



Asian American Native Hawaiian Pacific Islander HERITAGE MONTH

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How do you identify within the Asian American and Pacific Islander community?

There has been much debate over whether Filipinos should be considered Asian or Pacific Islander. I do consider myself as both, but widely under the Asian American category more so. I am of Filipino descent, fluent in Tagalog and no other dialects (sorry). Both my mother and father were from a small province called, Tanay Rizal in the Philippines. It is about a 2-hour drive southeast of Manila and well known for its mountain ranges and natural scenery. A beautiful countryside my parents once called, "home." They left behind their country, as well as everything and everyone they had ever known to start a new life in U.S., and settled their little family in East Oakland, CA, where I was born and raised.

How did you find your way to the Bay Area?

One of my paternal aunts gained citizenship when she began her career as an elementary school teacher for the Oakland Unified School District. Between the mid 70's and late 80's my aunt was able to petition for most of our family members, including my mother and father – to become U.S. citizens; helping to migrate one clan after another until most of them became well established here in different corners of the U.S. Although, most of my family is actually situated in the East Bay Area.

How has your heritage shaped the person you are today?

My Filipino heritage has shaped me into the strong woman and mother I am today. I proudly carry on the traditions, pride and resilience of my ancestors. The history of the Philippines is a collection of worldly beauties. It is a constant melting pot of culture that was once molded from unfortunate periods of colonialism. Yet, from that, emerged many cultural etiquettes that were birthed from Latin acquisitions, food and languages stemming from surrounding Pacific Islands and Austronesian origins, and many heavy influences from other neighboring Asian countries. I mention all of this, because my Filipino heritage has evolved from a grand production of diversity. Diversity – is something that recognizes and honors both individual uniqueness and common likeness – which ultimately connects and unites us all together.

Who are the role models or mentors that have influenced you or helped guide you?

My maternal grandmother, EUSTAQUIA – She instilled strong faith in me by how she lived and expressed her devotions to GOD. From her stories as a young farmer, living impoverished in her youth and suffering the aftermath of WWII – I learned how to be humble.

My mother, LUISA – She taught me how to love, to be selfless and to always be kind. She exemplified true unconditional love and kindness through her benevolent nature.

My father, AZUR – He disciplined me to be mentally strong and resilient in this tough world. He maintained an unwavering positive outlook on life, finding lessons, joy, and laughter even during the most difficult of times.

What brings you joy about your heritage and culture?

There are many things about my Filipino culture I love and appreciate, but two things immediately come to mind and bring me the most joy. Filipinos are very loving people. One way we express our love is through cooking and sharing food with our loved ones and the community. Quality time is often spent by hosting informal Sunday dinners to extravagant festive gatherings. Filipinos are deeply connected to their families. In most households, you'll find a multi-generational hierarchy structured around respecting and honoring our elders. We truly take care of each other in every aspect of life. In my family, if one soldier happens to fall down, you'd have a whole army happily, readily and willing to lift them back up. In addition to this dynamic, kinship may extend well beyond the immediate members creating an even larger and stronger bond. We are family-oriented people and especially loyal to our tribes.



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