

SPRING ISSUE 2024









FILIPINO HERITAGE MONTH

JUNE 2024

- June 1 Opening Day
 - Opening Ceremony / Philippine History Session / Film Showing and OPM Night **
- June 8 9 Mabuhay! Celebrating Philippine Culture (Centennial Square)
- June 15 Filipino Food Cooking Class **
 Learn how to cook Adobo, Lumpia, Pansit, & Sinigang
- June 22 Language & folk Dance Classes **
 Learn how to speak Tagalog & Cebuano & Filipino Folk Dances
- June 29 Language & Gangsa Classes **
 Learn how to speak Ilokano & Hiligaynon & dance with the Cordillerans
- June 30 Salo Salo Food Fiesta! **
 Eat together and celebrate culmination of Filipino Heritage Month

** Philippines Bayanihan Community Centre 1709 Blanshard St., Victoria, BC V8W 2J8 admin@bayanihan.ca www.bayanihan.ca









VECA Newsletter

EDITORS' NOTE

ILAW is the official publication of the Victoria Filipino Canadian Association (VFCA) based in Victoria, British Columbia, Canada. "Ilaw" is the Tagalog word for "light."

The VFCA was established in April 1969, by a group of 14 pioneering women and one man under the leadership of Marcelina Bolanos Baldauf. In the fifty-five years since its founding, the VFCA - together with its partner organizations: the Bayanihan Cultural and Housing Society (BCHS), the Victoria Filipino Canadian Seniors' Association (VFCSA), and the Victoria Filipino Canadian Caregivers Association (VFCCA) - has provided the Filipino Canadian community of Victoria with programs and services with the aim of:

- strengthening ties among community members
- raising awareness among members of the challenges and opportunities of their new life in Canada,
- educating Filipino Canadians and the community at large on the richness and diversity of Philippine culture,
- highlighting community achievements and milestones and
- increasing civic engagement and participation.

The ILAW newsletter has been an important vehicle in this regard. This Spring edition is no exception.

This issue introduces the community to the VFCA Board members, elected in December 2023. It also opens with an interview with Elaine Abanto, Committee Lead of the Building and Housing Committee, regarding the future of the Bayanihan Community Centre, in light of the recent purchase by the City of Victoria of properties adjoining the Centre, for development into an urban park. A Profiles section throws the spotlight on individuals and businesses that have raised the profile of the community in Victoria, and a photo diary summarizes community events sponsored by the VFCA, VFCSA and VFCCA for the past three months. No less important are feature articles and poetry written by community members.

ILAW is only as good as all who contribute to it. We invite all members of the community to share their observations, insights, comments and questions with us so that ILAW may be a rich compendium of the Filipino immigrant experience. You may send submissions using the email: ilaw@bayanihan.ca, or meyenkev@yahoo.com. Thank you for your readership and participation. *Mabuhay!*

Sheila Alonzo Lani Domaloy Meyen Quigley







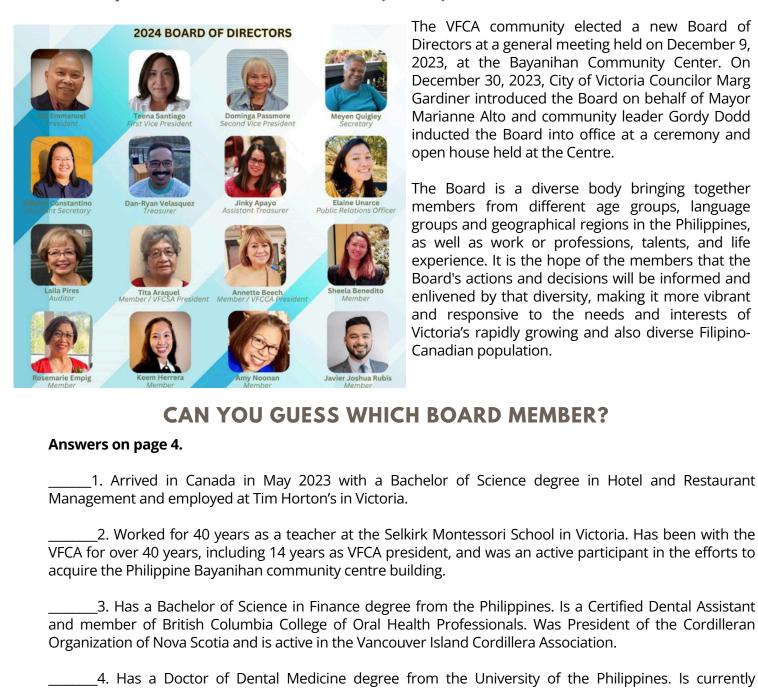


The Philippine Bayanihan Community Centre, with its affiliate organizations, honours and respects the $l = k^w = \eta = 1$ peoples, the Songhees and Esquimalt First Nations, as well as the WSÁNEĆ peoples on whose traditional territories the centre stands and operates. As an organization of Filipino Canadians on stolen lands, we commit to continuously learn about Canada's colonial history and the ongoing impacts of violence on Indigenous peoples as well as recognize our collective role in advancing truth and reconciliation.

INTRODUCING THE NEW BOARD OF DIRECTORS



Victoria Filipino Canadian Association (VFCA)



President of the Victoria Filipino Canadian Seniors Association.

Community Leadership Award for Arts and Culture in 2021.

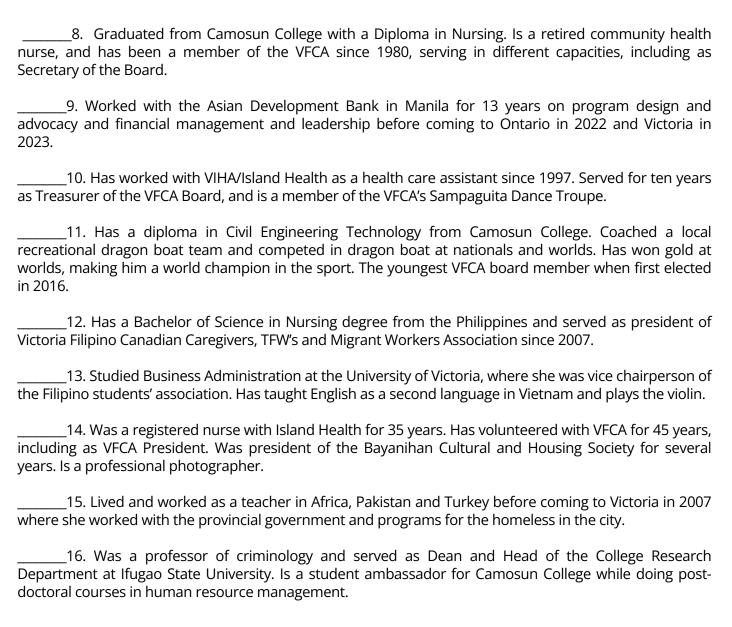
the University of Victoria and an Accounting Certificate from Okanagan College.

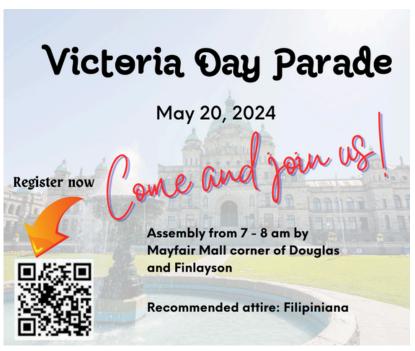
______7. Passionate about her Filipino heritage and food, works as a chef for Ate Restaurant in Victoria and is the owner of an Asian and Filipino inspired ice cream company that she started in 2022, *Ice Keem.*

Cultural and Housing Society (1991) and treasurer of the society since 1998. Received the Victoria

5. Is an account manager at TD's Victoria Commercial Banking team, with a B.A. in Economics from

6. Has been a board member of the VFCA since 1971, was a founding member of the Bayanihan





THE FUTURE OF THE BAYANIHAN COMMUNITY CENTRE

Q and A with Elaine Abanto

On January 18, 2024, the City of Victoria announced that they had purchased two properties on Blanshard Street - the former Romeo's restaurant and Urbana Kitchens, for the purpose of creating a new urban park. These properties, totalling 25,000 square feet, adjoin the Bayanihan Community Centre at 1709 Blanshard St. Before going to press ILAW interviewed Elaine Abanto, a member of BCHS' Building Committee, for more insight into the purchase and how it impacts the Centre.

