

In Heritage We Trust (An Essay by Poet Maya Teague) - MabuhayRadio

Written by Maya Teague

Tuesday, 13 July 2010 19:46 - Last Updated Friday, 20 August 2010 13:42

There are moments in time that we tuck away with tenderness in the sacred places of our soul. They are nestled among painful, as well as joyous pieces of our personal history.

One such moment happened 22-years ago when I boarded a flight out of the Philippines, the final step in my legal migration. As the plane hurtled past hangars and over city streets, I shifted in my seat a few times, disquieted by heavy thoughts. A spate of emotions came over me as I glanced one last time at the fading outlines and busy arteries below.

Manila

at its peak hours was a crisscross of bustle and brio, its darting jeepneys and belching buses a picture of kinetic animation from above.

In mere seconds, my country would become invisible and I would leave behind splinters of a half-lived life. I felt a tug in my heart. A sense of fealty suddenly struck me. There was this momentary stab of regret, a fog of disbelief, the urge to bolt, go back and try to make the grass greener in my native backyard. A solitary teardrop streaked my face while I mouthed a somber "Fare thee well, my dear Fatherland!"

In the meantime, I have become America's daughter – a dutiful, thoroughly-assimilated citizen of the First World, wanting to make my mark, make lots of money and make memories I can regale my progeny with. I have become a symbol of model-immigrant behavior here, happy with the status quo, laden with trappings of ease. Like my colonial sisters, I am quite capable of independent thinking, aware of my individual power, possessed of an evolving worldview and ever cognizant of the human condition.

While I have embraced this culture, its liberties and its generous gifts, I think that I may have misplaced my soul. During periods of reflection, I would pine for my Pilipinas, my country, the one that saw me awaken to the world fifty-some years ago.

My Filipino heritage is an inalienable, branded birthright that is burned into my consciousness and my core, no matter where I reside. It is my passport to a priceless, sacred past filled with warm remembrances and benevolent ghosts. My birth, my childhood, my kindred and my ancestors are all locked away in this capsule known as a heritage.

It is my slice of history, my rightful share of a legacy carved from my forefathers' blood, sweat and triumphs. My Filipino heritage is my nexus to a time and place where the heart never grows old, where children remain innocent, where life was meant to be lived for a higher purpose. It is a scrapbook of timeless and time-honored traditions that make us who we are, wherever we are.

Superficially, it is also my darker complexion, my pancit and adobo, the urge to connect with my

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kind out here, my balikbayan trips, my monthly remittances. It is a label I wear proudly. I may have been refined or touched up here, but make no mistake: This product is “Made in the Philippines.”

In other words, my Filipino heritage is right here in my heart of hearts, in the seat of my truest feelings. I take it everywhere with me.

{xtypo_quote} While I am America’s grateful adopted daughter, I am forever the Philippines’ beholden love child—Maya Teague {/xtypo_quote}

I implore the heavens: Give me my country’s oppressive heat, its smog and infinite traffic snarls! Give me its imperfect leaders and its hungry families who feed on improbable dreams. Give me its sweltering masses that swarm the streets and air-conditioned malls of every city. Give me my people’s struggles, their small victories, their catastrophic losses; the country’s charm with its volcanoes, mountains and twinkling bodies of water. And yes, let me have those predictable typhoons, earthquakes and eruptions as well.

Above all, give me a history steeped in victories as well as vicissitudes, loss and liberty, pain and progress, sacrifice hand-in-wounded-hand with sovereignty.

I have nothing, and I am nothing without my Filipino heritage. Knowing that I have one frees me from the coldness of my surroundings. Sometimes, it can get dark and desolate in another country.

While I am America’s grateful adopted daughter, I am forever my country’s beholden love child. At the end of the day, when thoughts are most pure and undisturbed, I am naked and I can only cling to this magnificent piece of myself. # # #

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Editor's Note: To know more about the Ventura County, California-based Filipino-American poet, please click on this link:

<http://www.google.com/profiles/MayaTeague1>

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