I’ll open the door.”

I rushed out of the bathroom, my shaking hands trying to get the key into the keyhole.

“Mum, hurry up! They’re chasing me! I ran hard!”

Maung Maung, my son-in-law, was there, kneeling down by the door. The door was opened.

“Go right there into the bathroom!” I said. “I’ll shut the door.”

Gunshots! Shooting what? A stray bullet might hit me, but I didn’t care. But my children must be kept safe and secure.

“Must hide our phones! They could invite trouble!”

So we had to find a hiding place for our phones. I had often heard stories that soldiers went wild, combing the whole house and looting property and hitting family members. After about twenty minutes, everything calmed down.

“Thank God!” my son-in-law said, relieved, “I was halfway to Father’s when I saw the kids running into the street from the main road. They were firing their guns. I was lucky. I escaped. I got back home in time. Just in time!”

Maung Maung was describing his exciting adventure. My husband missed his lunch that day. An hour later, my daughter was watching a live video file posted on Facebook:

“Mum, have a look! Those damned guys going wild, arresting our people in the corner of our neighborhood! Thank God Maung Maung’s safe! They’ve got two men - a pedestrian and a confectioner working at the teashop.”

“Yes! They’ve arrested ordinary people, not the demonstrators! Snatching away people like devils!”

More uprisings all over the country. More merciless oppression by the military regime. More arrests, more shootings at the strike leaders, and the staff of social welfare associations, innocent people, even a kid cuddling herself in fear in her father’s lap! And cases of sexual assaults of detained women!

“A damned dictator never gives up. More people out in the streets and on the road! More sacrifices of precious lives!”

I recalled what a well-known writer and journalist, Ludu Daw A-mar, said about the 88 Revolution.

Sacrifices of lives! Sacrifices of more lives! Life is precious, so we must safeguard our lives. But how about the lives of the soldiers? If our lives are in impending danger, under terrible threats, then isn't it fair to retaliate? Despite the violent crackdowns, there are more uprisings everywhere. “Don't go to the office. Unyoke yourself!” The unexpected CDMs, defying the rule of the military dictatorship, were a blow to the military regime. The more the military regime was hit hard, the more they targeted innocent people.

These days I felt very upset and distracted. My mind was restless: distracted, searching for an escape, finding no room to stay, the unrelenting destiny broke through, uninterrupted, like the cracked walls of a dam.

Is it today? Or tomorrow? I felt like walking in the fresh air, finding no destination. I could not scribble a word. I tried to concentrate my mind so I could read something, but I had no appetite for the books I used to read with pleasure. Then my eyes scanned the lines posted on Facebook, which provides space for unrestrained feelings. No wonder people's bottled-up feelings were pouring out onto the screen. Then I came across a poem entitled “The Velocity of an Arrow”; it was composed by the two collaborative poets, Moe Myint Yan and Su Pye Wa.

*Trembling cold, we will light our own fire,
And get burned.
Into the nights darker than midnight,
One's light shall provide peaceful brightness for another.
Our strong jaws, our clenched fists,
Holding the broken lives of our future inside,
Lives, blood, voices,
These trembling sounds,
In high frequency waves, hit again and again
Right into our ravaged hearts.
Now, wrapping up our tears,
Turning our pains and sufferings into deadly arrows,
Like the legendary warrior General Bandoola,
We had pulled the strings of our bows.
Whenever we hear the thunder,
With the blinding brightness of lightning,
We must get back our flag,
The flag of peace and joy.
With the sharpness of a brandished sword,
Penetrating the wind like an arrow,*

*Here we come, hurling ourselves onto the battlefield,
Striking the war gongs loud and clear.
Hey, you Devils!
We shall share the merit of our deed
With the libation of your blood
For the sake of our fallen heroes.
When the day breaks, we wouldn't say,
"Auspiciousness to you all!"
Our moans, our groans
Penetrating our hearts. Happy? No way!
Our lives, a chain of iron pains, day after day!
Our bright future, our sky of new light,
Where is it gone?
Here, in this country, where the devils are running amok,
Is it our destiny,
The play of nemesis, for us to suffer like this?
The devils made foul plays with lives,
Gloating over the torn and tattered lives of our their people!
They wash their feet with the tears of crying souls.
Lawless crimes are their policy, their laws.
Incarnations of the 21st century Devadatta!
Where the devils rule,
There's no chance for a little flower to come into bloom.
Justice's been blown away!
Fair weather is harder than drawing a figure in water.
No care for their own people,
Cravings of power and nothing else,
The pack of lunatics!
Should we go and lay our heads on their laps?
Should we go against those wretched guys?
To regain the land of peace and joy,
With cherished hopes and nurtured beliefs,
We will march together, never to go back!
Wipe out your fear,
Spread the blood of the brave,
And march forward!
Here we come, marching bravely together,
Looking forward to our long-awaited day,
Flying the banners of victory in the air!*

When I came to the last line, I could see in my mind's eye the flying banners of victory fluttering in the air. Firmness of mind flowed back into my veins, into my body. Yes, we must march forward! We must pray together:

“O Lord, whenever we take one step, whether over the dry and arid desert or along the wild river with a strong current, may the bridge of your Holy Grace serve each and every one of us to cross over safe and sound to the haven awaiting on the other side of the river. Amen!”

THE REVOLUTION

Pyo Zan

4-7-2021

(1)

Now they've got me. I knew I should shrug with resignation, and avoid any act or speech that would disturb them.

They came to my house in the evening. My neighbors didn't think of me as a hero, but I followed them like a lamb. When I stepped into their car, two policewomen didn't simply blindfold me, they also gave me a slap.

I am a native of this town, so I could imagine where we were heading, but I no longer cared to make mental notes. I knew the car was driving round and round, and I heard the movements of the security forces preparing for the car to enter a compound.

Then the car stopped in front of a building in the compound. Footsteps. Then I was dragged out of the car. I was pushed into a room, brutal hands pulling my long hair that hung down to my waist. Then the door was shut.

Then I heard the hard footsteps of boots. What I didn't know at all was what they wanted me to say. They asked questions, not in the usual manner of a discussion, but in the manner of being forced to admit what I didn't do. This was the usual interrogation practice.

(2)

I thought I should make a mental note of how many days I was kept in there. It was during the third week that I was taken to the place where many other detainees were being confined. Some were my friends, but they pretended they didn't know me, which, you can understand, was pretty awkward.

Later I realized that they didn't recognize people like me who had been recently detained. Like me, others who were thrown behind bars 'fresh from the oven' didn't attract other people's attention. It was only after a few days of close contact and care that we began to recognize one another.

More than 100 days passed in a life of downtrodden human rights. Then they took me away. Those who remained were worried about me.

(3)

Not being blindfolded, this time I could see the room very well. Only one door. No window. A small pigeon hole high up on the wall. We passed by many locked rooms, and then came to the room at the farthest corner, facing nothing but the wall.

Inside the room, I was ordered to sit on a chair. On the edge of the chair was a leg wearing a boot, his hand holding a cold cup steady, right in front of my face.

The clear, cold water in the steel cup whetted my thirst.

