



## Full Text

### I KNOW WHERE MY HEART IS

Richie believed that God used him as an instrument to our brothers and sisters in need. He died convinced that priesthood is his vocation and devoted his days unconditionally helping and caring for others. Let's listen to his heartfelt story.

*I Know Where My Heart Is* is part of the Modern Hero Stories, a series of stories under Sandaang Salaysay about the lives of great and honorable Filipinos. Brought to you by Arete and Ateneo de Manila Basic Education in partnership with The Bookmark, Inc. and sponsored by Role Players, Inc. written by Joaquin Domingo S. De Guzman and will be read to us by Chris Castillo.

“Mommy,” said Richie to his mother, “Remember, when you turn me over tomorrow, I will no longer be your son. I will belong to the Society of Jesus.”

The next day, Richie stood in front of the Sacred Heart Novitiate in Novaliches, where Jesuits train, live, and go through the first stage of their formation for priesthood. It is also where Jesuits in the Philippines are buried.

This was to be Richie’s new home. His mother was about her bunso, her youngest child. She was going to miss him. But Richie has always known deep inside him that he wanted to do something great for God. “Goodbye Mommy. Don’t worry, I’m with the Jesuits; they will be my new family now. I am giving my life for God,” he said to her before he walked into the compound.

Richie’s life as a scholastic or brother of the Society of Jesus had begun. He studied about God, the Bible, and much more. He lived the vows of the community, and learned Jesuit traditions. He prayed each day, went to Mass, and deepened his relationship with God. And he made many friends, including fellow brothers who shared his dreams and hopes. The two years of his novitiate went by quickly, then in 1992 Richie took his perpetual vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience.

When Richie was transferred to Loyola House for higher studies, he was happy to do apostolic work in the nearby neighborhoods. He was getting more involved with people he could help. He was growing stronger in his conviction that he was meant to become a priest.

Thus, when Richie became a regent, a period during which he could do missionary work in a community, he was excited to be sent to Phnom Penh, Cambodia in May 1995. He was assigned to teach in Banteay Prieb Center for the Disabled.

“Teacher, in English, this place is known as ‘The Center of the Dove,’” said the Cambodian who first took him around.

“What a beautiful and appropriate name! We will surely make doves of peace in our centers,” replied Richie.

Richie's students in Banteay Prieb were different from those you would find in regular schools. All his students were victims of landmines; all physically handicapped, many missing an arm or a leg, but never a heart and a soul.

Richie taught them skills so they could fully contribute to their communities.

Richie loved his students and they loved him back. He was always smiling, always cheerful in Banteay Prieb.

Often, his students would share their stories of survival, stories of their lives, and Richie would listen earnestly. Richie found himself another family among these students full of joy and hope despite living amidst war, violence, and poverty.

One such student was Sarom, a teen-aged landmine victim. He too had big dreams and wanted to finish his studies. He was quite rowdy and unpredictable but Richie never gave up on him. "Oh, Sarom? He is tricky, but he will always have a place in my heart," said Richie.

Unfortunately, because of Sarom's unruly behavior, the Center had to ask him to leave.

One day, Sarom was called to a meeting in the school. What happened in the meeting angered Sarom, and he took out a hand grenade from his bag. He looked like he was about to throw that grenade inside a classroom full of students, who could not escape because the classroom's windows had bars.

Richie realized what Sarom was about to do. He never had second thoughts. He knew what he needed to do because he had been living that way ever since, always thinking of God, and the people he loved.

Richie grabbed Sarom, and tried to stop him from throwing the grenade. Sarom dropped the grenade and it was over in a flash. Richie had used his body to shield everyone else from the grenade blast.

All the students were saved, even Sarom was unhurt, but Richie died.

Richie knew, he believed, he acted.

Just a few days before he died, Richie sent an e-mail to his friend saying: "I know where my heart is, it is with Jesus Christ, who gave His all for the poor, the

sick, the orphan ... I am confident that God never forgets His people: our disabled brothers and sisters. And I am glad that God has been using me to make sure that our brothers and sisters know this fact. I am convinced that this is my vocation."

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Source: *I Know Where My Heart Is*. Joaquin Domingo S De Guzman. The Bookmark, Inc. 2013.

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