

## The Tear That Dropped from My Father's Eye

By Mark Villegas

It was the first and only time I had seen my father cry. Even when some of his family members passed away, I did not see him shed a tear. But in our hotel room that night, I was sure I saw his eyes water and a tear fall. My family was making a cross-country move from Long Beach, California, where our navy base closed down, to Jacksonville, Florida, where we would start a new life. On the hotel room's television screen that night, an image of my father's ship flashed on the screen, and I remember hearing the reporter's melancholy voice telling of the navy base's end. The Long Beach base was our home for five years, and its closing signaled the end to my father's two decade-long U.S. military career.

My father came to the United States by joining the U.S. Navy as a cook. He proudly served as a cook throughout his duties in the military and his other jobs after he retired from active military service. In the Philippines, he began working at the age of nine, helping out with his auntie's soup vending shop. While attending school throughout his childhood, he worked tirelessly in order to help feed his family of more than ten members. Eventually, he graduated from high school and moved on to higher education. After running out of money for electrical school, he could no longer pay tuition. His options were few and at that time the U.S. Navy was vigorously recruiting Filipinos into the service. When he saw an advertisement about the recruiting opportunity, he did not hesitate to enlist.

The tear that dropped from my father's eye that night in our hotel room is sort of like the history of my family—the tear embodied things that are both terrible and magnificent. I believe that my father's tear was shed because of the memories of his escaped hardships, the sadness that accompanies leaving home, and the pride he had in his service. My family has been given many blessings, for example our nice suburban home, but like my father's poverty-stricken past, our history is not unblemished. Even though we all have been through rough struggles, we are able to embrace them with a feeling of love.

My life intersects with history in the way my parents are the products of U.S. imperialistic devices. The way U.S. imperialism relates to my father, as a navy man, he has helped serve the domination of U.S. interests globally. As a note, I was born on a U.S. naval base in Japan, the base being a symbol of U.S. empire. Like my father, my mother (who lived middleclass in the Philippines) came to the United States for better opportunities, only after being bombarded by “positive” images and ideas of America in neocolonial Philippines. In a sense, my mother was already Americanized to such a great extent in the islands. Sadly, she continues to believe that things that are American-made and people who are white are superior and deserve more attention. I hardly hear stories about the Philippines, as if life there is not worth telling.

The history of my mother and father—my history—are both terrible and magnificent. Sometimes I wonder how it would be if my parents never came to the States. Would my siblings and I exist? If so, would life be better? It is terrible to reflect on the idea of my

parents emigrating because of poverty and colonial ploys, but it is magnificent to be living so comfortably in the States, free from economic hardship and hunger. This moral dilemma—whether to praise or despise the U.S. colonial influence on my family—is perhaps something that cannot be valued, but just accepted and worked through. I cannot simply see my parents as passive victims, but they can be active agents creating history and designing the universe.

Another example of a moral dilemma in my family is the accidental births of my niece and nephew. It was terrible to find out that my oldest brother got his girlfriend pregnant, and doubly terrible to discover that my other older brother got his girlfriend pregnant seven years after learning from my oldest brother's mistake. Yet, no one can deny that those two kids are magnificent. They have in every way brightened and enlivened my family. In a sense, they cannot be valued as good or bad; because of the circumstances they were both. But my family worked through it, and there exists nothing but unconditional love for those children. Like my parents, those kids will also be active agents in creating our collective future.

The way I want to work through my identity as a second-generation Filipino American—a direct product of my parents' history, my grandparents' history, and so on—is to resurrect my family's lost stories and uncover the erased memory of the people of the Philippines. Furthermore, I hope to help create a new and positive identity for second, third, fourth generation Filipino Americans based on pride in their history, optimism for the future, and a sense of solidarity with all people, especially those who are not given

power. I think that living in such a hyper-consumerist culture, people are losing a sense of love for themselves and other people. I think that if people knew that their lives have value, that their past is worthy of praise, that they can be agents of progressive change, they will be able to live out their full potential and be a part of a generation that will create a new history for future generations. Whether or not I praise or condemn my circumstances and privileges of being an American-born Filipino is not the point. The point is what I can do here and now, and make change for a better future. Then perhaps some day, I will shed a tear that embodies the satisfaction of seeing a mission moving forward which was only possible because of the struggles of my history, a struggle wrapped in a feeling of unconditional love.