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Abstract

Acknowledgments

Table of Contents

Abstract.....	ii
Acknowledgments.....	iii

Introduction

In the summer of 2017, my mother and I went to the “Pistahan Festival and Parade” in San Francisco, California. We had lived in the Bay Area (more specifically in the cities of Mountain View and San Jose) for over eight years at that point, yet this was our first time attending this event. The cultural occasion is celebrated annually by an enormous amount of Bay Area Filipino Americans, having entered its 24th year by the time my mother and I participated. I remember eating food I have understood all my life to be traditionally Filipino – lumpia, adobo, pancit, anything with ube (especially the halo-halo) – and watching dancers and singers perform mixtures of English and Tagalog songs. The festival proved to be a showcasing of traditions deemed to be representative of Filipino, but with the purpose of celebration in the American context.

One of the displays at the Pistahan Festival that stood out to me was a small billboard sign with quotes by Pulitzer prize-winning journalist, LGBTQ rights activist, and immigrant rights activist Jose Antonio Vargas: “‘Baka malamig doon’ were among the few words she said as the fog squeezed in, wailing sounds echoed. I prayed a lot. I was afraid of the water.”¹ I thought about how I could not translate the first three words of the sign. My mother, born and raised in the Philippines, could most likely translate the words with ease. She and my father are not only fluent in Tagalog, but also in Taga-Bato – the dialect of their province (Bato, in Camarines Sur) and their first language – and in English, which they were taught during their primary school education in the Philippines. A sense of insecurity envelops me often in such situations when Tagalog words are presented, and my mind cannot claim them as my own words.

¹ Jose Antonio Vargas. “My Life as an Undocumented Immigrant.” 2011.

Figure 1. Image taken on August 13, 2017 in San Francisco, California. Quotes by Jose Antonio Vargas in “My Life as an Undocumented Immigrant.”



Despite not fully understanding one of the national languages of the Philippines or the dialect of my relatives' province, as well as not eating traditional Filipino food on a regular basis, I live daily knowing that the "Filipino American" label is prescribed to me and countless others almost automatically, whether consciously or subconsciously. The experience of the Filipino cultural festival influenced me to focus on the cultural aspect of an identity. No matter how much time I spend in Americanized environments, I cannot remove my ancestry or forget what my relatives have taught me indicates Filipino culture. I notice any usages of the Filipino flag in people's car stickers and banners, apparel, and many other decorative items. My curiosity is piqued if I hear "Filipino" used as an identifying characteristic of someone on United States news stations.

I have grown up in the “melting pot” ideal of the United States, with constant exposures to different ethnic and racial populations. I was primarily raised in the state of California, having received all of my education and nearly formed all of my friendships there. Nevertheless, it was always a constant conversation for many people to inquire about my race or ethnicity: “So if you don’t mind me asking, what are you?” There have been countless other moments during which I thought about my racial and ethnic identity. As a Psychology major while also pursuing a minor in Ethnic Studies, the topics of race and ethnicity are exposed to me on a near-daily basis. Likewise, they are presented to me in non-academic contexts. I once attended an “artivism” event held at my college, during which I was asked to paint a piece that exhibited a social matter important to me. For my painting, I decided to focus on my identity. I incorporated three colors of the flag of the Philippines: blue, red, and yellow. I then drew a set of human arms, signifying one of them as wrapped in ribbons as a representation toward which my ethnic identity has continually been tied. Other moments include times when I would be interested in utilizing DNA results websites such as 23andMe and Ancestry to see how far back my Filipino lineage reaches, or when I would briefly attend Asian American cultural events held at my school that would feature Filipino organizations presenting or tabling.

I find value in the label despite the insecurities I may feel for not being as intertwined with the Philippines nation, despite moments where a person might regard my identity as a “fake” Filipino because of how American I am. I wish I could speak the languages, but I remind myself that I am not the only person who does not inherit the language spoken by their parents and/or grandparents. I have to remind myself constantly that I am not alone in my experience, especially since a population of around 3.9 million people tied to any Filipino-related label living

in the United States is bound to contain heterogeneous experiences.² With the various possible contexts that exist, “Filipino American” does not predetermine how an individual will live their life. According to the Pew Research Center, statistics from as recently as 2015 show variability of education level, economic status, living area, and other demographics among those classified as Filipinos living in the United States.³

Though the language barrier is present, there are still aspects I have associated as derived from Filipino culture present throughout my background and in my recollections of the past. I remember moments of New Year’s Eves when I was younger, during which my mom would suggest to our family to wear clothes designed with polka dots as it was a sign for good luck especially for entering the new year. Along with that New Year’s attire, I remember coins being left on the windowsills in many of the places we lived. My younger brother, any child present, or myself would be expected to collect as many of those coins as we could carry once the new year rolled around. And despite having moved to a number of places within California, my parents always made an effort to establish ties to any contexts associated with their Filipino upbringing.

I am able to experience a culture derived from the Philippines in the United States through what others share, through what my relatives have shared with me, as well as through fellow Filipino Americans I have encountered. “The sharing of culture and cuisine is a feast – as in the meaning of the word ‘Pistahan.’”⁴ Thus, the Tagalog term proves appropriate for the title of the Pistahan Festival and Parade, and for celebrating a collective sense of identity formed by Filipino heritage. Events such as these festivals or any other occasion during which I spend time with Filipino relatives exhibit prime opportunities for bonding. These cultural events and other

² Pew Research Center. “Filipinos in the U.S. Fact Sheet.”

³ Pew Research Center.

⁴ Amabelle Ocampo. “Pistahan serves up feast of Filipino culture.” 2013.

representations and celebrations of the Filipino American community as they take place in the United States create a wider emphasis on Filipinos' place in the American fabric.

History and Categorization

The Philippines is a country located in Southeast Asia and consists of thousands of islands and a notable history of certain conditions that brought the Philippines to where it is today. There are various provinces that make up the nation, and thus contain varied cultural differences and multiple dialects besides the national languages of Tagalog and English such as Ilocano, which is spoken by over seven million people worldwide, and Bikol.⁵ The country was shaped by multiple interventions and colonization efforts, such as the 300-plus years during which it was under the colonial rule of Spain. After the United States defeated Spain during the Spanish-American war, the Philippines was claimed as a U.S. possession in 1898,⁶ and was also occupied by Japan during World War II.⁷

The Philippines regained its independence in 1946, after instances including the Philippine-American War from 1899 to 1902, arguments over incorporating Filipino migrants into American society, and several legislative measures surrounding anti-miscegenation and immigration exclusion that had already targeted migrants of other Asian countries. James A. Tyner, in "The Geopolitics of Eugenics and the Exclusion of Philippine Immigrants from the United States," examines the extensive history body of literature around the eugenics movement and its relationship to legislation especially during the period in which the Philippines was not yet independent from the U.S. "Paramount in eugenical thinking was the presumption of essential, biological differences among races. Second, a eugenical discourse maintained that the

⁵ Simons & Fennig. "Philippines."

⁶ James A. Tyner. "The Geopolitics of Eugenics." 1999. 61.

⁷ J. Nicole Stevens. "The History of Filipino Languages." 1999.

physical proximity of disparate races led inevitably to both racial and societal degeneration, as well as to racial competition and conflict.”⁸ Tyner outlines the different events in the early 1900s surrounding American representatives’ motivations for utilizing Filipino labor and limiting migration from the Philippines to the states – the Johnson-Reed Immigration Act of 1924; the Tydings-McDuffie (Philippine Independence) Act of 1934⁹ – thus presenting broader contexts for the longstanding presence of Filipinos in the United States and what led to the independence of the Philippines.

The Philippines has maintained a long-lasting tie with the United States, as the presence of Filipinos has continued to grow in the states since the Philippines was a territory. “They arrived as laborers, mostly in agriculture and domestic service, and as students.”¹⁰ They were recruited to serve in the United States Navy and other military operations. Such a history has helped to develop a significant population of what constitutes the current Filipino American population, of which many are thriving with the vast opportunities they may have received through education and employment. “Filipino Americans remain a population that is diverse on many levels that must be seen in relation to, not in isolation of, each other.”¹¹

“Filipino American” can apply in different ways to various individuals, as it does not have a unilateral meaning. Thus, those who find themselves under the Filipino American label might associate with other types of identity. Benito M. Vergara, Jr. in *Pinoy Capital: The Filipino Nation in Daly City* discusses his usages of the terms “Filipino/Filipina” and “Pinoy/Pinay,” his hesitation with using “Filipino American,” and how his interviewees would approach the labels differently in terms of what applies most accurately to their identities and

⁸ Tyner. 56.

⁹ Tyner. 70.

¹⁰ Melany Dela Cruz and Pauline Agbayani-Siewart. “Filipino Americans.” 2003.

¹¹ Dela Cruz & Agbayani-Siewart.

situations as residents within the United States.¹² Carla Kaplan describes identity having long “carried the meaning of relational and mutable identifications, actuated either by the individual’s chosen identifications or by others who label individuals or groups on the basis of characteristics and behaviors that seem shared.”¹³ The aspect of a Filipino American identity lies in tandem with other portions of one’s identity, playing a role in how one may approach one’s decisions and day to day lives.

Questions arise over how ethnic and racial groups should be classified. Setting aside biology as a definition leads to ideas of culture as integral to such categorization. Culture is generally understood to be integral to any group identified by shared histories and locations. When we meet people from countries outside of our own we may ask them questions about what their culture is like, already expecting to hear narratives different from our own. If we come to understand how one representative lives in their culture, we may compare those who identify within said culture, and question any deviations. Culture is a helpful term for categorization, but can have its consequences if used for major generalizability. “For many U.S. scholars, this troubling of culture as a category of analysis opened up a critique of the ways in which culture expanded in the late twentieth century to serve as an almost knee-jerk descriptor of nearly any identity group.”¹⁴ In an analysis of culturalist categorizations of race as exemplified in Latin American nations, specifically in communities of Peru, Marisol De La Cadena concludes that “unveiling the discriminatory potential of ‘culture’ and its historical embeddedness in racial thought is important; it can shed light on Latin American culturalist forms of racism which are neither exclusive to rightist politicians nor limited to academia.”¹⁵

¹² Benito Vergara. *Pinoy Capital*. 13-16.

¹³ Carla Kaplan. “Identity.” *Keywords for American Cultural Studies*. 2007.

¹⁴ George Yudice. “Culture.” *Keywords for American Cultural Studies*. 2007.

¹⁵ Marisol De La Cadena. “Reconstructing Race.” 23. 2016.

Though using culture as a primary marker to delineate a group can potentially be problematic for different ethnic and racial groups, culture is also a marker for understanding histories and bonds among people who may share similar backgrounds. Maria Jose del Barrio of the University of Valladolid in Spain and others discuss the usage of cultural festivals and the complexities in their relations to economy and consumerism. Cultural festivals in the public sphere constitute the ability to spread awareness to one's culture, but may also have the underlying effect of designating certain customs and cultural artifacts as commodities available for commercial sales. In the context of Spanish cultural festivals, "in many of these cases restoring heritage and promoting cultural activities also provide a means of legitimizing their activities to society."¹⁶

Literature on Filipino Americans

Many studies have been conducted on Asian American communities, with Filipino Americans as a subgroup that is often utilized. Pyong Gap Min and Rose Kim sought to study ethnic attachment by analyzing fifteen personal narratives of Asian American professionals.¹⁷ They followed on topics such as experiences with discrimination and lifelong friendships. Filipino Americans were included as one of the seven ethnic groups observed. An example included a Filipino American actor who, for Min and Kim's study, wrote on racial discrimination in the acting industry, where Asian representation overall needs improvement. "While a greater awareness of cultural diversity may have created more artistic roles for Asian Americans, the latter often remain shallow or stereotyped."¹⁸ Another professional discussed their bicultural heritage through the notion of applying certain Filipino customs to their offspring. "She trained

¹⁶ Jose del Barrio, Devesa, and Herrero. "Evaluating intangible cultural heritage." 237.

¹⁷ Pyong Gap Min & Rose Kim. "Formation of ethnic and racial identities." 736.

¹⁸ Min & Kim. 744.

her children to show respect to their elders by the traditional Filipino custom of ‘mano,’ placing the right palm of an elder’s right hand against the younger person’s forehead.”¹⁹

Studies by scholars have been done specifically on Filipino Americans on a variety of topics that may relate to their identity or their experiences of both Filipino and American notions. Such studies bring to light the challenges this group may face, but also the complexities existing within such challenges depending on the individual. Vergara, Jr. writes on the intricacies and experiences of a Filipino American community in Daly City, California, “the Pinoy Capital of the United States,”²⁰ and a city near the area where the annual Pistahan Festival and Parade is held. He analyzes many topics and challenges faced by people involved in the community, such as reasons for migration from the Philippines, relationships with their ties overseas, their obligations, citizenship, and the notion of postcolonial analysis and complications with the sense of belonging. Vergara, Jr. acknowledges the phenomenon of “Americanization” and tendencies of analysts to focus on “this same ‘crippling’ history of ‘colonial subjugation,’” which has “in many ways, permeated much of Filipino American studies in general.”²¹ However, he responds to these assertions by arguing that “Pinoy immigration to the United States needs to be understood as a more complex, economically pragmatic process, not just as a ‘progression’ simply reducible or attributable to the colonial.”²²

Martin Manalansan, an associate professor of Asian American Studies at the University of Illinois, writes ethnographies and conducts research on diasporic experiences of Asian Americans, especially on Filipino Americans.²³ One topic of interest in terms of his research has

¹⁹ Min & Kim. 746.

²⁰ Vergara.

²¹ Vergara. 158-159.

²² Vergara. 160.

