

Stories of Pilipinx-Americans: Understanding the Process

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Background & Purpose

The Pilipinx-American Stories Project was born from the idea that we needed more visible representation, and was driven by highlighting the accomplishments of many community members that I personally saw. It started off as this project on Twitter highlighting folx during Pilipinx-American History Month. Since the arrival of the first book project, “Representation Over Pure Visibility: Stories of Pilipinx-Americans in San Diego,” it has evolved into this multi-platform entity that focuses on understanding the stories of people in the community on a much deeper level.

To simplify what it means to understand someone on a deeper level, this project’s way of understanding is asking “how” and “why.” How did your journey begin? Why do you do what you do? How are you able to keep doing what you’re doing? Why is this important to you? But why is it important to get onto a deeper level with someone? It’s because of the society that we live in today.

We’re currently living in an era where most everyone is on social media, and what we typically see is everyone posting their best. We see posts about people living their best life through travel posts. We see people receiving awards for projects they’ve put together. And we see these heartfelt graduation posts at the end of the school year. These are all fine and dandy, but what we’re seeing are the conclusions; what we’re getting is the surface level of the iceberg.

The iceberg illusion analogy refers to what we see on the outside. When people are posting on social media platforms, they’re usually showing you what they’re like at their best, but what we don’t see is the hard work, and the obstacles that were overcome, in order to get to where they’re at now. What we’re seeing is the tip of the iceberg; everything else is below the surface.

What we don’t see below the surface is all the hard work it took for someone to be able to show what’s on the tip of the iceberg. It’s the blood, sweat, and tears that someone has shed. It’s the obstacles they’ve had to fight through to get to where they are today. It’s the constant doubt that they had to go through, wondering if they’re going to make their goal. It’s understanding that while you love the goal you’ve reached, you can’t romanticize it, and you’re reminded that your journey was rough. What we see below the surface is the process.

This is how the theme of understanding the process came about. I wanted to understand what it was like below the surface level. I wanted to ask those questions of “how”

and “why” to the people that were around me. Hearing the win is cool and everything, but I wanted to know what it took to get to that win. That’s how the search for these people began.

This incarnation of the Pilipinx-American Stories written series is a collection of seven individuals, with an additional narrative from myself, speaking on our processes, in different disciplines. What you’ll be seeing is a small snippet of what our processes are like. Keep in mind, our struggles are not this monolithic thing; we continue to grow with each passing day. The stories that you will be reading may have changed since the interviews have taken place. Take these stories as a temporary moment in time rather a process that is set in stone. Along with understanding that, know that everyone’s process is different.

I’ve selected these people because I wanted to understand what their own personal process was like in these specific disciplines; so you’ll see questions centered around their personal experiences rather than a general question for all those that represent that specific discipline. Even if they’re brought up in the same way, no two people have the same exact experiences. Take what you read from these eight narratives as something that is a case by case scenario.

With that being said, thank you for taking the time to pick up this piece of work. It took some time to develop this project, and the journey to do so was the best part of it. The stories that were gathered are presented in this raw conversational fashion, so you’ll be seeing the most authentic versions of those that contributed. I hope you enjoy the ride with this one.

Peace and love - Alfredo Leano

A Sociologist's Process

Narrative by Dr. Christopher Vito

What exactly is Sociology, and how did you get into it?

Chris Vito: When I started, I went to San Diego State for business first, I don't know if I told you about that. My mom was an accountant, and people from her generation, who came from the Philippines to the United States, did these kinds of majors; things like nursing and business accounting, so I got swayed to do accounting.

I finished my accounting degree, but I didn't really like it. It was a profession I believed would help me get a job, and would pay well. So I went back to school and I took a Sociology 101 class, with professor Jung Min Choi.

He talked about how the world worked, and why people would do what they do, and how stuff actually works in the real world. I was fascinated by that because those were questions I already had in my mind, but I never had an outlet to ask those questions in an academic space. I ended up taking a bunch of sociology classes, as an open university student, so I was paying out of pocket while I was working. I really got into it, so I applied for the master's program in sociology at SDSU.

I got in, and stayed there for about a year and a half, and read as much as I could. Then I went to the University of California, Riverside to pursue my PhD.

For people who don't know sociology, the definition that everyone gives is, "the study of society." I always tell students, especially with my research, that when we talk about the study of society, we're really talking about anything that involves people.

For me personally, I study Hip-Hop and its relationship to race, class, and gender; a lot of people don't think about this as a sociology topic. I had a professor that studies the sociology of sport in urban America, basketball in particular. When people think about sociology, it's *really* anything related to people.

What got me interested, in particular, was learning about inequality; it's something that affects everybody. We have to understand how the mechanisms of inequality actually work.

Alfredo Leano: After taking a sociology class with you, what you're saying now makes more sense. Like you stated before, people would define it as the study of people, which is a very broad topic. Hearing you talk about it more, this field can get very specific.

CV: That's what makes it a cool topic. Every person has different questions that they want answered. For one person, it may be about gender inequality, and that may be shaped by them

being a woman. Or someone part of the LGBTQ movement may have questions about sexuality. Some of us may ask questions about being Filipino because it's part of our ethnic identity.

All of these questions are vastly different, but when you start finding the fact there are generalizable patterns of behaviors amongst all of these different questions, that's where sociology comes in, and I think we can study that. If we're looking at something like race, there's something unique about it, but there's also something very common to it too. A lot of it is rooted in inequality and power.

AL: That's some good insight. This is just my own personal opinion, when people go to college, they should take at least one sociology class to get some critical thinking going.

CV: I agree! If I could go back to SDSU, I would've taken sociology much earlier.

What happens is that we tend to segregate people by majors very early on. The goal of the college is to make as much money as possible and garner as many students. We don't really give them the opportunity to explore. I think that's what colleges are really about. There are a lot of community colleges that push people to choose a major and want them to take a certain set of classes within the first two years; that often limits their ability to think outside the box.

AL: Thinking about it now, it's not realistic.

CV: It's not. High school, here in the United States, is a period where the students are getting trained to learn about the system, but they aren't getting critical thinking in. They don't get that until later, and that hurts some people. They may have some questions to ask, but they don't really have a space to ask them until much later.

Some may reach a point where they're graduating college, taking care of student loan debt, or starting a family, so they really don't get a chance to follow up with those questions.

Was being a teacher your first choice as a career?

CV: It wasn't. I had only found teaching to be my passion when I started appreciating what my professors did for me. As students, we see them sharing information, but we don't necessarily take the time to look at the nuance processes that go on.

Teachers spend a lot of time coming up with tactics to help students better understand the material. Sometimes they spend a lot of time on how they speak and interact with students. And some of them are just really passionate about the topic they're speaking on. When I saw that in the professors I was working with, I started developing that appreciation; it made me want to do it too.

AL: I appreciate how you put that into practice when I was in your class, especially when you allowed us to have small group discussions. We were able to bring what we've learned back to

the rest of the class. I can see now, how the inspiration you received from past professors translated to how you taught us.

CV: I was really lucky because I had a handful of professors who spent the time teaching and working with me. They were coming from this critical pedagogy aspect. There's this educator, Paulo Friere ¹, talking about teaching methods; he talked about how important critical thinking is and how you can't just keep inputting information for the students to memorize. You have to grapple with them when developing knowledge on the subject.

It's a hard task because it requires the teacher and the student to be equals; oftentimes, education doesn't see teachers and students as equals.

AL: I remember how you brought up the critical thinking pedagogy towards the end of class. Correct me if I'm wrong, but I'm thinking the reason you brought up that style of teaching towards the end of the semester is that you wanted critical thinking to feel natural, and without telling people what you were doing.