1. The purchase caught many people by surprise. Can you tell us more about how it came to be, and how VFCA and BCHS were informed?

The City saw an opportunity when both the Romeo's and Urbana properties became available for purchase at around the same time. The properties fit into the City's vision of more green spaces in Victoria, and so they acted. Such acquisitions are generally not made public until completed, and so BCHS and VFCA learned about it at the same time as everyone else in Victoria. Soon after, however, the City invited us for discussions as to how we can work together on our respective future plans.

2. Can you tell us more about what the City has in mind?

The acquisition of the properties offered the city a unique opportunity to create a large downtown park. The full development of the park is a multi-year process, so it is not as if the BCHS has to decide right away what to do with the Centre.

The development of the project plan alone is expected to take three to four years. Once the project plan is completed, there will be consultations with stakeholders and the public. The consultations, development of designs and estimates, and approval by the council will take about a year and half, and construction another year and a half.

3. Does the City have plans for the Bayanihan Centre?

The City is very much interested in what the Victoria Filipino community want and have assured us that the park development and design will not move forward without our input. They are aware that we are a vibrant and growing community, and that housing is part of our mandate. They expect us to do our own consultations and engagement and come back to the city with our proposals. Anything is on the table.

4. What are the options available to us for the Centre?

We have the option of selling the property and purchasing another, or trading the Centre for another piece of property, or staying put and making improvements as necessary while working with the City on how we can integrate with their plans in ways that will also meet our growing needs.

5. How will that decision be made?

We have requested federal government funding for strengthening our organizational capacity and some of the activities include conducting a needs assessment and demographic survey. We expect to hear back about the funding around August this year. We will then hire a consultant or consultants to conduct focus groups and other community engagement to identify the preferences and wishes of the Victoria Filipino community. Including the voices of all in the community will be invaluable in creating the future of our community centre. No quick decisions will be made.

6. What is happening in the meantime, while waiting for the funding for the survey and needs assessment?

KNOW YOUR BOARD MEMBER QUIZ ANSWERS: 1) Sheela, 2) Dominga, 3) Jinky, 4) Tita, 5) Josh, 6) Laila, 7) Keem, 8) Rosemarie, 9) Teena, 10) Amy, 11) Dan Ryan, 12) Annette, 13) Edlaine, 14) Sid, 15) Meyen, 16) Elaine.

Members of the Building Committee are in communication with the Board, asking the Board to identify our space requirements. The Board has also moved to establish a dedicated fund for the development of the Centre, whatever decision is made. And Committee members are surveying similar sites, to see what's out there, what's available.

On June 1 the Committee will be making a presentation to community leaders to share our plans and our growing needs for a new centre. We would only have anecdotal evidence at that point of the community's needs and wants. Our data will be more robust after the community engagements and survey.

7. Who are the members of the Committee?

There's myself, Josh Rubis, Mike Gonzalez, Chris Lee, Sid Emmanuel, and Ben Pires. All members of the community will have a lot of opportunities to share their vision for the Centre in the consultations that will be held once we have confirmed funding in place. This is a time for us to dream big and imagine a Centre that we will be proud to call our own.

8. If members of the community have questions, who can they address these to?

They can email me, Elaine Abanto, at: neveah_b@ymail.com



Elaine Abanto was born and raised in Victoria, BC. She has been involved with the VFCA all her life from dancing in the Folkfest and volunteering at the kiosk in her youth to supporting plans for a new Centre. In 2004, she earned her master's in

public administration from the University of Victoria and has spent the last couple decades or so working for the provincial government. Elaine and her husband Rob are parents to two teenagers, Mia, and Brandon.

Thank you, Elaine, and Committee colleagues, for your work and voluntary service to the Victoria Filipino Canadian community.

PROFILES

In this section, ILAW highlights people and businesses who are raising the profile of Filipino Canadians in Victoria and/or represent the community in notable ways. ILAW does not endorse businesses featured here; rather, we put a spotlight on their work and services so that the community may be informed. We hope that the community can draw lessons from the experiences of the individuals and businesses we focus on, and that they inspire members of the community in their own work and goals.

MEET JOSH RUBIS



If you ask Josh Rubis what drew him to the Bayanihan Centre, and eventual election as a VFCA Board Member, he will tell you it was homesickness.

When Josh decided to respond to a post inviting members of the Victoria Filipino Canadian community to apply for VFCA board membership, he

had been in Canada for six years, Victoria for five. It was 2023, a year after he had graduated from the University of Victoria with a Bachelor of Arts degree in Economics. "All that time I had little or no contact with Filipinos. One day at UVIC I heard a girl talking with what sounded like a Filipino accent. I approached her and it turned out she was Filipino, but that was it, while I was at UVIC." Josh notes how times have changed, with over a hundred Filipinos now enrolled at UVIC.

And it was homesickness because Josh spent many years in the Philippines, years of strong family ties and deep friendships that continue to this day. "When I leave a VFCA Board meeting I have a smile on my face. Even just hearing the Filipino chatter makes me happy!"

Josh was born to immigrant parents, but his is not the typical immigrant story. His parents, Dad Javier who is a retired mechanical engineer and mother Julita who still works as a nurse, immigrated to the UK.

This was in the 1970s when the UK was actively recruiting health professionals, attracting them with offers of further education, housing, board and lodging. Josh's Dad left his job in Saudi Arabia to join his mom in the UK.

Josh himself was born in the Philippines, and in a poignant twist to their family story, spent his early years with his grandparents who were lonely emptynesters in Oas, Bicol. When his grandmother, whom he was very close to, passed away when Josh was three, an aunt asked to keep him in Pasig, where she was an administrator of a public high school.



Josh aced his studies in elementary and high school, finishing valedictorian of his class, thanks in no small part to his aunt who devoted much of her time to tutoring him after school. He finished high school at De La Salle Integrated School in Laguna and prepared to go for university in the UK. Because

of the difference in school calendars, Josh ended up spending a gap year and enrolled at De La Salle University in Manila, where he took courses in Biology.

His beloved grandparents and aunt had passed away; he was drawn to medicine so he could keep his family healthy and help people live longer, but a college professor inspired him to see how the study of economics can help more people improve their lives. A visit to a cousin in Singapore made him see the impressive strides that country had made because of sound economic management, and inspired him even more. And then a visit to an aunt in the Okanagan in 2017 proved life-changing. The beauty of the Okanagan caught him by surprise. He ended up spending some months there, acquiring a diploma in accounting.

He told his disappointed but fully supportive and loving parents that Canada, rather than the UK, was where he wanted to be for the time being.

He rented a place in Victoria and enrolled at UVIC sight unseen - simply because practically everyone he talked to told him Victoria was the place to be. He enrolled as an international student at UVIC. While he had financial help from his parents, he worked to meet his living and miscellaneous expenses.

"My first job interview was at a bank in Tillicum mall. The interviewer looked me up and down and said: "I won't interview you today, because you have no dress socks. Come back tomorrow."

That experience taught Josh the importance of presentation and first impressions. Determined to take the bull by the horns, he did not just mail his resumes, but showed up in person at the places where he wanted to work to make the case for his hiring, appropriately dressed of course. He so impressed a manager at TD bank he was hired on the spot. That was in 2018. Josh, who is only 25, now occupies a private office as account manager for TD commercial banking, giving commercial advice to businesses.

"I wish I could have had mentors along the way, people to give me advice and point me in the right direction. This is why I would like to be a mentor myself to young people trying to navigate their way through life. Many Filipino Canadians don't see people who look like them in important and influential positions. I would like to change that. And I don't want to be telling people what to do, but sharing my story and hoping they learn from it."

Josh's story is one of the loving support of family and the long-lasting benefits of close relationships. It is a story of being supported to do his best. It is a story of taking risks, of imagining one's future self and taking concrete steps - pounding the pavement, as it were to realize one's goals.

Socrates's words "It is a shame for a man to grow old without ever seeing the beauty and strength of which he is capable" are Josh's mantra. Josh is a *jiu jitsu*, judo, wrestling practitioner - all of which teach him to be comfortable with being uncomfortable. He embodies the saying that if you work hard and put in the time, you will inevitably reach your goals.