²³ “Martin F. Manalansan IV.”

been food, which he includes in articles such as the short piece and “memoir” “Prairiescapes: Mapping Food, Loss, and Longing.” The relationship between food and culture is often discussed in ethnic studies. An example is Anita Mannur’s “Culinary Nostalgia” and the two essays cited within, regarding the feeling of nostalgia that “nostalgia is always already predetermined – indeed over determined – in scripting immigrant attachment to the past.”²⁴ Manalansan also contributes to the discourse of research that critiques the notion of utilizing food as a marker of culture identity and tie to a country overseas. Food memories may be discounted, as they might be regarded as inaccurate. However, rather than fully reject the food memoir idea as contributable to overall cultural discourse, he describes the importance of food memories as indicative of the diaspora experienced by immigrants. Detailing his own experience as an immigrant from the Philippines, he reflects on how steak in a restaurant in Illinois provided him with nostalgia for his aunt’s kitchen during his childhood in the Philippines. Manalansan highlights how “every immigrant has his or her own way of surviving an epidemic, the dangerous pangs of loneliness, or the daily struggles of making it... food is a tool for survival as well as a source for numerous frustrations.”²⁵

Manalansan continues his exploration of the complexities of food and culture in “Cooking Up the Senses,” in which he critiques the notion of television shows that feature “exotic” cooking as they contribute to how “Asian Americans’ relationship with the material and symbolic aspects of food is part of their continuing marginal and abject status in the American cultural imaginary.”²⁶ He has also explored other themes related to migration. Reconceptualizing Filipina domestic workers in “Queer Intersections: Sexuality and Gender in Migration Studies,”

²⁴ Anita Mannur. “Culinary Nostalgia.” 12.

²⁵ Martin Manalansan. “Prairiescapes.” 364.

²⁶ Manalansan. “Cooking Up the Senses.” 180.

he argues that sexuality is a major factor for those who migrate, and that there is value in “utilizing the tools of queer studies as a way to complicate and reexamine assumptions and concepts that unwittingly reify normative notions of gender and sexuality.”²⁷

Armand Gutierrez, of the University of California in San Diego, writes on the transnational (i.e., from one nation to another) social and economic connections encountered by second-generation Filipino Americans in his research article, “A family affair.”²⁸ He interviewed forty-one people from southern California who identify as Filipino and analyzed the different ways and motivations in which these people remained strongly connected to or experienced disconnect from their relatives who reside in the Philippines. Gutierrez also follows up on themes of the influence of class and/or privilege perceptions, of the influence of first-generation parents on their second-generation children, and of theories of transnationalism in general. He cites reasons for maintaining transnational connections such as “to maintain social and economic ties with family members out of a sense of obligation, which in Tagalog is referred to as ‘utang na loob’ (debt of gratitude).”²⁹

Popular Culture

The fabric of what constitutes the typical “American” or the typical “American culture” is continuously adapting to fit the different groups of people that reside within the borders of the United States. To see a certain identity represented on a widely-reaching platform as the Marvel Cinematic Universe is a feat of great importance. Actor Jacob Batalon, of Filipino descent and raised in Hawaii, earned the role of Ned Leeds for MCU’s *Spider-Man* movie franchise. In the most recent adaptation, people of color were cast in multiple roles, playing characters known for

²⁷ Manalansan. “Queer Intersections.” 226.

²⁸ Armand Gutierrez. “A family affair.” 2017.

²⁹ Gutierrez. 231-232.

being white in past reiterations. The character of Ned is essential to the plot of *Spider-Man: Homecoming*, as a support to the titular hero as they navigate high school and saving the people of New York. In an interview conducted through email with the *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, Batalon discusses his newfound success and, briefly, his Filipino heritage. “I grew up in a typical Filipino home. Everyone spoke Filipino, and even though I didn’t speak it, I understood every word. They love parties, karaoke and just having a good time.”³⁰

Several people involved with popular culture of the United States have expressed their relationship with Filipino identity. Filipino American actor Dante Basco, known for works such as a voice-acting role in *Avatar: The Last Airbender*, wrote “The Balikbayan Poem” as an expression of his feelings such as “like a foreigner in a foreign land yet [he’s] surrounded by familiar faces” while visiting the Philippines and his roots. “And I don’t know if I can convey to you what it really means when I come to the Philippines, feeling like a son that’s returned. I feel the love that I feel sometimes I have not earned, but it’s a birthright.”³¹ Youtuber Christine Gambito, known under the name “HappySlip,” directed and acted in many online skits centered on comedic takes on Filipino families.³² Other Youtubers and internet personalities living in the United States who identify as Filipino American, of Filipino descent, or of mixed-race with Filipino heritage, include Bretman Rock of Hawaii,³³ Roi from the channel Guava Juice,³⁴ and many others.

Filipina singer and actress Lea Salonga, though not Filipino American, is still another example of a distinctively Filipino presence who has made their way into the American fabric as

³⁰ Ruben V. Nepales. “Fil-Am plays new Spider-Man’s best buddy.” 2017.

³¹ Dante Basco. “The Balikbayan Poem.” 2015.

³² Christine Gambito. “About.”

³³ Bretman Rock. “Filipino Question and Answer.”

³⁴ Guava Juice. “LANGUAGE CHALLENGE! | Filipino VS Cambodian.”

well as achieved success nationally. Aside from theatrical ventures in productions such as *Miss Saigon* and *Les Misérables*, she has lent her singing voice to two Disney princess characters, Jasmine from *Aladdin* and Mulan from the 1998 film of the same name.³⁵ Her voice is continuously heard in replays of songs such as “Reflection” and “A Whole New World.” Singer Jessica Sanchez, who identifies as half Filipino and half Mexican and was the runner-up of the eleventh season of *American Idol*, has strongly acknowledged pride in her heritage. Responses from the Filipino and Mexican communities in the United States were highly positive and enthusiastic over the representation featured in the show. A fan in response to the news station NBC San Diego who supported Sanchez’s bid to win *American Idol* noted that “a lot of Asians aren’t represented in Hollywood so when you see a young Filipino-American who can represent the Filipino community it gets really exciting.”³⁶

The Black Eyed Peas, which distribute music primarily with English lyrics, have released three songs reflecting the Filipino heritage of one of the groups’ members Allan Pineda Lindo. (also known by his stage name “apl.de.ap”) “The apl Song” focuses on apl.de.ap’s history of growing up in the Philippines in an impoverished context. “I was fourteen when I first left Philippines. I’ve been away half my life, but it felt like a day. To be next to my mom with her home cooked meal. Meant I felt complete, my emotions I feel. Now life has changed for me in the U.S., but back at home man, life was a mess.”³⁷ “Bebot” is the second Tagalog song to be released, and is akin to terms such as “babe” or “chick.”³⁸ The most recent song featuring Tagalog lyrics stems from the international version of their album *The E.N.D.* and is titled

³⁵ “Her Story.”

³⁶ Elena Gomez. “Sanchez’s Filipino and Mexican Fans Root for Her Win.” Quote by fan Emmelina Maghring.

³⁷ Allan Pineda Lindo. “The apl Song.” 2003.

³⁸ Pineda Lindo. “Bebot.” 2006.

“Mare.”³⁹ I remember instances from road trips during my childhood of when my mom would play such songs on her iPod, without hesitation to replay them more than the other Black Eyed Peas songs.

³⁹ Pineda Lindo. “Mare.” 2009.

Stories of Filipino Americans

Oral Histories

In the spirit of the word “Pistahan,” the value of sharing stories and experiences does not go unnoticed. I wish to use this platform to cultivate my understanding of this important genre of the Filipino identity, as well as to showcase the unique histories of various individuals who may fall under the “Filipino American” label. Seven participants who were enrolled in or recently graduated from college at the time they were interviewed, with a majority from the University of California, Riverside, were asked to participate and granted their consent for their narratives to be included. It is essential to note that these select few do not represent the entirety of the Filipino American community. The following chapters consist of seven transcribed oral histories.

Chapter 1: “Close and Generous Culture” and Treading New Ground

A conversation with Jorel, a physicist.

Where were you born?

I was born in the Philippines. In Quezon City, Philippines. And I think it was before midnight. (*both laugh*)

And did you grow up there? Like spend a significant amount of time there?

Yeah, I spent six years of my life there.

How did your family become situated in the United States?

So, when I was a kid, I remembered when they [my parents] told me we're going to the United States and it's like at first I thought it was some sort of vacation and I guess we just never went back. (*both laugh*) But how it actually happened was my parents lived during the times of when the Philippines was still in the dictatorship. They knew what it was like and they wanted to, you know, have better opportunities available for me. Because, Philippines is not the nicest place to live. I mean, that may sound bad saying that about your country, but I think it's true. There's a lot of crime like... I was fat when I was a kid, and my dad jokingly said “Oh, um, we're scared you'd get kidnapped,” ‘cause like if you're fat that means you had money, that type of thing. There were a lot of thefts in there, specifically where I was situated in. I remember one time when I was visiting, one of my cousins actually got killed. I was like “Oh, what's going on here?” You don't see this often in America.

I think it was a pretty tough decision for my parents because they were both pretty successful doctors there, so, because they were doctors there that doesn't fully translate to being

doctors here, so it was a tough time getting situated. When we first moved, my sister was not even a year old, so it was tough for them finding a place to stay and keeping the children. Initially we were like house-hopping with friends and relatives. We initially stayed in Pasadena for a month in this one room hovel and like, the four of us slept on the floor while my parents were situating and finding jobs and such. And then after that we moved to another friend's house to like, get settled in because at that point they were able to find nursing jobs. And I think from then we got an apartment, but it was getting tougher and tougher to work these long hours. And so we flew in our grandma from the Philippines to help out. And she stayed with us for a couple years, and helped. Helped my sister and I grow up when I guess school happens. Yeah. Helped with taking us to school, cooking and cleaning.

So you pretty much mentioned where you grew up. So it was just Pasadena?

We moved from Pasadena, then moved to West Covina. Like, to that friend's house, and we moved to an apartment in West Covina, and we moved to a house in like a block away from West Covina. La Puente. Yeah, my friend across the street lives in West Covina and I live in La Puente so.

Would you say that area kinda reflected a Filipino community in any way? Like was there a large presence?

Definitely. The apartment where we lived at was a two-minute walk from this road, filled with shopping or grocery complexes. And there it was mostly Filipino food, you got your Seafood City, you got your barbecue restaurant. You got your Jollibee. I still miss the McChicken but you know, Jollibee will do. Ah, let's see, there's also tons of restaurants, tons of

grocery stores. Pacifics and the other one there, Red Ribbon's another one there. Maybe I've just repeated Red Ribbon twice but. (*laughs*) It was actually pretty easy to like situate. It felt so familiar to the Philippines because, even though I wasn't in the Philippines I was still eating Filipino food, and they were made by Filipinos so, they know how to make it good.

Would you say that's pretty relevant for you now? Having been in college for a couple years like, is that something you see around like Riverside at all?

There's no Jollibee in Riverside. (*laughs*) There is no Filipino food here, but there is like a lot of student communities. A lot of Filipino student communities. There's Filipinos in Health Sciences. Katipunan. But the thing is I didn't join those things. Because of how diverse Riverside is, most of my friends aren't Filipino.

When it comes to certain ethnic or racial labels like "Filipino," "Filipino American," "Asian American," what do you think about like all of those labels? How do they apply to you?

I think they all describe it properly. I don't see anything wrong with labeling myself as Filipino, Filipino American. I am an American citizen. My parents are dual citizens, so guess you can call them Filipino American, or Filipino and American. But, I don't see the labels as anything too bad or too good, it just is so.

How would you define Filipino culture?

I would have to say, a really generous culture. Because growing up here in America, my parents usually – I think you're familiar with it, too, because you're Filipino – they send these things called Balikbayan boxes to the Philippines. They send money to the Philippines. When

they go back and bring a lot of souvenirs, when we come back from the Philippines we bring a lot of food from there and give it to friends and family here. So I think it's a lot of generosity. A close and generous culture is what I would describe it because it's like, when I talk to my friends and like "Oh, I'm Filipino," it's like "You're Filipino, too," and [we] hug. It's like realizing, "Oh look, there's another person like me." Talking with other cultures – like for example my girlfriend's Polish – that doesn't happen in the Polish culture. So, I would say it's close-knit, and I would say it's generous.

What traditions exist in your immediate family? How do traditions work for you and your family?

Filipino communities like where I came from, it's heavily Catholic, so one of the traditions is we pray the rosary every day. We did that in the Philippines, we do it now here. That's one tradition that's stayed true. I wasn't too familiar with the traditions we did in the Philippines. Yes, that's it, that's all I have. (*laughs*) I don't know if you would call them traditions because I'm not too familiar with what other cultures' families are like. So maybe what some things we do is seen as tradition but, because how it is here and how it is back there it's not too big of a difference. Like family-wise, I don't know which ones are traditions and which ones are not.

Some other things I thought about as like ways of things that are passed down through generations could be like language, it could be food. And you talked about food a lot already.

Some other things that might not be like traditions but might be things that happen a lot in different generations could be occupation?

So I definitely do agree with you on the occupation. When I first came to Riverside, I wanted to be a doctor. Part of the reason is, my parents were doctors, in the Philippines. They were nurses here but um, some of the fondest memories I have growing up in the Philippines is my mom had her own clinic and I was usually there with her, and so seeing her work with them was pretty good. Because they were doctors, that means they also have doctor friends, and I saw one of their doctor friends do like, doctor things. (*laughs*) What are doctor things? Like the non-invasive surgeries I guess, because they were working on my cousin and 'cause they were pretty close, again as Filipinos are. I actually saw some of those things happen. So I wanted to become a doctor.

As you may know me, but some of the people here not, I'm actually a Physics major. I came in as Physics major hoping to do pre-med, and hoping to do radiology. Or forensics for a federal agency. That's not what happened. I want to be a physicist now. And, that didn't translate too well for my family because, we wanna be generous like, being generous to your friends and family, being generous to your friends, that's how it is. But being generous to your family is even more so, it's like the idea of giving back to those who helped you get to where you are now. You wanna give back to your parents, you want to give back to your grandparents, you want to give back to your uncles, aunts, all those who helped you get to where you are now.

Being a doctor, even though it may take some time in med school, may accrue a bit of debt, you'd still be able to make enough money to not only sustain yourself but to also sustain family back home, old family back home, and your parents for example. So, being a physicist may not get that much money. My parents knew nothing about what a physicist was. Because being a scientist isn't that big in Filipino culture. But, I was able to convince them. I want to be a physicist now. I don't think I'll change it in the future, in the near or far future. But, occupation

is a big thing that I do see, even here. In UCR Riverside you got Filipinos in Health Sciences. Lots of those people's parents are probably nurses. Some of them maybe doctors but I know a lot of them were nurses.

