



# **Comfort Woman: A Filipina's Story of Prostitution and Slavery under the Japanese Military (Asian Voices)**

*Maria Rosa Henson*

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From *Comfort Woman*: 'We began the day with breakfast, after which we swept and cleaned our rooms. Then we went to the bathroom downstairs to wash the only dress we had and to bathe. The bathroom did not even have a door, so the soldiers watched us. We were all naked, and they laughed at us, especially me and the other young girl who did not have any pubic hair. At two, the soldiers came. My work began, and I lay down as one by one the soldiers raped me. Everyday, anywhere from twelve to over twenty soldiers assaulted me. There were times when there were as many as thirty; they came to the garrison in truckloads. I lay on the bed with my knees up and my feet on the mat, as if I were giving birth. Whenever the soldiers did not feel satisfied, they vented their anger on me. Every day, there were incidents of violence and humiliation. When the soldiers raped me, I felt like a pig. Sometimes they tied up my right leg with a waist band or a belt and hung it on a nail in the wall as they violated me. I shook all over. I felt my blood turn white. I heard that there was a group called the Task Force on Filipino Comfort Women looking for women like me. I could not forget the words that blared out of the radio that day: 'Don't be ashamed, being a sex slave is not your fault. It is the responsibility of the Japanese Imperial Army. Stand up and fight for your rights.' In April 1943, fifteen-year-old Maria Rosa Henson was taken by Japanese soldiers occupying the Philippines and forced into prostitution as a comfort woman. In this simply told yet powerfully moving autobiography, Rosa recalls her childhood as the illegitimate daughter of a wealthy landowner, her work for Huk guerrillas, her wartime ordeal, and her marriage to a rebel leader who left her to raise their children alone. Her triumph against all odds is embodied by her decision to go public with the secret she had held close for fifty years.

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