As a member of Bayanihan's Building and Housing Committee, Josh is tasked with envisioning the future of the Bayanihan Centre and making that vision come true. The VFCA is fortunate to have him on board. Josh believes it was no accident that he responded to that post about the VFCA board elections. "It was serendipity," says a man who does not sit around waiting for things to happen, but who actively hits the road in pursuit of his dreams.

THE LITTLE GIRL WHO COULD

Many households in Victoria know the little girl - and she is little - running around packing big boxes with LBC tape, by name. Her name, Vanessa, is in fact synonymous with the cargo company LBC, and there are very few families in Victoria who have not sent home a Balikbayan box through her or other companies. If that were the only thing that Vanessa, who is 46 years old, does, she would not be extraordinary. But while Van, as her friends call her, moves - along with her husband Jeff - over a hundred Balikbayan boxes every month, from Victoria to Vancouver where they make their way to the Philippines, she also cooks food that she sells from home, like pan de sal, lumpia, barbecue, and pancit; has a thriving buy and sell business - buying items dear to Filipinos wholesale and selling them, including products imported from the Philippines like Purefoods Juicy hot dogs; has a remittance service for Filipinos who want to send money to the Philippines; and hosts international students for whom she cooks a meal every night.

There was a time when, on top of all this, she did maintenance at Royal Jubilee and later a care facility and also had a cleaning service going, while helping husband Jeff with his business of moving and hauling. More recently her husband Jeff built her a 100-square foot shed that she uses as an office and a mini store, and she and Jeff are preparing a vehicle for use as a food truck.



Vanessa with husband Jeff Sackman

Where does she get all that energy, and how did she become such a dynamo?

Her childhood in the Philippines may explain some of that relentless drive to succeed. "I had no fixed address when I was a child, Ate," she explains. As is a custom in the Philippines, aunts and other relatives helped raise her as her parents struggled to raise their five children.

She moved back to live with her parents at age seven. Her mother supported the family through a *carinderia*, which closed when an employee ran off with the funds. Van's mother became a sidewalk vendor, selling cigarettes, salted peanuts, and sliced fruits, and Van, when not in school, was right there with her. "I also sold *pan de sal.* A neighbor had a bakery, and I would help sell their products."

She passed a scholarship exam for the Gensantos Foundation College Inc., but her parents could not stretch their funds to support her through college. She made her way to Cavite where a cousin took her to the economic zone and told her to check out the factories there. She was too short for an electronics company but found work putting tags on baby clothes for export while getting paid 25 centavos per tag (not even one Canadian cent). She enrolled in computer courses at AMA College, working from 7:00 am to 3:00 pm, and studying from 4:00 pm to 11:00 pm. She later moved on to a better-paying job with a Japanese company that made car stickers. She eventually earned enough money to rent her own place, and yes, send money back to her parents.

In 2010 a friend posted her profile on an online dating site and Jeff, in Canada, responded. They married in 2013, and Van came to Canada in 2015. She wanted to send a Balikbayan box home and met Ding, who had an LBC business at the time. Ding was looking to give up his business. When Ding found out that Jeff had a moving and hauling business, he suggested that Van be an LBC agent herself and take over his LBC clients. Van, like many new immigrants, was working in a restaurant at the time, and doing cleaning as well. She and Jeff took on Ding's challenge and have never looked back.

In those early days, Van and Jeff concentrated on their hauling and moving service and would collect only two or three boxes to ship via LBC, every day. Today, they pick up more than 10 a day. They have won awards as top performers from LBC. Van has brought two sisters to Canada, and continues to send money to her parents, whom she was able to bring to Victoria on a visit in 2021. She has given up her cleaning and care home jobs, and Jeff too has retired from his moving and hauling business, but the remittance and cargo services are still going strong.

"Do you ever stop and just take it easy?" I asked Van. "I get bored when I am not doing anything, Ate. I have to be always on the go."



Rare moments of leisure are singing karaoke at home, playing with their dogs, or going crabbing in Sidney - although even that is turned into a business opportunity.

Vanessa personifies true grit, determination, and the immigrant work ethic. Her life story thus far is one of overcoming significant obstacles and seizing every

opportunity that came her way to make her and her family's life better, not letting the difficult circumstances she grew up in limit her reach.

Vanessa has cooked a few times for the VFCA as a volunteer, been a regular sponsor at VFCA, VFCCA and VFCSA events, and donated LBC boxes to BCHS fundraising causes. Come June, apart from an LBC table, Van will have a stand at the Mabuhay celebration selling Filipino food. She does not leave the cooking to others but does it herself. She will demonstrate the same grit and entrepreneurial spirit that she showed when, at age 7, she sold salted peanuts and sliced fruit from a sidewalk stand or to her elementary school classmates in General Santos City, South Cotabato.

Vanessa Sackman's little store and remittance and LBC cargo forwarding services may be accessed at 1656 Myrtle Avenue or by calling 250 813 2099.





Children and adults alike had fun at the VFCA-sponsored **Easter Egg Hunt** held on March 31, 2024, at Glandford Park. Kudos to all the volunteers who made the event an unqualified success! Over 120 children participated!

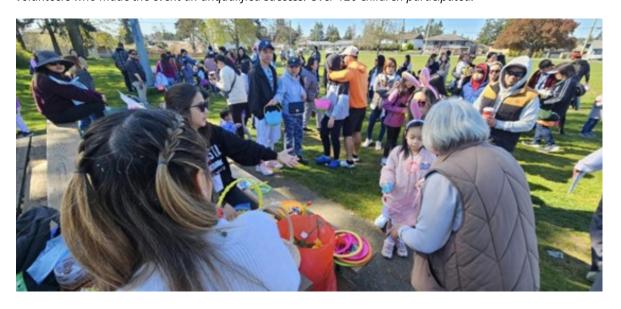


PHOTO JOURNAL





The Seniors held a successful Bingo Social after their meeting on February 12 (above left), and on March 29 sponsored a "Pabasa" at the Centre in observance of Holy Week (above right). On March 19, 2024 they also observed the 40th day after the passing of member and friend Andrea Mitchell.



The VFCCA had great fun at their **Valentine Party** held at the Edelweiss Club on February 10, 2024.



Honored guest Gordy Dodd, philanthropist, enjoying himself.



And the winners were: Grandma Valentine - Onida Chadwick, Mrs Valentine - Mary Jo Macatiag, Miss Little Valentine - Francine Lexi Gonzalez, Miss Valentine - Mary Trei Shan A. Dela Cruz and Mr. Valentine - Allen Scott Cruz.



The BCCA and the VFCA participated in a number of events promoting inclusion and diversity sponsored by various groups. The Sampaguita Dancers performed and VFCA and BCCA had tables at the **2024 Newcomers and Expo Day** held at Commonwealth Place on March 3, 2024.







BCCA, VFCA, VBFCCA and VFCSA also attended the **Welcoming City Conference** hosted by the City of Victoria's Welcoming City Advisory Committee on February 28 & 29, 2024, at Victoria City Hall.



On February 19, the organizations were represented at the **Victoria Police Department's Diversity Advisory Committee** Dance Party.

The Centre hosted a large number of events through the "A Home for All: The Centre as Open Access Community Venue (AHA-OA)" project of the Bayanihan Cultural and Housing Society (BCHS), funded by the United Way of Southern Vancouver Island. AHA-OA provides non-profit organizations, community associations, and cause-oriented groups with FREE access to and use the center's event hall, commercial kitchen, and podcast room for their social events and projects.



Members of the **Vancouver Island Cordillera Association** (VICA) having a Gangsa workshop at the Centre.



Members of the <u>African Arts & Cultural Society - Centre Issamba Centre</u> holding an event observing **Black History Month** in February 2024.





BCHS and VFCA continue to hold events to benefit the Filipino-Canadian community in Victoria. Above left, a **Tax Information Session** held April 6, conducted by Frecel Dillera. Other community service events included a session on **Tenancy Law** (April 10), and a session on **Online Information Privacy** (right) sponsored by WorkBC and conducted by VFCA board member Leia Grace Elaine Unarce on April 13...

A BRIEF REUNION

by Lani Domaloy



After governments had cleared their airports for safe travel, I thought of revisiting home 4 years after my last. The pandemic made it challenging to travel over those years. Deciding to visit in December to experience once again how we celebrate Christmas at home was exciting for me given that it was almost 20 years since my last Christmas there.