How does the influence of Filipino culture interact with American culture for you? Do they interact at all, or are they pretty separate or like how does that work?

I can't see them as separate because like, growing up, like when I was a kid, I felt like Philippines was like America's number one fan. All the top American songs you hear in the Philippines radio, you hear the Filipino radios, you'll see it in Filipino TV shows. They have like their version of *The Voice*, they have their version of like *Dancing with the Stars*. The cartoons I saw growing up, they were American cartoons. So I guess I would say it was like, it's not that they're separate. It's just that Filipino culture growing up, American culture was already part of it, I guess, I would say. That's what I would say about that.

And it's pretty similar being in the United States?

Oh definitely, especially where I grew up. There's a big Filipino community. My middle school. My high school. There was a significant student population that were Filipinos.

And does your daily life reflect on Filipino heritage or influence in any way?

I do very much think about it, especially being a Filipino in the physics field. Most of the time I'm usually the only Filipino in the classroom, so I think of it often. Such as "Do I belong here?" or because, when I went to a physics conference, past year, there weren't that many people of color, and even more so, not that many people were Filipinos. I don't think I saw any

other Filipino there. Even though it's in the back of my mind, it's still there. It pushes me to encourage minorities to pursue STEM education. That's what it pushes me towards. Right now I'm starting to make blogs about like, particle physics for example. It's still in the process of happening but, I'm starting to work on that. So yeah, it does very influence me.

Were there any significant moments in your life in which you personally faced any challenges about like how you viewed your identity?

One of the biggest challenges came from my decision to stop pursuing the medical sciences and pursue becoming a physicist instead. The only other Filipino in my cohort, he wanted to do medical sciences. He changes his mind this year, but, for at least three years, he was gonna pursue the medical field. And, it was very difficult because I felt as though I'm treading new ground. None of my family members were like, even though they're doctors, they don't do research. None of them have done physics. My mom said that she only passed physics in college because her professor was really nice. My dad had no comment. So, it was particularly difficult because I see all my Filipino friends, they're doing nursing, they're doing pre-med, physical therapy, something related to health. That challenge came up, as to whether what I'm doing is, like, "Am I doing the right thing?" Especially going to that physics conference, "Do I belong here, as a Filipino person?" where there are barely other Filipinos, that's where a big challenge came in. But, again, going back to the reason why my parents came here, other than the opportunities for them, it's more so, more opportunities for their children. Me and my sister specifically. So, I was thinking, to be a Filipino American, follow the American dream is usually... you are free to choose what you want to do, that is, and so I do. Regardless of background, regardless of parents' background, regardless of what society or culture tells you

what you should do. You're still free to choose what you want to do. That's how I was able to go over the idea of being a physicist. Even though I'm Filipino.

Any last thoughts you'd like to tell?

I would just say, don't be afraid to try something that's different. That's the only thing, I would say.

Chapter 2: “A Very Unique Thing” and Comfortability with Identity

Alternative Title: “Can I Go Back to Food?” A conversation with Karen.

Where were you born?

I was born in downtown L.A., in the Good Samaritan Hospital – I’ve rehearsed this answer for like twenty years. (*laughs*) Ah yeah. I was born there.

How did your family become situated in the United States? How did that family history work out?

I think it’s pretty interesting ‘cause my great grandfather, he came here in the turn of the twentieth century. The brightest students from the Philippines were sent to the United States for to be schooled. And then the deal was that they would be sent back to the Philippines to become basically like leadership, and lead their community. So my great grandfather, on my dad’s side. He was sent to California. And he went to high school in Santa Ana, so Santa Ana High School. And he graduated high school and, from there I think he went to some sort of four-year college. And then, he also ended up going to Georgetown University. He started working in government and then eventually became the supreme court justice of the Philippines and, what is it, he ended up serving in the Tokyo War crimes trial. You can look up what that is, but it was something that happened after World War II. So, that was a pretty important thing and it kinda like helped, and he was part of a committee that helped determine the sentencing for some of the criminals in that war. So yeah.

So after he went to the United States and went back to the Philippines, none of my family went back until my parents came here. So I thought that was really interesting, but my grandparents didn’t bother coming over. Yeah, my parents came here separately, because they

didn't meet until they got to the United States actually. So my mom, she told me, she actually told me that she came straight to New York to meet up with her sister, my aunt. And they lived in New York for a couple of years and eventually they moved out to L.A. So that's how they started out in the United States. And, my dad, I think he went just straight to California a couple years later, so my mom was 25 when she came here, and my dad was probably around 26 or 27. And yeah, the reason he came was – I love telling this story because I think it's so funny but – the reason he came was because his girlfriend at the time was here. And he wanted to follow her here. And when he got here, he found out she had a boyfriend, so. (*laughs*) It was pretty savage. But yeah, so that obviously didn't work out. And I think a couple years later he met my mom in L.A. And that's how they ended up together. So yeah. Yeah, that's the story of how my parents came here.

Oh wow. Did you end up growing up in L.A. or were there any other areas in California that you did grow up?

I've spent my entire life in southern California. All of us were born in L.A. 'Cause my mom is just like, she always wants the best for us so, I guess we were born in L.A. on purpose. When I was born, I think my parents already had a house in Diamond Bar, so we just went to Diamond Bar, and I lived in my parents' room. (*laughs*) 'Cause there was no other room and that's when they realized they needed a new house. And we eventually moved out of there when I was 7. And we moved to Chino Hills, which is like a town over. Which isn't that bad. But we went from a one-story house to a two-story house, and then, yeah. And then, I've lived in Chino Hills ever since. And then college, I went to UC Riverside and yeah. So I haven't really moved since then.

Did any of those areas, and you can consider just the presence of them as well in your communities, did any of that reflect a Filipino community, like any sort of things that you would relate back to being Filipino?

In those areas? That's funny you say that 'cause, even though... Well, Diamond Bar I didn't necessarily see anything that was like outright Filipino about it. There's just the community that was there. Chino Hills, we didn't really get as strong of like... I feel like Diamond Bar is like, it's kind of hard to phrase but. Diamond Bar, at least while I was there or while I've been here, like during the 2000s and 2010s, Diamond Bar has been like an increasingly Asian community. But it wasn't necessarily a Filipino community. Chino Hills is a lot more racially diverse, 'cause there's a good amount of white people, about a good amount of Latino people, a good amount of Asian people, too. The way I started noticing the Filipino community is through like the businesses that are there and stuff like that. So eventually, over the past five years or so, in Chino Hills they've established about three or four Filipino restaurants, which I think has made an impact. Also religiously, there's always a strong Filipino community in the church that I go to in Chino Hills. But I wasn't necessarily a part of that. And so, I also can't say anything about how the Filipino culture was in high school, because I didn't go to high school in Chino Hills. I went to high school in Fullerton. But I wasn't really a part of the Filipino community in high school either, it was just kinda there. But I do remember in Chino Hills, based on my sisters' experiences there, is that the Filipino community in their high school was pretty strong. And it was really convenient because, but yeah. I think they weren't necessarily a part of it either. They were in choir, which happened to have a lot of Filipinos, but it wasn't defined by race.

Because of how Diamond Bar and Chino Hills were culturally, we ended up going to like, I don't know, going to places like West Covina if we ever needed something Filipino. I mean, eventually one of the businesses in Chino Hills were established, my mom started becoming a patron of them. But, I remember when we were growing up we used to go to West Covina a lot, to this business place. There's a street called Amar Road, and that's like famous for having a crap-ton of Filipino establishments. And my mom, she'd always get here nails done and then stuff like that. And we used to go to Seafood City sometimes. They had just all those places. There's this one restaurant that she used to go to all the time. But she stopped going there. It was called DJ Bibingkahan and it's still there. But she just doesn't go there anymore because she buys from other places now. The intersection of Amar and, might be Nogales. Yeah, might be that street. So I would consider that a pretty strong hub for Filipino culture.

Talking about location just opens up a lot of stuff, you know. I think this is pretty unique, but my parents were a part of this rosary group and, it mainly encompassed the San Gabriel Valley. 'Cause a lot of them were from Duarte or Monrovia and stuff like that, that's where it was established. And my parents found out about it and they joined, and they're still in it technically. Those rosary groups, they would always meet up in someone else's house. They would take turns having their Santo Nino's and stuff like that, and we would always end up at someone else's house every other week or so. And so, that's like sprinkled around San Gabriel Valley and West Covina, 'cause a couple people live there. And our house, and my friend's house in Chino. So yeah. And they're all Filipino.

When you think about how you label yourself as like “Filipino,” what do you think about the different labels of “Filipino,” “Filipino American,” or “Asian American”? How do they apply to you?.... Do you identify with them or which ones do you prefer over the other?

Oh, um. I mean, I definitely identify with all of them. I mean, I identify more with “Filipino American” and “Filipino,” because I’m second-generation. And I think that’s pretty easy to understand, right? Um, yeah. Um, yeah. And yeah, like “Filipino” versus “Filipino American” for me, it kind of implies like, whether you came here or whether you’re born here. So like, that’s like the difference I see between them. Or like “Filipino” is more like an ethnicity, like “What is your racial background?” And “Filipino American” is like more of your identity. Yeah, I have no problems with those. Oh, “Asian American” is a pretty big umbrella. I wanted to start going off about the difference of being like South, like I wanted to start talking about how Southeast Asians tend to be overlooked and stuff like that but, I don’t think that’s relevant to this interview so.

How do you define Filipino culture?... From your personal experiences and everything, what have you seen constitute as Filipino culture?...

Oh my god. (*both laugh*) That’s, oh my gosh, that’s a hard question. How do I, how do I define it?

Ok, well. The first thing I thought about was like the food, ‘cause I guess like the food is a very unique thing... I mean I guess one thing you know is I don’t know how to cook any of it, which I think is interesting. Wow.

What traditions exist in your immediate family?

What traditions exist in my immediate family? I mean, going to church every Sunday. That's like the first thing I think of. My... traditions. Oh, ok. Not just on a daily basis, ok, or a weekly basis. I mean we always celebrate Christmas, 'cause we're Catholic. We always celebrate Easter. My parents do this thing called Simbang Gabi, if you know, you've heard of that right? Yeah so, they do that. They do that, but they never forced any of us to come with them. They do the rosary thing. We have that thing, we usually get it like every year and we pray for two weeks until – we keep it for two weeks 'cause you're supposed to keep it for at least two weeks. And then we have like a day where we pass it off to the next person. It's also like a gathering of people to pray together and like, we bring food and stuff like that and yeah.

Um, traditions. I mean we celebrate every other American holiday, too. So, there's that. Um, yeah. I hope I'm not missing anything. Um, food. Can I go back to food? Ok so, a lot of Filipino food, I learned of it from the cooking of my grandmother on my mom's side. Um yeah, she used to cook us a lot of soups and stuff like that. But since she's getting older – so she's about 86 years old – because of that, we haven't eaten as much Filipino food in the house. Or we haven't eaten as much home-cooked Filipino food in the house. 'Cause my mom, like she would know, I'm not sure if she'd learned how to cook all of it, all of what my grandmother knows. So, or if she even has the time because while she's raising four kids. But um, yeah. So like a lot of the times my mom resorts to American food and stuff like that for dinner. And every once in a while she'd bring Filipino food and it'd be great. And yeah. But she doesn't cook it herself very often. So there's that. And then, I learned a lot about Filipino food from going to family parties, so they have that kind of stuff. They'd have like that whole spread and sometimes the kind of spread varies depending on the house. Depending on what dishes they like best. Um, let's see. And, there's a lot of like, family-owned restaurants that have Filipino food that we go to

sometimes. Filipino restaurants that are structured like [...], which I always thought were interesting, like they have like the, it kinda looks like a cafeteria but it's not. And they gave me food that way, which I thought was really interesting. 'Cause I never really saw that in any other Asian establishment, other than like Indian restaurants, because they have a lot of food, too. Let's see. Um, yeah. And then there's always certain, like certain chain restaurants that were started in the Philippines that came to America, for example like Jollibee and Red Ribbon and Goldilocks. Man, when was the last time we had Goldilocks? I haven't had that in a long time. Yeah. So I always considered all of those Filipino. And yeah. I always notice that, Filipino culture has always been influenced by something, so like for example lumpia, eggrolls, and in the same way that Chinese people have eggrolls and then um, Filipino... oh man, I finally found – I think I know, I'm like slowly figuring out how to answer this question. (*laughs*) Yeah. In the same way that pancit is an analog of like chow mein – oh, by the way, I learned how to say “chow mein” properly in Chinese. But I won't say it right now because, I'm still working on my Chinese.

Yeah but like, Filipino culture has always been influenced by both like East Asian influences like, mainly Chinese, also like Spanish influence. For instance when I started learning Spanish in high school, I noticed like, like oh, I notice like some overlap between the two languages of Spanish and the national language Tagalog. Did you know that the way you say “Hi,” like “kumusta ka,” like that's, it's kind of like a bastardization of “Como estás.” Isn't that crazy? Like, I didn't notice from the way that they sounded, but they like took that and made it their own, which I always thought was interesting. What else. I mean in my generation at least, or like ever since the U.S. began relations with the Philippines they've been, the Philippines has been pretty heavily influenced by America, too. So, it's basically expected or like, it's very

common for Filipino immigrants to come to the United States with a considerable educational background. And they're expected to know English as well, 'cause like since the U.S. occupied Philippines in a very unique way, like they had them learn English, and they structured their government in a way, and they defined like the education standard and stuff like that. In terms of like socioeconomic background, my... I don't remember. I don't know anyone who hasn't gone to a four-year college or has gotten like a post-graduate degree in my family. Everyone has received at least a bachelor's. Including my grandmother, which I thought for the longest time that she didn't go to school, which was very wrong of me. And I regret ever thinking that. But she actually, she had her first kid at 19 so I assumed that she, that she didn't graduate but she did. And she graduated at 19, and that's because in the Philippines they skip middle school, so actually they, they graduate high school at an earlier age than we do and they graduate college at an earlier age than we do, which I always thought was interesting. So they had like a higher standard. So it was interesting how their standards are different. So she already had her bachelor's degree by the time she had her first child, so, there's that. So the way that crossed over into like Filipino American culture is that like, it's weird if you, like you're expected to know English but you're also expected to know Tagalog, which is like, it kinda sucks if you end up growing up in America, because you're expected to speak English and not necessarily anything else.

