



## INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY OBSERVED

**International Women's Day (IWD)** is celebrated on March 8 every year. After women gained suffrage in Soviet Russia in 1917, March 8 became a national holiday there. The day was then predominantly celebrated by the socialist movement and communist countries until it was adopted in 1975 by the United Nations.



International Women's Day is celebrated in many countries around the world. It is

a day when women are recognized for their achievements without regard to divisions, whether national, ethnic, linguistic, cultural, economic or political. International Women's Day first emerged from the activities of labor movements at the turn of the twentieth century in North America and across Europe.

Since those early years, International Women's Day has assumed a new global dimension for women in developed and developing countries alike. The growing international women's movement, which has been strengthened by four global United Nations women's conferences, has helped make the commemoration a rallying point to build support for women's rights and participation in the political and economic arenas.

The Charter of the United Nations, signed in 1945, was the first international agreement to affirm the principle of equality between women and men. Since then, the UN has helped create a historic legacy of internationally-agreed strategies, standards, programmes, and goals to advance the status of women worldwide.

Over the years, the UN and its technical agencies have promoted the participation of women as equal partners with men in achieving sustainable development, peace, security, and full respect for human rights. The empowerment of women continues to be a central feature of the UN's efforts to address social, economic and political challenges across the globe.

The theme of International Women's Day 2019 is "Balance for Better."

## ON INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY...

### ALUMNA WRITES ABOUT HER MOTHER

#### **I Will Never Be as Brave as My Mother**

Elizabeth Ann Quirino (AB 1977)



When I saw on the calendar that today was International Women's Day, I thought of my late mother Lourdes "Lulu" Reyes Besa and her bravery during World War II. I could never be as brave as she was.

Several years ago, around 2001, one late evening, as I turned off the kitchen light to go to bed, the phone rang. It was unusual for our home in New Jersey to get phone calls at nearly midnight. I let our answering machine pick up the message.

"Hello, my name is Robert Dow. If you are the daughter of Lulu Reyes-Besa, I want to thank her. She saved my life," said the elderly male voice on the other line.

I picked up the phone as the man was still leaving a message. My mother, Lourdes had died in 1981. So, I needed to find out what this man wanted.

"I have spent the last fifty years searching for Lulu Reyes. She saved my life when I was a POW in the Philippines," Dow said.

He identified himself as Corporal Robert J. Dow, retired from the United States Army, recipient of the Bronze Medal and the Purple Heart. He told me stories about my mother during World War II that I had never heard about. Corporal Dow was one of the many American POWs my mother had saved while they were incarcerated in prison camps in Camp O'Donnell, Capas, Tarlac and later in Cabanatuan. Dow was suffering from malaria. So were other American and Filipino POWs who were imprisoned. The miserable, inhumane prison conditions made the captured soldiers sick and they were dying by the day. The POWs badly needed medicines.

"Do you even know the dangers your mother went through to save our lives? She saved so many American soldiers," Mr. Dow revealed.

I was astounded. My mother was a loving and nurturing person. But she and my father, the late Gualberto S. Besa led very quiet lives in Tarlac after they married long after the war was over. My parents never talked to my sister and me about the gut-wrenching inhumanities my mother witnessed during World War II.

Mom never talked about the brave, courageous deeds she did for American and Filipino POWs. I can only imagine it was painful and horrific to re-live. And as the most loving mother in the

world, I know in her heart she wished for her daughters to never live through the horrors of war.

My mother, Lourdes "Lulu" Reyes-Besa grew up without a father most of her life. She and her brothers were raised by their widowed mother, Luz Jugo-Reyes. They went through the painful ravages of World War II when their home in Malate was bombed and destroyed to the ground during the Battle of Manila in 1945.

As a young, unmarried girl in her twenties, Lourdes suffered through the ordeal of hearing that her brother, Guillermo "Willie" Reyes was captured by the enemy and went through the harrowing Bataan Death March from Corregidor to Capas, Tarlac.



When Willie went missing, Lulu vowed to her mama, and her brothers one thing. "Mama, I will find Willie."

The Reyes family went through months of not knowing whether Willie had survived the death march or whether he was in any of the concentration camps known for their harsh conditions.

As a member of the Chaplains' Aid Society, together with members of the religious clergy, Lulu Reyes penetrated every prison camp searching for her brother. She eventually found Willie. He was wounded, and malnourished, but he was alive. With total disregard for her safety, she and her mama, Luz, returned to Camp O'Donnell in Capas to bring Willie medicines and food.