Landing at NAIA in 32 degrees sweltering heat reminded me of the days when I had to walk a mile to school under the heat of the sun. It didn't matter to me then; it won't matter to me now.

Before I stepped out to get to my assigned bay to meet Vanessa who came to pick me up, I stopped at the Duty-Free Shop to grab a couple bags of "tsokolet." This never fails to put smiles on the faces of family, adults even. I smiled at the thought that when we were growing up, and there's nothing left of our *ulam*, the *tsokolet* became the *ulam* swallowed with white rice enough to make it another meal.









Buko, dinengdeng, banana q and ar-arusip.



VOLUNTEERS NEEDED

- ✓ Vendor Relations Management
- ✓ Venue Setup / Tear down
- Information & History booths
- Environmental Management
- Stage Management/Decor/Logistics
- Others...



June 8 - 9, 2024



As Ian shuttled us home, we took the NLEX, then merged to SCTEX then finally to TPLEX taking me home in less than 3 hrs. A stark difference from the last time I visited. No, I took the bus home last time just for the experience.

Slowly settling home, I felt disoriented in a way. Feeling slightly like a foreigner, I started rediscovering everything and everyone. Noticing if the cool things I knew then are still cool now. It was also the first time I visited when my sister was recovering from her battle with cancer.

At home, I had to relearn everything, including where everything was kept. My old room in the mother house lay unused, dusty and had cobwebs. As I looked out from the jalousied window, the old *kalapaw* was also gone, replaced with mangled wood, lumber, and other junk. That night, we had native tenola. Free-run and free-range chicken, we call it "native."

Then came the opening of whatever was in my suitcase, while fondly connecting and bonding with every family member. I almost lost my voice the first night from continuous talking and giggling at the same time. My Dad started to narrate the events and activities that were happening in the village for Christmas. Three days later, I received an invitation to be among the judges for a cultural event in the neighboring village of Sagunto.

Later that night, my siblings, nephew, and cousins were all in my room in the small house. I couldn't get them to leave as we were endlessly chatting, teasing, and making fun of each other.

Such are the joys of family reunions especially. Then I started seeing home with more appreciative eyes. Things and moments that I took for granted mean so much more to me now. Even though everyone's lives have changed, they are still the same people and family members I love and who love me back.





The markets both wet and dry were among the places I wanted to frequent. In the market, I filled a bag of fresh local vegetables that I've missed over the years I've been away, like the fish that's only available in the Philippines such as *bunog*, and the *small sapsap*. For someone who enjoys cooking, I was already crafting recipes in my head as I went about my market run.

As Christmas came close, I heard carolers, most of them children who came by. In a teasing mode, I made them sing over and over before giving them *pamasko*. Every night, the same faces showed up and they grinned when they saw me, whatever their grin meant!

I was invited to speak at one church service. I prepared a piece and delivered it as eloquently as I could. Later after the service followed an endless chat with my childhood friends, folks in the church who are now elders. *Manang, manong,* uncles and aunties. At one point, I realized how time has not really changed at all. And the bonds, acquaintances and stories shared will always fill that special place in my heart. Nothing can replace the culture we share and grew up in.









Christmas season is always festive at home. Christmas day, I invited family friends and neighbours who have selflessly helped us over the years. These are people who are not related to us by blood but who treat us like family. One request from my dad and they come running to help. We feasted on simple meals while I did my best to catch up with their lives to date. Manang Ambit, our yaya travelled all the way from La Union to have time with me during my holidays and we chatted endlessly. On the eve of the New Year, I watched my nephews operate a bamboo cannon as I relayed to him how I made my cannon when I was his age.

I miss the simplicity of life growing up, so I recreated that when I was home. The simple bonds that make family stick. And even when it was time to leave, I knew it will always be home to me no matter where in the world I live.

To read more of Lani Domaloy's writings, go to <u>dimpledjourney.medium.com</u>.

IGBARAS, ILOILO

by Charles Au Lavoie

During a visit to the Philippines in 2015, I was invited to the celebration of a baptism in Signe, one of the barangays of Igbaras in the province of Iloilo. After watching for a while the adults eat and drink and children play games, I decided to explore the surroundings: native chicken were running freely and goats were gazing under a sun crushing the landscape with intense rays. There was an old plough on its side in the middle of field and a cow stood in the shade, attached to a picket.

Overwhelmed by the uniqueness and universality of the scene that had no reference to time and without looking at one of the party's guests who was following me at a distance, I said aloud, "This reminds me of my childhood." With a laugh, the man replied, "In your country, you have tractors and expensive equipment." "Not in my memories," I objected, "I feel at home here."

While we were walking back to the party, my companion asked: "Why do you like our country?" I kept to myself what came to my mind: "Certainly not for the diesel pollution that makes me sick with pneumonia each time." Which would have been offensive or: "Filipinos are generous hospitable." This would have been nice to his ears. Instead, I remained silent, thinking: My ancestors lived off the land. They were people who trusted what they sowed and planted themselves. Rather shy, they were wary of what looked and sounded different, i.e., ideas and manners. This is the world I wanted to forget when at the age of 12, I left home for a college, more than 300 km away. From that moment, I immersed myself in books.

Emotional, I replied, "I feel like I belong here."

Suddenly, the Mount Napulak in the background got replaced by the Laurentian Mountains in Quebec that defined the property of my maternal grandparents who, like their ancestors, worked from sunrise to sunset, prayed for the rain to fall or stop falling and wished for a better life for their children.



SIGNE, IN IGBARAS, ILOILO

11, 266 kilometres away from Canada (according to Google) I had just reconnected with my soul and not the house of cards that I had built all those years.

When I am in Igbaras, I get up early and after having done writing, I go out before the temperature gets too warm. All day long I watch ordinary people busy with the necessities of life: commuters waiting for jeepneys; vendors at the market selling meat and fish, and tobacco leaves (that my own grandparents used to grow); an old man riding a carabao with a grandchild behind him; a crippled man going home to home looking for something to eat, singing popular songs and distorting the words; children playing with marbles, and a shoemaker on his door steps conversing with a customer, standing on one leg.

My roaming in the fields of rice, peanuts and mung beans bring back memories of playing hide-andseek between stalks of feed corn until the farmer chased us out, my friends and me.

One day as I walked along the national highway I saw a distressed pig in a cage pulled by a scooter, on its way to the slaughter. The image sent me back to my childhood when, on a school day, going home for lunch, I could hear the cries of pigs being slaughtered in the backyard of the local butcher's shop.

At night, in bed and listening to the barking of dogs and the cock-a-doodle-doo of roosters, I realise that, notwithstanding all my efforts to eradicate them, my roots are alive and, as a Greek philosopher said, it's time to for me to go home:

"If you are a sailor on board a ship that makes port, you may decide to go ashore to bring back water. Along the way you may stop to collect shellfish, or pick greens. But you always have to remember the ship and listen for the captain's signal to return. When he calls, you have to drop everything... [...]

"If you are advanced in years, don't wander too far, or you won't make it back in time when the summons reaches you." (Epictetus, Enchiridion, Chapter 7)



CHARLES' MATERNAL GRANDMOTHER AT AGE 16

© Charles Au Lavoie, March 25, 2024 (*) Excerpts from a book, soon to be published.

About the author:

Charles is a Victoria-based writer, originally from Quebec, who has a deep love for the Philippines and the Filipino people and has visited the Philippines a few times.

REMINISCENSES

by Cristeta Araquel

There was a time in my life when the thought of being a farmer seemed so ideal, purposeful, and satisfying. Clean air, fresh produce, good exercise, what else could one ask for?

I remember times during my childhood in the Philippines when our mother would gather her six children and lead us to the back garden to clear the land, uproot the weeds and sow beans, corn, chayote, eggplant, sweet potato, and other vegetables to help sustain the family.

My mother was widowed at an early age but was determined to raise her children and send them all to school. Although it was a struggle to survive, there was love, care, and respect that sustained and glued the family together.

Being the youngest, I was not expected to do much work in the garden. I would play as my older siblings worked. I was there when they cleared the land, planted, weeded, and watered the garden. I was also there at harvest time.

It was so much fun to help gather fruits and vegetables. This early life experience made a significant mark in my memory and planted a desire for me to have my own garden.