Were there any other aspects of your family that kinda transcended like other generations, like, things that weren't necessarily traditions but were still things that reoccurred in different generations? So that could be like, occupation is an example, it could be language like you mentioned earlier, things like that. If you could think of any.

Well. The thing that definitely transcends other generations is the expectation that you should have (*laughs*), is the expectation that you should, that if you can be a doctor, be a doctor. If you can be a nurse, be a nurse. If you can be a lawyer, be a lawyer. And so on and so on. Actually it's been pretty, I mean in my immediate family, it's pretty, it's fairly diverse. Yeah, very diverse actually. Yeah. Um, yeah. You remember [...] right? Like, all of his cousins are doctors, which I think is not a coincidence, but my family is very diverse. So like for example, my dad works like a government job of computers and I don't know anyone else who works in computers other than my dad. My mom studied philosophy and she was a legal secretary. I don't know anyone else who did that. My aunt was a nurse and I don't know anyone in my family that's a nurse. 'Cause I know so many family friends that are nurses but I, no one in my family is actually a nurse, other than her. I mean we try to, I guess as a family we, we try to go into health professions but, if it ends up being that we're not comfortable pursuing, it's okay if we switch to something else, basically. For example my cousin, like everyone like, like they – you've gotten this, too, right? If people ask like, usually people suggest to you to be a nurse but they don't force you to be a nurse. Right? Yeah. So like, yeah, so it's very diverse. Like my cousin, my cousin's studying computer science, my cousin on my mom's side. So, it's like different for my dad. And my dad's a systems analyst, she's studying like coding. I learned to differentiate between those. Like my cousin, one of my cousins is an accountant. My other cousin that I didn't even know until like recently, she studied cognitive science at UC San Diego, and I was like "Ohh." (*laughs*) Which is like really, which is like very similar to my line. And then her sister became a doctor, and, her other sister is just a mother living in Texas. And she, I think, I don't know if she still works at a car dealership. So do you see, do you kinda sense the diversity? In occupation. Yeah, so. I always thought my family was pretty unique in that sense. They never

really like prided in it, 'cause there's not, there wasn't really much to be proud of I guess, or like, this isn't going to be exceptionally proud of, you know. So yeah. So yeah. I guess, short answer is no. (*laughs*)

Does your daily life in a way like, reflect on Filipino identity in any way?

Um, on a day to day basis? I have friends who would definitely say yes to that, but I don't think I can say that for myself. Yeah. Um. Yeah. Yeah I guess I'm pretty American. (*laughs*) I guess like, hm. Me, myself. Yeah. I don't know if there's anything to say about that, which is a very strange feeling. I mean, I've always wanted to learn Tagalog but I never, I still haven't gotten around to it. I've learned Chinese first (*laughs*) which I think is hilarious. When I started learning Spanish, especially these past couple of years like I, I've made more of an effort to like kind of like sprinkle Filipino phrases that are appropriate. Like sometimes when my parents are like watching like, teleserios, I would always recall making like the conscious decision to watch with them. So I guess that's like one of the ways I like, kind of like keep up with the Filipino culture. Even on the surface it looks pretty like ridiculous 'cause like, it's just like a bunch of love teens and stuff like that and like, my dad watches like the same TV show which is, which I think is hilarious. But yeah no, like, I think that, I think, even though it's very minor, I really think it counts. Um, yeah, and then also, there's, like, my grandma gives me a lot of her clothes. And sometimes like, and sometimes it's like garments that she's had ever since she was in the Philippines. Sometimes I wear clothes that are, that are like – or sometimes I integrate Filipino-like textiles and stuff like that into my wardrobe, which, so it's like very like, it's very much like yeah. Yeah. I'm not very outspoken about it. Like unless someone asks me about Filipino culture, like you are. I don't really talk about it.

That leads into the one question that I mentioned to you, you talked about a lot earlier – how does the influence of Filipino culture interact with American culture for you?

Can I add something? Yeah, in that regard, a lot of people who have realized this, would say it, or will say it, so they'll be, so I feel like you should be prepared to hear this a lot. But um, like knowing your Filipino culture and like, respecting it, really plays into how much you respect yourself as an American. The more I realize that you're, that you are both Filipino and American, and that's something to be proud of and that there's other people that are proud of that, too. For me that really like, that really, like empowers me as like an American citizen. So, yeah, so like, like I have to remember to like, like I have to remember that like, I'm representing a community. Or like, no matter where I go. You know what I mean? So, yeah, so also like advocate for those voices, you know. So yeah.

Were there any significant moments in your life uh in which you faced challenges about your view on your identity?

On a personal level. The thing that I always end up talking about is that, I think I told you this before but like the thing about like, going like. I do have an answer to this question, I just don't know how to, how to start. Or like, hm, I guess in terms of like, like in the sense of community I guess. Like I guess there's like a certain like guilt in like having the community, or like having that Filipino community there for you. Like, for example like, like at home, or like in church. Or like in college, for example like Katipunan. Like we have those resources available to us, which is a really special thing. But I don't identify with those sub-communities. Does that make sense? And I'm sure, I'm sure you relate to that, too, right? And like, so I do feel a certain

sense of guilt about not, not feeling like I can fit in with those people or not, or not trying to reach out to those people. But at the same time I'm very comfortable with my identity as a Filipino American. Mainly because like in my personal experience my identity has never been challenged or or like, you know like, or seen as like less. You know what I mean? Or less than. Yeah. That's very interesting.

Yeah, I think I'm just gonna keep ruminating on the whole like, the whole not fitting into sub-community things, 'cause like at some point in time I realize, or it kind of occurred to me that like it might be because I thought those communities were like, or I don't know, they were like, like they were like too, like I couldn't like, I couldn't, I still can't put it into words now but... Yeah, I couldn't tell if they were like, I don't know, I saw those groups as too like, as too Filipino and I felt guilty about that because like, 'cause like, it also, meant admitting that I was, that I was more American than Filipino. That's why I was uncomfortable with those communities. Or I conduct my life more as an American. Does that make sense? 'Cause like, various times in my life I've like seen, I've looked at those communities as oh, I'm too, I'm too like, I'm too "cool" for it, or like I feel like I'm not – 'cause like a lot of those, communities are dominated by Filipinos and not Filipino Americans. So I feel like they needed that community more than I did. And I didn't want to get in their way.

And also like, having, going to college is pretty important for me because – this is gonna sound super college-y but, but like the colonialist mentality like, confronting that. And how that pervades in like Filipino and Filipino American culture. Yeah, like I was always so proud that my great-grandfather had become like such a significant person and stuff like that. A lot of my family wealth has resulted and like the, has resulted in like the, it's like kind of like a – this is hard to put into words. Like a lot of my family, like a lot of my ancestors were in like the

military and stuff like that. Their cooperation with Americans in that regard like, helped them, become well-off for the rest of their family. I also had to realize that there were consequences to that, to us as a community. Um, so yeah. So like not, not all- so like, not all Filipinos were like that. Like not all of them were like upper-middle class like my family was in the Philippines. And that wealth allowed my family to settle successfully here. Um, yeah. Or like, comfortable. Not necessarily successfully.... And also like my grandfather getting the education and stuff like that and like. I also like wonder if he didn't have to go back to the Philippines, what would have happened to him and my family and our culture? So like, kinda like the ramifications of like, of like that kinda stuff and realizing that my family was like complicit to those forces in a way. And yeah... So that was a pretty big thing I realized in college.

Chapter 3: “Entwining Mix of the Two” and Acculturation versus Assimilation

A conversation with Richmond.

Where were you born?

I was born in Pasay City, that’s in Metro Manila, in the Philippines.

How did your family become situated in the United States?

So my dad’s family, it was mainly the side between my two families that came here first. All my mom’s family’s in the Philippines. My paternal grandparents came here in the 80’s. They were petitioned by my aunt on my dad’s side, his sister. And then they followed – my father and their siblings, the rest of their siblings. Well, not all their siblings, all except two, came here in 1994. So several years have to pass before I believe they could petition me and my mother. Well of course, 1994, I still wasn’t born yet, nor were they wed. So I think they waited to be married, and then after you’re married you have to go through this citizenship process, and I believe before it took such a long time, that’s why it took for them five years ‘cause we came here in 2001. December 2001. And then, yeah, we’ve been here since then. I’ve been here in California since then so.

Where did you grow up?

For the first five years I was in the Philippines mainly in a town called Alaminos, Laguna. I was born in Pasay. I was mainly just with my mom’s side of the family. They were residing in Tondo, Manila. That’s where they’ve been living since their like whole childhood. It could be considered somewhat of a, not necessarily like a poor neighborhood but like, there’s poverty-stricken around. My mom’s side was more middle-class kinda. I was a very sickly child,

so I was in and out of the hospital. My dad's family has land that they own, the rural sides of the provinces. That's where Alaminos is at, in the Laguna province. In 1998, our house that was being built in Alaminos was finished, so that's when my mom decided to move to Alaminos in our new house, to also help reduce like me becoming sick.

So since then we've been there from the house to 1998 'til December 2001 when we left here to go to the U.S. And then from 2001 to 2006, 'til November 2006, I was in National City, California. It's in San Diego. That's one of the cities in San Diego near like Chula Vista. That's where I went to elementary school and then middle school. We briefly left to go back to the Philippines from 2006-2008 because my mom went back to school. She studied nursing, going to the second round of schooling, and then came back in 2008. And then from 2008 to now, I still live in National City. I mean apart from here of course, going to UCR.

Did any of those environments that you grew up in represent kind of a Filipino community?

Yeah, I mean I definitely feel here, in like National City, San Diego area – definitely feel more of a Filipino kind of presence, or community, bonding, or identity, in that kind of area. The aunt that petitioned my grandparents, and then subsequently they petitioned my father, and the siblings, her husband was in the Navy. I don't know what role but, that's how they were situated in San Diego and that's how it just transpired that we followed in San Diego after.

What do you think about the labels of "Filipino," "Filipino American," "Asian American"?

How do they apply to you?

I'm comfortable and I'm also alright with whichever of those labels. At first I was uneasy to use "Filipino American" just 'cause, I mean, I'm like pure-blooded Filipino. In my view, no

trace of American blood is on me. But considering my citizenship is American, so I see where that would apply and that's why, when I realize that, I became more at ease with that term. "Filipino," I mean always been. Like whenever we fill those surveys or anything I'll always identify as Filipino. And with "Asian American," I think it's very important to also identify as that because, especially now, we're slowly becoming more and more identified or given opportunities in a more previously white-dominated society. Being able to identify as Asian American and then being able to succeed in several fields. I'm aiming for the medical field. Being able to be a part of those and representing the Asian American community and the Filipino community is a big accomplishment and big honor, too.

How would you define Filipino culture?

I would define it as a culture that is really family-centered, especially God-centered, of course. I would say like 80% or 90% of Filipino culture really revolves around religiosity. Especially like we're a heavily Christian nation, so really want to adhere to those values. I see it, and I hope others see it like, incorporated into the daily values and I guess that's also one reason why whenever people visit the Philippines they say like "Oh, they're so hospitable." You don't feel like you're a visitor, you feel like you're family. So I guess that's where it really comes from. And again like, the devotion to the faith, the devotion to God. Practices of faith is really really strong. That's like the strong or independent aspect of Filipino culture as a whole.

But inside that I also view it as like a mix of cultures because we also were dominated in several eras, several centuries even of various cultures. Before the Spaniards came in, we were heavily Muslim, heavily kinda like the Austra-Malay, Bornean, those kinds of cultures around the Malay Archipelago. And then, you know, the Spaniards came in for about 300 and thirty-

something years. And then we were dominated by the Americans for forty years. And then we were occupied by the Japanese. And then now through media we also are becoming even more interconnected with other cultures.

What traditions exist in your family?

The traditions, mainly are again family-centered and God-centered, that's really where it stems. Like recently we were at a Santo Nino Fiesta, which is like if you look further into it, it's like a celebration of the Holy Child, Jesus, because it really stems back to commemorization of the first Christianizing encounter between the Spaniards when they arrived in Cebu. Especially since my mom's family as I mentioned is also from Tondo, Manila, there's really a strong devotion there to the Santo Nino as well. So we were in a fiesta just last Sunday. And then also, when it comes like Christmas time, we have like of course the Simbang Gabi – I don't know if you've heard of it – Simbang Gabi, for nine nights and that's really a devotion also.

And more family traditions you know, we go celebrate birthdays, especially if they're in the zero's, especially 50, 60, 70, those kind of like milestone birthdays. That's really a tradition we keep. Also during the May season, it's a Marian month. Marian devotion, and so we have like the florists de Mayo, which is really a big prominent thing also. There's flower offerings each day, and that's for the whole month of May. And then my sister would always be in the offering, each afternoon before the mass starts. And just those sort of things, just family get-togethers, reunions, those kind of things.

Are there common things that happen, like do you think you exhibit any sort of the same things that your parents or your grandparents have been doing in the past or probably now?

We're pretty much all unique. I mean I think the one that does – every generation – is the hard work. You know, the diligence, and especially being God-centered always, you know. Always trusting in God. I mean as well as just like, working with one another, working with family. Asking for the support of the family. And I think that's really been maintained throughout generation after generation so.

How do your caregivers and other influential figures exemplify these cultural aspects that you talked about?

I would say like... I myself would not be attuned nor informed in these kinds of cultures of traditions if they themselves did not embody it, if they themselves did not show it. My mom is a very deep and religious Catholic, you know, adhering to all these traditions, and through her I got to know the meaning of those. Through her and through diligence and through self-exploration as well, and like my self-interest as well, not just being forced. Like you know, especially for a religion or a church like "Oh, they're just forcing us 'cause blah blah blah," but when you find you yourself are interested personally to know more about it. That's a really big deal. And then in terms of all the other things that I'm talking about, my grandmother and my aunt on the side of my mother, they're really strong figures for me as well, seeing as motivation and as inspiration to continue further, and also maintain the culture.