Father Forbes Monaghan, an Irish priest assigned in Manila, wrote in his book *Under the Red Sun*:

*"After the fall of Bataan, Lulu went to Tarlac with her mother, to bring help to her brother, Willie, who was a prisoner. Seeing the misery of other POWs, she devoted herself to aiding them. Though it was forbidden to enter the prison camp, Lulu went to the Japanese commandant and got his permission to bring in medicines and food. She smuggled money and notes even if she was warned death was the penalty for doing so."*

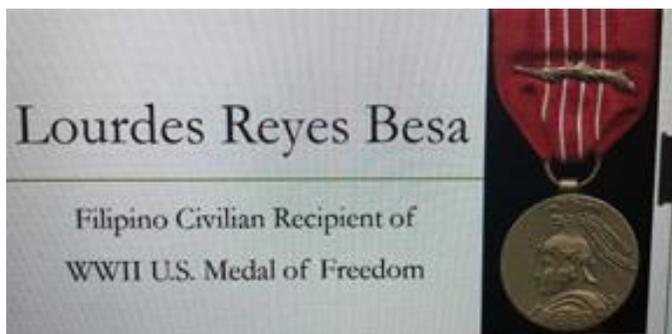
After Corporal Robert Dow contacted me in 2001, we had many phone conversations about my late mother. Dow sent me copies of the letters she wrote to him. He described what she did to save him and other American POWs:

It turned out Lulu Reyes brought in quinine for the soldiers who were suffering from malaria. One of them was Robert Dow.

“Without the atabrine Lulu Reyes got to me, the malaria may well have killed me. Lulu smuggled in quinine and atabrine through the priests who visited the camp,” Dow said.

“Every time Father Santos said Mass, he cautiously gave me atabrine smuggled in by Lulu.”

Most people would have lost all hope at this point when her brother went missing after being captured by the enemy. But my mom, Lulu Reyes did not. From childhood, she knew how to muster the strength to be a survivor at anything life hurled at her. Even better, she learned how to turn the darkest hour into the moment with the most brilliant light shining through with her faith, family, and unwavering optimism. In her search for her brother, she found other prisoners in misery. She kept going back to the prison camps to help them. She valiantly did this with total disregard for her personal safety, with no thought of being captured, raped or even killed. She courageously did what she had to do. She saved lives with the medicine and food she brought to the POWs.

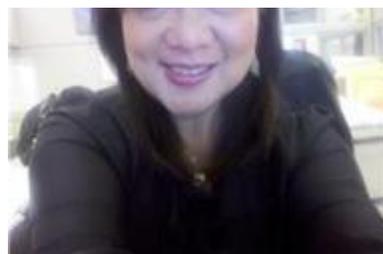


My mother was my hero. Through all her pain and hardships, she was awarded the Medal of Freedom by the United States twice – on August 11, 1947, and on September 24, 1947, for her valiant World War II efforts to aid American and Filipino POWs (Prisoners of War).

Major General George F. Moore, commander of the Harbor Defenses of Manila and Subic Bays during the Japanese invasion in 1941 said, “Lulu was one of the outstanding heroines of World War II.”

I can never be as brave or courageous as my mother, Lulu Reyes, was. But I learned something from her life and heroic war efforts. Every day, as I live my ordinary life in my New Jersey home, as a wife, mother, author and writer, I am constantly being challenged and my world view is expanded. The petty things I think or worry about are what they are—trivial, in stark contrast to the real problems so many other people face each morning when they wake up. Life teaches us lessons we need to learn to take the next step in our lives and to fulfill our mission in life. I am a writer and that is my gift—to tell the story of this strong woman.

*About the Author: Elizabeth Ann Besa-Quirino is based in New Jersey, USA, an award-winning Journalist, Author, Writer, Correspondent, Blogger, Artist. Find her stories on [www.AsianInAmericaMag.com](http://www.AsianInAmericaMag.com)*



## ALUMNAE GATHERINGS



**High School 1965  
Lunch for Marichit Bernardo and Lourdes  
Mitra  
Fely J's  
27 February 2019**

**High School 1968  
Get-Together in Elmont, New York  
9 March 2019**



**High School 1965  
Despedida for Marichit Bernardo  
Sentro Greenbelt  
9 March 2019**

## CONDOLENCES

The Paulinian Family condoles with  
the Tesoro sisters (Alice, Lulu, Mita, Dolly, and Dettie)  
on the death of their brother, Bobby  
and the family of Mely Calma-Sol (High School 1965).

