

Walking the Same Streets as Carlos Bulosan

By Marc Loresto

This essay will connect my life to history — to the history of Filipino immigration to the United States and the racism experienced by them as well as other Asian minorities. I was born in Los Angeles in 1983, two years after my parents came to the U.S. For the past three years, my family has been living in the newly named Historic Filipinotown in the Temple-Beverly corridor near Downtown Los Angeles. These are the same streets that Carlos Bulosan once walked in his book, *America Is in the Heart*. The important things in my life are doing my best in school, or “my studies” as my family in the Philippines calls it. But more than that would have to be just succeeding in what I do to live a comfortable life. Working in the community in some way that makes use of film, getting married, buying a house, and having kids are all life aspirations of mine — all relatively simple things that are just going to take a matter of time. I never really thought about it before — about how my life has been shaped because of what has happened in the Philippines and in the United States. Although my understanding of all this is not completely accurate, I know that it has affected me.

My mom is number six of seven children and the first to come to the U.S. Despite her father’s dislike for the United States, she left after college with my father and came to Los Angeles in hopes for a better life — a life that could not be found in the Philippines. My mom lived in a poor area where food was hard to come by, and at times all they would eat was rice. She started going to the marketplace at the age of seven to sell things. She has told me about how hard it is to have grown up in the Philippines, but I

cannot even imagine what that could be like. The social stratification in the Philippines is very distinct, and my mom has said how if you were poor then that is how it would be.

There was no real in-between — only the rich and poor.

She decided to come here because she felt she could succeed in many ways that she would not be able to in the Philippines. There would be ways she could make a living in the U.S. that would never be possible in the Philippines; truly the U.S. is a land of opportunity. And because of that fact, because a better life could be afforded, my parents left the Philippines and moved to the United States.

Although a better life would be in store for them, they probably were not expecting the kind of discrimination that happens in the U.S. — the kind where you are treated differently because of your race. Yes, it was difficult to live in the Philippines, but at least everyone around you was kind and accepted you. My mom told me how her co-workers treated her like she was stupid, how she did not feel accepted because they would all make plans to go out after work and never ask her to come even though the plans were made right in front of her. She told me about how they would laugh at her accent when she talked and that they would make jokes about the kind of food she brought for lunch. Then she told me about how that made her feel, how horrible she felt for eating the kind of food she ate, for talking the way she did, and for having skin that was not white. Because of all this, she decided that she would show them just how great a worker she was, and in only a couple of months she got her first raise. She also promised herself that she would never work for anyone again — she did not want to feel

the kind of pain she experienced ever again. From then on, she has owned her own business and worked for herself.

C. Wright Mills has said that when one finds where their life intersects with history that it is “in many ways is a terrible lesson; in many ways a magnificent one.” Another reason my parents came to the U.S. was because they wanted me to grow up in a place where I would be able to eat everyday and a place that would not be as difficult to live in as the Philippines. Like I said, I cannot even imagine what is it like to live in a house not larger than a regular sized bedroom and with no real walls or insulation. I am thankful for my parents’ decision to move here. I am able to eat everyday, and I never had to start working until I wanted to at the age of 16. These are a direct result of my parents’ decision to immigrate — this is a magnificent lesson I have learned. Because of this I have come to respect my mom in so many ways that I never have before. I am actively learning more about those who came before me — the kind of lives they have led, the struggles they have faced, and the victories they accomplished as being Filipinos in America. Because of all this I have been able to form a new cultural identity for myself that never used to be there. I have been able to empower myself, and I want to share that and help the community to feel the same. All of these are magnificent lessons I have learned recently. But I did not learn all this until I realized the horrible lessons first.

I have grown up in brown skin but I never knew that. I never saw how color could mean anything or even cause tension — then I grew up. I learned about my mom’s pain, I learned about the Filipino World War II Veterans, I learned that I was a minority and that

I did not have white skin. I learned that because of having brown skin I am treated differently, I live in areas where there are ONLY people who are people of color, and that I would never have the same kind of access as someone who was white. I understood just how many advantages being white has in this country. Because of never really growing up around white people, and of my mom's experiences with them, I have developed a sort of discomfort being around those who are white. I have never had any white friends until this past summer of 2003. And these same people just do not know how privileged they are to be white. They will never know the kind of struggle being a person of color is and the emotions that come with it. They can never know the kind of discrimination that people of color experience.

This gained consciousness of the intersection of my life and history and all the lessons I have learned because of that leads me to one conclusion (so far): I must do my best to help others in my community, to educate them and show them and help them gain another perspective or view about the world we live in today. I want to get involved in my community in a way where I can show them something that textbooks in elementary school and high school fail to mention. I want to help people become more culturally aware because identity is found in heritage and where you came from. I also want to help people see that where they are today could not be possible without the struggles for equality and justice. It is important that students now take this responsibility, so that we can create a new history for ourselves and shape a better future for the next generations of Asian Pacific Americans.