Of course, you have to adapt. Especially here like in the U.S., you know. I don't know if it's like another [interview] question but I'll just say it now. When I was in middle school, of course – I don't know if you experience this also but like – if when they see you as like a new student, everything like "Oh, you came from the Philippines," they have some sort of stereotypes or certain characteristics that they immediately ascribe. That's for all cultures or for whatever

reason right? But especially particular for Filipino Americans or Filipino students who are new students, like “He probably has like broken English” or “He does this, he does that.” And they give all these negative stereotypes without even getting to know the person. But I with the inspiration of my family and advice, I overcame that. Of course you have to adapt to the situation, but with not being plastic to yourself or not faking it. Like you’re not faking it but you’re just adapting so that you’re able to be on par with them, not be demeaned or degraded in any way. I believe that’s very important.

But at the same time, my comment on that is, I would think just that as like acculturation versus the term assimilation. In regards to those two, I think it’s very important – especially like with Filipino, Filipino American youth, especially the ones who weren’t actually to be born here but just came here – to be acculturated you know, be able to adapt and kinda like weigh the ins and outs of the culture that you’re now in. At the same time you’re maintaining the culture you came from, which is being Filipino. I mean this is my personal opinion but like, assimilation in a very major aspect from what I’ve seen, from what I’ve been through, it’s not a total rejection of where you’re coming from, your culture of origin as Filipino for example. In one way you’re kinda ascribing to ways of the new culture just to please the others, but you yourself know that you’re not enjoying yourself, you, you know that you’re not being true to yourself. So I think that’s very important.

Does your daily life reflect on Filipino identity in any way?

Um, I would say yeah, definitely. Especially here in the university setting, it’s very hard, not necessarily to show the culture but to maintain it, I guess. I live in the dorms so if I crave for Filipino food or anything, the trivial thing about the dining is, before, the only Filipino food,

quote-on-quote, that they would have is like apparently chicken adobo or pork, but it's not even true. They just have it as the names so that people don't protest like "Oh, why is Filipino food never ever served." And like you know, recently they added like chicken afritada, which is like, it's an attempt to show that they have some Filipino food knowledge, but like you know.

But in terms of other aspects of course again, the religion is there, especially. I'm the Mass on Campus coordinator, I'm heavily involved with the church here. I mean, it's not just like a Filipino thing, but it's also a Catholic thing in general. But like, being fervent in the faith is definitely like a hallmark of Filipinos. I would say like, a positive characteristic that we embody. But in terms of other things, I have a lot of Filipino food like – what's it called – the snacks at my dorm, or my apartment. And Filipino clothing as well, Filipino kind of like brand names, especially the ones I bought when we visited in past years or have been gifted to me. Whenever I'm on my phone, I of course, I'm subscribed to news pages from both here in America – like you know, ABC news and stuff like that – to Filipino news from like GMA and other, you know, you've seen. I guess part of also the culture is always the entertainment side to the media. I watch my shows, too, daily. Just stuff like that. Much though, I do have some music that are like Filipino music but like, my phone is kinda full so I can't load it all. But I mean, from time to time I do listen to some special OPM songs, kind of like that.

How does the influence of Filipino culture interact with American culture for you?

For me it's being open-minded and being respectful of the cultures. I really only gained a sense of like being Filipino American when I was in middle school, when I came back. Because when I was in elementary school, as kids all you know is like play, do your work, do your assignments, eat, and then you know, just living [as] a kid. And then as you go on further, you

gain a social identity, you gain that cultural identity, and then you're at that point in your life where you decide where to go or how to act. And again, that's what I was saying earlier with acculturation, assimilation.

I really did gain profound, more understanding of the Filipino culture entwined with American culture when I came back in 2008, after my mom studied in the Philippines again. And it was from there on that I decided that, it's not just like one way's correct or one way's more correct, one way is the better way, one way is like "oh, just abandon this way." It's really an entwining mix of the two, because it's really important to me, to be able to balance both out because you really can't. And in this day and age you really can't just say this is always the right way because you always have to see where you came from but at the same time you have to look forward to what's coming next. And then when you're in the moment, it's really a mixing of the two, so you really have to decide how you do you. How you live your everyday life, for me is like really being always mindful that the two are integral parts of me, so.

Were there any significant challenges you faced about your view on your identity, aside from what you've already listed earlier?

I guess, as I was saying, the challenges come with that kind of like peer pressure, when you're in middle school, high school, to be who people want you to be. And that's not just being particular to one culture, I mean it just like any culture I guess. But being mindful of the culture that I'm coming from, as a Filipino, as a Filipino American, the challenges that I really faced were, oh you know like, the criticisms that people gave of like "Oh, why are you still believing those kind of things, they're like all made up" or "You know those are the old ways."

Especially, I would hear this from my fellow Filipino, Filipino American students who themselves are in the same situation as me, who came here when they were young, who grew up here. And yet, they know how to speak Tagalog or other Filipino dialects, but yet they choose not to just ‘cause to win the favor of others, whatever that is. So I guess that’s one of the challenges. In my personal experience, when I was in middle school or high school, I was really very proud to show my culture. I guess the only stumbling block or, the finding that I was like, it’s so ironic that it’s also kinda like your fellow Filipino, Filipino American – who should be, in my view, supporting you, being with you, being in unity with you, being part of your culture, showing your culture – it’s kind of ironic or also kinda sad that they were also kind of the ones that kind of like bringing you down, and like “Oh why are you showing like that, oh like you’re in America, you should show this.” So I guess that’s just one of the challenges, being determined despite the opposition and despite the obstacles that might come, the social obstacles. I guess the term “not minding the haters,” you know.

But also just knowing that the culture should be passed on, the culture should be continued. Because if we again just go to one way and then yet, this culture – this rich culture, especially among Filipino Americans – is not being passed on properly nor fully, then later on in later generations then, it’s slowly gonna subside into nothingness or slowly gonna get lost, just going to be a part of history, it’s not going to be a living culture anymore, it’s not going to be a vibrant culture, the way it is now and the way it has always been, the way it’s been then, the way it’s always been. So, that’s really one of the goals that I really ascribe to whenever I show my Filipino culture, even despite the challenges that may have come up.

Are there any last things you’d like to say? Anything at all?

I just hope that as the years continue or as time goes on like you know, more and more information, more and more knowledge about the culture, about our history, about the current situations especially, are made known on a more mainstream kind of level. Of course you have to highlight the negative you know, corruption, politics, all that. But I hope that among the youth, especially among the Filipino Americans. Their parents who've had or who've come from difficult backgrounds, they themselves ironically are the ones who are discouraging their sons, their daughters or their granddaughters, grandsons, to learn more about the culture, which is sad. Especially if that child, or if that grandchild themselves are interested to know more about the culture.

And it's just sad – because of the hardness of where they came from because of their economic status or you know, their poverty levels, and then they came to America and found a better life for better opportunity – they have that kind of experience and then, you know, like later on it just gets shunned down and all these negative connotations about the Philippines and the Philippine culture, which I believe is really not heavily true. There's some aspects to that that is true, but that's not all Filipino culture is. Like there's very much that may be true, but there's more percentage or more part that is really a more positive and really something that is really noteworthy and well-factored, especially to visitors and people who have never heard of Filipino culture for example, or have very underrepresented or understated, very minimal information of Filipino culture at all. So, I really just hope that, even despite the challenges that we may be facing, especially nowadays where we have like kind of a culture identity crisis, or we have a mixing of cultures – which is not necessarily a bad thing. But, maintaining that identity while still being mindful and respectful and admiring also the other cultures is really something to think about and to actually do.

Chapter 4: “Strong Sense of Just Overall Pride” and the Dichotomy of Excellence

A conversation with Michael.

Where were you born?

I was born in Loma Linda, California. Like from here to UCR it’s a bit like 15 minutes so, not too far from where we are right now.

How did your family become situated in the U.S.?

So unlike most families that I know of, at least immigrant families, my family actually met in America. A lot of families I know, they met in their respective home country, and then they came over here for either better opportunities or other situations. But my family actually met in America. My mother was a top-notch student, she got high grades, she was number one in the class and number one in her private school and she came over to America actually on a scholarship to either New York University or Dubai. But she chose New York because I think one of her reasons was because she always wanted to see Disneyland. But, top-notch student so, she ended up graduating out of New York University with her Bachelor’s in Nursing. She ended up getting her Master’s in, again, Nursing at USC, and then she ended up getting her nurse practitioner’s license through the Loma Linda School of Nursing, so she’s been the high top-breed, top-notch, smart smartie of the family.

My father on the other hand, he came from a farming family, lived near the beach on the few acres of rice paddies. And he came over to America with his mother because his mother was part of a program to bring aspiring teachers from, at the time, lower-developed countries or developing countries over to America so they could get a head start and bring levels of education. My father came here as a freshman in high school and so he was situated. He came

over here to L.A., south L.A. specifically, to become situated like you know, since his mom finally got a job in the L.A. school district. And so through him, he wasn't like the top-notch grade A student. He was more like "I'm just trying to get through life, you know. Maybe work out, trying to work through different financial problems." And you know, "I'm not trying to be like crazy professional. I just wanna live life, listen to records." And I think one of the best stories that he ever told me was that, his mother would give him allowance to take the bus to school because the high school wasn't near his area. But, instead of taking the bus to go to the high school, he would save his money and just walk. And he would walk about five miles round-trip, simply because he wanted to save money so he could buy records at Aron's Records, and to impress the Filipino community that was established there, like two or three years before he finally came.

And so, this big dichotomy of what I like to tell other people is that, how did a New York University graduate student, [who] got nurse practitioner from one of the best programs in the United States, meet a guy who barely graduated high school and barely graduated high school because he got credits through work experience, how did those two meet? It doesn't make sense. It was more of a series of coincidences, really. My mom's friend was the cousin of my dad and you know, they met because my mom finally got to go to Disneyland after she finished her Bachelor's at New York University. At the time, since most Filipino immigrants were coming to the country, were relatively new immigrants, there was a huge wave of Filipino immigrants. A lot of them like to stick together, even like in my mom's New York, she would stay with not even family, just the community of other Filipino immigrant nurses. They might have come from different parts of Philippines but they were in New York for the same purpose. My dad just happened to grow up in a Filipino community, because my [grandmother] found a house in that

area. And so, this idea of family, to me at least is not just immediate blood relatives, but it's like this idea, again, we share the same heritage together. Even people that I wouldn't consider to be blood relatives like uncles, like they might be like Chinese, half-Chinese, half-Filipino, but they're still my family. So, to answer your question how they got situated, after my parents got married my mom continued to do her Master's and eventual nurse practitioner's license. My father would help her out because he knew that even though he couldn't be the one to be I guess the breadwinner of the family, he knew that my mom was going to be because of all the degrees that she had and all the high marks and all the letters of recommendation from different doctors. So he would help her out while she was studying, so back in the day with the rolodexes and you'd have to copy, and he'd be running across the library while my mom was sitting and studying, and he'd copy hundreds of pages in one day, and that's what they did. He would also provide a good studying environment for her, so if she had to study like for a state test, sometimes he would either leave the house, hang out with friends just so she could have the house to herself, so she could study and to be successful in her test.

And then, in terms of I guess our current family now, me and my brother – I have a brother (*laughs*) – when we were born, my mom was actually still getting her nurse practitioner's license so, while she was, she acted like the normal mother you know, taking care of us but at the same time she would also be giving part of the care to my father, because she knew that like “I have to get this license so I know that I can provide for my children.” So, now she's got her license and she's very experienced. But, in terms of other families like aunts and uncles, our immediate family – my father and my mother – have actually been trying to promote some of our family to come over here if their situation wasn't great in the Philippines, maybe get a new start here in America. Or if they had property in the Philippines to stay there. I believe that

there's like a culture of this thing called the balikbayan box, where we send stuff from America to the Philippines to I guess, to either impress or just say "Hey, thanks for giving us the head start in life," and we'd like to give back to our community.

Where did you grow up and did that area reflect kind of a Filipino community, so was that like Loma Linda still or?

So, I grew up in Moreno Valley first. When I went to kindergarten, I moved to Redlands which is again, right next to Loma Linda. But, the thing is, the Filipino community that I had was mostly my family. The area that I grew up in Moreno Valley was primarily Hispanic. Not many like Caucasians or African Americans, but mostly Hispanics. And so, the community I grew up with, especially during my early days in preschool at the local Catholic church was, again, like with people of Hispanic heritage. So, as much as there is a difference in cultures, I really didn't think there was because, I believe there's a lot of similarities between different cultures, especially with immigrant culture that has come over. When I moved to Redlands however, we moved into a different neighborhood that, compared to Moreno Valley, it wasn't as underserved. And so, I got to experience different cultures of you know, Caucasians, or African Americans, and so that gave me a new perspective on where I lived in. The Filipino community that identifies myself today, it didn't really occur to me until I moved on to middle school, where most elementary schools congregate all their children to be in, at least, one of the four middle schools in the area. And so from there, I met other Filipinos from other elementary schools that were from other different areas, and so I got to know them and became friends with them and as we moved on to high school it became evident of where the Filipino community was.

How do you think about the labels of “Asian American,” “Filipino,” or “Filipino American”?

How do they apply to you?

To me, I believe that “Filipino American” is its own separate... not race but I guess, identity. Just like as what I believe that most Korean or Chinese Americans would say about their own cultures as well. I believe that we’re a independent and unique group at least within America and immigrants. So, I would prefer to identify myself as Filipino American rather than the global term “Asian American,” because “Asian American” is referring to the continent rather than maybe the specific country or the culture that you’re from. And we are completely different than most continental Asians. And so, to me, Filipino American stands as a very unique subset of the Asian cultures that have propagated here in America.

How do you personally define Filipino culture?