“Sayama (woman school teacher), you know what you’re going through, don’t you? I offer you a chance. Go home and resume your duties. Your fellow teachers have returned to duties already. If you don’t agree, this room is yours!”

When I was first taken to this camp, I was addressed very rudely, so it was the very first time I was treated politely. Yet his voice, though a bit polite, was harsh and cold.

I was sitting calmly, but my eyes were fixed on the steel cup of cold water. After more than one hundred days, it was the very first time I was addressed as Sayama out of respect, and at the same time, I found myself gazing at the crystal water in the shiny steel cup, with drops of vapor on its surface.

The more I looked at the water, the more my throat became parched, my dry lips craving the cold wet taste. At such moments you would surely be inclined to comply with any demand.

(4)

Our conversation didn’t take long. They did their job in half an hour. The water in the steel cup, the sight of which had whetted my appetite, was splashed on the corner of the wall. Bang! The one and only door of the room was shut.

Me all alone in a dark cell.

I was determined I would never surrender till my last breath.

DREAMING OF LONDON

Yu Ya

“Are you coming along with me?”

No answer.

“Ko Ko (Darling)! ...”

“Sh! ...” Ko Shwe Yoe silenced him by placing his finger on his lips. He was quaking with fear because two houses away the soldiers were firing guns and flinging a volley of curses. Since February 1st, they knew their lives were no longer safe and secure. They were inside a building in the downtown of a city like Mandalay, hiding under a bench for protection. A strong-headed guy, he was about to crawl to the window and peep out when Ko Shwe Yoe pulled him back and made him hide under the bench. Then he said under his breath, “Foolhardiness and bravery are two different things. Remember!”

Ko Shwe Yoe scolded him as though he were his young father. He had been recently discharged from hospital. So his body emitted the kind of odor you smell in hospitals. Well, there is no difference between these two. His stained body also smelled of blood. He had treated many injuries, as well as the wounded, after today’s demonstration in Mandalay. Ko Shwe Yoe, hiding in his corner, seemed to feel suffocated, and was about to get out when he pulled out Ko Shwe Yoe’s duty coat, and asked the same question, “Ko Ko, are you coming along with me, huh?”.

In fact, he was the one who had been so active and energetic when coming all the way over to this camp. But it was Ko Shwe Yoe who turned out to be more active after they arrived: he operated on gunshot cases, as well as heavy-weapon wounds, then applied medical ointments, and everything else. Ko Shwe Yoe was a kind of perfectionist who cared about everything and did everything on his own. But before he did something, he racked his brains for hours. He was another Hamlet.

For example, they were once discussing informing Ko Shwe Yoe’s parents about their relationship. Ko Shwe Yoe said that if his mother learned about their relationship, her heart would break because her dream was for him to be married, to have a wife and child, and to build a family life. Therefore, the news of their relationship would bring down hell on the whole family. So they put it off day after day. Finally, though, he took Ko Shwe Yoe by the hand, went over to his house, and said, “Aunty, your son and I are now going steady.” And the problem was settled. At first, Ko Shwe Yoe’s mother was so sad. What she expected was a daughter-in-law, but what was offered to her was another son, yet over the course of time she accepted everything. Since his family had been informed of their relationship, Ko Shwe Yoe never left him alone. Even in such dangerous situations, he was with him dead or alive.

Irony of life, if you may put it that way. What they had dreamed of was postgrad studies in London.

Ko Shwe Yoe told him that he would study hard to be a physician and he thought of choosing the same specialization so they could study together in the same college.

When they were in London, the first thing they would do was visit London Bridge. They would take selfies against the background of the famous bridge and post their photos on Facebook. But the reality they were now facing was crossing a bamboo bridge in jungles and mountains amidst flying bullets. Worse than that, these two young docs, now lost in the jungles and mountains, had to post Likes on the Facebook photos of their classmates who were now studying for their postgrad exams in London.

Well, they had lost the chance of going to London for further studies, but they had also had many other London dreams. Among these dreams was watching a show performed by Adele. When they had free time, they had planned to visit Buckingham Palace. They had many, many other fanciful ideas. But in reality, their dreams were left far, far away. When a tug-of-war broke out between their great expectations and the dire needs of their country, they gave themselves up to the stronger pull of their country. He was lost in his thoughts when Ko Shwe Yoe came near. "What are you thinking, dear?" said Ko Shwe Yoe.

"I was thinking I don't feel lonely because you are with me among these mountains and jungles, Ko Ko."

Ko Shwe Yoe burst out laughing. Then he began to share his feelings.

"Well, the main motivation for me to come along with you was Saya Maung Maung Nyein Tun getting detained. It made me think that those damned guys were detaining and killing smart intellectuals, and I was also responsible for putting an end to this. The gun is no concern to us, but the syringe and the scalpel are our tools. I can't fire a bullet at those damned guys, but I can remove the bullets shot into the bodies of our comrades and save their lives. After we've dispatched this mission successfully, we'll go to London. Right?"

He was holding Ko Shwe Yoe by the hand, encouraging him. He didn't continue thinking about London Bridge and coffee shops.

At that moment, they heard music coming from a nearby cottage. The music got livelier. Taking Ko Shwe Yoe by the hand, he walked towards the cottage. The scene was replete with joy and sorrow, evoking an atmosphere of yearning. Men and women over fifty were singing songs. The majority of the old people here could not speak Myanmar language, but when they sang, they sang Myanmar songs! The theme of the song they were singing reflected their life. Their musical instruments were tin pots and pans and whatever cooking utensils they could lay their hands on. Great song! Much, much better than a show performed by Adele! During the chorus verse, they sang their hearts out, and he and Ko Shwe Yoe even sang along with these amateur musicians and singers:

*"Though, sometimes, I wish I could run away
Far, far away, to the farthest place on earth, ..."*

It had been more than three months since he and Ko Shwe Yoe had arrived at this camp. When they first got there, they were not accustomed to this new strange setting. The bites of sand-flies all over their legs. They

had to lay their backs on bamboo mats, their new bed, which gave them backaches. When the wind came with the rain, the waterproof canvas, which was used as a roof, was blown away, and everything got wet. It was a make-shift camp surrounded by mountains, and the wind was so chilly. The rain was cold, too, and they trembled through the days of cold weather. When they first arrived, the only thing on the entire bare ground was their small clinic. Not a sign of a dog or cat. A chill ran through their spines since they could not see a soul. At night, they stayed in the dark: a light would attract the attention of soldiers. When they heard a noise in the dark, they had to encourage each other. Now they had gotten accustomed to their new lifestyle. They were afraid that even if they had a chance to go back to Mandalay, they could no longer get used to their former city lifestyle, teeming with crowds and dazzling lights.

Thank God! Their clinic had solar light, phone charging, and an internet connection. It was these facilities that still kept them in contact with donors.

Of course, their clinic was quite different from the kind you could imagine: assistants standing by the cash counter, and a showcase displaying medicines; a nice nameplate hung on the wall near the door bearing the big letters Dr. So-and-so; the doctor would look very stylish, combing his hair neat and shiny, examining a patient and providing treatment. In reality, their clinic in this spot was just a bit better looking than a sentry hut in paddy fields. A bamboo roof with a waterproof canvas cover, a bamboo floor, and a few medicines - that's all. What made it look like a clinic was the two doctors with stethoscopes over their shoulders, on stand-by. Sometimes the two doctors would do operations wearing men's capri shorts, as though they were at home in casual dress. Today they received a call: a child got injured. The news made them worried.