CV: That's exactly what happened. I want the students to learn the process and be part of it, and at the end I would show them what I did, and ask if it worked. I hope that the classes they would take in the future would be seen differently with this pedagogy. I think the most valuable thing is when you create knowledge, because you play a part in it, in turn creating change; we aren't these passive boxes where information comes in and out. The information is supposed to go through, and when it does, it creates an agency to change the world around you.

Being a Sociologist, what sparks in your mind when coming up with questions?

CV: It comes in two ways.

The first stems from your own life. Sociologists ask questions based on their own life experiences. For me, growing up in San Diego, I saw a lot of racial segregation. We segregate by ethnicity, social classes, immigration patterns and other things like that. When I was growing up, I would always have questions about the world around me.

Why were some groups of people hanging out with certain groups of people? Why did some racial groups have less access to resources? Why were some people going to college and others not?

A lot of these kinds of questions came from my own personal life.

Second, a lot of my questions come from students and from the field of sociology itself. I can't tell you how many times students have asked valuable questions while we're talking about the topic. While we're talking, they'll ask questions that may not be new to me, but are seen from a

different perspective. It forces me to rethink some of my answers with the questions that they ask.

You think about one topic like race and ethnicity; there are probably thousands of ways to look at a single topic. If you're studying something like Filipino-American history, I'm obviously not going to know everything about it, and when a student gives me their perspective, it makes sense in my head and allows me to ask new questions.

AL: It sounds like the process of coming with sociological questions is constant. You're always being affected by different factors.

You brought up how you would have students that have questions that may have a different perspective from you. Your thought process then changes up because you're introduced to that different perspective.

CV: Sociologists like to think of this process as dialectical. We can both ask questions to each other, and we can use that moving forward; it's never this process where I have an answer for you right then and there.

Sometimes, I think that frustrates people because they want direct answers, but when you give answers that are "correct," there leaves no room for inquiry. We start seeing that answer as the objective truth, rather than something that is constantly changing; I think that's important because society is always changing.

AL: You can't really romanticize the sociological process; it's not all black and white. It gets boring when you have straight answers like that every single time. If it's like that, then when are you going to make room to question things?

CV: I think we have to keep on questioning things, and I like it too. The more we question, the more we can look at history. With history, there's so many stories to tell. Sometimes I learn other people's history, and it makes me ask more questions.

When I was growing up, I had a lot of questions about Filipinos and Filipino-American identities, especially with my dad coming from the Navy. He used to tell stories of what Filipinos went through in his generation; they were treated very poorly because they were seen as the lower class in the Navy. When I started talking to other Filipinos, they would talk about how their dads had the same experience. There were a lot of similar stories of them having to clean up the dishes and beds, and whatever low work there was.

They would say that their dads never brought up racism because they wanted to get citizenship and a better life for their families. It's stuff my dad would say, or I would hear other people say about their dads.

That whole process of listening to everybody's stories makes you ask questions differently too.

What are some difficulties you've come across as a Sociologist/teacher?

CV: There was a sociologist, Peter Berger, that stated that asking a lot of questions can be an annoyance. With the questions I ask, obviously there will be some people that won't like me asking so much.

At my job right now, if I ask questions about racism, people in positions of power won't like that because it disrupts the system that they've created. If we're talking about Filipino identity and how they've been colonized for a very long time, I would ask what the school is doing to aid this movement. They may not like that question because it may mean they have to dedicate more money and time to certain movements and issues.

AL: From their point of view, it may even be just a controversial question to ask. Like for you, it may be more work for people to do.

CV: But that's how we change things. People in institutions have to be willing to change and do that work. I think the hard part is that people in positions of power don't like change because it challenges the system that they've created.

If you create an educational system where people are getting paid six figures, they won't want to spend more time to change the system they've created just for a racial minority that might be disenfranchised.

AL: It's wild because you're in this unique position where you're questioning a lot of micro and macro. Micro in the sense that you're doing work as teacher, and macro because you're also seeing the big picture as a sociologist.

CV: That's the linkage. A lot of these institutional processes require making that change. Sometimes we do make changes, and it seems very small, but my professor used to say, "If we engage in those small processes, then that's how we create institutional change."

It just gets difficult to see it because there are a lot of barriers to getting those things done.

With the high demand for teaching, how do you find balance?

CV: When I was doing grad school, that was one of my biggest obstacles. I was teaching at UC Riverside and Southwestern College, and also finishing my dissertation, and I was doing research. It was very demanding.

I ended up making a life choice, which a lot of academics have to make: I had to choose whether I wanted to work at a 4-year university or a community college/liberal arts college. A lot of my friends that worked at 4-year universities had to leave California.

When you go to a 4-year university, their main job is doing a lot of research, which requires many hours of work. The choice I had to make was based on my work-life balance. I decided that family was more important, so I came back home to San Diego and started job searching here.

There's only three major colleges (SDSU, UCSD, CSUSM), and those are your only options, and it's fairly hard to get jobs within those schools. What I did was look at community colleges, and Southwestern was the closest to where I'm from. I applied there, and I was lucky to get the job.

What was cool was that community college has a little bit more leniency, so my work/life balance was good; I was going to work from 8:30 A.M. to 12 P.M., then I could spend a good majority of my day seeing my family. That's how I resolved that work-life balance issue, and at the end of the day, I'm sure I made the right decision.

AL: And you were still able to put out all the things you wanted to put out too. You just put out a book² recently too.

CV: I think that's what allowed me to do that; I was able to do research, but I was able to do it at my own pace. At other universities, you also do research, but you have to accommodate to a certain timeline; you don't get promoted or get tenure if you don't produce a certain amount of articles during a certain time period. I was able to do my research on my own free time, and it allowed me to work better because I didn't feel as much monetary pressure; I was doing it because I was really passionate about it.

The book was something I was really passionate about, so I worked on it on my own time. It was better because I was able to take that book in the direction that I wanted to. I was able to make it a free textbook that was available to a wider audience. I'm happy about it because it got a lot of downloads, and I was able to promote it in a way that was beneficial for students.

AL: I'm happy that you brought up that you chose what was best for you. Other people have that same choice, and many go out of state for work, like you said. They would have to make sacrifices and give up things that may be important to them.

CV: I think that's where we're going, with globalization. There are jobs there, but sometimes people have to choose what's the most valuable thing to them.

If you want to have a career where there are jobs out of state, I encourage that. I have friends that want to research a lot, and they're willing to go out of state for those kinds of opportunities. I also had this one friend, who had a baby that didn't want to leave her hometown. She ended up

getting a research job where she lives; she's really happy there because she had that opportunity to stay with her family and not relocate.

AL: Finding that balance was a lot easier for you because you were aware of what you valued.

What kind of advice would you give to people going down the sociology and/or teaching path?

CV: The best advice I can give them is to pursue sociology because you want to ask questions. Their questions are probably going to be shaped by their history, life experiences, or cultural background; whatever it is, I think they need to use that as their driving force to be successful. They're going to come with their own unique set of questions that a lot of sociologists don't know or don't answer. If they can bring those questions to the forefront of their field, that gives them a niche to create their career, even if it's teaching.

Say they want to become a high school teacher, they're background is actually going to shape how they teach. There are students in the U.S., particularly San Diego, that can use teachers with their background.

If there are teachers that are predominantly white that teach minority students, their own perspective might skew the student's learning. We've made that mistake where we teach students histories about the United States and Western Europe, and they aren't getting their own cultural history. Those students would have to wait all the way to college, and that's after we've created ethnic studies programs such as African-American and Asian-American studies.

AL: Sometimes not even until after college. Sometimes those may have to go out on their own to discover that history.

CV: That's what I'm saying. It's if they're lucky enough to go to college and take those classes. It goes back to earlier, if we're tracking all these students to go and take science classes right away, they'll never get to see those ethnic studies classes and never get those questions answered.

For students who want to study sociology, they have to use that because I think it'll be in their benefit. We can make a lot of changes by increasing the types of questions people ask.