Fast forward to Canada. Driving just outside our city one day, we came upon a small acreage farm that was for sale. We bought the property and promptly made arrangements to move to the country.

The farm was almost seven acres. The whole family was excited. The children had so much room to run around. Eyeing the newly purchased riding mower, the boys volunteered to mow the lawn; we were happy to oblige.

My husband was not a farmer at heart. He preferred to be at his studio painting "people, places, and faces" as he put it.



Painting of a rural scene in the Philippines by Ed Araquel, the author's husband. Cristeta Araquel is the President of the Victoria Filipino Seniors Association.

Our little girl, cute, but just as feisty as the boys, did just as well in facing the joys and struggles of living on a farm.

Happy to be on my dream farm, I started a small garden and planted it with spinach, beans, and squash surrounded by tall sunflowers. The garden did well that year. The following year, my husband, with the help of the boys, built a chicken-rabbit house. Half was occupied by six chickens and the other half by a pair of pink-eyed rabbits. Having a small pond at the back, we added a goose and gander to the farm.

As was expected, the hens laid their eggs. The rabbits did well and soon had six baby rabbits. Not to be outdone, the goose laid her egg and the "wanna-be" farmer was happy.

One morning, I woke up early, got some chicken eggs and made sunny side up eggs for breakfast. Gathered around the table, I happily pointed out to the kids that they were about to eat eggs that were organic and laid by non-GMO fed hens etc.etc... In short, all of them did not eat the eggs as the yolk was "too yellow." The same happened with goose eggs. They preferred to eat the pale, yellow-coloured store-bought eggs.

My husband has always been a practical joker. He was not enthusiastic about farm chores, so I was surprised one morning when he asked me if I had collected chicken eggs. I went to collect the eggs and... surprise! There was a "golden" goose egg in the nest! He had taken one goose egg and gilded it with gold leaf to create a golden egg.

Knowing his lighter side, I knew the culprit right away. Later that day, he took this "golden egg" and went to our bank to deposit it for safekeeping. The clerk was confused, amused, and called the manager. They all had a good laugh. It was an April Fool's day to remember.

The rabbit colony was multiplying fast, so my sister and I decided to butcher one. We cooked the best tasting rabbit "adobo" one could have in the city but when we served it to the family for supper, there were hardly any takers knowing it was their "Bunny" that was being served.

With these experiences, my enthusiasm for farming was gradually going downhill. Soon enough, the children left the farm one by one, as they sought to follow their dreams of going to university or starting new jobs. Left to ourselves, the place became more and more difficult for us to maintain without the extra hands. However, with the arrival of Spring, trilliums would burst into bloom down by the pond, Maple trees became green again, fruit trees got covered with flowers, birds sang their happy tunes and life on the farm was great once more. It was this annual Spring renewal of life that kept us at that small farm for a few more years until we decided to move to Cottage Country for a change of pace.

One summer, we visited a niece in Victoria. We were impressed with the mild climate, the scenic places, and the pleasantness of the people we met. We made our move to Victoria and never looked back.

As we sit on our rocking chairs reflecting on our lives, we are grateful for the life we have, for the people we met and for all blessings that were given to us.

Spring is here once more and in the back of my mind on that small farm we had, down by the pond, trilliums are bursting into bloom once more, maple trees are green again, fruit covered trees with flowers as birds sing their happy tunes. It is a memory etched in my mind as every Spring the Cycle of continues.



The author, Cristeta Araquel in her garden.

PINOYS ON PARLIAMENT

My Filipino Identity and What's the Tsismis?

by Micah Leonida

Here's a few questions for you to consider: What does it mean to be Filipino? Am I Filipino, Filipino-Canadian, Pinay, Filipinx, Pilipinx? Am I Filipino enough?

Like many young Filipinos, these are a handful of questions that I have been trying to answer. My search for answers led me to volunteer with a podcast called What's the *Tsismis* (WTT), participate in the Pinoys on Parliament Conference, and offer my spare time to the Bayanihan Community Centre (BCC) in hopes of connecting with others also looking for answers.

WTT is a podcast based in Treaty 6 Territory. The podcast explores the stories and experiences of Pilipinx individuals in Amiskwaciwâskahikan (Beaver Hills House) also known as Edmonton, Alberta. WTT was launched in 2019 thanks to the Pilipinx diaspora and enthusiastic allies, including Cherie Island, Ryan Lacanilao, Mishma Mukith, Jenna Prop and Sophia Yang.

Supported by Chris Chang-Yen Philipps, Podcasting Coordinator, Doug Hoyer, and Maaike Lynn, WTT began to engage with other Pilipinx individuals by covering taboo topics through meaningful dialogue and humour!

Since its launch, WTT has grown to include new producers including myself, Arianne Barroma, Ryan Lacanilao, Julia Juco, Nikki Mendiola, and Rajah Maggay. Collectively we have been spilling the tea or tsismis about interracial relationships, mental health, fatness, land inheritance, media representation, gender roles, parental expectations, and financial health.

WTT is truly a team effort. From recruitment, administration, social media, and podcast production, WTT draws on a variety of skill sets. The success of the podcast is also a testament to the generosity and willingness of the Pilipinx community to connect and share.

As a platform for Pilipinx identities across Canada, WTT was approached by Pinoys on Parliament (POP) Conference organizers to lead a workshop on the topic of "Pagitan" for the POP 2022. POP is a yearly national leadership conference for Filipino/a/x-Canadians typically held in Ottawa, ON.

POP is an initiative organized by Kabangka, a youth-led and youth centred leadership organization that connects Filipino/a/x-Canadians across generations and sectors. Kabangka's mission is to build connections, inspire action and empower young people to be leaders in their communities.

In 2022, WTT hosted a virtual workshop for POP titled, "Reinventing *Tsismis:* Reclaiming Our Stories Through Storytelling." The workshop saw the participation of Filipino/a/x-Canadian from across Canada and encouraged participants to reclaim their experiences as stories of courage and resilience.

The workshop challenged participants to honour their unique experiences and to champion their Filipino identities. WTT also produced an episode called "Bonus Episode: Pinoys on Parliament" which features audio clips and the reflections of participants from the workshop.



Delegates, workshop facilitators, and organizers of the 2024 Pinoys on Parliament Conference at the House of Commons with Senator Gigi Osler and House Speaker Greg Fergus. Channeling Filipino representation!

In February 2024 in Ottawa, ON, WTT hosted their second workshop titled, "Laro: Freeing Your Inner Child Through Creative Play." The workshop was a multi-media conversation supported by drawing, sculpting, collaging, and writing stations. Participants were asked to reflect on their childhood experiences, and the impact these have had on who they are today. The workshop urged participants to explore their inner identities: past, present, and future.

So, what have I personally learned from these experiences? Do I have a better sense of who I am and how I fit in? I would say, yes, but it's a work in progress. Through my four years as a producer with WTT and as a second-time workshop facilitator with POP, I know that I can be Filipino, Filipino-Canadian, Filipino/a/x-Canadians, Pinay, Filipinx, Pilipinx or whatever I choose to call myself. My experiences are my own, my stories are my own, and how I choose to represent myself is up to me.

I know that I am Filipino enough despite not being born in the Philippines or being able to speak Tagalog fluently. What matters the most to me is that I am trying to understand my culture. I am learning from different generations and people with a variety of experiences.

For those who are still looking for answers, I encourage you to step outside of your comfort zone and approach learning with an open mindset. When I moved from Edmonton, AB to Victoria, BC I didn't have a Filipino community to go to. Until one day, I emailed the Bayanihan Community Centre and was graciously invited by ate Jean (Jinggay) Penola to observe a traditional Filipino-folk dance practice. From there, I met Tita Laila Pires and Tita Dominga Passmore who welcomed me with open arms.

Rest assured there are opportunities out there to connect with like-minded Filipino people, whether it be through WTT, POP or through your local Filipino community centre. The first step is always the most daunting, but you never know where a spark of curiosity and a bit of courage might take you.



(Left) Micah Leonida and (Right) Ryan Lacanilao representing the What's The Tsismis? Podcast at the 2024 Pinoys on Parliament Conference featuring materials from their workshop, "Laro: Freeing Your Inner Child Through Creative Play."