"Saya! Saya!"

There they came, in crowds.

"Come in. Come in."

The two docs thought that only the parents, with no companions, would bring the child to the clinic. My gosh! There were seven kids accompanying the injured child. His hand was injured. One kid even encouraged his friend, saying softly, "Pal, don't be afraid. We are with you." Ko Shwe Yoe glanced at the crowd of kids.

"Master patient, come closer, sir," said Ko Shwe Yoe, sweetly, so that the child would not get scared. "Your injury is not that bad. Look at this. Your nail is pretty hurt. Sterilize. And a few stitches. And then medical ointment. Pretty painful. Okay?"

The kid was very scared to see the blood on his hand. He was speechless. His friend standing next to him told Ko Shwe Yoe what had happened.

"He cut bamboo. Gonna make a gun, Saya. He was cutting the bamboo pole and he cut himself. He ain't learned the skill yet, ya know."

Making a toy gun? Well, kids in this region had gotten accustomed to seeing and hearing guns, so guns were the only things they were interested in. In a toy shop of towns and cities, if you pay 500 or 1000 kyats, you get a toy gun. Poor things! They have to make their own toys with whatever they can lay their hands on in the jungles. This is the life of a child at a war refugee camp, the loss of children's rights.

In fact, he and Ko Shwe Yoe had a dream of giving birth to a child in London. Their younger generation would be brought to this world with the aid of advanced technology. For example, their sperm and eggs would be taken out and mixed together, and a mother would be hired for the pregnancy. But on second thought, instead of having a new child, would it be better if you love the kids before you, who need your love?

Ko Shwe Yoe stitched the child's hand. It was not cut off, but his nails were badly hurt. The kid turned his face away. Painful. He had to grit his teeth to tolerate the pain, tears flowing down his cheeks. His friends said words of encouragement.

After the minor operation, the child wiped his tears, blew his nose, and left. Then his friend gave him a gift, saying, "Take it. It's yours." When Ko Shwe Yoe looked at the gift, it was an insect tied with a string – a living toy for the kids. If he came across something like this in a town or city, he would scold them, saying, "Don't play such a game." But here, the live insect served as a toy.

"No! Saya, please. It's painful."

The cut was deep, so the patient was in pain. As a doctor, when you stitch an injury, you have to know how to distract patients so they don't pay attention to their injuries. One technique was asking questions.

"Why grapple with the guy just because you wanted his gun? If he'd taken a shot within close range, you'd have been hit right."

The patient's name was Ko Thein Win. A former schoolteacher, he was now a revolutionary fighter. Ko Shwe Yoe started a conversation, while treating his injury.

"No! You don't know the ground situation. When you're brave enough to grapple with them, the guys just drop their guns and run! Some guys aren't brave enough to sacrifice their lives for their commander-in-chief, you see."

With a cool head, Ko Thein Win explained what had happened.

"Doc, you see, these guns come from our people's taxes. It's fair if we get back what we own. What are we doing in a jungle like this without a gun to fight? Do or die! We must win! After we've eradicated them, I'll pick up the chalk and resume my teaching."

See! A few minutes earlier, Ko Thein Win was in pain, but when he vented his resentment, he forgot his wound and his pain!

Ko Shwe Yoe finished his last stitch. Ko Thein Win made a wry face, but proudly looked at the gun he had left at the entrance.

“Son of a bitch!” he grumbled. “They looked down on me, a school teacher. Next time they’re dead!”

Ko Shwe Yoe just smiled. Then he made a joke.

“Ko Thein Win,” he said, “when the schools reopen this time, you can’t just go straight to your classroom. First, you must attend the ethics course for children so guys like you can churn out sweet, polite boys!”

Both laughed. A witty guy, Ko Thein Win replied.

“Please don’t worry, doc. I won’t be the only trainee in the course. Those darn supporters of the military regime, and the whole population of the country. You, too!”

They all burst out laughing. Well, that was their life. If you look up, you’ll see the rainproof canvas as the ceiling; ordinary rice for your meals; rain water for your bath; the ground for your bed; your music, the whirring sound of the plane and the explosions of heavy weaponry. Not a thing of luxury to sniff at. But you are not exaggerating if you say that these jungles and mountains serve as a safer, more secure place for you than the brick walls of buildings in towns and cities. You can understand the true meaning of existence better as a human being living among life and blood human beings.

The words still ringing in his ears and thoughts, Ko Thein Win said something to Ko Shwe Yoe before he left, “If I die, and I’m reborn as a human being, I pray not to be born in this country. I wish I’d be born in the US or in Singapore. You see, you don’t need to fight in wars. Just mind your own business. Just follow your profession.”

“A penny for your thought, Saya. People accused them of being fake policemen on Facebook, but I stood with them.”

A CDM nurse started to talk in a tone that indicated she was proud of herself. Her lover, a CDM corporal in the police force, helping to carry boxes of medicines, nodded in agreement.

“Well, well, Nurse,” said Ko Shwe Yoe, storing the medicines according to type, “what’s wrong with you two?”

“What’s wrong,” said the nurse, “is that we’re both CDMs, you know, but he argues his CDM is better.”

The police corporal, who was a Kayah national - his name is Loral - put down the big box of masks, donated by supporters, near him.

“I was just teasin’ her, ya know. But she’s fumin’ all the time!”

The two sweethearts were reporting to Ko Shwe Yoe so that, like a wise Brahman, he could adjudicate. These two always did their assigned tasks, but they also fell into heated arguments. They might get angry, yet a few

moments later, they would be addressing each other as “Darling!”

Last February, in Loikaw, when some police joined the demonstrations, the news was posted on Facebook, followed by many comments, some were praise, but others critiques, saying since they were wearing slippers they were fake. But the nurse, a Kayan national, supported the CDM policemen, assuring the Facebook followers that they were really CDMs. Then these two friends went underground together, came to this camp together, and became lovers, sharing the same hearts.

“Saya Shwe Yoe, am I right? Am I his benefactor, the Lord of his shame?”

Everyone burst out laughing. In fact, those CDM police were getting into trouble. They found themselves in a tight predicament - very dangerous - because people accused them of being fake while at the same time the military regime threatened to take action against them for joining the demonstrations. It was only when they came to this camp that they felt safe and secure.

“Excuse me, Madame,” said the corporal, teasing his sweetheart, “I’ve heard of an expression like ‘Lord of his life’, but never heard of ‘Lord of his shame.’”

The nurse was about to say something when Ko Shwe Yoe interrupted:

“By the way, when are you two getting married? I mean, before the revolution is over or after the revolution?”

The corporal looked amused. The nurse cast a side glance at her man. Corporal Loral looked very eager to answer.

“We’ll only get married after this military regime has been driven out. I have a plan of formally asking for her hand with the consent of her parents according to the Kayan tradition. She’ll be lookin’ so nice in her traditional costume, n I’ll be lookin’ nice, too, in the new police uniform servin’ under the new government. Promise me you two as a couple must attend our weddin’ without fail.”