I remember you gave me this question last night and I couldn’t think of something I can verbally say. But in a way, in terms of similarities to other cultures, I believe that we’re more similar towards most Hispanic cultures rather than Asian cultures. Because most of the Philippines’ history was ruled by either Spanish, and then towards the nineteenth century, Americans. And so, I believe that most of our culture stem from the Spanish culture and American culture. And it’s evident on many colloquialisms or many ways that we refer to different foods or different ideas. It’s more of a Spanish culture than say either like Taiwanese or Chinese or Japanese in that sense. So again, this relates back to why I identify the Filipino culture as a unique culture. In terms of actually defining the Filipino culture, I believe that the thing that – at least me and my father like to agree on – is that we’re very, very ecstatic about our country. We have a huge pride in our country, and I think one of the best examples of that is

especially with Manny Pacquiao. Manny Pacquiao when he goes to fight, he presents not just he's a Filipino American by he truly represents the Philippines as a whole, because everyone comes together to watch one man represent our entire country during his fights.

And so, we have the strong sense of community, a strong sense of just overall pride in our country. And knowing that even if there are bad times – I know in specific areas it's truly a struggle – we still look towards happiness, in a sense. Either because of our Catholic backgrounds or just because they make the best of their situations. I believe that this overarching sense of pride, community, and I guess just identity, no matter where you're from from the Philippines, as long as you're what they say "Pinoy," as long as you're Pinoy, you can always find someone here in America to bond with. Even if we go to Las Vegas or even in the middle of Utah. Somehow in the middle of Utah, somehow we find a Filipino community and we always hang out there more than even if we're driving or for like eating at a restaurant, we always somehow find it. And I think that's the best part about our culture is, that the community isn't because of different regions than the Philippines, it's that the Philippines is its own community, communal region.

What traditions exist in your immediate family?

In my immediate family, a strong Catholic presence, so either it be like blessing of the Santa Maria on certain days of the year, I personally cannot tell (*laughs*) I'm sorry, I'm shaming my grandmother right now, but yeah I know that at least once a year we always bless the vigil of the Santa Maria that we have. And also recently, the most recent tradition that we had is, the new inducted saint that the Catholic church has inducted was a Filipino. And every family party, we always have a family party every Sunday, like on the dot, I'm not kidding you. Every

Sunday we always go to one of our family's houses, we always bless the newly inducted saint because again, he represents not only our strong Catholic tradition but also that we are a strong Catholic force within the church, and so, he's a very important idol, a person that represents our strong religious faith.

Another tradition that we usually do is baking of specific breads during Christmas time. And this tradition, even though it's like I can see it in many Hispanic or many Caucasian cultures, this tradition was actually handed down by my great-grandfather who coincidentally has the same birthday as me. (*laughs*) But it was a tradition to celebrate like harvest during that time in the Philippines. So we always celebrate, we always have a lot of our immediate family, up to grandmothers and their immediate children to come by, help bake bread with us, and then we eventually, somehow for all the pounds of bread we make, we eat it all. (*laughs*) It's to represent the harvest but it's also to represent like "Hey, you know, our family came from a single village or a single part within the city of Manila" or, I can't remember where my father's from [Southern Leyte] but somehow he did the same thing, like either be tied to Filipino culture as a whole or just families 'cause I know that some families don't do that. We always come together to bake specific bread for that.

In terms of recent traditions that some of my other families, is the Sunday party. This Sunday party, we always always, every single week of the year, we always have a family party. And you know, it might be like maybe two or three immediate families, but we always go because like it's just good food. My father and my mother just love talking so, I hope you can tell. (*laughs*) They love talking to all of the different aunts and uncles because it reminds them of their old heritage from the Philippines that, maybe American culture might have separated them for a while since they haven't been back for periods of five or six years. And so it really

brings the Philippines in their minds back to them, and it makes them feel even more at home than the ones that they've established here in America.

How did your caregivers and other influential figures exemplify these cultural aspects that you describe, and you kinda touched upon that a lot in terms of how both your mom and your dad and your aunts and uncles and everyone but, any other elaboration on that?

I wanna talk specifically about my mother and father. It might not be related to a Filipino origin, but it's just that, again, my mother was this shining example of academic excellence whereas my father – as of right now, he works as a postman in Perris, which is as of right now mainly underserved communities. And so while my mother serves as this academic excellence, my father served as a social excellence, to know people rather than to know things. And so, I believe that this dichotomy, or this opposites, has really influenced me, is because that while I've realized “Yes, academic excellence is why I should strive for,” is how you be – in the case of my mom – the only way to be successful. My father would say that's great and all, but if you can't tell people why it's so good, then it's not. It simply isn't a virtue that you should pursue. And so, the influence that my parents have given me is that like, you can't have one without the other. And that while you can specialize in one thing, if you don't have this overarching – not a jack of all trades but – just an overarching sense of things then you will at least make one mistake within your life.

In terms of my grandparents – moving on through the chain of priority – my grandfather, my father's father, was a naval officer for the Filipino army, and he served during World War II. One of the best stories that he has is that General [MacArthur] during World War II, he stepped onto the beaches of Southern Leyte in the same village of where my family's from. So, my

grandfather had this sense of pride in legacy of either be it the country – like nationalism – or just pride in whatever you do. And so because he was a veteran, and especially an officer veteran, he would always instill “you can’t do things half-heartedly.” My mother’s mother, one of my other grandmothers, was the shining example of that you didn’t have to conform to a societal expectation that the male has to be the breadwinner of the family. In fact – continuing the line of tradition – my grandmother was the academic excellence when she married my grandfather. The other grandfather was a store merchant. He would know people in the village and he would bargain, so that was a huge influence. And so my grandmother in that sense was instilling the academic excellence throughout her lineage.

That’s in a sense different from my grandfather from my father’s side, where again it was more like you can’t do things half-heartedly. You have to not only be knowledgeable in what you may be talking about, but you also have to be passionate about what you’re talking about. And so, when my father came over here to the L.A. area, even though he might not have been the best academic excellent – in fact he always tells me “I want you to be better than what I was in school” – he would at least find different ways around things that didn’t require excellence like awards or scholarships. It’s just if you know a guy – “Hey, I know a guy that can do this for me” – he’d always say “If I scratch your back, you can scratch mine.” So, as long as a social excellence was achieved, then you could be successful in what you do. And those two things in terms of academic excellence and social excellence is what I strive to at least combine, at least grab a little parts of so I can make my own.

Does your daily life in any way reflect on Filipino heritage, Filipino culture, like any of those things?

There was my father – “Michael, you’re not a Filipino, you’re an American.” And you know, in a way, I feel a bit ashamed that I didn’t learn my native language, either Tagalog or Visayan. But the thing is, I believe that the Filipino heritage actually does propagate throughout my daily life as well. Especially when I wake up in the morning, my mother is like “Oh Michael, you always have to bring your baon.” So in many different contexts it can either mean lunch or just daily support, either through money or just “Eh, don’t screw up today.” But anyway, this idea of a baon I believe is a very Filipino heritage, at least, or tradition that I experience every day of my life. The idea of community also is a Filipino heritage that propagates in my life as well, because every time I leave the house, my mother is very helicopter like “Oh where you going? What are you doing? Who with? When are you coming back?” And you know, as much of a mother as she is to me, that isn’t because of what “mother” is, it’s because you always have to know where your family is, all at all times. She not only does this to me but she does it even to aunts and uncles, nephews or nieces, or maybe even just her other Filipino friend that has a son. So, I believe that this is a part of Filipino heritage. It might not be unique, but it is definitely part of our heritage.

How does the influence of Filipino culture interact with American culture for you? If at all?

For me again, as I allude to in the previous question, it’s more like I didn’t experience a true Filipino culture. I come from a bloodline and a lineage of Filipinos but really I grew up as an American. As much as I try to say like “Oh, I’m Filipino,” I always have to stop myself to say “I’m a Filipino dash American,” because I didn’t grow up either in the rice paddies that my father did or in Cebu city that my mother came from. And so, as an American I feel that I’m different simply because of either my skin color or whether because of the way that I was raised

in a Filipino family. But as a Filipino, I'm not truly a Filipino because I didn't grow up in the same circumstances as some of my other family has grown up. In fact, one of my cousins – she's in high school now – came from the Philippines recently like my father did when in freshman year of high school. And so she has a different way of generally going about things rather than I would because I grew up here. As a Filipino American combining these two, I believe that the strong sense of community is still present. I would not say that it's as strong as when my parents first came here because now we are first-generation American-born Filipinos. At least people within my age group, or either two or three years older. We're mostly not immigrants now, we are mostly first-generation born. So the sense of community hasn't decreased in a sense, but it's definitely become more diverse rather than say like "I am a Filipino American," or it would be more like "I am an Asian American." At least that's how it affects me daily, is having this difference between a true Filipino immigrant or versus a Filipino American, either first-born, first-generation.

Were there any significant moments in your life in which you faced any challenges about your view on your identity?

Again as I touched upon [in] the previous answers, that the difference between an Asian American or a Filipino. As my father always said – 'cause my father's full of little tidbits that I really like – "You're not Asian, you're not Filipino, but you're American." Even when we're applying for different programs especially during college, they will always ask you "What's your ethnicity," right? And only recently have I noticed that they finally added a Filipino sub-branch, if they do that at all. It surprised me that it was like that recent, again. But like in a way I rationalize it as "Ok, we're from the Asian subcontinent so like, we're defined as Asians." But I

would say – I’m not speaking for all South Americans but – if say example if you’re from Brazil, you wouldn’t say you’re South American, sometimes you would either say you’re Brazilian. And again, I believe that that applies to us as well, as that I’m not Asian, it’s just “I’m Filipino,” right? I’m not an Asian, what you might think. I’m not from the Asian subcontinent with including nations like China or Taiwan or Japan, or even India. Or Thai, or Vietnamese. I feel that we are separated because of you know, water. I feel that we’re a separate part of this overarching Asian identity that we have.

In terms of just challenges, it’s been more of like “Ok, how do I keep my Filipino traditions safe for the next generation once my parents are gone? How will I continue their legacy of Filipino traditions?” I struggle with that bit every day simply because I can’t speak the language. Like I know a few words like “tubig.” [Tagalog for “water”] Or “init,” like hot. I can piece together certain things but because I can’t speak the language of my ancestors, it’s been a struggle to try and continue these Filipino traditions after my parents are gone. I think about it every day and it’s like, then I’m just truly going to become an American, and I feel like I might lose my Filipino part of that heritage.

Is there anything else you’d like to talk about?

I guess the one thing I wanted to talk about is how my parents, actually how they’re trying to keep up the heritage. My mom’s side of the family has already sold most of their property in the Philippines and moved over to America, like land of opportunity or simply because “Hey, you’re successful here, maybe we can be successful as well.” Because one of my uncles is an electrical engineer, he believed that he would find better success here than say the Philippines.

But my father on the other hand is very, very, very nationalistic. Very. He truly believes that if you sell your property in the Philippines – and it's fine moving over here but – if you sell your property, you've cut off almost all of your ties to your Filipino tradition. In fact, that's why once I come out of college, if – hypothetically – if I become successful, he wants me to take care of the land that he still owns in the Philippines. In fact, the will is still left to us. And one of the struggles that I have is that I haven't been there. I've never been to the Philippines. It's a sea, this land that my father always talks about daily. Daily, always shows me on Facebook different pictures of the beachfront property and the mansion that we have, and all these different things and you know, when I look at it compared to America standards, it's modest.

But again, this strong idea of losing your heritage because you're selling off your ties to the Philippines is strong with him. I really really want to be more in touch with that side, to either continue to support the property that my father's side of the family still owns, and also to be in touch with not just urban culture as what I'm trying to go into right now. But like be in touch with maybe the rural culture, because we're kind of in – my father even calls it like the “backwater of Southern Leyte” as it takes like not only two days just to get to my farm. And so, to get back to a society where that isn't run by modern standards. And it's more run by still harvesting, fishing, small tight-knit communities that are still in that rural sense. In that sense, that's another part of me that I struggle, but I'm more proud of that. I'm proud to be a Filipino American because of that line that I hopefully – not hopefully – but I will inherit.

Chapter 5: “Help Your Neighbors Out” and Taking the Good from Each Side

Alternative Title: “Nah, I’m good.” A conversation with Peter.

Where were you born?

I was born in Las Pinas City in the Philippines. I was the last of three children born. My parents when I was born, they just moved to Las Pinas so yeah. My uncle and aunt were the doctors that were in the room. They were the ones that birthed me.

How did your family become situated in the United States?

So my aunt actually moved here in the 80’s. We moved here in 2003, so she’s been here for a while. Right around when I was born, they [my parents] were talking about moving to America. So my aunt started the process then and she filed for a green card and everything. And in 2002, that’s when we got the greenlight that we could actually go. I actually remember going to the U.S. Embassy and everything with my parents and they would be answering questions. I was actually in the room with them when they were answering the questions. I don’t remember the questions but I remember being intimidated, but the people were so nice. But I knew what was at stake. You could see how nervous my parents were because like, we would be there like 4, 5 A.M, we’d be in this super long line and people would be like selling stuff to us, yelling stuff at us, and it was really cool. But at the same time we’re like “Oh hey, we’re going to move to America soon,” and this is only part one.

So when we actually got to America, I finished first grade in April and when I got here [in U.S.] I had to do first grade again at the school nearby my aunt’s house. It was just three months of me and my parents living at my aunt’s house and you know, just trying to get situated. My parents were already looking for a job. My aunt owns a business, so my dad ended up

working for here, for a little bit. And yeah, I only spent three months here going to school and we went straight back to the Philippines for like two months, and then we came back to America again. But yeah, my aunt had a big role in it, like she literally took care of all the fees, our house and everything. She provided that for us for a good year, year and a half, until we moved out and got a place of our own. And yeah, that's like the beginning of our story here, I guess.

Where did you grow up?

Growing up, they're three significant portions in my life. So, I didn't move here until I was six years old, and I would say a big chunk of my life was spent in the Philippines. Growing up, I was shaped a lot in the Philippines so like, the way I am, the way that I act and everything. So that's the first part. But when I got here, I spent about two years in Orange County. And during that time, the school I went to, the majority were Caucasian people. So, as a person who didn't speak like a lick of English, it was not a fun time. A lot of the people there weren't really familiar with other races, I guess. And, not to get I guess political about it, yeah, but me and the other minorities, we were the only ones that would hang out with each other, with like an occasional two or three Caucasian people were here.