AL: It's essentially being true to what you're curious about?

CV: C. Wright Mills used to say, "Curiosity is what sparks sociology."

Asking questions that a lot of us take for granted. If we didn't ask new questions about race and ethnicity fifty years ago, we wouldn't be where we are now.

I've been doing this for a long time, and I learn from my students. Their life experiences shape the questions they have, and they may not be the same as mine. As I get older, those experiences

become more relevant because those generations are going to be the ones to make change. I have to hear those questions, and I think that's what good teachers and sociologists are supposed to do.

A Process in Academia

Narrative by Professor Teresa Hodges

Did you always know you were going to be in the education field?

Teresa Hodges: Absolutely not. I think when I was a kid, I wanted to be a teacher, but it wasn't until I graduated from college where I wasn't sure what I wanted to be.

When I was in college I wanted to be a professor, and a lot of things happened where I was super involved in student organizing. I did programs to help me prepare to think about grad school; I did a research program. I also did Summer Bridge as a discussion facilitator in my last year of undergrad. I helped students within that course to facilitate discussion.

Throughout college, my friends and I had to help facilitate discussion through workshops, whether it was in or out of organizations. We would do a lot of workshops on campus, especially for high school conferences that would bring students to tour the campus and get familiar. Especially through the eyes of being Filipino/Filipinx, Chicano/Chicanx, etc.

I did a lot of these things, but ultimately, I wasn't ready. When it came time to apply to grad school, I wasn't ready. To put it, I wasn't ready emotionally, but I also didn't feel ready academically. My GPA around that time was about a 3.2. I also had a mentor, at the time, that told me that I shouldn't go to grad school. Logically, it made sense, but my heart was crushed.

After college, I did temp work for a while as an administrative assistant. After a while, I decided to go back to get my teaching credential, because I was too afraid to do a master's program.

One month into the teaching credential program, I realized that I wanted to teach about race and ethnicity. I saw how it was playing out in classrooms. And I also saw how some of my peers in the credential didn't want to talk about race even though they were going to be teachers in a very diverse district in San Francisco.

I wasn't happy with what was going on with K-12, but I realized that I wanted to teach teachers. I wanted to teach students, but I wanted to teach students that were going in to teach students.

I finally had the courage to apply to the master's program, so I applied and got into Asian-American studies, because I've always wanted to teach ethnic studies. During that time, I also linked up with Pin@y Educational Partnership (PEP)¹.

Alfredo Leano: With Ate Allyson, right?

TH: When I met her, she suggested that I apply to PEP, and do the master's program in Asian-American studies. I ended up doing that and getting into PEP, and I guess the rest is history.

It really solidified teaching ethnic studies at the college level. And it really helped me develop confidence, and the academic skills to help me apply to a PhD program. Ever since the master's program, I knew I wanted to be a professor.

Although, there was another break during my master's program where I worked as an office manager for two years. I wasn't sure what I wanted to do during that time, but it took a toxic work environment to apply to a PhD program.

I asked questions like: "What am I doing here?" "What do I want in my heart?"

Those were hard questions to ask because they're scary. I was thinking I'd move up in human resources with that office job.

AL: But it shifted.

TH: And I realized that I didn't want to do human resources long term. I was afraid to apply to a PhD program until I had no choice but to follow what my heart wants.

AL: Did it feel like that office job you had was more filler than anything else?

TH: It was a filler, in the sense that I needed a job, but it was also one of those things where I thought, "Let me try and see if this goes to something."

I thought there could be a chance for that, and after I graduated my master's program, I wasn't even thinking of a PhD; I didn't know what I was going to do. I just wanted to see what interested me, which is a natural thing to do.

AL: With post-undergrad, you just want to explore a little bit.

TH: Especially if you're not sure.

AL: Even though it didn't seem like the first choice, it seemed like you were in academia at one point or another, in a teacher-sense.

TH: In PEP, as you know, it's about teaching in the classroom.

I was in PEP for three years, and one of those three years I was in the office manager position. And I was in the office position for two years, so there was one year where I wasn't in the classroom at all; then I realized I missed it.

It's funny, because even as an office manager I would create presentations for staff. I would even use critical pedagogy in the way I would interact with people. And I would create an environment where people felt welcome.

AL: It sounds like a lot of that was natural to you.

TH: I realized that I had to make the best out of my situation. It was hard to be an office manager, in the sense that I didn't know I was going to end up there. It's also hard because I came from a standpoint where I knew critical pedagogy, and identified my position in the world; then transitioning to an office manager and not doing as much of that.

AL: I mean, you were doing that for so long.

Was there one specific catalyst that got you into teaching?

TH: There were actually three things that got me into teaching!

I've always been interested in teaching and learning, but these were what ultimately got me into it was ethnic studies.

The first came after I graduated from high school. There were five hundred of us that graduated, but we initially started out as a class of seven hundred. Out of that five hundred that did graduate, thirty-two of us went to a four-year university right after high school. What happened with those numbers is that many of them went to community college and then transferred to a four-year. There's nothing wrong with that, and being at community college doesn't make you any less.

What I learned at Summer Bridge, is that there wasn't a choice for a lot of people, and that choice was basically made for them. I noticed the inequality with that.

Secondly, in third grade, I learned that being Black was "ugly and undesirable," to some people. Even though I'm Black and Filipina, I internalized what others thought of Black people, in the sense that I didn't think that I was pretty, and I thought that I was inferior.

With those two examples, I learned there was a miseducation of race. A miseducation in identity and the way that people saw me, or what I thought people saw me, in terms of media, society, and what I felt as a person. I wanted to correct that, which is why I wanted to teach ethnic studies.

The last one is PEP. It reframed the idea that it's not so much about me as a teacher, but more so about the students in the classroom. What are the needs of the students? What are the communities that these students come from? How does teaching Filipino-American studies help them grow and develop as people, and what they want to be?

Can you give your experience in academia (transitioning from being a student to the one teaching students)?

TH: It's hard. I spent a lot of time lesson planning because it felt like I wanted to facilitate everything, so it took time to get to the core of what I was trying to draw out from the lessons. Sometimes there would be too much information, and I wouldn't know what to do. Sometimes, when I talk, I have to peel layers of the core.

I finally got comfortable after a lot of practice, and after I spent time building who I was as a person; all of that helped me become a better teacher.

As a teacher, you don't know what students are going to come at you with. Students ask all kinds of things, which leads to these dialogues about the world that relate to the course material; it could be anything, to be honest.

You have to be comfortable with who you are, and continue to work on that while you work with them. And that is hard.

AL: A class size could be about fifty, and it's essentially rolling a fifty-sided die, and the face you land on is the question you get.

TH: I find it even more random in the K-12 world.

Balancing everything was really hard because teaching, community work, life, and other extracurriculars took a lot of time and practice.

Financially, it's difficult because teachers don't get paid a lot. You also put a lot of money into the resources for your students. And it would depend on the schools you would be teaching at; sometimes they would provide and sometimes they wouldn't.

The last difficult thing in transitioning is moving from being a student to a teacher, in the sense of imposter syndrome. I didn't feel like I was good enough as a teacher, or capable enough.

I had a lot of imposter syndrome when I was in my master's program, which was when I was teaching in community colleges. When I started as a PhD student, I didn't really have it, but it happened again when I started applying for tenure jobs. Now that I am finishing my program, I feel a lot better, but it took a lot of work to get over it.

Transitioning in academia, from being a student to a teacher, is seeing yourself as worthy and valuable. Teachers are expected to know everything, but I don't claim to know everything. I learn a lot just from being around my students.

AL: I see what you mean. Personally, I didn't have co-learning experiences growing up. My teachers would do more banking, and when I would be confused I would seek their help because I believed that they know everything.