The police corporal seemed to be happy about the future, rowing an imaginary boat with a whole load of his dreams. But unlike the corporal’s dream, Ko Shwe Yoe feared not everyone would be there. Maybe they would miss his wedding because they would be doing further studies in London. God forbid! Some would be unlucky. Anything could happen tomorrow. Who would get shot tomorrow? Would it be the corporal? Or the nurse? Or Ko Shwe Yoe? Or him? Nobody can see the future. For this revolution, they all had put their lives at stake.

These days the military regime was putting more pressure on Kayah State. A volley of RPG shells fell right on the villages where civilians live. This morning both the police corporal and the former school teacher warned everyone to be more vigilant than ever. The night was getting dark. No more songs from the refugee music troupe. Some had taken refuge in the bomb shelters. The kids must be scared, they might be crying in fear.

Tonight seemed more terrifying. Ko Shwe Yoe was worrying about who would be hit. Both he and his fellow doc

started making arrangements for the would-be wounded and who would be in charge of who.

The sound of the heavy weaponry, shaking the ground, got nearer to their clinic. Sometimes their hearts missed a beat when they heard the explosions of bomb shells. How about the old folks and the kids? When he was younger, Ko Shwe Yoe didn't know anything about the civil war. The people had been deaf and blind, engulfed by the army propaganda. But he had now learned the truth: it was the army that was threatening the lives of the different ethnic groups living in our own country!

Explosions!

The shells exploded near their cottage. It was shaking badly - worse than an earthquake. He held Ko Shwe Yoe's hand, and Ko Shwe Yoe held his hand tightly.

"I'm sorry I've dragged you along into the pit of danger."

Ko Shwe Yoe smiled at him - the most beautiful smile in the world.

"No! I'd regret it if I hadn't come along."

Hearing Ko Shwe Yoe's words he was on cloud nine. He had all the strength he needed to get through these terrible nightmares. No more heavy weaponry explosions. *Is it a break? Or are they continuing their shooting?* But his heart was still throbbing. A few weeks later he got infected with Covid-19 from a patient, so his heart and lungs were not yet functioning normally. He put his face close to Ko Shwe Yoe's chest. Ko Shwe Yoe patted his back.

"Why not have a nap? I'm with you. You haven't fully recovered. Hope they are not shooting again."

He and Ko Shwe Yoe are the same gender, in the same medical profession, both wear glasses, both share the same love, share the same hearts, and above all, share the same political beliefs.

Ko Shwe Yoe kissed him on the forehead. He smoothed his locks, and said, "I love you." They had been going steady for years, but this moment was the most precious, the most meaningful. Love in "weal and woe". Gradually, their hearts had gotten tougher, like the muscles of an athlete. These mountains and jungles had trained them to get stronger, to face and overcome any challenge of destiny.

Explosions!

Again, a shell exploded near their cottage. How far, how close, they didn't know.

"Darling, if the shell falls - God forbid! - right onto the roof of this cottage, we will both die. Then just imagine, before your last breath, the image of London Bridge and the coffee shop in the city. And then we'll be together in London in the after-life."

MAY JUSTICE REIGN IN MYANMAR

Thaw Htet Kaung

15-8-2021

With the gentle breath of the cool breeze, the dulcet tone of little fluttering leaves. Who was the first writer or poet to create this expression, “gentle breath of the cool breeze” instead of saying, “the gust of the breeze”? Anyway, the expression, “the gentle breath of the cool night breeze” sounds a bit rhythmical.

Under the dim moonlight, the dark blue night, not being pitch dark, looked beautiful.

The cool night breeze blowing through the window caused a chill to run up and down my spine. I was planning tomorrow’s schedule. When I remembered that the nationwide Covid-19 vaccination project for the entire country would start in February, I smiled to myself.

When the pandemic broke out in the other parts of the world, the other nations were greatly impressed with the systematic measures that, with foresight, the State Counsellor established for Covid-19 treatment centers. Yes, that’s true!

The centers for infected cases were also good. And there were excellent quarantine centers for those who had come into contact with infected patients.

It was only in Myanmar that a patient taken to a Q center was treated humanely like a VIP.

In the multiparty democratic general election that was held on November 8, 2020, the NLD entered the election with a handicap: 25% of seats would automatically go to the military. Yet as it was the people’s party, it won a landslide victory. Systematic measures for Covid-19 were taken, and thanks to the warm services of the medical staff, voluntary services, nonprofit social welfare associations and donors, the people of Myanmar withstood the Covid-19 pandemic.

Competitions such as creating mask designs and systematic handwashing guidelines were broadcast every night on TV, and the State Counselor brainstormed solutions on Zoom - this was the loving kindness and empathy the State Counselor Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, known as Mother Suu, showed to her people.

After the second wave, infected cases increased. So every effort was made to buy vaccines in a timely manner. No wonder the people of Myanmar were looking forward to getting the same kind of vaccine as the American President

As the pandemic stretched on, the economic crisis became the big challenge. After some lock-downs were imposed, people had to fight to survive and were exempted from paying their electricity bills, while the poor and needy were blessed with cash donations from the government. Thus, the ‘big props of loving kindness’ supported our people’s survival so they would not collapse under the pounding pandemic crisis. Thus, despite

the challenging hardships, year 2020 ended with some rays of hope.

In April, 2020, the golden padauk blossoms bloomed all over the country, but because of the Covid-19 pandemic, the water festival passed quietly, with no splashing of water on one another. But our people accepted the 'new normal', making contacts and wishes for the new year through Zoom software.

When year 2020 ushered in year 2021 - and after being injected with Covid-19 vaccines - the people's representatives, replenished with new vigor, were ready to attend the third session of the new Hluttaw on February 1st, later postponed to February 2nd. The Pyihtaungsu Hluttaw (the Union Parliament) was to be held on February 5.

The Hluttaw representatives were vaccinated, and the whole population was waiting with great expectations for the day when each and every person in Myanmar would have a chance to get vaccinated. Filled with the hope of surviving the pandemic, those days meant a lot to our people.

The people were making plans for a better economy, accepting the new lifestyle of the new normal. And the third session of the Hluttaw was on the way.

On February 1, 2021, however, all our hopes, all our plans were blown away after learning the unexpected bad news, which came like a tornado into the lives of the people of Myanmar. We could not hold on to anything, as if caught up in a strong earthquake, as if we had encountered a frightful nightmare. The news made us all freeze, fossilized!

The bad news: Abusing the power of the armed forces, the State Administration Council, the military regime, detained the State Counselor and the President, as well as state leaders and public figures.

Is it true?

Is it really true?

Really?

Is the news really true? Impossible!

Are you joking?

If it is true, it is not true to accept the bitter truth, and that truth must be just the shit of distorted truth! Where has the guardian spirit of the world gone?

Does the guardian spirit governing the world with peace and justice really exist?

I have read the phrase, "The loss of self-control or restraint" in the texts. I thought that personal feelings meant being preoccupied with something, feeling excited, or feeling despair. But in the case of the destiny of a nation, the loss of self-control or restraint means regret, resentment, distortion of the truth, and when you calm down,

waves of fury begin to surge in your heart. You know what I mean.

