Theme: The Journey of my Life: Half Way Around the World. The sacrifices that were made to achieve the American Dream.

Abstract: I was only 8 years old when I decided to live with my godmother and her husband so that I will get away from the poor living conditions my family was facing. I didn’t want my parents to have to worry about me so I decided that it’s best that my godmother take care of me. They took good care of me and treated me as if I were their own child, they adopted me with the hopes of taking me here in the United States so that I could better and continue my education and have more opportunities ahead of me. This paper talks about the challenges me and my new “mom” faced when we got here in the US and what we had to go through before we even had the chance to come here. We decided to leave our family behind for a journey of a lifetime. We didn’t expect it to be easy, but we didn’t expect it to be hard either. By coming here we have fulfilled our dream, the American Dream.

Keywords: Family, Education, American Dream, Mother, Journey, Language, Philippines, Immigration, United States, Citizenship, Visa

The Journey of my Life: Half way around the world.

April 4, 1991, I was born in a small town called Bilogo, in the city of Batangas in the Philippines. I am the eldest of 6 in my family. I have 3 younger brothers and 2 younger sisters. I completed kindergarten, first, and second grade in Bilogo. My family was not well off. We were poor, my father was a farmer and my mother was a homemaker. So they could not afford to provide us with the high quality items but we were happy with all the love they gave us. During that summer after I finished second grade I visited my godmother in another town called Puerto Galera. It’s a small town in the island of Oriental Mindoro, much further away from my home. I liked visiting my godmother, her husband, my grandma, and my cousins that live there that I often don’t get to see. I always enjoyed they’re company especially my godmother’s husband. He would always get us whatever we wanted and would always take us to places like
downtown or to another town. For as long as I could remember, all of my cousins in the family including me, called him “papa”. He was a dad to all. He was an American citizen so they had to come back and forth from there to here every year.

Him and my godmother always wanted to have a family of their own. But due to some complications, they weren’t able to have a child of their own. Since I had been coming over to their place every summer or every time when school is out, they had treated me like they’re own child and them my other set of parents. At their home, I had to learn how to speak a lot of English. We were taught English in schools but it’s still different when you’re trying to have a conversation with someone who speaks it fluently. Learning a new language is always difficult but it was surprising that I caught on pretty fast on my English but I never forgot my own language, which is Tagalog. It made our communication much more easier when I finally got a hang of speaking English around him all the time.

One day, they talked to me about coming to stay with them for good and I immediately agreed. They talked to my parents and they also agreed. I was excited to go to school there. I first went to a catholic school and there I met new friends and new set of crowd. I would stay with my grandma whenever my godmother and her husband would come here in the United States to visit. I love my grandma, she would always take care of me and make sure I was eating properly and that I was doing all my schoolwork done on time. Time flew by and I was in the fifth grade, I remember one day my godmother and her husband sat down with me in the kitchen during dinnertime and talked to me about me being part of their family. Meaning that they would adopt me and I will officially be their daughter. I was happy. I had a big smile on my face.
From then on out, I was their daughter on legal papers. They started getting all of the papers done so that us three could all come here in the United States. Getting papers here and there, running around in the big city and going to interviews and court dates were very tiring. We spent days in the city trying to get our passports and visas ready along with all of the necessary items from the adoption. They had completely changed my birth certificate and who my parents were. All the vaccinations that were required was done before we had to go back to the US Embassy in the Philippines. It was a long journey. We waited so long for every little detail to be sent to us. But both my parents were patient about it.

However, half way along our journey, my Papa became very ill and him and my godmother, my mom now, had to come back here in the US for him to get treated for his disease. It turned out that his cancer came back after years of not having it. I was left with my grandma and cousin who took care of me very well. It was almost a year that they were staying here in the US when they decided to come back home. I was excited to see them both because I hadn’t seen them for a long time. When they came home, my Papa was really ill and he was very weak. We needed to take care of him, he stayed at our home and my aunt helped us with caring for him. She was very helpful with assisting us and making sure he is okay. I did what I could to help after I got home from school everyday. My papa never gained his strength back but once he was feeling better he asked if he could drive to town and my mom let her. He was just so happy to drive again but it wasn’t the same. Though I’m glad we made him happy. His son came from here to the Philippines to help us take care of him. I remember having our entire family over for a thanksgiving dinner a few months after they came back home from the US.
We made everything so that he would have a good remaining of his life and he seemed happy during that time. He made us all happy and that was the time when he really needed us and we were in fact, there for him like he always was. The doctors had said that he would only live for a few months but he was able to be with us for longer than that. But as we all know, none of us will live forever. After a year of being with him and taking care of him, he reached the end of his life and he passed away on September 2001. It was the saddest day of my life. I remember my cousin picking me up from school early telling me the news on the way home. Even though I was sad, I didn’t cry. I don’t know why I didn’t cry. I guess I figured that he wouldn’t want to see me sad and that I’m going to be okay and that he’ll be watching over me from above.