Now it's not always like that. You're not going to know everything. There will be people that know more than you, and that's okay.

What are some obstacles you go through as a teacher?

TH: I experienced this as a teacher and as a grad student: burning out. When I feel like I burn out in some type of way, it's a signal to slow down and take care of myself.

Feeling isolated is another one. It's very easy to feel isolated as a grad student and as a teacher. You're cool with all your students, but it doesn't feel the same as being around your friends. You wouldn't necessarily talk about your experiences as a teacher with your students.

AL: Unless they have questions along the same path.

TH: And I do that with some of my students going down the same path. I answer a lot of questions about grad school. I am able to talk about those things with my students, once in a while.

I do have my group of sister scholars that acts as my support group for teaching, which is the contrast to this obstacle.

What are some things you can't romanticize about teaching?

TH: Self-care is a struggle. It's hard because you want to take care of yourself, but at the same time, you also want to get paid and have a living wage. This is the biggest thing for me because I tend to overwork.

AL: You put out this dope product for your students, but there is a lot of pain and tears behind the final product.

TH: Yes, and part of it is also related to the idea that you aren't just "blank." You can be Filipino/Filipina/Filipinx, but that's not all you are. I'm not just a student; I'm not just a daughter; I'm not just a graduate student, I'm more than that.

If you only think of yourself as just a teacher, you burn out more often; especially if you don't do other things to enjoy your life.

What advice do you have for people going into your field, whether it be ethnic studies or general teaching?

TH: I have five pieces of advice.

First, do it for the students, in the sense that you are there for them.

Second, follow your dreams. There is not one way to be a teacher. You can be a teacher in the classroom, but there are also different spaces to facilitate discussion. For me, I facilitated discussion while I was an office manager. To bring it back, follow your passions and what you enjoy.

Third, have fun with it and be creative. You're going to have to balance the needs of your students, but do it your way. I teach using a lot of pop culture in the classroom, but I also have them teach me things I don't know about pop culture. It doesn't have to be one type of way when you're in the classroom. When you allow for creativity, you also allow the students to open up their minds.

Fourth, you have to love what you do, which is related to following your passions. It's hard to be a teacher, so it's important to love the work that you do.

Lastly, you need to learn critical pedagogy. Learning reflects society. If you are about social justice and equity, then we as educators have the ability to intervene and address the needs of students.

A B-girl's Process

Narrative by Melissa Adao

What was it like prepping for the Freestyle Session 40 & Over Battle?

Melissa Adao: It was challenging. Not just the physical aspect of it but the balancing part of it as well. I wanted to achieve certain goals with the reality of my life.

Basically, I had a goal to produce a certain kind of movement, and be this “kind of b-girl.” In reality, it was not happening. I started training for it (Freestyle Session¹ in November), in June. I asked Eddie Styles (Rock So Fresh Crew)² and Dyno Rock (Cypher State)³ to train me, and I worked with them on alternate weeks; it became every week when Freestyle Session got closer.

Initially, my goals were to have windmills and five sets prepared, but then reality hit. I was working at the zoo, I was teaching summer classes, all while dealing with my period every month; life hit hard. Even though my overall schedule showed me I had time, it wasn’t the case. But I did what I could, and I learned to be more understanding with myself.

If I don’t get my goals, it’s okay. I’m still doing this. I’m 40 and I’m still doing this. Who else is doing this? Not that many.

In order to do this for myself, I had to change my mindset from obtaining the power moves and the rounds to looking at November six months from then and seeing how far I’ve come. If I look and feel better as I b-girl, then I’m doing good.

Alfredo Leano: It wasn’t even about making top 32 or top 16, it was more about feeling your best.

MA: I wanted to make the top 16 for sure. The closer I got to the event, the more confident I felt. Even at the event, I thought I was going to get a slot. Looking at the screen and not seeing my name, I was like, “oh okay.” But someone I looked up to wasn’t on the screen either, which was a huge surprise to everyone at the event.

The biggest lesson there was not to let the judges define me. I’m at where I’m at, and I have to be happy with my outcome.

A big plus, at the event, was getting to battle Iron Monkey⁴- a San Diego legend in the breaking scene. He’s not in San Diego as often, so to battle him in the prelim round, I already felt like I won.

AL: Was there a good amount of layers of lessons that came out of this experience?

MA: I was able to build relationships, and that event created momentum for me. Even though I didn’t top, people still recognized my round and gave me love.

Building with B-girl Beta

I've been building with B-girl Beta (Heart Breakerz Crew)⁵, and she's someone I look up to; someone who paved the way for us b-girls in the scene. One of the things Beta told me was, "If you want to gain respect, and get better, you need to start entering everything. Don't just enter the big stuff, or don't just enter the small stuff. Support everything and enter everything, and that's how you'll build confidence."

During the summer, I attended as many jams as I could. My personal goal was to feel more confident in the cyphers, and I did. During the first three months of my breaking journey, I went to Cypher Adikts⁶, and it was super intimidating. Three years later, I'm at Freestyle Session and it's such a change from before.

How were you able to balance training with your work life?

MA: I had to be honest with my body, considering it requires physical and mental strength and endurance. I currently teach at two colleges now; I previously worked at three, but cut one out in order to rest more, train more, and host more private classes.

The balance is seen in me prepping for five classes and lectures, and creating choreography, which is done outside of teaching. By the time I look at my schedule, I see that I have time but the energy isn't there. It is what it is, and I can't knock myself for not having the energy; I needed to rest.

AL: You were still able to go through the process?

MA: I was able to, but I'm still 40 years old trying to balance life and what I'm passionate about. It's hard.

What kept you motivated to train for the 40 and over battles, and what continues to motivate you now?

MA: There's several things.

One: I'm enjoying this new layer of dance that I haven't touched before. I've been doing open-style choreo for twenty years, so getting into breaking is exciting and new. I'm like a sponge absorbing everything, and it's exciting to me. It's something that some people might be whatever about, but it's exciting to me. I get to learn, go to all the events, take classes, do everything.

Another layer is that I'm a 40 year-old woman, in this male dominated scene, that is now inspiring people to do things. It's not even just dance, it's doing things period. It doesn't matter if you're too old, and you're never too late to start something.

Over the course of my three-year journey, I had a lot of people go, "Wow, Mel, encouraged me to start breaking," or "You reminded me that my age doesn't matter."

Just seeing that makes me feel glad. I'm not doing this for them, but me living this life encourages them, and that gives me life.

AL: It was an unintentional result of you just doing you.

MA: When I got into breaking, my purpose wasn't to tell the world that you're never too old or never too late. I just started doing it, and over time, I noticed that people have become inspired by my walk in this breaking journey.

The phrase, "I'm too old for this shit," I never hear that around me anymore. I'm walking it and I'm living it. They don't say those words, around me at least, because they know it's not true.

AL: And that's what keeps you going too?

MA: It excites me that it's encouraging this new demographic to push to do what they love.

Your title for the previous project was, "It's Never Too Late to Start." Does that still apply to you?

MA: It will and always will. This dance is very youth dominated. The older we get, the more people get settled in with their lives, but within their own right. The reality is that it is hard to keep up in this dance when you have to "adult."

I have an advantage because I teach dance. One of my motivations is to stay up-to par with the culture and trends, so that I can give the best education to my students, who continue to trust me to do that.

With the "never too old, never too late" lifestyle, I love seeing young adults and older people, even over the age of 45, taking classes from me. I can see the message getting out there.

AL: Does that inspire you even more?

MA: I think it's inspiring more people than me, though. I see it and it's cool. I love those people, and I acknowledge that they're doing what they love. If anything, it's inspiring the students in my classes.

They're giving this different demographic respect, instead of having the thought of "I'm young and I got this."

AL: It's a sense of normalizing in this dance.