About the author

Micah Leonida is a Policy Analyst by trade but a Community Connector at heart. She is originally from Edmonton, AB but currently calls Victoria, BC home. In her spare time, you can find Micah at the Bayanihan Community Centre attending Filipino folk-dance practice, rollerblading along Dallas Road, or editing the latest What's the Tsismis? podcast episode.

RESOURCES:

- What's the *Tsismis:* https://whatsthetsismis.transistor.fm/
- **Pinoys on Parliament Conference:** https://www.kabangka.org/pinoysonparliament
- KABANGKA: https://www.kabangka.org/

Answers to LENTEN QUIZ: a. 10, b. 7, c. 8, d.13, e. 11, f. 1, g. 4, h. 12, i, 2, j. 5, k. 3, l. 13, m. 9, n. 6:

POETRY

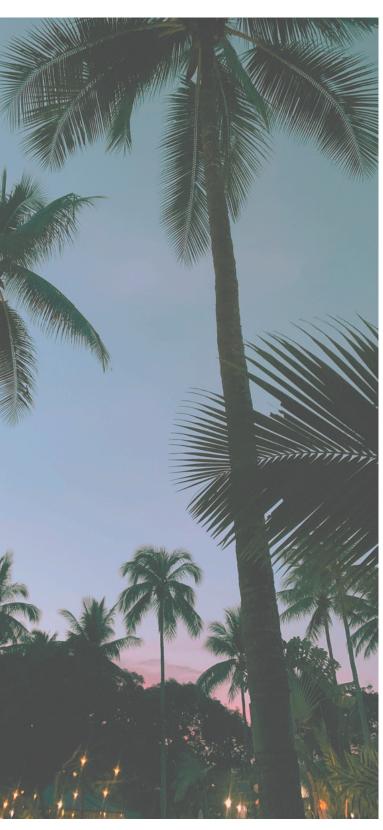


Photo by Lily Maloney (Batangas Country club)

love letter to the Philippines

by Jessica Somera

You are our *paraluman*

You've suffered & endured so much

All these years & tears, & you still stand strong with a smile on your face.

You love us unconditionally, at home & abroad

You wait so patiently for Us to go home,

With your luscious trees, waters & sky

You wait for us to claim you proudly

When you've always adorned us with sun kisses

We love & hold you gently - more than any foreigner can

One day, you can finally rest with your eyes closed

That is what you deserve

Lessons in Borders

by Sam Peñola

For today's lesson, I will teach you about borders. Google says that a border is a line that separates two political and geographical areas. My political science classes might argue that borders protect a country's sovereignty. We made these invisible lines into arbitrary entities of separation. These lines that we cannot see hold so much power over human identities.

Borders.

For today's lesson, I will teach you about OUR borders. Our borders look like a classroom- with a coloured sign that says, "You are welcome here!" plastered on doors, yet for every whisper in the hallways of "We don't see colour" was a

"You speak very good English for a..."

"You're very smart considering..."

"You're very lucky to be here since..."

Our borders are a language that cannot even pronounce my last name; accents that become measuring sticks for how well I can speak it. The culture I bring is an assessment; it tells you if I'm the good and subservient immigrant... or the immigrant that's going to take your job...the immigrant that will crash the housing market... or the immigrant whose presence compels you to pay extra on your taxes.

All these are but short steps towards a platform that will either make a trophy or a dustpan of my existence.

Our borders are the tones of a question hanging at the tip of your tongue. Sometimes our borders...

are you.

For today's lesson, you will learn...that we don't stop crossing borders when the officer gives us THE stamp of approval, because being a migrant means always crossing borders to find freedom in labels.

Immigrant.

Refugee.

Skilled worker.

Unskilled worker.

Alien.

Undocumented.

Illegal.

Words build as easily as they deform. Words create stories. And your words are more powerful than mine. Our borders are tapestries of a narrative you weave with washed fingers- a brick wall you build between you and me; each brick a question, a sentence, a name, an event that identifies my differences to you. And differences are threatening. The higher the brick wall, the smaller we become.

And things that are small and threatening don't belong on the other side of the brick wall, but under itcrushed with the bones of those whose land this was stolen from. There are no instructions that come with my identity, no armour that comes with bearing my skin. You say this country is multicultural, but mul-ti-cultu-ral has the same number of syllables as as-si-mi-la-tion.

For today's lesson, I will teach you about borders and how I keep crossing them. I carry the soil of my home on the sole of my shoes. Every step forward costs a crumble of the home I left behind, because cleaner shoes make it easier to climb over the brick wall. Funny how in my country, it's customary to remove your shoes when you enter a house that isn't yours.



Sam (Suzanne Alexa Marie Peñola) moved to Victoria, Canada in December 2017, together with her father and younger brother, to join her mom, Jean Peñola who was an international student at Royal Roads University. Sam is currently finishing her undergraduate degree in Political Science, with a primary focus on International Relations at the University of Victoria. Shortly after her arrival, Suzanne dedicated time to volunteering for the Victoria Filipino Canadian Association (VFCA) as part of the Sampaguita Dance Group and the VFCA Choir.

She participated in two major productions - Our Story in Songs and Dances in March 2019 and Balikbayan: Reconnecting with our Filipino Roots in November 2022 under the direction of her mother, Jean Peñola. Prior to moving to Canada, Suzanne trained in feature journalism as well as competed in regional public speaking competitions. She also specialized in music - voice and instrumental as a student of the Special Program for the Arts of Iligan City East National High School. She aims to leverage her skills in her future career endeavors as well as to empower the Filipino youth to harness their voices in raising social awareness. Suzanne hopes to serve as a catalyst for inspiring individuals to recognize their power in reshaping immigrant narratives rooted in stereotypes and discrimination, encouraging, and engaging in critical conversations.

Artist's Statement - Sam Peñola

I have always written poems about events that have happened in the past- to me, my family, and my friends. I write to mourn for pieces of me that I lost to mistakes I made and for the person I could have become- if not for the choices I did not make. My writing not only speaks of my grievances of the past but also gives me closure. My piece, "Lessons in Borders," would be the first piece I have written that airs out the frustrations that I and so many others like myself are currently experiencing as we navigate through our loss of culture and groundedness in diaspora. This is the first piece in which I have yet to find acceptance in the things that still haunt me today, with no resolution as to how to move forward. While this piece is very personal, it is triggered by a sense of relatability with the class readings I have engaged with, particularly David Chariandy's article, "Postcolonial Diaspora," which explores the relationship of diasporas and the framework of nationhood. The article raises the potential to utilize diasporic studies to understand alternative perspectives on identity and culture. But more than that, this piece is a dedication to the many migrants, refugees, and displaced people that I met in my journey here. Our experiences may not be the same, but we find comfort in knowing that we are not alone. I felt it necessary to offer a firsthand perspective on what it is like to float through the diaspora- what it is like to free ourselves from what constrains us back home only to be boxed as a category here. I would also like to preface this piece by saying that the "you" I refer to in this piece is not specific to you, my readers, but rather the people before you who made life transition here into a game of survival. You are not at fault for their doings, but your responsibility to us now, at present, is to lend us your ears with an open mind.

"Inevitably, though, there will always be a significant part of the past which can neither be burnt nor banished to the soothing limbo of forgetfulness— myself. I was and still am that same ship which carried me to the new

shore, the same vessel containing all the memories and dreams of the child in the brick house with the toy tea set. I am the shore I left behind as well as the home I return to every evening. The voyage cannot proceed without

me." — Luisa A. Igloria

FOCUS ON CULTURE

Special Lenten Customs in the Philippines

by Meyen Quigley

The Philippines is known for its rich Christian history and traditions. Over the many centuries since Magellan brought the Cross to the islands, Filipinos have made Christianity their own and developed religious practices uniquely Filipino, weaving together faith, scripture, history as well as local materials, artistry, and beliefs. This is especially true of Lenten observances.

Paete is a town in Laguna noted for its skilled wood carvers. Every Holy Wednesday, the people of Paete bring out 53 life size images of the people who played a role in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Some of these images, carved by local artisans, are over one hundred years old. They are mounted on *carrozas* or carts that go on procession around the town.

Every Good Friday, the people of Quezon Province gather in the town of Dolores to take part in a procession known as Colorum. Starting from Dolores, the faithful go up Mount Banahaw, reenacting the story of Christ's passion and death, along the way including Christ praying in the garden, carrying His cross and falling three times. People believe Mount Banahaw to be a holy mountain, a new Jerusalem. At the mountain top is a clearing that people call *Paraiso*, or Paradise.