About a year passed and we got a really good news. We were finally granted our visa and green card for us to stay here in the US. My mom had talked to me carefully about our decisions and if I really want to come over here and live and study over here. Well, I told her I wanted to, because I want to make myself a better person and help out our families. And when I grow up I want to be successful and be a good citizen of the country. We packed our belongings and we left a few months after, leaving behind everyone in our family. September 24,2004: this day completely changed my life. It was the day we flew in the US and my stepsister and step bother in law picked us up at the San Francisco International Airport. When we got out of the plane into the airport and out to the car, I could feel the cold breeze I had never felt before. I thought to myself “wow look at all these lights, all these cars, and all these people, this is going to be a really different environment.” I became frightened. But at the same time I think about all the trouble we went through just to get here. We lived with my stepsister, her husband and
daughter in a three-bedroom house. My mom and I shared one room with a king sized bed. The room was also used as my stepsister’s office so while we were there she used it also. So we didn’t really get that much privacy.

It was really hard for me to adjust especially with time and my sleeping rhythm was different. My mom didn’t wait long for me to be enrolled in school so the next school day we came went to the school near where we lived. First day was pretty scary for me. I had no friends, I didn’t know anyone, I didn’t know where my classes were. And I was afraid to speak to anybody because I didn’t want to sound “wrong” or “bad”. I thought I couldn’t speak proper English. At first, the school required me to go to an English learning Center because I was from out of the country and I needed extra assistance in learning English. Well, I only went there for a day, I took a test and found out that I passed it so I went back to the school and they changed my schedule so that I didn’t have to go back to the learning center. It was hard for me to make friends in the first months of school. I absolutely just kept quiet and to myself in class and on recess and lunches. I didn’t want anybody to judge me on how I looked or how I spoke or where I’m from.

My mom on the other hand struggled finding a job in town because she wasn’t driving at the time and the only transportation we could get is through the bus or on foot. She spent most of her time at home while I was in school and once I get out of school, we’d go for a walk around town just to see different things. At my stepsister’s house, it was different from what we were used to back home. There, everything was not shared and it’s not like the saying we go by, “my house is your house”. I felt as if we were not part of their family. Yes, we were renting the room because they didn’t let us live there
for free even though they knew that my mom didn’t have work yet and that we only had so much savings. But God is always good to us. My mom found a seasonal job, she started working at JC Penney during Christmas time, and we were able to save some money. After that, she had also found a job at Ace Hardware, she seemed to like that a lot because she got out of the house and it gave her something to do while I was at school. It was hard for her to get to work because, like I said earlier, we didn’t own a car so she had to walk to and from work. That took half an hour each way. She’d walk to work and when she would get off I walk to her work so that she won’t be alone going home.

A year passed and my stepsister and her husband decided to move to Utah, leaving us with no place to stay. Luckily, my mom’s boyfriend at the time was kind enough to let us live with him at his house. He was very nice to my mom and I and it made it easier for my mom to take care of me. She seemed more confident. In 2005, I finally became a US Citizen. That was a very exciting moment for me. I couldn’t believe that I got it in only a year of staying here. Thanks to my mom’s hard work! During that same year, we also moved in to an apartment because of her relationship not working out. We found a small apartment near the high school and from there we lived our daily lives. Throughout my schooling, I did what was expected of me. I got good grades and I attended school on the regular basis. I also participated in different activities such as the high school’s colorguard and marching band and also orchestra. My mom just took care of the house business and myself. I was in the 10th grade when my mom decided that she wanted to move here in Hollister. She had met a nice guy that lived here and asked us to live with him. He’s been taking care of us since then. Yet again, we moved a different city. Another new school, another set of new people, new friends, new home, pretty much
new everything. Starting from a really small city, to a bigger city and yet again another small city, my life has completely changed. It wasn’t easy, I tell you. We went through ups and downs trying to get to this place and reach the “American Dream”. And look were we are now, we finally did it. I can finally say that I’m proud of myself for sticking through this and never giving up. As of now, I’m getting my education and planning on continuing with it. And someday I would like to be a Registered Nurse and help people in need. I hope to tell my story to my children and I hope they learn something from it.

Nothing comes easy. And for us to get something that we really want, we have to put in extra effort into it. I have no regrets of coming here in the US, I feel that my experience has made me stronger throughout the years. Thank you for taking the time to read my story. I hope you enjoyed it.