MA: Again, Hip-Hop, choreography, breaking, and others are all youth-dominated; a lot of the people who are getting recognized for their work, are young. You don't have older people on this higher platform spreading the message.

After doing this for 20 years, I still love it. What I encourage, especially for those that feel “stuck” in their passions, is to surround yourself with people who love it the way you want to love. It doesn't have to be people who are the best. Sometimes the people that are the best are also the most toxic. Be around people that love it the way you love it, and that are hungry the way you're hungry, and that's how you'll keep loving it.

A Process of a College Student

Narrative by Christie Pascua

How did you get into Pilipinx student organizing?

Christie Pascua: My eldest Kuya was part of Texas A&M PhilSA¹, which was one of the first Filipino student organizations in Texas. After he told me about being in that organization, I made sure that going into college, no matter which one I go to, I was going to make sure to be part of a Filipino Student Association (FSA), and it just so happened to be at University Texas of Arlington.

I got super involved in it when I became cultural chair last year. During that time, UniPro Texas² reached out to me, and that's how I got involved with them, and I've wanted to build with the community ever since.

Alfredo Leano: Why was the Cultural Chair the one that stood out the most?

CP: For our FSA, you had to be Filipino to be cultural chair, and my Ate who was Chair at the time encouraged me to do the same. During that time, there weren't as many Filipinos in the organization as there are now. She took me under her wing as her mentee to eventually take over.

I wanted to make a change with how we took on the culture because it wasn't present at all.

AL: Was the organization more social?

CP: Our FSA was more social in terms of partying, sports and modern dance, so cultural dance wasn't really present. The cultural section of our meetings would almost be silent. We would usually just do one slide, with no interaction, so the other members wouldn't learn about the Filipino aspect of FSA.

AL: It's wild hearing this, because similar to the exhibit you were taking care of at Lumikha³, the topics brought up are not so different from the topics brought up on the west coast. It's surreal hearing that because it feels like we're not alone.

CP: UniPro Texas started this leadership retreat last year, and that's when officers of these FSAs go and attend. We would talk about who we are and why we do what we do.

There's this activity, which is the fish bowl, where we ask tough questions like, "What is your identity outside of FSA?" It gets super emotional, and that's when we come together; it feels like we're not alone in what we do.

Why do you feel it's important to do the work that you're doing?

CP: There's so many cultures in the States, and not all of them are appreciated. We learn about American history, but we never really learn about our own. Not many people know Filipino culture.

My theme as cultural chair, last year, was "knowing your roots." Our culture is beautiful, and I wanted people to recognize that.

I've always loved my Filipino-ness, but having lived in primarily White communities, it was more difficult to bring that out. Wherever I lived, I only really had my family and a few others.

Now, I have this space where I have the opportunity to be me. I'm in this space where I can let other people feel the same and the same impact.

AL: Exactly! You're in a space where you are more free to be yourself.

What do you get from doing the work that you do?

CP: Happiness and satisfaction. I want to be a positive presence in someone's life; there's a lot of negative energy in the world. To be that person to push others to be better and help them in some way is a reality because I'm doing this kind of work with my cohort.

I had this conversation with my cohort, and we are slowly realizing that we are starting to make changes by what we're doing. It's that feeling of "we did this for that person." When people come up to me, they've told me that the work I do made them feel at home, despite not ever going to the Philippines.

AL: You're seeing the work you're doing come to fruition!

CP: A while back, I hosted a Kilusan⁴ workshop alongside UniPro (Texas), and the topic was "movement through time." My Kuya thought it was just going to be a history lesson, but after talking to other members in FSA, he saw that they were impressed.

They liked how we connected tinikling to immigration from the Philippines. The people that took that workshop were happy with the fact that they had a safe space to talk about immigration. And it wasn't just Filipinos that were impacted. Half the people that were present are Vietnamese.

Their families have their own stories with immigration. They spoke of the struggles that their parents went through, and related it to those of Filipinos, not realizing how much of a connection

Vietnamese and Filipinos have. After that, my Kuya was telling me how many people I impacted that day.

How do you achieve organization/school/work/life balance?

CP: I've always had a discipline of managing my time, mainly because I was in taekwondo when I was younger, and it also had to do with how my parents raised me. I feel like that's the basis of how I am now.

It especially showed when I was in high school. I had a huge load because of band, advanced placement classes, clubs, and also having two jobs. My mindset with working through it was, "you don't have enough hours in a day but you can work through it." It's really this mentality that helps me balance everything.

Having my Passion Planner also helps me keep on task because everything is written down. I also had AVID in high school, where our teacher was very adamant on us doing things with our planners.

To-do lists are also a big thing for me. There's this satisfaction from crossing off a task or a goal on your list.

What's something you find difficult about student organizing?

CP: Getting everybody on the same page.

We have our mission and vision, but there are times when we get distracted and forget where we're going. We sometimes get ambitious, leading us to want to do everything. I don't know if it's because we're still young, but at the end of the day, it's not realistic; that's why it's hard to get everybody together.

Another thing that's hard is that we don't have leaders, per say. Everybody wants to be in the organization, but nobody wants to step up and do the work. That's something I personally find hard because I want people to step up. I know they love FSA, but they may think they can't do it, or don't want to do it.

Communication is another thing. It isn't something that's too difficult but it can be when people make it that way.

What's something you want people to know about student organizing, that others don't generally understand?

CP: Quality over quantity.

There are people who will want the biggest student organization, but only a few are active. For example, a student organization may have around 700 members, but only 100 of them are really active.

My personal goal is to help get all our members active, whatever that number may be.

AL: That's a huge commonality that student organizations have. At the beginning of the school year, everyone wants to join because they see this new organization, but by the time culture night season rolls around, that number is way less.

CP: FSA is also about reaching out to others too. While many organizations tend to want to compete against each, we're all the same at the end of the day. We're the same in various aspects including social, culture, and dance, so why not reach out to each other?

An Event Producer's Process

What are some things you've learned since you made event-producing your full-time job?

Lauren Garces: Doing events full-time has made me entrepreneurial because it's essentially my own business. I've learned to start my business, run it, and also build relationships with my clients.

Time management and prioritization are the number one things that I've invested time into pursuing and learning. This job isn't like a traditional 9-5.

Alfredo Leano: It's more like 9-9, or even longer.

LG: I work super late into the evening to do whatever I can to get the project done, but at the same time also learning how to balance my health in the process. I've felt burnt out on several occasions, but I've found something I'm really passionate about. It doesn't always feel like I'm working, it's something I was meant to do.

Going back to time management and prioritization, we're taught this in college, even in high school, but what people have to understand is that it's something you have to practice constantly. This may include evaluating what needs to be done now, and what are some tasks you can push for a later time slot. You also have to evaluate where you are in that prioritization.

People will always focus on the task without realizing how important it is to take care of themselves.

AL: We need to be able to balance both.

LG: Exactly!

I've also learned how to say "no" in my process. For example, when other people ask you for things while you're working on different projects. I'll consider it if it's related to the project I'm doing. There are times when people will ask you from the outside, and it's usually from their own self-interest; the same people won't always consider the other person's time or goals. So it's important to evaluate those "asks," and being comfortable with saying "no."

After accomplishing my goals and my priority tasks, I'll consider putting those requests into the mix later down the line. I love building relationships with these clients, and I love hearing their requests, but I'm also transparent about what realistic deadlines are.

You can't ask someone to do something big and expect it by the next day. The fact of the matter is, I'll probably already have something in my line-up of priorities that I'm handling; meaning I'll probably have other deadlines to meet over someone else's request.

AL: Of course. You're balancing out your work and collaborations to a point where it's manageable.

LG: Collaborations are wonderful, and I often search out for ones that are meaningful, especially for bigger projects. I love seeing these different perspectives, and how we can be doing better, but you also need to take the time to be by yourself, and value what your priorities are.

