

Carmen Artero Kasperbauer's 79<sup>th</sup> Anniversary  
Liberation Day Speech

On this, the 79th anniversary of the liberation from enemy occupation of our island, I cannot help but remember that it was a time of fear, uncertainty, and survival for the people living on Guam.

Good morning, everybody! Mauleg na oga'an todos hamyu. Thank you for allowing me to share some of my personal history with you this morning. Guaho Si Carmen Artero Kasperbauer, Familiar Artero yan Kita'an. It is indeed an honor to be here today.

Before I begin presenting my personal testimony, I hope you would first permit me to share that while living through the atrocities, anxiety, and pain of war, there is an overwhelming compulsion within my heart to extend the critical importance of forgiveness and compassion.

Very early Monday morning, on the eighth of December 1941, my oldest sister, Tita and I, (seven and six years old respectively) walked hand-in-hand with our Papa to the Agana Cathedral - dressed as angels, carrying our baskets of fragrant flower petals. Mama stayed home to care for our four younger brothers and sisters.

I remember clearly that at the beginning of Mass, we heard the drone of airplanes overhead. I thought it was Pan Am and wanted to go outside to see it, but Tita said "Keto!" (Keep still!) But I still wanted to look, so Tita said, "Famatkilo yan keto; basta e pa'schomo!" (Keep still and stay quiet!)

Then a man came up to Bishop Olano, at which point, he stopped the Mass to talk with the man. While they were whispering, the planes continued to fly overhead and then there was a loud explosion heard in the distance! Bishop Olano urged us to return to our homes right away because the Japanese were invading Guam.

Tita and I were holding hands and crying. We could not find Papa and were very scared. Then we saw our Auntie Ana. She was holding her high-heels in one hand and told us that our father had left quickly to take care of Mama and the children, and that she would be taking us home.

As we were running, an airplane flew very low and everybody was terrified. We ran under a house, and I remember that I landed on top of a big turtle that the family had! When the plane had flown away, Auntie Ana quickly grabbed us and we ran home where we found Papa and Mama already in the jitney with our siblings and personal belongings. Auntie Ana helped us get in and Papa started driving away. I remember that people were crying and hollering at Papa, begging him to take them. "Antonio, please take us!" He would tell them that the jitney was already too full with my family in it, but the people would cling to the sides of the vehicle. This scared us, children. We were all crying. My father had to push and pull them away from the car. From there he drove us to Toguac, which is now NCTAMS, and that is where we stayed for a long while during the war.

As we were living there, there was an American soldier that hid in the jungle. US Navy radioman, George Tweed, was helped and kept hidden by many Chamorro people. When Tweed finally made it up north, my father took care of him for almost two years, until Tweed successfully signalled the Americans and was rescued.

After that, Papa decided that we needed to get to Manenngon, but he could not find the bull to pull the cart. At that time, two men came to our house and told Papa that they had to take our family to headquarters so we could be compensated for all the food they had taken to feed the Japanese troops. Papa did not believe them because at that point the Americans were already bombing the Japanese. So, Papa threatened them with a gun and our dogs, and they left.

We then took our clothing, provisions, and whatever else we could carry and relocated to the cave where Tweed was hiding. We could hear the Americans bombing all over and above us and we just kept praying and thought we were all going to die. My cousin, Jesus, shouted that the Americans had arrived. My Dad met with two American soldiers. They radioed the ship to tell them to stop bombing our area until they could get us to safety.

My mother asked one of the soldiers what day it was because we had been hiding in the jungle and couldn't keep track of time. He told her it was August 8th. She came back laughing and crying, hugging me, saying, "Mamie, today is your birthday." I will never forget that we were rescued on my birthday.

As we went down the cliff, I remember that on the right side, there were a lot of dead American soldiers. To the left, there were a lot of dead Japanese soldiers. Some were hanging in the trees.

The Americans drove us to Pigo Cemetery in Anigua, which was Camp Bradley, an internment facility, during this time. We could not return to our home in Agana because it had been completely destroyed. Instead, we moved to Agana Heights after it was cleared of enemies and lived on our Cruz relatives' property from then on.

Forgiveness and compassion come only with understanding. In order for us to achieve a true and deep sense of understanding, we must first submit to the realization that humanity is fickle. It is not always going to be perfect. It is not always going to be empathetic. And it is not always going to be fair.

We will come face-to-face with bridges whereupon we will either have the freedom to choose, or be forced to cross, despite what may be waiting on the other side. I believe that while we, the island people, were forced into treacherous circumstances, so were the enemy soldiers. I will not philosophize about that. Rather, I will only illustrate with personal experience.

During the war more than 80 years ago, in my home in *this* village of Hagatña, I remember a knock at our door. My mother answered and began speaking in English to a man whom I would soon discover was a Japanese Navy warship captain. He was walking around Hagatña and stopped at our house because he saw paintings we had on our porch. He discerned that they were from Europe. He had similar paintings at his own home in Japan.

In their conversation, the Japanese captain told my mother that he had graduated from Cornell University in New York. When he returned to his home country of Japan, he married and was drafted into the military. He and his wife had two young children. He told my mother that he did not want to go to war against America because he loved America, and he and his family had made friends with many Americans, but he was forced into this position. There was nothing he could do.

I remember that he took out pictures of his wife and children and showed them to my mother. He was brave to not sound emotional, but I remember seeing tears roll down his cheeks. He told my mother that he did not think he would ever see his wife and children again.

I will never forget that moment and other memories of the war. Long discussions about our experiences during WWII were frequent with my parents even into my life as a wife and mother. Reflecting on these times, even the hardest of times, were so very important because they helped me to remember that it wasn't the struggle that defined me, it was how we overcame with God's help that would keep me strong mentally and spiritually for the rest of my life.

War is terrible. We should all learn to work together, to love, understand, and tolerate one another in order to live in peace and harmony. We are all children of God. No matter what country or island we are from, whether we are rich or poor, literate or illiterate, we are all children of God and we should learn how to love and help one another.

In conclusion, I would like to share wisdom learned through my war experience. Very simply: Living in hate will destroy you. Living in love and peace: that is what will truly liberate you!

Happy Liberation Day to all of us! Dangkulo na Si Yu'us Ma'ase todos hamyu!