San Pedro Cutud, Pampanga, is the scene of actual crucifixions during Holy Week, usually consisting of men wanting to atone for their sins. Other penitents beat their backs while walking barefoot in procession, and wear crowns of thorns on their heads. Some carry heavy crosses, imitating Christ on the way to Calvary. Companions dressed as Roman centurions whip the penitents as they walk.

In Bani, Pangasinan, townspeople climb 1,000 steps to a venerate the Redeemer's Cross, a 15-foot cross that stands on a plateau overlooking the China Sea. Likewise, in Guimaras, devotees reenact Christ's passion in the town of Jordan, ending up at the top of Balaan Bukid, or Holy Mountain.

In Binangonan, Rizal, every Good Friday townspeople carry a statue of the *Santo Intierro, the* dead Christ around the town. They recite verses from the Passion as they walk. The event is called "Giwang Giwang," from the way the statue sways as it is being carried.

Perhaps the most colorful Lenten practice is the Moriones Festival of Marinduque. From Holy Monday until Easter Sunday, devotees wearing masks and costumes of Roman soldiers roam the streets, reenacting the story of Longinus. Longinus was a Roman soldier who was blind in one eye.



Baluti Photography, Marinduque

Christian legend has it that Longinus's blindness was cured when drops of Christ's blood fell on him after he pierced Christ's body with his spear. He becomes a believer and because of this is hunted by his fellow soldiers. The hunt for Longinus ends in the capture and beheading of Longinus.

May modernity not dim Filipinos' faith and beliefs and the colorful practices they use to express their faith!

′



Photo by Mark Christian Tolentino Rinon



Photo by Baluti Photography, Marinduque

TEST YOUR LENTEN VOCABULARY - MATCH COLUMN A WITH COLUMN B

- a. MAHAL NA ARAW
- b. *KWARESMA*
- c. DOMINGO DE RAMOS
- d. PALASPAS
- e. *PABASA*
- f. SIETE PALABRAS
- g. VIA CRUCIS
- h. VISITA IGLESIA
- i. SALUBONG
- j. SENAKULO
- k. *PANATA*
- I. PENITENCIA
- m. SANTO ENTIERRO
- n. PASKO NG PAGKABUHAY

- 1. THE SEVEN LAST WORDS
- 2. THE MEETING OF JESUS AND MARY
- 3. A RELIGIOUS VOW OR PROMISE
- 4. THE WAY OF THE CROSS
- 5. DRAMA REENACTING THE PASSION
- 6. EASTER
- 7. FORTY DAYS OF LENT
- 8. PALM SUNDAY
- 9. THE DEAD CHRIST
- 10. HOLY WEEK
- 11. READING OF THE PASSION STORY
- 12. VISITING SEVEN CHURCHES DURING LENT
- 13. WAVING OF THE PALMS
- 14. PENANCE

NOTE: ANSWERS ON PAGE 18

KNOW YOUR HISTORY: Araw ng Kagitingan, April 9

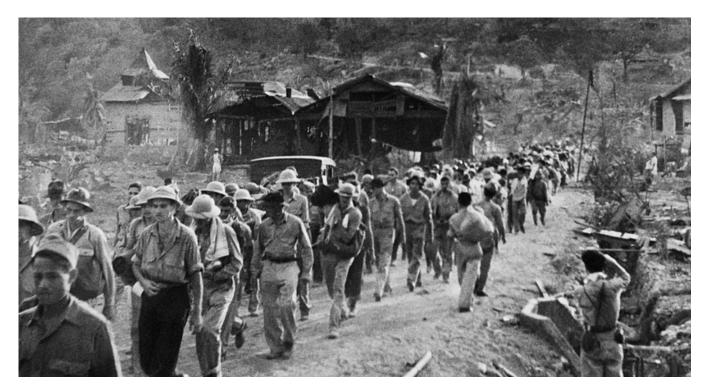


Photo from the US Library of Congress

If you ever find yourself in the province of Bataan, in the Philippines, you are not likely to miss the sight of a cross standing on a mountain, towering to the sky. The mountain is Mt. Samat, in the town of Pilar. The 312 foot cross is part of a memorial built to honor Filipino and American soldiers who fought against the Imperial Japanese Army in World War II. The shrine complex includes a colonnade as well as a museum with art and memorabilia, including weapons and armaments used by Filipino, American and Japanese forces.

Mount Samat was where Filipino and American soldiers fought a losing battle with the Japanese in 1942. On April 9, 1942, United States Major General Edward P. King surrendered to the Japanese, in what was the largest surrender of soldiers in American history. Now prisoners of war, the Filipino and American soldiers were then forced by the Japanese army to walk from various parts of Bataan to Camp O'Donnell in Capas, Tarlac, a distance of over 100 kilometers.

Over 76,000 Filipino and American soldiers walked what is now called the Bataan Death March. At the time the Philippines, which was a commonwealth of the United States, was home to some 20,000 US troops. About 100,000 Filipinos were attached to the US Army by President Franklin Roosevelt in 1941 and together they became known as the US Army in the Far East (USAFFE).

It is estimated that between 5,000 and 18,000 Filipinos and 500 to 650 Americans died during the death March. Of the 76000 prisoners (66000 Filipinos and 10000 Americans), only 54000 reached Tarlac.

The sacrifice and heroism of those soldiers is remembered in the Philippines every April 9. Celebrated as the Day of Valor (Araw ng Kagitingan), it is a day to remember all who have given their lives to defend and protect the Philippines.

HONORS

ILAW Joins the Victoria Filipino Canadian community in applauding individuals and groups who have brought honor to the community.

DENNIS GUPA, OUTSTANDING UVIC ALUMNI

Dennis D. Gupa, who completed his PhD in Applied Theatre at the University of Victoria where he was a Vanier Scholar, has been honored by UVIC with an Outstanding Alumni Award, presented on April 11, 2024. His dissertation, which focused on climate change and indigenous ecological knowledge, was further amplified during his role as UVic's Ocean Networks Canada Artist in Residence. Dennis is a theatre director, performance maker/researcher, and applied theatre practitioner. His academic journey includes an MFA in Theatre (Directing) from UBC, and an MA in Theatre Arts from the University of the Philippines.

He was assistant professor at the Department of Theatre and Film at the University of Winnipeg. He is featured in the Cultural Centre of the Philippines' Encyclopedia of Philippine Arts for his significant contribution to the contemporary theatrical heritage of the Philippines.

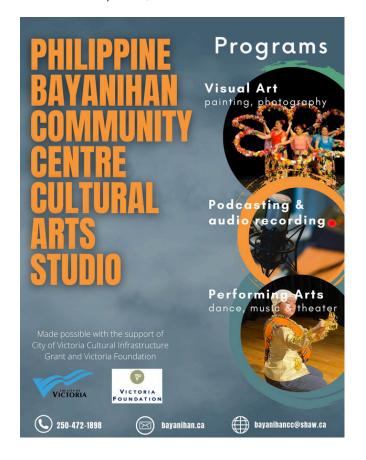
Dennis was a volunteer with the VFCA, most recently in July 2023 when he conducted the MigARTion community arts project tour together with Alvin Erasga Tolentino. *Congratulations Dennis, you make us proud!*



Dennis (front row, left) at the Bayanihan Centre in July, 2023, with participants in the migration community arts project.



Dennis surrounded by members of the Victoria Filipino Canadian community, and friends, at the University of Victoria ceremony where he received an Outstanding Alumni Award on April 11, 2024.





The adult Sampaguita dancers who performed at Claremont include Jean Graciela Peñola (also the teacher), Karan Irma Gonzales, Mary Kaye Abellana, Micah Leonida, Razie Mae Lauzon, Arnel Bongcasan, Geoffrey Peñola, Sean Benedict Peñola, and Raine Hermosa.