But yeah. Majority of the time, during that time it was I would say – what's the word for it? Like, it's "growing pains." I don't know if that's the right phrase for it, but yeah, during that time was kind of the hardest because sometimes I would get made fun of because like you know, "He didn't speak English." And that's when I grew to take care of myself. Even though I did have friends, it was still kind of hard because I still didn't feel like I fit in. But after I moved out, when we got our own place, I spent most of my time in Monterrey Park, Montebello area. And that was when I actually got to shape who I am today. I went to a Catholic school, and all my

friends there were really cool and like, I wouldn't say I was a part of the smart clique or whatever but, I was always part of the people who people would copy off of in class. And that really helped me achieve for higher goals, and that was when I really decided to become like "Oh hey, this is where I wanna go. This is what I wanna be in the future."

The follow up question to that would be like, did any of those areas that you just described, did they reflect kind of a Filipino community at all?

Obviously, being in the Philippines you know, Filipino community. But when I got here, I was the only Filipino in class for the first two years. I did not speak Tagalog at all at school. Being Filipino during that time was more of a novelty. They would ask where I was from. I'd be like "from the Philippines" and you know, they'd always ask like "Oh hey, say something in Tagalog."

The first two years in Orange County, ah yeah, no. Not at all. But when I got to Monterrey Park, Montebello area, the school I went to had a church with it. We'd go to church every Sunday and after church, my parents – being the socialites that they are – they would go hang out with the other Filipinos. That's when it kinda all started for me like, being a Filipino wasn't a novelty anymore. It was more of a identity. That's when we started going to other people's houses for dinner and Simbang Gabi for church. And yeah, that's where I learned most of the culture, because in the Philippines I only had three conscious years. But over there, I was there until I was fourteen. That's when I really felt Filipino through my life.

The next question is, what do you think about the labels "Asian American," "Filipino," and "Filipino American"? How do they apply to you?

For those labels I feel like, “Filipino” is an identity. For me, I’m proud to be Filipino because of that sense of pride that you get when somebody mentions like “Oh hey, Manny Pacquiao won” and whatever. You get that – I wouldn’t say a sense of accomplishment but like – you’re proud to be of the same nationality or ethnicity. But the other words “Filipino American,” “Asian American” and I guess “Asian,” like sure, they’re just ways of identifying us. But, it’s something that I see mostly on, or I would associate with the S.A.T. and filling in “oh hey, your race or ethnicity” like “Asian,” “Asian American,” or “Filipino American.” Like “Filipino” and “Filipino American,” that can be your identity, but Filipino in itself for me has the most weight to it. Because that’s everything, like that’s your culture. And that’s how you grow up. Or if you grow up Filipino, people associate that with something else instead of just “oh hey, you’re from this country” or whatever.

What traditions exist in your immediate family?

My family doesn’t have a lot of traditions but we do have really important and big ones. One of the biggest things is during Christmas, most families do get together and all that but, in my family we celebrate the ones who passed away. Even though they’ve already moved on, it’s still a big part of our family. This happened especially during our earlier years here, where those who passed away, we’d always have pictures of them up. And we would pray during Christmas time and all that. During Simbang Gabi, we’d have petitions and everything for their memory, and we’d always remember or, we would try our hardest not to forget them. I had an uncle that died when I was three, four years old and even though I may not have met them, I still know who they are and what they’ve done and everything.

A lot of my family's traditions revolve really around those who passed away, on their birthdays or death anniversary. We'd still celebrate them. For one of my uncles who kind of recently passed away, we'd have a party for him every year, and it'll be a whole big thing 'cause his friends would come over and my aunt would have food, have lechon and all that. We'd just have a good time and we'd have mass at the beginning of that. Just talking about him, remembering who he was as a person. And we do that for my grandma, my grandpa, like everyone who was close to us. We'd do something for them. But on a traditional, or I would say on a non-sad part, Simbang Gabi is one of my family's biggest traditions. Because, my brothers moved out when I was younger, so we didn't really spend a lot of time together. But every holiday season we would go to church for a straight week and just have a grand ole time, eat dinner afterwards. And since my dad played a big role in that organizing Simbang Gabi, we'd always be preparing it, too. And we'd always be the last ones to eat, so it kinda sucked. But it was definitely a memory that you know, I really love having with my whole family.

Does that help you at all in framing kind of a definition for overall Filipino culture?

For Filipino culture, it definitely does 'cause one of the biggest things that I got out of growing up Filipino is that we love giving stuff away. Not to put that in a bad way, not to make myself sound selfish – even though I am. (*laughs*) No matter what, it's kind of that like "Don't check if your neighbor has more food than you, check if they have enough." First moving here, we didn't have enough money, but we'd always go to church, and if anybody ever needed help, my family would do everything they could to help them. I guess Filipino culture – like the way I grew up understanding it, is more of "Help your neighbors out." Like "kababayan," is like, "your fellow countrymen or your fellow man." It's not just one person. You're a collection of people

that get through life struggles together. That's one of the main lessons I got out of it. Because even now, my parents – we're in a better position and everything – we still try to do everything we could. Even though we moved away from the church, we always come back every year to organize that Simbang Gabi and just have a good time with everyone. And I know I talk a lot about it, but it's seriously like one of my favorite times of the year.

How did your caregivers and other influential figures exemplify these cultural aspects that you describe? And you kinda touched upon that as well, like when you were talking about your parents and everything but if you have any other things to say?

We actually have this family friend. I'll just call her Ate Pack 'cause that's her name. She's one of the most influential people in my life. Growing up here, her family was like my family's best friend. She ran this business and that's how really we got to know her. She'd make us food for lunch and then, it'd be fresh and everything and it was like the best thing ever. There would be times where we couldn't pay for those lunches, and she would still come by and give me food 'cause she knew my family was in a tough spot. And whenever I needed a ride home and everything, like even though she'd live like [in] the opposite direction, she'd always take the time out of her day to make sure I got home safe and everything. And her kids were the same way, too. I would associate that with being a good person but like, the way everyone I knew that was Filipino acted like, that really instilled the value of helping others out. She was the only Filipino person I knew that spoke Tagalog in school, and we'd always talk to each other in Tagalog and just have a good time and everything. People associate Filipinos with nurses or caregivers or whatever, but like, it's not just because "Oh hey, it's for a job" but it's something that actually we can resonate with, like helping others out.

Does your daily life reflect on Filipino heritage or Filipino culture in any way?

No. Not really. I guess growing up here, growing up in the place I grew up, Filipinos weren't always a big thing. There were never a lot of Filipinos. I feel like I grew up more with the American values than Filipino values. I wouldn't say that there's a lot of history with the way I grew up or the way I act and everything with my history. Growing up in different places has made me into a chameleon, or like it's kind of mixed in the background.

How does the influence of Filipino culture interact with American culture for you? If it does at all?

Filipino American culture, both have good aspects and bad aspects. I wouldn't say bad aspects, they're more like something they kinda shy away from. Having experience or growing up with both sides, I try to take the good out of each side. American culture is very like, it's very free. It's kind of like a "Live life to its fullest" kinda message. Filipino culture is more like "Live life as a good person," the way I grew up understanding it. But yeah, so the way those two interact would be they do affect each other, at least with me. Because American culture, it's not just like one thing. It's a mixture of everything. So, I guess having a Filipino culture – those traditions and everything – helps me really identify with people of my race, I guess. Because, even though we've been here most of our lives or whatever, we still have something that we can rely on and be actually happy about then not be lost about who we are. That's like the base effect of Filipino culture. Interaction between Filipino and American culture, you can still identify with one, but at the end of the day if you choose to, you still have the values that you got from the other.

Were there any significant moments in your life in which you faced any challenges about your view on your identity?

So in recent years, I would say no. I've always been sure of who I was, but when I moved here, that was like six-year old kid, not the most stable person. So, during that time of my life, I hated being the foreign kid. This memory I had was like this kid – you know first graders suck, they're terrible people (*laughs*) – he would always every day pick on me. And he would always be like “Oh hey, say this” or whatever. Being a naïve six-year old kid, I'd be like “Oh yeah” this.” And then him and a bunch of other people would always be like “Haha, you said” so-and-so, and it was like a negative context like “Oh hey, you're like...” The one that really stuck out to me was being called “trash,” and not knowing what actually being trash was, you know. And during that time, I hated school. I hated being Filipino, like “Why couldn't I have been born here?” I kind of wished that I was never born in another country, I guess. But after moving – moving back – I finally got the good part of being Filipino. People accepted me for who I was, no mater the background I came out of. Like, they thought it was cool or they thought it was unique or whatever, not just like “Oh hey, you're form another country. You should have stayed in that country.” I never really experienced that after moving out of that area. Like after that, that's when I really became proud to be Filipino and not just like “Oh hey, I'm Filipino. Hey, I say this. Like I can say words in another language.” It wasn't just novelty anymore.

Any other things you want to say, any concluding statements?

Nah, I'm good. (*both laugh*)

Chapter 6: “A Very Colorful Culture” and Emphasizing Community

A conversation with Aya.

Where were you born?

I was actually born in the Philippines. I wanna say in Baguio City in Luzon. Yeah, I was born there. I lived there up until I was three and then we moved to America around... I wanna say, I didn't just turn three, but it was in the beginning of 2000? Or 1999? I grew up here in America.

How did your family become situated in the United States?

My dad was working in Saudi and he had been working overseas for a long time. And I think one of my relatives who was working with him actually had connections and got him a position to work in America. And so once he got that position, we all kind of collectively moved. And by “we” I mean my mom, my brother, and I, and my dad obviously.

Where did you grow up?

After we moved, we actually moved to Mountain View, which is where I live now. I grew up in Mountain View. Mountain View has always been like a place, like we never moved out of Mountain View, I guess. Even when we moved, it was like in the same place.

Did that area reflect a Filipino community in any way?

Yeah, actually. In all three places that I've lived in, I was surrounded by a Filipino community. My first apartment where I lived up until whenever third grade was, it was an apartment complex full of Filipino families. And then when I moved, we also lived in another

apartment complex full of Filipino people. And my family always had Filipino friends, and so they would always come over. We would have parties, so there was never really any lack of the Filipino community.

Would you say that's kind of relevant for you in college?

For a big chunk of college, I didn't really interact with any other Filipino people. Up until this year, I hadn't had any Filipino friends or Filipino people to like relate to. And this was also an ongoing theme throughout, I wanna say, like my schooling career. I didn't really have a connection with my culture outside of my neighborhood or people I lived with.

When you think about the labels "Asian American," "Filipino," or "Filipino American," what do you think about them and how do they apply to you?

While I do consider Filipinos like Asians, when I hear "Asian Americans," I typically think about East Asian people, that kinda deal. Yeah, I consider myself a Filipino, considering that that is a part of my heritage and the people I associate with. Most of my family is from the Philippines, and that's where it kind of began for them. And while considering I did immigrate from there, I do have history there. I do consider myself a Filipino. And it's just like how their culture has been integrated into my upbringing.

How do you personally define Filipino culture?

For Filipino culture, obviously it's the religion aspect. Like, our story, but also just the way Filipino culture is. It emphasizes on community. It emphasizes on loving one another and accepting one another. Yeah, it's an emphasis on trying to love each other and it's a very colorful

culture. It's loud without being too loud, I wanna say. It's a visually appealing, but also it's quiet when it needs to be. I don't know how to describe it. I'm trying to describe it as an object rather than like a feeling, I guess. When you think about it as like an object, everything about the Philippines and about our culture is vibrant and big and colorful, while our people – while we are big and colorful, we are very hospitable. We're very nice. I don't want to say we know when to keep our mouth shut but more of a, we're people persons. We're humble. We're nice. We're good.

How did your caregivers and other influential figures exemplify these cultural aspects that you just described?

I guess the biggest cultural thing we take part in is usually just religious cultural things. Like the other eighty whatever percent of the Philippines, we are Catholic. Like, my family is Catholic. So we go to church, which is like an obvious tradition. But the one Filipino thing that we always partake in is Simbang Gabi, which is “night church.” I wanna say, like “church at night,” I wanna say [is] the direct translation. And it's when, I wanna say, for nine days – the nine days before Christmas – you either get up early in the morning or you stay up late at night and you go to church. You go to church with your family, and it's a shortened version of mass. It's like a special mass for people who were unable to during the day, because of work or whatever. So that's something we usually partake in. It's usually my mother and I who would go, one, because I don't have school during that time. But also my father does work early in the morning. But when he's able to, he does come.

Some other things I was kinda suggesting as possible – not necessarily traditions but – things that kind of occur among different generations that are passed down in a way, so an example could be language, it could be occupation or profession or anything like that?

Oh, ok. Well, like most Asian parents I wanna say, the suggested occupation is always been like “Oh, be a nurse. Become a doctor.” That kind of deal. That’s usually one of the things that is told to us, but I think it’s more of a “I want my kids to do well,” and doctor’s probably the best way to go about it. But I find that interesting because like most Filipino people are nurses or doctors, or they’re working somewhere in the medical field.

Another cultural thing that I see being passed down is – to make sure it’s passed down, if I ever have children – is the sign of respect when you’re talking to elders, I guess. Introducing yourself even though you’ve seen them maybe like last week or something. It’s always the “blessing,” I wanna say. It’s when you receive a blessing from your elder. And typically what you do is hold their hand and bring it up to your forehead as a sign of a bless.

How did your caregivers and other influential figures exemplify these cultural aspects that you just described?

My parents usually just... I don’t know how to say it. I kinda just grew up with it. Since my brother was, he’s seven years older than me. So when I moved here when I was three, he was like ten. I wanna say ten or eleven. And he’s the one who would tell me like proper things to do, like “This is what you’re supposed to do. Like here.” My parents were busy trying to make a livelihood for ourselves, so it was mostly my brother who would give me cues in case there’s something you need to do. Like “here, this is what you’re supposed to do.” I’d remember to do this, “you’re just supposed to do it, I don’t know what to tell you.” That kinda deal. The other

religious aspects, I would just follow what my parents would do, without really knowing what it was. It's always been like "Oh, my parents always do this in this context, so I should do it in the same kind of context as I grow up."

Does your daily life reflect on Filipino heritage or Filipino culture in any way?