Why do you consider your line of work a form of art?

LG: I relate to it like an artistic process. Everything I try to do, I bring creative magic to it. I love figuring out what's possible to create, and then creating the steps necessary to make that vision tangible.

It's something I imagine in my head, along with the perspectives of other people. I try to figure out what people are going to feel after they walk away from these projects and events. Art is supposed to make you feel something, help you gain a new perspective, or have a conversation about something you didn't have before. I think events are one of the biggest platforms to do that.

An event can be something as simple as a milestone in your life, like a birthday, or some of the biggest events in the world that change the face of how we do things. Look at Burning Man¹. I've been doing a lot of research on the Burning Man project, and what those organizers have been able to do.

I believe they were able to decommodify the value of money, so there are transactions that occur on gifting terms. Things aren't necessarily paid for over there, but transactions still occur; it's something I'm still trying to fully understand. The fact that they created an environment like that that was agreed upon is amazing. They've created a culture behind what they do for events. To me, that is the epitome of what art tries to do.

AL: You just sent me into a different perspective of what events are.

When you are painting your canvas, what do you hope to achieve?

LG: I see it as this puzzle where I help bring everyone's individual pieces to the big picture; it truly matters to me.

When I'm painting these canvases, what I have in mind is what others want to see. What can they contribute? How can they be involved? I aim to get people involved in the art process of it all.

AL: The way you're speaking about events is so wholesome. It's giving off this kind of Bob Ross energy.

LG: He sees the world in this beautiful perspective, and I try to do that too. I try to help people see the beauty in every detail.

AL: You help people see the intention behind everything, regardless of the size of the event.

LG: I've done a lot of multicultural events, so it's very important for me to take the cultures into account; what their perspectives are and what they want to voice through the event as well. I try to reach out to those representing to be part of the canvas painting process.

What are some difficulties you've experienced in your art form?

LG: Burn out is a big one.

You're going to be working on something for so long and you'll eventually get tired. The best thing I understand to combat this is to never give up. You can take a rest, but you can't give up.

Give yourself the time to rest when you need it. Take a step back and realign why you're doing what you're doing, then get back to it when you're ready. And just remember not to give up. Anything worth having, you'll work hard for it. You may not see the final product right away but you'll get there.

Another thing is working with egos in the community.

You cannot please everyone. I believe, at the end of the day, if you are approaching everything with your best intention, you aren't doing anything to intentionally hurt anyone. The best thing for that is to put yourself out there with the best intentions.

If it doesn't match up that way with other people's egos, then maybe you aren't meant to work with them in that way. Or maybe it's a sign that you're meant to work with other people that align with your vision.

Personally, I try to challenge myself in ways I work with those different kinds of egos. If you try a couple times, and those times aren't working, then there may be other people to work with.

It's not something to burn bridges over, and it's definitely not something I advocate for. Some people have reasons for acting the way they do, and it's completely their choice. Everyone has their own way of approaching things.

AL: At the end of the day, it's your canvas and your art. There will be people that won't understand how you do things, and it may not be the best to help you grow.

LG: And there are many others that align with you, but you just have to be willing to open those doors. Once one door closes, five more open.

Event producing is a stressful career. How do you take care of yourself?

LG: Before, I used to be 51 percent extroverted and 49 percent introverted.

AL: Is it switched now?

LG: It's switched now, but I'm still very much 51/49, with the 51 leaning more towards the introverted side.

The reason I say this is because you really have to understand yourself first. That's why I did the Myers-Briggs test to help me identify my work styles and what makes me tick. It's a lot of self-reflection.

People really need to take the time to be alone with themselves, and figure out what they do and don't need in their lives. There are a lot of people that don't take this time to self-reflect but it is super key if you want to take your growth to the next level.

Part of it is also figuring out how you interact with other people. What are your relationships like with other people? What are they saying to you? Is it true? Is it not? Also realizing how your actions are affecting others.

It's a deeper understanding on how you operate, and how that affects others. Ultimately making changes to better yourself.

My self-care is being able to be alone with my thoughts. I get many emails a day, which throw my mind in different directions, so that's why it's important for me to take time away from that. I need to be away from all of that so I can focus on what I need, and how I can realign.

One of the things I enjoy is going to the spa and being alone. I'm able truly be with my thoughts. I also value taking naps, and writing things down, as my self-care. I also take time for my hobbies.

One is being by the beach, which is my Hawaii side coming out. Being by the beach is very calming for me.

AL: You're essentially doing the things that spark joy, or things that revitalize yourself?

LG: Another fun thing that I do is researching events. Event producing is my full-time job, so I research aspects of all the events around me; there are many things I can learn from each event.

And by research, I try to travel to other events in order to get that inspiration. That's how I found out about the process with Burning Man.

I went to this exhibit in Oakland, and I witnessed what went through it all. Doing things like that helped charge me back up, and it also inspired me to bring those ideas back home.

If you really love something, you'll find other ways to connect to it. For me, it's going to other events, or going to other creative spaces, to see what other communities are able to put forth.

How do you hope to grow as an event producer?

LG: I do these events for the communities that I serve, specifically underserved, and multicultural communities. My growth is tied back to the communities that I serve.

When I feel like they're inspired to do similar work like throwing events or creating their own spaces. I want to be able to do events and have them walk away inspired to host their own events; that's when I'll feel like I've taken it to the next level.

A Writer's Process

Narrative by Jenah Maravilla

You started out with the route of nursing? What made you start, and what made you stop?

Jenah Maravilla: I started off on the career path to nursing because there was this familial pressure. It was something that brought my mom to the States and gave her all she has now. So of course she'll want a life that will give as good, if not better, for me.

With those pure intentions and me being the first-born child, I definitely felt that pressure. I was a little more focused in school, so to me it didn't feel like it would be a huge sacrifice to be on that path. I also wasn't a "dedicated student." School through high school was pretty easy for me. I don't recall there being a difficult time in school, unless it came to math or physics.

Going into nursing, which is prestigious in the eyes of Filipinos, was the easy thing to do. Was it easy to do? No. Ultimately, it was my decision to keep on going. I had failed twice, and that just made me compete with myself even harder. I ended up graduating with honors, summa cum laude.

Afterwards, I worked as an intensive care unit (ICU) nurse, during the night shift, for two years. How I got hired was a "fluke," and by that I mean the person that hired me thought I worked in the ICU for two years. How it works it is in nursing school, the last two years is rotation in the ICU.

It doesn't necessarily mean they were irresponsible for hiring me. I had a mentor, a preceptor, who basically became my second mom. She was my preceptor for about half a year, in ICU, which is not typical for new nurses. Most new nurses weren't as new as I was. It was a prayer answered.

I knew I wanted to be challenged as a nurse, and I knew I didn't want to start off on a regular med floor. I just knew I needed to have that stimulus, otherwise, I'd feel bored of the occupation from the get-go. The learning curve of it all finally made me realize what, "doing my best every day" meant.

In that space, lives are on the line.

I thought nursing school was hard, but nursing itself is much harder. It took so much out of me without fulfilling me that way that I needed. And I was working the night shift.

Working the night shift made it harder to maintain connections outside of work. I would be working when everyone is off, and vice-versa.

AL: Was that aspect pretty draining?

JM: It was physically and mentally draining because it kept me on my toes. It was emotionally draining because of the deaths that I saw. At one point, there was some racism towards me.

There was a patient, who had sundowner syndrome, and he would be very nice during the day, based on the notes I read. Generally, the way load works is that nurses usually get one easy patient and one hard patient; this is to help balance load. It became difficult when both patients were hard.

This patient became very irate, and he would get out of bed without my assistance. There was a time when he called me a “little Hawaiian girl.” It ended up getting to that point where we had to sedate him.

I remember that night vividly because it was the first time I had anyone throw anything racial at me.