THE SAMPAGUITA DANCE GROUPS

The **Sampaguita Dance Groups** of the VFCA performed at the Greater Victoria Performing Arts Festival on April 3 at 5:30 p.m. at Claremont High School Ridge Playhouse. Gina Sinclair-Davis, the Ethnic Dance Adjudicator, recommended that the Sampaguita dancers receive Choreography/Stage Presence and Adjudicator's Award certificates, and the Memorable Performance by an Open Group award for "Tinikling", and "Silong sa Ganding". They performed again at the joint Ethnic Dance and Fiddle Highlights Concert held at the Philip T. Young Auditorium at UVic on Monday April 29th at 7:00 pm. The Sampaguita Kids received the Story of Dance Certificate and the Dance Group received the Stars of Tomorrow Award. *Congratulations to all the dancers. You do us proud!*

The Sampaguita Kids include Sophia Marie Wilson, Luisa Marie Lavina, Viazi Annica Lasat, Aliyah Lampitoc, Tashanne Orlaw, Sean Liam Wilson, Markus Myhre, Halleigh Zhea Castillo, and Ayla Lampitoc, with their teacher Clarissa Mijares.

Sampaguita is the national flower of the Philippines.



by Laila Pires



I bought tickets for a concert entitled "80's Rewind" on April 6, 2024, at the Christ Church Cathedral to support the VFCCA that co-sponsored the event and to watch local talents I knew were performing as the opening acts. As a Baby Boomer who left the Philippines in 1969, I wasn't familiar with the headliners, Joey Albert, and Odette Quesada. Stepping into the packed Christ Church Cathedral, the atmosphere buzzed with excitement. The opening acts included Geralyn Nonesa, Rayver Agapito, Amie Aquino, Rjay Garcia, and Thia Lanuza. Febryl Dela Cruz and Sasha Elaco were backup dancers.

Some of them I have known since they were children. It's been a joy watching them grow in their craft.

The Victoria talents delighted the crowd. The emcees, Miguel Gavar, Amie Aquino, and Rjay Garcia bantered and gave away prizes to those who could finish a tune they sang together. As the room darkened and the spotlights came on, Joey and Odette walked onto the stage. They greeted the cheering crowd and talked about their lives.



As I listened, I made rough calculations in my head that pegged them to be in their 60's. They exuded youthfulness and certainly looked much younger. Joey and Odette each performed, sang and danced with energy, even strutting down the aisle to encourage audience participation. They were engaging, encouraging, and entertaining.

Many enthusiastic Gen X fans sang along to Joey and Odette's delight. Odette showcased her talents as a gifted songwriter and composer, accompanying herself on the piano. Joey, bravely sharing her journey as a three-time cancer survivor, joked that she was fully alive and that we were watching her performing in flesh and blood! She charmed the audience with her singing, her wit and resilience.

They took turns gracing the stage with their individual performances. The spotlight shifted between them captivating the audience. Joey belted out her hits with passion and poise, while Odette mesmerized with her soulful melodies and heartfelt lyrics.

Despite their separate performances, there was a palpable synergy between them, reflecting the camaraderie and mutual respect they shared as fellow artists. Together, they painted a vibrant tapestry of OPM, each adding their own brushstroke to the rich musical legacy of the Philippines.

When my niece saw our front-row seats on Facebook, she was ecstatic, as Odette Quesada and Joey Albert were her favorites. She reminisced about their impact on the OPM scene in the 80s, and how incredible it was that we got to experience their performance up close.

Leaving the cathedral, after snapping photos with Joey and Odette, we felt we got more than we bargained for. The concert was a treat, displaying the timeless appeal of Filipino music. It's heartening to see how Filipinos carry their love for music wherever they go, contributing to the rich tapestry of cultural heritage in Canada.

Discovering Joey Albert and Odette Quesada and their contributions to OPM was enlightening. Their songs, filled with heartfelt lyrics and simple melodies, capture a range of emotions from love to heartbreak with a touch of humor. It's energizing to think about incorporating this diverse range of music into our arts initiatives at the Bayanihan Community Centre, further enriching our cultural exchange and fostering a deeper appreciation for Filipino arts. Indeed, there is always more to discover and learn.



Finest Summer Rifflandia 2024!



Finest Summer (James Gonzalez) recently returned from his three-month music tour in the United States. He played 29 shows at the Fox Theater in California in front of 500 people and at the Hawaii Convention Center in Oahu in front of 800 people. Without missing a beat, Finest Summer also recorded five new songs and shot four music videos while on tour.

Born in Manila, completed his masters in Psychology from California and now based in Victoria, **@finest.summer** performed in front of 1,200 ecstatic music fans at Edmonton's Union Hall (Alberta) and 1,000 at Vancouver's Enso Event Centre (British Columbia) last October 2023.

Did you know, that 19% of all Filipinos living in Canada reside in BC? Despite this, Filipino representation in BC music festivals is lacking and Finest Summer wants to change that. He is mobilizing support from the Filipino community to highlight the importance of diversity and representation in BC festivals by securing a performance slot this year in Rifflandia Festival 2024. Here's what you can do:

Search **@finest.summer** on Goolge or your social media (Instagram, Facebook, YouTube) then: like, comment, follow, and share or re-post with your friends to advocate for his inclusion in the Rifflandia Festival lineup.

Doing this will raise awareness about the importance of diversity and representation in BC festivals. Let's amplify Finest Summer's voice and inspire positive change in the local music scene, tara!





#FS4Riff2024 #FSR2024

IN MEMORIAM

Rest in peace, dear Amy

by Charles Au Lavoie

When I met Amy, I was working on my book *Legacy of a Filipina*. We used to meet at a small bakery at the Esquimalt Plaza. The bakery was owned by a Vietnamese couple and the wife was a friend of Amy's. After the restaurant situated next door that had been a gathering place for the community for decades was sold, the space remained empty for several months. The baker's wife squeezed in two tiny tables with chairs set against the wall, transforming the bakery into a coffee shop.

This is where I interviewed Amy about the Japanese occupation of the Philippines during WWII and her memories of that period, when her family moved out of Manila. They could hear the sounds of destruction in the capital. Under the strict control of the grandmothers from both sides of the family, Amy and her sisters were told to be quiet and particularly not to sing. They couldn't leave the house, as Japanese soldiers were everywhere. Amy could hear them and see them showering outside the neighbouring house. I took notes as I listened to Amy recalling emotions and events from her childhood and enjoyed following her even when she became lost in reminiscences. She would sometimes seize my hand and hold it for a while.

We also met after the 10 am Sunday mass, held in the community hall of the Lady Queen of Peace Church in Esquimalt. Over the years I got to know most of the Filipino parishioners.



Amy always carried sweets to share with children. She would "borrow" my arm when descending the stairs. I took this as a mark of trust. Amy was generous, with money and smiles. Underneath her apparent delicacy, she had a strong personality and didn't shy away from telling her friends what she liked and didn't like. At ease with Caucasians, she often welcomed me in the intimacy of her house during the holidays or on special occasions.

She came to my house a few times for an *al fresco* lunch. She would stroll around my garden, which was more or less a jungle, commenting and making suggestions like cutting back the branches of the cedar trees so I could see the delicate flowers of the plants that grew underneath. One day, we picnicked on a bench at Saxe Point, watching families sharing a meal and children playing. She would laugh as she related anecdotes of her life after coming to Canada. She talked about working in the BC Interior and how she met her husband, Gordy, in Vancouver.

Amy loved life and having a good time. It always seemed to me that her entire existence was a celebration of love. She dressed beautifully: exquisite shawls, Italian shoes, her hair nicely arranged and her nails, impeccable. One summer I met her sister Bambi, who belonged to the Focolare Movement that was founded in Italy during the Second World War and whose goal is to contribute towards the fulfillment of Jesus' prayer "May they all be one" (Jn 17:21)."

Bambi invited me to visit her in the Philippines, which I did in January of 2019. One of Amy's nephews brought me to Tagaytay City, south of Manila, where Bambi came to live when she retired. I stayed at the Mariapolis Centre for several days. There I familiarized myself with the spirit of the Focolare Movement by borrowing books and magazines from the library. I met with as many people as I could. Due the high-altitude, the weather was pleasant for me but cold by Philippine standards. I was happy there, hoping to find out what made focolarini men and women tick. That is what I try to do wherever I go, keeping in mind that because we are all individuals, i.e., non-divisible, we're ultimately unknowable. This is precisely what I felt about Amy every time we met and now that she is gone; I feel it even more.

Rest in Peace, loving and beautiful stranger!









Celebrating Williams

Celebrating Philippine Culture

Food, Music, Dance and much more!

June 8 - 9, 2024 8:00 AM to 4:00 PM

Centennial Square
Victoria, BC