Uncontrollable anger and bitter feelings, then the click of your tongue would join other people's, and then there is the echo of thunder of the click of tongues sweeping all over the country!

We people were faced with the action of the military regime, so inhumane, so disgusting! Almost all the people 'drove the military dictatorship out of the jungle' at 8pm by striking iron pans and rods, tin pans and boxes, or whatever they had, creating a din that flew up to the sky. The weapons of the people were just a stick and an iron frying pan.

The iron rod signifies people's resentfulness about the distortion of truth. To drive out the terrorist devil, the loud banging of iron pans spread all over the world.

Internet connections were cut off, CDMs, who boycotted going to offices and working for the military regime, were arrested. But on February 6, the Yangon Division people's representatives successfully conducted online conferencing for the third session of the first meeting of the Yangon Division Hluttaw (First Day), and held the swearing-in ceremony. And our people were pleased to witness that. People on the side of Dhamma (justice) were also delighted to witness other divisions holding swearing-in ceremonies in line with the rules and regulations of the Division Hluttaw.

On February 15, arrest warrants were issued for the members of the CRPH, who were living in their own houses, under Section 505 (A). Despite all these types of oppression, the people unanimously launched the Spring Revolution.

From February 9, 2021 until the night of August 12, there were 966 fallen heroes of the Revolution; 7164 detainees, with 5562 still detained; and 1984 arrest warrants.

The war brings sorrow. The third wave of Covid-19 took a great toll on the lives of our beloved people; our people suffered from natural disasters; some have taken refuge in the war refugee camps and others in the 'zone of freedom'.

Many students have left their classrooms, while the number of young souls who have not only left classrooms but also said goodbye to their loved ones and to the world has increased. Economy, social affairs, and everything else have been deteriorating. But we believe that the Spring Revolution, born out of hatred of injustice and love of the truth to drive out the military dictatorship, will be victorious.

According to the legend, *Four Legendary Islands of the World*, Myanmar, our country, is located to the south of Mount Meru; naturally, any omen, good or bad, could turn out to be true. This is what the Myanmar people believe. Starting from August 15, 2021, our people, who support the CRPH, have bought lottery tickets to raise funds for the new government, according to the motto, "Fly the banner of victory, buy a lottery ticket in support of the Spring Revolution". The armed forces of the revolution will soon be marching towards the goal of victory. Then, all the people, young and old, will look forward to welcoming the armed forces of the revolution, each holding in their hand a spray of fresh eugenia sprigs, the symbol of victory.

RA-HTAI

“Potail”

Palu-te-la Ra-htai, Ra-hai,
 Ra-htai so-lan wusa
 Ra-htai kalian phaya a-ma*
 Ra-htai kalian kyaung-a-ma**

My hand holding a boiled duck egg, a white cotton thread on my wrist rubbing forwards and backwards. It was my grandma who was pulling the thread with both hands, muttering a mantra, beginning with “Palu-te-la”. (We call her Phi Phi in Kayin/Karen language.) A plate of white rice with a sprinkling of some salt was placed beside me.

“What’s dat? What are you doin’?” I asked. “Well,” she replied, “it’s our traditional way of callin’ back the spirit.” In our village, there were so many kids, who were as mischievous as monkeys. Sometimes we played till dark. We played hide and seek underneath big trees, and my Grandma had to call back the spirit. Whenever a terrible thing happened in the village, when you happened to go and see a dead body, then Grandma had to call back the spirit.

The spirit has its synonym - butterfly. According to the elderly people, if you say, “The spirit’s flown away,” a person’s spirit has left the body. If your butterfly doesn’t come back to your body, this means you are already dead.

Whether the spirit has flown away or not, I am not sure. But I was always happy when my grandma Phi Phi called back the spirit. After she got tired of rubbing my wrist with the cotton thread and muttering for a few minutes, she tied the thread round and round four or five times. Then she took a piece of the boiled duck egg I was holding in my hand, and put it together with a few morsels of white rice on my head. After that, I had the privilege of eating the rest of the boiled duck egg with the white rice. Because I like duck eggs, I was always happy when Phi Phi did the ritual of calling back the spirit.

Phi Phi said words in Kayin language, which might be interpreted as:

“Little butterfly of spirit, come back. Come back,
 Bring some oil,
 Bring rice and paddy, too.
 Come back and be the woman donor of the pagoda,
 Come back and be the woman donor of the monastery, please.”

In this way she made wishes on and on. She said these words all in Kayin language, but she switched to Myanmar language when she said “the woman donor of the pagoda” and “the woman donor of the monastery”. Actually, she had been making a prayer for my elder sisters, so when it was my turn, she made a slip of the tongue, and made a wrong prayer for me, a little boy. So I questioned her.

“Excuse me, Phi Phi,” I said, “how could Nga (“I”), dis little boy, be a woman donor of the pagoda of the monastery?”

“Oh, I’m so sorry, Grandson.”

Then she said the prayer a second time, replacing the phrase with “man donor of the pagoda” and “man donor of the monastery”. The first-person pronoun “Nga” might sound impolite to the ear of the Myanmar people, but it’s quite common to use it when addressing a listener, young or old, man or woman. When I attended school in town, though, I had to use a ‘more polite form’.

By the way, I remember something my girlfriend said. She was appointed to the post of schoolteacher at an ethnic group village in a far-flung area. The kids coming to the school could not speak Myanmar very well. The form of address, “Nga”, for the first-person pronoun (me/ I) sounded quite unfamiliar to her. But one day she was surprised to hear a kid addressing himself as Kya-naw (a polite form of “I”). In response to her question of how he had picked up the Kya-naw term, “In the whole village, the only one who knows the use of Kya-naw,” said the kid, proudly, pointing to himself with his finger, “is Nga (me).”

I’d like to continue to tell the story about Phi Phi.

With reference to the traditional rituals of the Kayin people, Phi Phi was like a Nat Saya (medium of the spirit) of the village. She undertook the spirit-propitiating rituals, held once or three times a year, such as Kun-myo-tin (a small scale offering of a bottle of water, white rice, sprinkling of salt, and chicken) and Nat-sa (a grand scale offering with chicken or pork, joined by all family members and relatives, far and near) and as the Nat-medium, offered the chicken or pig to the spirit, and prayed for the health and prosperity of family members and relatives who were present. Not only the local people of our village but also those in the neighborhood came and made a request for her service.

I had to leave my native village when I reached middle school. Phi Phi, my grandma, remained in the village. But I never had a chance to visit my native village - not even once a year - so I no longer had the privilege of having Phi Phi call back the spirit. When I entered university, Phi Phi passed away. Ironically, nobody in the village had the knowledge required to call back Phi Phi’s spirit.

Well, as you know, urban lifestyles are quite different from rural lifestyles. First, I had to learn to replace the first-person pronoun, Nga, with the ‘more polite form’, Kya-naw. I had to go by bus wherever I went. I had to learn to adjust my lifestyle of taking a full breath in a small room. I soon got accustomed to the new lifestyle.

I am a country bumpkin, but lucky me! The girl I married has a fair complexion. I worked hard to earn money, and my wife - thank you, darling - saved money, and over the course of time we were able to build a family life with a living standard that was a bit higher than an ordinary family. My life became perfect when a son was born to our family.