The catalyst that shifted shortly happened after I started doing community work with UniPro and Filipino American National Historical Society (FANHS) Houston¹. While I was getting fulfilled doing that kind of work, Hurricane Harvey hit.

If you weren't following the news back then, most of Houston was underwater for about a week. The rains that came after the hurricane were a huge factor because it was steadily pouring. And the water system out in Houston was a shit-show. The city planners pretty much lied about the integrity of the land that people bought, so they could get money.

At the time, my whole hospital flooded. Thankfully none of the patients or nurses were hurt, but they were transferred to a different hospital. I tried that shift at a sister hospital, but there was no orientation. And their paperwork was completely different. I wasn't the only one feeling lost, my co-workers felt the same.

I was just getting my stride in the hospital I was working at, and I was really learning the ropes. When Hurricane Harvey hit, everything changed and I was a new nurse again.

I didn't have a family to feed like the other nurses that were there. It was very low-risk for me to say goodbye now, so that's what I did.

AL: As messed up as it is, do you feel like it came at the right time?

JM: I can see how it's messed up because I can see it as a blessing for me, but I would consider it more of a wake-up call. I was starting to become content with the lifestyle I had.

I do believe in something greater than me. I learned a lot from nursing, and one of those things was learning how to humble myself when it came to what my mom went through as an immigrant nurse. I did not have the same barriers she had, and she flourished. I realized that I wasn't using my God-given talent.

October of the same year, which is Filipino-American History Month², and I was working with Ate Christy (in FANHS). She had a book she was working on (Filipinos in Houston³), and she needed help.

AL: Was this project the catalyst that made you want to write full-time?

JM: I've always wanted to be a writer, but I thought it was just going to be something on the side. I would say Hurricane Harvey was the catalyst for me to quit nursing and focus on something different, and it just so happened that the book was starting.

What was the process of putting together "Filipinos in Houston" with Ate Christy?

JM: Working with Ate Christy felt natural. She was more big picture, and I complemented that by being more detail-oriented.

When it came to hitting all the cornerstones of something of this caliber, she got it. We had meriendas so that the older folks would come out to these restaurants, where they would bring their pictures and talk to each other. It would like a reunion of sorts. And we would scan these photos while they were talking.

This is how we got a bulk of our pictures, and each time was a beautiful thing. It was this picture of new stories being told, and old friends meeting after a long period of time.

In terms of putting together, Arcadia Publishing had very specific requirements per photo. It's a history book, so it needed to be cited as such. Individual photos needed a specific caption length, and same for those of two photos. Each caption is required to have the "who, what, where, when, and why." What's difficult about that is Filipinos don't talk like that when it comes to their pictures.

They'll say things like, "Oh that was Tito Bobby's birthday." And we'll be left wondering what the significance is. We have to really comb it out of them. Some older people were hesitant, which is normal.

You would be too if you were giving someone else your photos. They didn't understand what we were trying to do. In order to remedy that, we would have personal sit-downs with them; even going to their houses.

Arcadia Publishing even wanted full names, and some people were only known by their nicknames. So a lot of the names in the book are nicknames, which is still valid. Once a person has passed, it's a lot more work on us to look them up in city records, while the community only knows them by their nicknames. Which is why we ultimately left the captions with nicknames, mainly for the community.

AL: It's a reality check because I've seen some of the other Images of America books, but I've never really heard of the process putting it together. It seems like such a community effort to put something like this out there.

JM: It was a huge effort to turn out. Ate Christy and I may have put the photos together, but at the end of the day, it's their stories that are being told.

Filipinos in the South are younger. We're only two generations deep because the 1960s is when immigration reform changed the landscape of the South. And that's when all the nurses, teachers, and engineers were pulled into the South. That's already different from the East and West coast, which were primarily blue collar, and much older.

We didn't have as much ground to cover but we had to help these community members realize that it was important to tell their stories. That was hard to do because they thought it was just a little side project.

A lot of people, who were big in the community, actually did not give us photos. And once the book came out, they regretted it.

AL: Because they realized that it was history, and it was something people could learn from.

JM: They didn't realize it was something that would be this official. And now, people are clamouring for a second edition of the book, or one that is specific for the artists in Houston.

I know Ate Christy is excited to do another book, but that's her thing; her passion is history. I came in wanting to learn the process of creating a book. Such as working with the publishing agency, and meeting those specific deadlines. I wanted to learn those lessons, rather than the book being my project.

Ate Christy was president of FANHS Houston, at the time, so history is one of her biggest passions. That's how I give her a lot of credit for how the project moved forward.

AL: It sounds like the skills you had as an ICU nurse translated well with putting this book together. I talk in terms of the detail-oriented nature that you had as a nurse carrying onto this project. It looks like it came full circle.

JM: I didn't realize it at the time, but looking back, it definitely was like that.

It also helped because through the ICU, I was exposed to different generations of people. With the book being centered around an older generation of people, I had to be in a different mindset than I was in something like college. In a college setting, I would tell myself that I couldn't talk to the older generation or I might come off as disrespectful.

My experience being an ICU nurse, and seeing different generations of stories, and walks of life, really humbled me. It really helped me find more relation to other people. Ultimately, reclaiming my kapwa. Although, as a nurse, it did drain me.

It's interesting to see it in two different contexts. While it drained me as a nurse, it helped a lot as someone putting together a project like the book.

What difficulties have you experienced as a writer, and how have you overcome them?

JM: The first difficulty was writing again. As much as I helped Ate Christy with the book, the captions wrote themselves. I didn't necessarily have to do that much creative writing or thinking. And I was also coming back from nursing.

If you combine the years of nursing school and the years I was working, that was a total of seven years of not writing creatively. When I was in high school, I was avid about writing. Since I attended college, I had to buckle down a bit and dive more into scientific literature.

When I started up again, articles were the easiest to come out of me. A lot of it has been poetry, which is based on real life, but it's still creative. I'm getting there, but ultimately, I want to get into long form fiction.

I had short fiction stories back in high school that were part of our literary magazine, and I was so proud of myself. Looking back, I had really good writing; however, all my characterizations were Western and White. And I had to realize that I'm a different person.

Knowing what I know now, in terms of our representation, I want to be better than I was. I want to be able to keep myself accountable in that way. I'm also an overthinker, in the sense that I don't want to misrepresent Filipinos; I don't want to write things that I didn't live through.

For me, it's been a teetering of imposter syndrome. I think it's due to that fact that I don't let myself sit and write, versus thinking about writing. Thankfully I'm signing myself up for more projects and workshops. And making sure that I'm radically vulnerable.

The word "vulnerable" is usually used in a negative context, or in a way that is presumed to be weak. Being radically vulnerable is using vulnerability as something to help us expose our shared humanity. To me, it's another way of showing kapwa; it's the way I expose myself. It's fueling me.

This presidency has shown me that White men can basically do whatever they want, regardless of how incompetent they are; contrasting, I'm hella competent, and I need to just own it.

Those are my personal difficulties, but when it comes to technical difficulties, there's so many. It's so easy to self-publish, but to do it the traditional way, there's so many roadblocks involved. And I'm still discerning whether it's what I want to do or not.

There's certain perks when it comes to approaching a publishing company, and having them do most of the work.

How do you feel about your process of writing and publishing?

AL: I personally like going the solo route because I need more control. For the book that I put out, it was something very personal and I didn't want anyone else to touch it.

I could've gone with a publisher, but I couldn't find one that aligned with my values. Instead, I chose to take it into my own hands.

JM: Totally understand that. I wouldn't consider myself a slow writer but if I had an editor I would produce more.

And that's where I'm coming from when going in that direction, but at the same time, I just need to produce something.

When it comes to freelancing, I'm doing more editing, and writing articles, but a lot of it is East and West coast based.