Daily life? I mean besides the typical "be nice to one another," that kinda deal, another thing that I've noticed is when something is bothering me, I typically don't say anything about it. Even if it's like a huge bother, I typically just don't say anything about it. It's just how I was raised I guess, as a Filipino. I don't know if it's like a Filipino thing, but I've noticed this is a lot like about a bunch of us where we don't complain while we are doing things up until we come home. But other than that, it's always just been my daily life. There isn't really much of a cultural impact, like specifically of Filipino cultural impact.

How does the influence of Filipino culture interact with American culture for you?

Since I grew up here, I've mostly been immersed in American culture. As an easier way for me to assimilate as a child, my parents altogether tried to stop speaking to me in Tagalog, or Ilocano. So I've been mostly, or even completely, immersed in American culture. There are some aspects of American culture that differ from Filipino culture, such as American culture usually has children who have a bit more freedom in what they do and what they want to do. There isn't as big of an emphasis on family. And I guess like manners-wise, it's different. I feel like American culture allows you to be more outspoken on things, and the different values of which I hold are very different from Filipino values.

Were there any significant moments in your life in which you faced any challenges about your view on your identity?

I guess there was one point in my life where I did realize that I didn't want to be who I was. It was when I was younger. It was always this thing in the Philippines. There's this value system, I wanna say. Like if you are darker skin, you're valued less as a person. You are seen as someone who's lower. You're considered dirty in a way. And there was this one point in my life where we would always use whitening soap because it was just like the thing in the Philippines. And we brought it over because it was just like whatever. And I remember when I was younger, I'd gotten real dark. And my mom mentioned it and she was saying like "Oh, you got dark again. You need to stop spending time outside." It wasn't a specific moment, but it was just throughout my childhood. I was just like "Don't go outside. You're gonna get dark." It's like "If you're gonna go outside, wear a hat, wear sunblock, wear long sleeves." And it was always considered not pretty to have darker skin. It was just like "Oh, you don't look good with darker skin," or like "you're gonna look ugly if you have darker skin." It's always been kind of like that. So that's like one of the things I had issues with. It wasn't until my aunt kind of just told me "Hey," like you know, "Dark is beautiful, like it's fine if you're dark. It's okay." And that's when I learned just – not really stop following what my mom said – but more of a like "be more confident in my skin color." There are points now where I kinda look at myself in the mirror and I'm like "Mmm, getting to that weird pale I don't like going on. I should stand outside a little bit more." That kinda deal. That's one of the times that I had like issues with the Filipino identity. Or like, not so much the identity, but like the old Filipino identity and their values.

I guess one of the things now that bothers me a little it is the fact that I don't really know what I want to do. I mean, I do in a way, but I don't know if that's because it's something that I

was told as I was younger like I'll become. It was like an expectation, not one that my parents brought upon me, but what I feel like my culture has brought upon me. The expectation like, I'll do something great and the great is to become a doctor. And so that's always a goal I strive to become. And now, I do think I do want to become a doctor. I do want to fulfill like that expectation for myself. At the same time I don't know whether or not that expectation became, or my goal has become that expectation because I've been working so hard to, you know, meet that expectation, or if I'm genuinely interested in it. Well. Like I've convinced myself I'm interested in it, but I feel like I am. I feel like I am, but I'm not entirely sure.

I guess other ways it's conflicted is like, the whole American culture, it's usually like friends or family. And mostly in Filipino culture, it's always like you know, blood before water, that kinda deal. So that's one of the things that I've had some issues with, because, there are times where yes, I do love my family, but I wanna spend these holidays with my friends, I wanna hang out with my friends more. And I find myself conflicted because I think about what my family expects now. It's that kinda deal, but it's also the flipside. Especially in college where I would want to come home and you know just be around my family because I'm just like "Oh, I haven't seen them in a while, I miss them," even though I live really close. And my friends are thinking like "Oh, why is she coming home?" And I just tell them like "I miss my family." Familial obligations and that. But also like I just miss them. That kinda deal.

Any last statements, any concluding statements or comments you'd like to make?

Not really, as far as what is being interviewed. I guess one thing that is interesting to expand a little bit on, like how my parents got me to assimilate better. I wanna say my first or my kindergarten teacher was a Filipino so, it was a lot easier for me to assimilate better. But for a

long time, my parents just stopped talking to me in Tagalog or Ilocano. I mean they would at some points but in order for me to talk to other kids or have an easier time in school, it was always English. And so with time, I used to be bilingual. Not with English but with Tagalog and Ilocano. I was fluent enough as a child. Like, very fluent as a child at the age of three which is pretty cool. But after moving here, it's always just been English in order for me to have an easier time, all that. So eventually I lost the ability to speak Tagalog. Like I don't understand, or like, if I try to hold a conversation, I have a very limited vocabulary. Some at which, I can't tell which word it is between the two languages. But say I'm trying to talk to my family in the Philippines, and I try to speak in Tagalog. There's some points where I don't know whether a word is in Ilocano or Tagalog. Or I just don't know the word even though it's a very simple word and I just start speaking English. That kinda deal. But the thing is that I still do understand. Like I do understand Tagalog and Ilocano fairly well. Part of that is just the community I grew up in, like I did have a very good understanding as a child and you know, having people around me even if they're not talking to me. Just hearing them talk to one another, it was very helpful in that. I have moments in my life where I do wish I was more fluent. Trying to find like a program of which I can practice speaking Tagalog would be nice. But again, I did grow up here and most of my speech development was formed here, around many, many, American children. One interesting thing was that I was in... an ELS class? "English as a second language" class. Or I wasn't in that class, I was just taken out of my classes to have those speaking comprehension classes as a child up until I was in fifth grade when they stopped. And now, I speak English very well. Well, fairly well. Words are hard still. But I feel like that has nothing to do with the language barrier, I'm just very bad at speaking. But yeah.

Chapter 7: “How My Parents Raised Me” and Keeping That Through Life

A conversation with Erika.

Where were you born?

I was born in Vigan, Ilocos Sur, which is in the northern island of the Philippines, Luzon. I was born there.

How did your family become situated in the United States?

I did move to the United States when I was about two years old. My dad’s sister, she got married to a Filipino that already had a citizenship here in the U.S., and so we lived with them for a while. So we moved from the Philippines when I was two to America, and then, obviously we didn’t have any income. My parents were kinda struggling to finding their own jobs because in America they want you to know fluent English, and they want you to know American culture. Obviously my parents had none of that. Maybe a little bit of English, ‘cause they do teach you English in the Philippines with their education system.

But the first job that my mom ever got was a telemarketer and the first job that my dad had was a cashier at 7-Eleven. So we pretty much struggled, and I do come from a very disadvantaged background because of this. We lived in my aunt’s house for maybe like two years, and then we finally got on our own feet and moved into an apartment and, we didn’t even have furniture for this apartment. We had a futon or like a bed. Just a bed, not even a whole bed set, we just had the cushion bed. And we would just sleep on the floor. We didn’t even have actual chairs, we had plastic chairs, plastic tables. So we lived in this apartment, but it was still very hard for us. We weren’t living comfortably, but you know. What can we do?

My dad and my mom were working very hard at it. But eventually you know, we grew. And they got better jobs. You know, I would consider myself pretty much of like the middle-class, and my mom is now a merchant teller at the back of Hemet and now my dad is an accountant clerk at Soboba Casino. And me and my sister, who is seven years older than I am, we both have degrees from UCR, so. Things got easier as we kept progressing in our lives, but definitely it was hard when we moved from the Philippines to America, 'cause we didn't know what to expect. I was two years old, I didn't know what to expect. But with my parents, it was a lot harder because they're providing for the family, you know. And, it's just crazy when you move from another country without really knowing what the country you're going to live in is like.

Where did you end up growing up, and did that area reflect a Filipino community in any way?

I pretty much grew up in the more lower income areas. I lived in Santa Maria, which is kinda close to San Luis Obispo area. That's in the central coast. And then I moved to Hemet and San Jacinto, which is more southern California. And I pretty much grew up around a very dense Hispanic and black population. I didn't really have a lot of Filipino friends growing up. So the only Filipino community I really had was my family. But that being said, regardless of not really having a huge Filipino community, I was still able to be raised in a Filipino household where I kept the cultures and traditions that my parents had taken when they were kids and growing up in the Philippines.

With the labels "Asian American," "Filipino," and "Filipino American," what do you think of them and how do they apply to you?

I guess labels don't really matter to me as much, 'cause I know my identity is Filipino. And because I grew in America, I do consider myself Filipino American, because I am so Americanized. I was two years old when I moved here. Yeah I understand Ilocano, and I can't really speak it anymore, but I still hold the Filipino Culture within me. But I do identify myself as a Filipino American, just because I was raised in America and I'm so Americanized now at this point in my life. But yeah, labels don't really get to me or anything like that. You know, I'm Filipino. That's the bottom line.

How would you personally define Filipino culture?

There's many ways I guess you can define Filipino culture. But for me, it's more of how my parents raised me. So how I define Filipino culture is pretty much how my parents raised me in a Filipino household, if that makes sense. It's really hard to explain, it's a hard question to answer. But the Filipino traditions that my family taught me has resonated with me obviously throughout my whole life. So we cook Filipino food every night. We don't do Simbang Gabi, but we come from a Catholic background as well, which is like a main religion in the Philippines. Or Christianity at least. So we are very Catholic, I guess you can say. And yeah, we do a lot of other Filipino things that I can't really remember. But I'm pretty sure we do them. (*laughs*)

How did your caregivers and other influential figures exemplify these cultural aspects that you describe?

My parents when I was still pretty young, I was going to school. I went through kindergarten – pretty much kindergarten – through whatever, right. But in my early childhood when I lived in America, it was my lola that took care of me. And so the thing that I very much

remember is the Filipino cooking. That's probably the biggest cultural aspect – Filipino culture I guess you can say – that really resonates with me. Because that's what was the main thing, was Filipino food. And language obviously, but Filipino food is like – everybody loves Filipino food. So I think that's like the biggest cultural aspect of the Philippines, is the food. And so my grandma, my lola, she would cook me like spam with eggs and rice, or Vienna sausage with eggs and rice. And then you know, the lumpia, we had pancit, and all this other Filipino food. And the other thing, too, was also the same thing I said – religion. My grandma's very religious and so we would pray sometimes in the living room, or say a couple "Hail Mary"s. Stuff like that. 'Cause I know Filipinos have a devotion to Mary – Mother Mary. And I kept that with me since childhood. And I think that's really all I can think of is. Food and religion are the biggest parts, I think. For me at least, in a cultural aspect.

Does your daily life reflect on Filipino heritage or culture in any way?

In some ways they do. I know there's this thing where if you're trying to point something out, Filipinos point with their lips. I still do that. (*laughs*) And then, when I get hurt, I know I say "aray" or "anay." It's like these little things I still keep to myself. But also, I have gone through this a lot of times where I'll go somewhere and there's a Filipino woman or man and I would still be respectful to them. So I'll be like "opo" or something like that. I don't speak Tagalog, but I speak Ilocano. But I do know still the respectful ways of talking to your elders, even in a public setting. 'Cause that's how I was raised. That's how what my parents had taught me. I guess that's another cultural aspect, is that we have these little like words and phrases that give respect to our elders or something like that. 'Cause Filipinos are very respectful in that way. So yeah, that's how I pretty much live my life, the way my parents had taught me.

My sister, she's seven years older than I am and I call her "Manang Jen Jen." Like I don't say "Jen Jen" at all. Yeah in Ilocano, "Ate" is equivalent to "Manang," and "Kuya" is equivalent to "Manong." And I wouldn't call my uncle or my aunt just "uncle" or "aunt." It'd be "auntie" or "uncle" [accented] or "tito," "tita." So I keep those still with me.

How does the influence of Filipino culture interact with American culture for you?

For me they go hand in hand. Like I can be normal, Filipino person, I guess you can say, in an American culture. And I can totally be American in a Filipino culture, because I think we've just evolved in such a way where these two cultures pretty much intertwine with each other. That's how I view it at least. I don't know with everyone else. But for me, it's not really a problem that they intertwine. It's actually kinda nice, just to pretty much be in two different cultures. Because you learn more, 1). But then, 2), it shows that everyone is the same and everyone should get along, kind of thing. And also I'm rambling at this point because my mind is jumbling everything in my head. But point being, I don't have a problem with it really. It's just become my lifestyle where I'm super Americanized in a Filipino culture and I'm super Filipino in an American culture.

Were there any significant moments in your life in which you faced any challenges about your view on your identity?

Maybe in my early childhood. 'Cause not a lot of people understood what Filipino people were. Where I grew up it was very, like I said, a dense population of Hispanic and black. So they would hardly see any kind of Asian around. And if they did, it's like "Oh, are you Chinese? Are you Japanese?" So in the beginning, it was hard to maintain a Filipino identity because not a lot

of people understood what you were. But then I realized like it doesn't even matter. Like, I'm Filipino and I know I'm Filipino. If somebody doesn't know that or accept that or whatever, it doesn't matter to me, I just kinda went on with my life, not really caring what other people think. Just understanding, I guess. It just takes some time to understand that you're Filipino. And this is just how you were brought up. And that's okay, because that makes you super cool and super diverse than everyone else. Why would you want to be the same as another person? So I came to that kind of conclusion.

But in the beginning though, it was pretty hard 'cause I was just a child. I didn't understand what the differences were really. But I guess when you're the only Asian in this kinda community, it's like "Whoa, what is she?" But then also it became to the point where I was getting racial slurs from kids that were like ten years old. It's not cool. It's not fun. That's why I also had some kind of struggle with my identity, was because a lot of people would give me all these like – I'm not gonna say them because, I don't wanna say. But there were just these racial slurs and stereotypes I didn't even know ten-year olds would know. I didn't even understand what these meant, and I brought it up to my sister and my mom and dad and they were like "Oh that's not good." So I grew up in that kind of environment but then I realized, I don't care what they think. They can call me whatever names that they want. But I'm Filipino and I'm gonna stick true to what I am and in what I was raised up as.

Are there any last concluding comments you wanna add in or anything?

Just be true to yourself. And love yourself.

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