My son, born of a father of Kayin blood and a mother with a fair complexion, of course looked so handsome in the eyes of his parents. Metaphorically speaking, everybody thinks that their pounded, sour fish tastes more

deliciously sour than any other pounded fish on earth. With the birth of my son, I must say that I discovered the true meaning of falling head over heels for someone. I loved him so much, and I could imagine how much more his mother, who gave birth to him, loved him.

We were informed that my wife was going to have a child. Both of us were filled with crazy ideas, as in the saying, "The first son makes the parents go crazy." We started collecting baby wares and accessories little by a little every day. We studied books on nursing a child, and held discussions. And we did what we thought we could do the best. As a guy born wild in the countryside, it might sound like I had become conceited, but with a guilty conscience for forgetting how I was brought up. As you all know, not every child has the privilege of enjoying good childcare and a happy, safe and secure childhood.

How crazy his mother was! When my son was old enough to go to nursery school, we bought him a small bike. We told him to only pedal round and round the house. A child's bike has spare wheels on both sides so the bike doesn't fall over. But, despite all our care, while turning the bike fell. Losing his balance, my boy fell onto the concrete road and hurt his knees, with little cuts and bruises. The kid didn't cry, but he got a bit scared. I washed his knee and applied some ointment, and that was all.

I thought that was the end of the incident, but in the middle of the night I happened to wake up to have a drink of water, and found my wife sobbing. My Gosh! I didn't blame her. She was so worried about her boy's injured knee. I just went to bed as if nothing had happened.

When our son reached the school-going age, we chose the school that we thought was the best in our town. But later I was too busy to get involved in his school affairs since it was his mother who guided him in his education, even in choosing a private teacher for her son. And I just played the role of family breadwinner. I must say we were lucky parents because our smart boy followed his own plan which was not that different from our own, meeting our expectations, but with no pressure placed on him. No need to scold or punish him. He had good relationships, not only with his parents but also with his teachers and friends. So he had a good group of people who loved and admired him.

As expected, my son graduated with all Ds - distinctions in all subjects! This was my son's victory, as well as our victory as his parents, but I must admit my contributions were only minor, even though my satisfaction and pride were not that low. During the night of celebrations my son, wife and I had a leisurely discussion. Normally, you know, we had been busy with our own affairs. But I know for sure that I was not as busy as my boy was with his tight study schedule. That night he said:

"I have a dream of being a doctor. Not a big dream, as people would say, like 'doing good for our mother country'. My dream is not that big. I'd be happy if a patient I treated made a speedy recovery. I just want to relish the feeling of saving a life. Yes, that's all."

"Well, son," I said, "follow your heart. We won't give you orders to do this or that. And we won't object to your dreams, either. We'll stand by you so that you can follow your heart, but we might give you suggestions, if necessary, if we think you are on the wrong track. Just go, go with your own decision."

“Thank you, Father.”

“Don’t say thanks. It’s not time for saying that. But I’d like to congratulate you and give you some kind of reward for your success. I wonder what you have in mind - the thing you want most in life. If I make a choice for you, and it turns out to be something you don’t like, you know we would both suffer. So tell me what you want, Son.”

He fell quiet. He might be grappling with a dilemma. Or he might be feeling ‘‘awkward’, finding it a bit hard to express himself. A few moments later, he said:

“If it isn’t a burden for you, if you don’t mind, please buy me a small plot of land a bit away from our town. Before I have to join the university, I just want to clear the ground and grow plants. If I start now, by the time I have become a doctor, the compound will be nice and pleasant with trees and plants. I will grow flower plants. If I grow flower plants, little butterflies will come. I love little butterflies, Father.”

I was a bit surprised to hear that. Of course, his request was not a burden for me. If it was beyond what I could afford, I would for sure find ways and means to fulfil his request.

It was only when my son had joined the University of Medicine that my wife found time to relax and take things easy, as she didn’t need to accompany her son any more. Indeed, I trust my son. This is the choice he himself had made - the future he himself had built.

Life is full of twists and turns, you know. This we all knew on February 1, 2021. It was the day when the civil government, which the people had built together, would start serving its second term. It was on that day that the military regime carried out the coup.

On that day, the military regime, having detained all the leaders of the country, went wild.

Much like when you throw a stone into a tranquil lake, aggressive waves surged up all over the country. The military dictator bullied and tortured people in unexpected, merciless ways. People from all walks of life and from all nooks of the country, who had witnessed the wretched forms of injustice everywhere, revolted against the military regime.

Credit goes to young people, the age of my son, who have taken the lead in the revolution. It was quite heartening to find out my son and all the other young people had the strength and qualifications that we older generations never dreamed of. Every day, those taking the lead in the demonstrations all over the country were the younger generations.

Though she was worried about his safety, my wife didn’t stop her son because she said he would despair if he were not a good son and would suffer in hell for not heeding her warnings and joining the demonstrations. Every morning, putting on his backpack, he left home. In the evening, he came back home, drenched in sweat. Normally, he should have been attending classes in the University of Medicine! But now destiny made a drastic turn which we could not stop.

Days followed days. The cruelties of the military regime intensified.

They fired guns at the young people staging peaceful demonstrations, detained them and tortured them. In the afternoon, a person would be detained, and on the following morning, his or her family would be told to retrieve his or her dead body for burial. How many dead bodies? Just imagine. What astonished me was that you would witness your people and friends getting shot or detained today, but on the following day, there you would go out again, with no fear of joining the demonstrations in the streets and on the roads.

Even the world was taken aback by the strong resentment and unrelenting revolutionary spirit of these young people. Many more got killed, many more got detained. And my wife began to worry about her son. There was nothing she could do but pray that her son would remain safe and sound.

That morning was like other mornings. Putting on his backpack, my son left home.

I didn't expect it would be the last day I would see my son putting on his backpack and leaving home.

Then, like the summer lightning, the bad news stormed in. We were informed that our son was shot dead in the head, and that he died on the spot! When his body was taken home, my wife fell unconscious.

She was a mother who never scolded him or spoke to him in a hard tone. But her son was shot dead! Life's ironic, isn't it? Nobody could save the life of a young man who wanted to save lives. Now in the plot of land I gave him as a reward for his success, trees have grown tall. Some flowers have already bloomed. I can see one or two butterflies fluttering about.

On the following morning, the dead body of my son would be cremated. The night had darkened, and people had gone to bed. My son's body was laid in front of our house. I had to get my wife to take a sedative and sleeping pill every day, otherwise she could not fall asleep. As for me, I have never had a wink of sleep since that tragic black day.

I went into the kitchen, and checked what was there. When I opened the door of the refrigerator, I found some duck eggs. My son, like me, liked duck eggs. First, I boiled an egg. After that, I prepared a plate of rice, and sprinkled some salt on it. Then I peeled off the egg shell, and went to the front of the house. One important thing I forgot. I searched in the boxes, opening the lids. Finally, I found what I was feverishly searching for in a plastic box.

A little roll of white thread!

