

JUVELYN JARABELO
Killed September 20, 1985
Escalante, Negros Occ.

Portrait of an Escalante Martyr

Escalante, September 20, 1985. The demonstrators were soaking wet in the scorching heat of the afternoon sun. The military and the Civilian Home Defense Force (CHDF), failing to disperse them with water cannons, started to lob tear cannisters at them. A cannister fell at the foot of one of the demonstrators, a twenty-year old girl. She picked up the unexploded bomb and threw it away to where it would be harmless. The afternoon sun in Escalante gave off a crimson ray. A shot rang out and Juvelyn Jarabelo fell, mortally wounded.

This much we know of her from the story in the papers. But few know the girl behind the story, the Juvelyn Jarabelo whom Fr. Mana-ay (Juvelyn's parish priest) described as "always smiling, cheerful, and had such great faith in God."

Jovy, as her friends fondly called her, was born on July 16, 1965 in Fabrica, a small town near Escalante. She was the second eldest of nine children in the Jarabelo family. When she was about eight months old, she was adopted by her aunt Elsa. She received her elementary education at the Eusebio Lopez Gonzaga Elementary School.

She spent her high school days at the Holy Trinity Academy, where she graduated with honors. It was during this period, Fr. Mana-ay recalls, that Jovy, as an active catechist and choir member in the Holy Rosary Parish church, developed and strengthened her faith in her Creator, a faith she held to the very last moment of her life.

After high school, Jovy went to the University of Negros Occidental Recoletos (UNO-R) where she studied Commerce. During her stay in the university, she became a member of a conservative Christian group. But living in a deeply impoverished and heavily militarized society, Jovy could not but advance from an apolitical faith to a living and liberating Christianity. Being a person of humble social origins herself she could not help but identify with the deprived and abused *sacadas* (seasonal workers) of Negros. In her last semester as a college student, she became an active member of the Student Christian Movement (SCM) in Negros. From then on, she found the living synthesis of Christian ideals and social commitment. As an SCMer, she worked as provincial coordinator for the northern part of Negros.

Henry Mecha, district chairman of the Student Christian Movement of the Philippines (SCMP) in Negros, remembers her as a person having a



Juvelyn Jarabelo: In one eternal moment, she saved others' lives -- and lost hers.

"strong conviction manifested in her tremendous task of conscientizing, organizing and mobilizing the youth to work for a society where genuine justice reigns and peace abounds." Furthermore, she was one SCMer who possessed a zest for life, and when she worked, one would "not hear complaints nor see signs of boredom from her."

After graduation, she became much more involved with the marginalized sectors. She was supposed to go to Zamboanga where a job was waiting for her but instead she pledged herself to the service of the poor and oppressed. She used her education and devoted her time to social work and Bible-sharing with the grassroots people of the communities in Negros. In her last months, she integrated herself with the folks of Escalante.

When an island-wide "*Welgang Bayan*" (National Strike) was called, Jovy was one of those who organized the youth in her home town of Fabrica to support the sugar workers' rally in Escalante.

During the *Welga*, she was with the kitchen staff, cooking and cleaning for the strikers. Her participation in what some would regard as a menial task, is reminiscent of Christ's washing of his disciples' feet, a humble act made noble by the love which prompted it.

Then came the afternoon of the second day of the *Welga*. The combined forces of the Marcos regime's PC 334th Company, CHDFs and armed goons of the sugar baron Armando Gustillo, had been firing water cannons at the demonstrators in order to break them up. By then Jovy had joined the front line to form a barricade with other strikers. The fire trucks had exhausted their water and still the demonstrators stood their ground. Seconds after that, the military started to lob tear gas cannisters at them. Jovy picked up the second one that fell and threw it towards the

empty plaza where no one would smell its poisonous gas. In that eternal moment, a fatal hiss sounded. A military man, whose fingers had long been itching to carry out the bloody order of his masters, pulled the trigger.

That was Jovy's last act, but it was an act of pure courage and commitment which will forever be cherished in the heart of every freedom-loving Filipino. She knew that she gave her life for the hungry and malnourished children and for the emancipation of her suffering people from a malevolent regime. Perhaps she also knew that for every martyr's blood that sprinkles the fertile ground of struggle, the flowering of a more human order is ensured and that someday, her people shall be free.

(Note: This is a slightly revised reprint from *Breakthrough*, official publication of the Student Christian Movement of the Philippines, pp. 11-12, written by Jun Cañete.)