

**Topic:** Moving From the Philippines to the United States.

**Abstract:** My family and I faced an unfortunate turn of events that led to our movement from the Philippines to America. Saying goodbye to my family in the Philippines was difficult, but never seeing them again beats any pain I've encountered. When we arrived in the U.S., assimilation was the greatest obstacle; nevertheless, we overcame it.

**Key Words:** Philippines, America, Vacation, Assimilation, Family, New Life

In the Luzon region of the Philippines, a family of six was just declared bankrupt due to a fault in the banking system; apparently someone, or a group of people, managed to steal every bit of wealth the family owned. Unfortunately, neither the insurance nor the banks were able to compensate for the loss; thus, the family was forced to take drastic actions. The mother and father decided to use up all the savings they had in a jar to buy plane tickets to the U.S.; the children thought they were only going as a vacation. The family consists of a mother, a father, three daughters, and a son; I'm the son.

Back in the Philippines, my father was a flight attendant; we would seldom get discounted, if not free, trips to various places around the world. My mother was a business woman of some sort; to this day, I still don't know what she did specifically, but I do know she handled a lot of money and worked with very influential people. I have three sisters: the oldest one is five years older than me; my other sister was born two years after my oldest; and my youngest sister was born two years after me.

It was a Wednesday night (I remember because my tutor, who came every Wednesday, had just left), and my parents told us about the trip. I remember the excitement my sisters and I displayed when we heard the news. My mother, with a very worried yet cheerful expression on her face said, "Children! come over here! Your dad and I have something to tell you. We are going on a vacation to America and we are leaving on Saturday so I want you guys to start

packing what you can and I'll help by doing the rest tomorrow." Filled with excitement, my sisters and I responded by saying things similar to: "Really?! I can't wait, yay!"

The next day, I went to school and told my teacher that I wouldn't be able to come to school for a while because of the "vacation." She looked at me in a way I've never seen before, as if she was concerned about me; now that I look back, I think she must have known about our predicament, my parents must have told her what had happened. I left school that day without taking the opportunity to say goodbye to my classmates, my friends. I got home, packed as much as a seven year old could on his own, and went straight to bed still excited about the upcoming vacation.

Friday morning, I woke up and there was nothing anomalous about my morning. I got up and ate my cereal as part of my usual routine, went straight to the couch and watched my cartoons; it was an ordinary day until my mother came into the living room. She was on the phone with my aunt; her eyes were red, probably from tears, and her voice sounded as if it crackled. I never bothered to ask my mother what was wrong, I guess my adolescence made me ignorant towards the feelings of others. When my mother hung up the phone, she looked at me and said, "Go get your nice clothes, family is coming over for a really big get-together." As a child I always did what I was told, so I got up and got myself ready for a big day.

Our aunts and uncles came over in the afternoon, followed by our grandparents momentarily. My sisters and I were in our church apparel: a buttoned up shirt with slacks for me and dresses for them. The house was filled with an aura of both joy and sorrow. Back then, I didn't understand why there were so many mixed emotions. When my cousin came, we went off into the backyard and started playing games, but there was something about him that was bothering me. I asked him, "Hey cous, what's wrong? You seem a little down."

He replied, "I'm okay. I'm just wondering if I'll see you again."

"Of course you will! It's just a vacation! We'll be back, don't worry."

Those words brought a smile to his face, yet his eyes still had that look of apprehension. He knew the truth, but I guess he chose not to tell me. It surprises me how a kid his age was able to handle such news so well, I don't think I would have been able to stop myself from crying. When evening came, everybody gathered for one giant feast: it was our last dinner together. After supper, my sisters and cousin fell asleep on the couches; I looked around and saw the adults showing so much compassion to each other with kisses and hugs. Tears were rolling down and wishes of good luck were being given. When everyone finally left, I went to bed wondering why we even had the gathering in the first place.

I woke up, it was Saturday morning, and everyone had already started getting ready. My mother came into my room and started nagging me to get ready as fast as I could; she was always so punctual. We finally got ready with our bags packed with only the essentials. Before we left the house, my father called all of us all into his room. He wrapped his arms around us and used his strength to group us together into a circle. We were all so close, I could feel my father's heavy breathing and hear my mother's heartbeat. My father started praying, asking God for protection and guidance; then, I saw my father cry for the first time in my life. My father, the man I perceived as the strongest person alive, the symbol of solidity and confidence through my eyes, showed a moment of vulnerability that I can never forget. Even after that moment, I was still not able to put the pieces together. I still thought we were going on a vacation and be right back home after a few weeks. We got in the car, with our luggage in the back, and drove off. That was the very last time I saw that house I grew up in.

When we arrived at the airport, we saw everyone who was the get together the day before. At this point, my mother was no longer able to hold back her tears; she, along with my father, aunts and uncles, began to bawl. The atmosphere was incredibly depressing and even I started to feel melancholy. I received numerous hugs, kisses and gifts from my family and they said their goodbyes: little did I know, that was the last I'd ever see them again.

Our first destination when we entered the U.S. was my father's sister's house in L.A. The time period between our departure from the Philippines and our arrival at our aunt's house was mostly a blur, since I was asleep for the most part. My aunt welcomed us into her home with open arms. I loved living at her home; it was very spacious and the meals she cooked were incredible. We lived there for two months, and during that time I began to get homesick. I started pestering my parents, asking them when we would go back home and all they did was either ignore me or lie by saying: "We will go home soon, don't worry."

After two months of living at my aunt's, my mother got a hold of her cousin and told her we were coming to visit. We packed our bags, said goodbye to my aunt, and headed up north where we would start our new lives: Hollister, California. We arrived at my mother's cousin's house late at night and my she showed me to my second-cousins' room where I fell asleep for the night. The next morning was full of greetings and introductions; I have never met this side of my family until that day, at least I don't remember meeting them until then.

Their home became our home for the next 8 months. Our families became inseparable; my second-cousins became my new best friends. My parents started looking for jobs and my uncle (my mother's cousin's husband) hired them as employees in the Dominoe's restaurant that he owned. When my parents started working, they made us go to school, so I went to start the middle of my Second Grade Year in Cerra Vista Elementary School.

Assimilation was particularly difficult for me. Being in a new school with kids that spoke a completely different language was very intimidating for a 7 year old. I didn't know how to communicate with my classmates for the first few weeks. Luckily, my second-cousins were able to help me learn. My sisters and I learned English pretty quickly, my parents on the other hand are still having a little trouble with their English today.

After finishing my Second Grade Year in Cerra Vista, my family moved to another house in town: my current home. For about 5 years, we were living in this house with an old married couple: they were friends of my aunt's who were the original owners of this house but made an arrangement with my parents to let us live with them if they'd pay rent. A family of six and an old couple were living together in a 3 bedroom house; needless to say, it was quite crowded in there. They moved out 5 years after we moved in and now my parents own the place.

My parents never told me directly that we were never going back to the Philippines. In fact, I don't actually remember the moment I realized we were never going back home. Maybe I just picked up the implications from the events that occurred: my parents getting a job; me and my sisters going back to school; and my family moving into a new home. Ever since our departure, I have only been able to move forward, I still haven't had the opportunity to visit my old home and say hi to everyone I miss so dearly. If only I had known that was the last time I'd see any of them, I would have said my goodbyes. It saddens me every time I think about that regret.

Here I am today, a native of the Republic of the Philippines living in the United States of America. My family and I moved here after an irreparable economic crisis that occurred back home. I suffered the pain of leaving people, the struggles of assimilation, and the hard work of

starting a new life. I am a Filipino-American, and I am part of the 11 million immigrants in the United States.