I sat down beside my son's body. I held his hand. It was so cold. I tried to put the boiled duck egg in his hand, but in vain. How could a hand so cold, hard and stiff hold an egg like this? So I just put the egg gently in his palm. I cut off the cotton thread, and rubbed it on my son's wrist back and forth. I could not recite the mantra like Phi Phi, my Grandma. The only word I remembered was Ra-Htai. I recited the word. Must call back my son's spirit!

The cotton thread rubbed across my son's cold, hard wrist made a loud sound in the silence of the night. Ra-Htai! I command you! Alright, I won't give up till my son's spirit returns to me!

Palu-te-la. Ra-Htai. Ra-Htai.

Ra-Htai. Ra-Htai.

Ra-Htai. Ra-Htai.

.....

Ra-Htai. Ra-Htai.

The following morning, when people woke up, they found a man on the ground beside the dead body, his hand holding a string of white cotton thread. At that very moment, a woman with disheveled hair, who had just left her bed, questioned the people looking around.

"A few moments earlier," she said, "I saw a little butterfly fluttering in my room, but now it's disappeared! Did any one of you see the little butterfly? What are you doing here, guys?"

The people were baffled about the connection between the boiled duck egg in the palm of the dead young man, the piece of cotton thread in the hand of the man who had fallen on the ground, and the little butterfly that the woman with the frenzied mind was searching for.

Ra-Htai. Come back!

phaya a-ma*: woman donor of the pagoda

kyaung-a-ma**: woman donor of the monastery

WOUNDED DIARY #1

Wathondaray

In truth, the word “Interrogation” is not unfamiliar to me. I have heard of this word since, in my younger days as a girl, I stayed with my grandpa and father. It was already dark when the prison cars entered Shwe Pyi Thar Interrogation Center on March 27th. It took a long time, giving me the impression that the cars were going round and round on purpose. Through the iron mesh window of the car, I watched what we were passing on the road. As our cars passed by the family staff barracks, they all were outside, as though enjoying a show. Some eyes expressed feelings of pity, some showed disgust, some made faces, their sarcastic eyes shooting a ‘What-can-you-do-now, Man’ question. When the cars stopped under the pine trees before office-like buildings, an officer shouted, “Get out!” and we did so hurriedly. I could hear ohs and ahs, along with scolding from officers and blows from batons from the prison cars carrying the men detainees. Though at first we were handcuffed in groups, the handcuffs were then unlocked. I held onto a box of fried noodles and a packet of water bottles that my daughter had given me, and jumped off. We had to squat down in a line, heads down, and hands clasped behind our necks. Thet Wai Hnin and I were in the front. Khin Lay, Nora, Si Kham and Thazin were behind us. An officer gave a briefing, and handed the case files to another officer. Then, at the command, “Walk!”, we had to walk, flanked by the soldiers, as though we were dumb creatures being herded into our pens. There were unturned lumps of earth all along the stubby paddy fields. At the command, “Hurry up!” we had no choice but to find an even path. My leg got jammed between two lumps of earth. So painful! I had to pull out my leg very hard. Thanks to those younger fellows who kindly helped me carry my things along. Dusk was falling. But I could see four or five girls walking barefoot. How painful that must be!

Amidst a volley of curses and scolding, our shaky, slippery legs managed to get to our destination. We passed by the place where men detainees were kept, and then came to our spot. The brick cell behind the barbed wires, which had for some time been deadly silent, now seemed to spring back to life. Carpets were spread in the hall. Thank God! Quite a relief for me as I have an unnamed phobia of concrete floors. Then, at the command, “Sit down in lines!”, I sat down in fear. When we heard the officer call our names, we were ordered to state our fathers’ names. One absently replied, “Present!” and she was scolded with a volley of curses. After the names and people had been checked, we had to provide short biodata. Then, when a photo was taken of each woman holding a paper with her name and her father’s name, I felt pretty sad. In truth, we hadn’t committed any crimes. Yet the front, back, left, and right sides of our body were photographed, like criminals. I clenched my teeth at the thought of being forced to be registered as a culprit.

I had to stay in the squatting position of a prisoner for the whole day, kneeling down and clasping my hands behind my head, getting hit when detained, and losing my appetite for food, so I felt pretty exhausted. We were told to take a break, so I found a space to stretch my limbs. Buzzing nuisance of mosquitoes! Resting my head on my arm for a few minutes. Then an officer came in shouting angrily. “You problem-makers!” he said, “Because you don’t stay indoors safe and secure, you’re giving us troubles!” *Giving you troubles? Really?* We had to line up once again to check our names. What I wished for right now was a cup of boiled water. I am allergic to cold water. I only drink hot water, but I know I can’t ask for anything here. So I had to sip cold water just to satisfy my

thirst. That officer shouted and cursed, checked the number of detainees, and left. Then another came in. He spoke softly, exercising the technique of being congenial and tactful! Yes, I assumed the authorities were using the psycho methods of blending rough and soft techniques to win us. *What time is it now?* We were all tired already. After giving the list, we were told to take a break. So I lay down and rested my head on my arm. Thank God! We had a toilet and water in the cell. When I was about to doze off, four or five officers came in. We were called by name. We were then ordered to line up in a sitting position, and the interrogation began at four or five tables, where we were told to sit, head down.

The moment I got detained, the words of the writer Bamo Tin Aung sprang to mind: "When your enemy wants you to die, you must find ways and means to live and survive". Well, the same thing was happening to us. Our enemy was trying to trap us to put us behind bars! When your enemy is trying to imprison you, you must evade the traps and find a way out. I recalled what I had said at the police station. My name was skipped, and Thet Wai Hnin was called first. Then my grandpa's voice came back to me: Whether you are in jail or prison, close your eyes, shut your mouth, but prick up your ears. I pretended I was very exhausted, and lay down, but I of course pricked up my ears. Then I heard Thet Wai Hnin answering the interrogation questions. I also kept my brain activated. I was making mental notes of what Thet Wai Hnin said about the place, time and reason, so my answers would be the same as hers. The officer mostly used leading questions. He drove the detainee into a corner, although, on first hearing, his questions gave the impression of opening an exit. It was quite certain that the moment you entered that exit, you'd be trapped. How clever Thet Wai Hnin was! She successfully evaded the traps. After making mental notes, I pricked up my ears again to hear what people at the other tables were talking about. The little girl next to Thet Wai Hnin's table got trapped. I was worried about her because her answers sounded as though she had admitted her guilt.

While pricking up my ears and listening to their voices, I fell asleep. Then I was awakened. My turn had come. I woke up in fright. I was reeling when I stood up. All the eyes of the officers turned to me. I intentionally dragged my feet to the farthest table. But in my imagination I was smiling to myself. *Well, let's start the game.* I dragged myself, with my left hand painfully holding my left leg. As it happened, I was the oldest of those arrested today. Everyone was staring at me. "Aunty," said one officer, "are you alright? Please walk slowly." I sat down before the officer who was going to interrogate me, and was breathing hard. He was looking at me in disappointment, so I gave him a faint smile. He took the paper from my hand, and said in a commanding tone, "Tell me exactly what happened." I repeated the same place, time and incident. He seemed to be tired. I glanced at his watch. It was 4am sharp. Now came a series of leading questions: "How many of you are in your group?" "Who was the leader?" "Who made contact with you to come to the demonstration?" "Who are the other people arrested together with you?" My answers were the same as Thet Wai Hnin's: I came from another region; I was going to my friend's tailoring shop; I came back with her to the Sule bus stop; when we came to Pansodan, the group of demonstrators passed by us; at that very moment, the military trucks came; all in chaos! "Run! Run!" they cried; stunned, we were standing on the pavement, and got detained for what; we got beaten - for what; and we came here.

He stopped questioning me. He was just staring at me. I assumed the innocent face of a lamb. "You said you were not involved," he said, "but you're wearing jeans." I laughed. I said, "When women get old, they can't wear

their longyi tight. When you're staying at home, it's okay, but when you travel, it's not okay. So I put on jeans, you see." Then I raised my left hand with relaxed muscles. "I feared I was going to have a stroke, so I retired from my government service before I turned sixty. It's not okay to put on my longyi." He fell silent for a moment. Then I began my assault. Addressing myself as Mother, I said, "this Mother, this old woman, was in service since 1981. I experienced time and changes through successive governments. A government servant takes interest in nothing but his or her duties and responsibilities, you know. I just want to live on a pensioner's salary, live a comfortable life." Well, my words hit the target. He closed the file, and said, "You may go." Wearing a downcast look on my face, again I dragged myself to my corner.

All the officers engaged in the interrogation now stood up and stretched their legs. Then, one gave a briefing. "Listen," he said, "we do not guarantee what will happen to you next, and where you'll be sent. We have to go through your files. What you should do right now is pray hard." They then left and locked the door. We still heard shouts, curses and hitting from the hall where men detainees were being kept. Si Kham, Thazin and Khin Lay looked small. Poor girls! These young, good-looking girls must be feeling worried about their husbands. We had to steal some sleep when we were given a chance. As for me, I thought of acting like a sickly, old woman, an unlucky old woman who got arrested while out on the road, like an unlucky monk into whose alms bowl a bird dropped dead, by coincidence, and who was accused of killing the bird; an old woman you don't have any reason to pay attention to. How many days do I have to stay here? Anyway, I must close my eyes, shut my mouth, and prick up my ears. After doing breathing exercises, I fell asleep, with no pillow, no blanket, no mosquito net, amidst the buzzing bloodsuckers. The present moment is the most precious time, isn't it?

GLOSSARY

CDM - The CDM refers to the Civil Disobedience Movement that started two days after the February 1, 2021 military coup. Initiated by the civil service and led by medical and healthcare workers, it quickly expanded to include a wide range of professions, including teachers, lawyers, and engineers. Courageously refusing to work, CDM participants demanded that the elected government be returned to power. Their civil disobedience movement gradually expanded into a larger pro-democracy resistance movement.

CPRH - The CPRH refers to the Committee Representing Pyidaungsu Hluttaw (Assembly of the Union), a Burmese legislative body in exile composed of National League for Democracy (NLD) lawmakers and other members of parliament, who were forcibly removed from power during the February 2021 coup. Burmese civil society collaborated with elected parliamentarians to create the CPRH.

Daw - An honorific used for a older or married woman, and which translates as aunt or Madame, or as royal and sacred.

Hlaing Thaya - A township in the western part of Yangon that is one of the largest and most populated townships in the country.

General Ne Win - General Ne Win was a dictator who ruled Burma as Prime Minister from 1958-1960 and 1962-1974, and as head of state from 1962 to 1981. He founded the Burma Socialist Programme Party in 1962 and served as its chairman until 1988. His 'Burmese way to socialism' policy led to 26 years of isolation and to Burma becoming one of the poorest countries in the world.

Generation Z - Generation Z—often referred to as Gen Z—is Myanmar's younger digital native generation that has played a key role in the Spring Revolution.

Insein Prison - Many journalists, creative artists, politicians, and protesters have been detained in Yangon's infamous Insein Prison since the February 2021 military coup. During the previous close to 50 years of military rule, Insein became known for the mistreatment and torture of political prisoners.

Kayah/Karenni - The Kayah—also known as Karenni—are an ethnic nationality in Myanmar who speak the Kayah/Karenni language. Situated in eastern Myanmar, along the Thai border to the north of Kayin (Karen) State and south of Shan State, Kayah (Karenni) State is one of the country's seven official ethnic states. Loikaw is the capital.

Kayin/Karen - The Kayin—also known as Karen—are an ethnic nationality in Myanmar who speak the Kayin/Karen language. Situated in eastern Myanmar along the border with Thailand, Kayin (Karen) State is one of the country's seven official ethnic states.

Ko - An honorific that translates as older brother.

Myanmar Spring Revolution - The Myanmar Spring Revolution is a mass protest movement against the Myanmar military forces that carried out the February 1, 2021 coup.

Nay Pyi Daw - Also written as Nay Pyi Taw, Nay Pyi Daw succeeded Yangon (then called Rangoon) as the capital of Myanmar in 2005. It is the country's third largest city, after Yangon and Mandalay.

NLD - Founded in 1988 as part of the pro-democracy movement, the NLD refers to the National League for Democracy. Its chairperson is Aung San Suu Kyi. After winning a landslide victory in the 2015 national elections, the NLD assumed power for the first time. Although it won a second landslide victory in the 2020 national elections, it was prevented from taking power by the February 2021 military coup.

PDF - PDF refers to the People's Defense Forces that quickly emerged in the wake of the February 2011 military coup to protect civilians and to fight the regime. Some view them as a precursor to a federal army meant to replace the military. The People's Defense Force of Myanmar is the armed wing of the National Unity Government (NUG).

Pyithu Hluttaw - The Pyithu Hluttaw is the Myanmar House of Representatives.

88 Revolution - Originating as a student-led pro-democracy activist movement against the military junta, the 88 Revolution was a series of nationwide strikes, marches, and protests. As key events took place on August 8, 1988, it is known as the 8888 Revolution or Uprising. The term 88 Generation refers to the 88 student leaders.

Saya - An honorific that translates as teacher (Sayama for a woman).

Shwe Pyi Thar Interrogation Center - The Shwe Pyi Thar Interrogation Center is a military interrogation center in Yangon where, in the wake of the February 2021 coup, artists, writers, journalists, protesters and other members of the resistance movement have been detained and subjected to interrogation and torture before being sent to prison.

State Counselor - Aung San Suu Kyi, Myanmar's iconic and controversial leader and head of the National League for Democracy party, served as the country's State Counselor and Minister of Foreign Affairs from 2016 until 2021. As the Constitution of Myanmar prohibited her from becoming president, the position of State Counselor was created in 2016, enabling her to act as de facto leader. Aung San Suu Kyi has been detained by the military since the February 2021 coup and subject to a series of rigged trials.

Tatmadaw - While Tatmadaw is the official name of the Myanmar armed forces, with the suffix 'daw' or 'taw' translating as royal or sacred, Burmese more commonly use the term Sit-Tat, with Sit translating as armed/military and Tat as forces.

Tumbling Kelly - The Myanmar Tumbling Kelly, or Pyit Taing Htaung, symbolizes the belief that Burmese can always fight to reach their goals, or, in other words, can always right themselves after being thrown down.

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