I can do the work remotely, and I have. I've edited a full manuscript for someone who was about to publish their first article-based memoir; this person was based out of New York, and needed a Filipina editor. I was great at it, and my client loved it. The process was natural for us. Being a Filipina editor, I was able to give a different input than someone from a different ethnicity.

AL: That's wild because that was just a year ago.

JM: It was. And I was incredibly affirmed in my path because someone needed me. It was trying to figure out who were those people that needed me, and will need me.

AL: That thing was one of those moments that made you realize you really wanted to go on this path?

JM: Yes, and especially since all my community work led me to that. It was kind of like a domino effect. Now that the domino effect has stopped, it makes me question what I'm supposed to do.

AL: There's probably another set of dominos, but they just haven't been set up yet.

JM: Most definitely.

This whole experience has gotten me closer to God and my ancestors.

What are the main things that keep you going as a writer?

JM: I recently made an artist statement for the Filipinx Artists of Houston⁵ directory:

As a Filipinx American, moving in a politicized body through different spaces means more than just becoming "Successful".

Maravilla's work centers around the ideas of honoring those that came before, empowering those present, and shifting the conversation to radical vulnerability.

What this looks like in practice is her intentional use of succinct statements that do not sacrifice breadth of emotion. Respecting the complexities of her audience while remaining understandable to those who do not find themselves face to face with literature often, Maravilla hopes that her work does not alienate, but rather, peel back the curtain of everyone's shared humanity (Kapwa, in Tagalog).⁶ (Maravilla, 2020)

What keeps me going is a mix of things that have to do with past, present, and future. I want to do things so that my immigrant parents, who don't read, can understand.

The poetry about my parents, while not the deepest thing I've put together, was definitely for them. They understood it, they loved it and that's all that matters.

AL: It's so wholesome!

JM: I've always wanted my writing to be understandable for our people. And I wish I was more fluent in Tagalog, so I could insert it in how I write.

Going back to my artist statement, being in a politicized body means being a Filipina woman who speaks English, not Tagalog. All the layers of who I am is why I do what I do. It's figuring why I was born in this body; I could've been born a White man, but I wasn't.

AL: You telling your story is enough, and it's so validating to hear. It's so important to hear everyone's individual stories because you may never know who you come across. Or what kind of impact will come out from crossing that person.

JM: I'm in this bible study, hosted by a Greek family, and we were celebrating a graduation dinner. It was weird, because at one point of the evening I found myself really talking to some of the guys in the bible study. And they were so eager to hear what I was talking about.

These were guys of different ethnicities, they were sitting there listening to me talk about the Filipinos in Houston book, and it was a strange place to find myself in.

Keep in mind, this bible study is of all ages. At one point of the night, I found myself speaking about the book and Lumikha, and the guys around me, who were really listening to what I had to say. They were asking a lot of questions, and were engaged.

It felt strange, and I wouldn't have thought that because in my work, I'm mainly exposed to Filipinos. And the community work is mostly women, so it was really interesting to be surrounded by four different guys, that weren't Filipino, that were eagerly listening to what I had to say.

What advice do you have for people that are going down a path of writing?

JM: Don't quit your day job until you have "x" amount of money. I don't know what that means for that person, but for me, I survived off my nursing money for the most part. And that's one of the practical pieces of advice I have.

A metaphorical one is connecting to what one's story is before you go external. I feel like people tend to just "go, go, go," and produce things without learning about themselves. I know for some people, the process is the other way around. But I assure you that things you will produce will be so much richer if it's something you own.

AL: People really need to understand themselves, and do things that they love. If you're just writing all the time, one can be more susceptible to putting in fifty percent of what they can truly produce versus one hundred percent when understanding themselves.

JM: It's also decolonizing the whole capitalistic ideal. I'm personally trying not to feel ashamed of not having a day job, and it's hard.

AL: At the end of the day, you're doing what you want, and that's you really need to ask for.

JM: Yes, but we live in a capitalistic society. I want to be able to sustain myself, and there's where the pressure of a day job comes in as well. It's hard being creative.

At the end of all of this, I'm still a work in progress. I'm not where I picture myself to be, but every day since Hurricane Harvey has been something I've never imagined before.

AL: And now you're growing as this person that you are right now.

JM: It's terrifying, but it's also exciting!

An Adulting Process

Narrative by Rea Sampilo

What got you into doing work with Pilipinx/Pilipinx-American Organizations?

Rea Sampilo: I'm originally from Somerset, New Jersey, and I moved to Texas when I was seventeen. What got me to do work with the Pilipinx/Pilipinx-American community started in my first year of college. I was looking for an outlet to perform

I initially joined PhilSA at Texas A&M. It was more of a social organization, when I first joined, but then I got into performing our folk dances. After performing both modern and cultural dances at GoodPhil¹, I started getting more invested in our culture. I was really curious on how Filipino students, in the South, form their identity within the college space.

This was my first taste of doing work with Filipino organizations, and it eventually got me into graduate school. I realized there wasn't that much discussion about our culture, and doing the research allowed me to dive deeper into my identity. It took me on the path to self-discovery, then UniPro happened.

I'm one of the founding members for Pilipino American Unity for Progress, Texas chapter.

Alfredo Leano: The main aspect for you was wanting to better understand culture?

RS: Yes, and I realized how welcoming our culture is. And being in the university space helped me become more curious, which is why I went to graduate school for performance studies.

While there, I developed a critical lens of what it means to be Filipino-American. Right after grad school, and learning about all these Filipino-American movements on the West Coast, I became a founding member of UniPro Texas.

We really wanted to highlight the Filipino-American experiences and stories in the South because there wasn't space for that here. We realized that these conversations were happening everywhere, once we started. We were a little "late in the game;" however, after three years, we feel like there was this need for dialogue, especially through performance and arts.

How are you able to balance adult life and organizational work?

RS: It's a very difficult process. I'm currently in transition.

Right now, I'm contracted to do some cultural organizing in terms of the arts. And I'm still technically employed under the Contemporary Arts Museum in Houston. So a lot of my

organizing work and my actual work tie in together. At this moment, everything is working out careerwise, as I'm not making any hard switches.

With adulting, being financially stable is an issue, and I'm currently trying to figure that out. I'm trying to find that balance and footing in terms of my work and organizing. Despite that, I'm really excited about this process.

If it wasn't for organizing with my community, I wouldn't have been able to unfold myself as much. I feel that because of this 9-5 lifestyle, and people wanting to attain certain successes, they don't take the time to unpack what it is in themselves. Because of attaining those milestones, they figure out or unpack a little too late that this unfolding process is right here.

I'm taking that time to be really present with myself. And even if I am struggling, I feel like it's healthy for me to know myself entirely. Ultimately pursuing, with force, what I want to do.

AL: I'm personally going through that same process with figuring out this 9-5 lifestyle. Taking time to understand myself is helping a lot in this process.

RS: Absolutely!

In terms of this whole college business, you're required to pick a major and stick through it for four years. There's no sense of leeway, per say. During that time, is it really enough time to know what you want? Then you do your best to get that job or internship, and you're expected to stay, but there's not enough time for exploration.

In my process, it was originally nursing. I guess I put it out into the universe and it helped me question whether this was for me or not. Then it shifted to this current path that life has thrown at me. I told myself that I'm going to explore this path, and not be afraid along the way.

I can do anything I set my mind to, but is this the way I can contribute to my community? I know I'm gifted with certain things, and I want to be able to express that to the max. I don't want to be at a point where I'm tunneling myself in a field where I can't express myself.

What keeps you motivated to do what you do?

RS: It's that hunger to always improve on myself. In doing that, there's always the curiosity of "how can I make this information of Filipino identity accessible to our community?"

With our workshops, that "aha" moment with our audience allows me to keep going. Those reactions that I didn't know before keep me going. Providing them with new ways of

representation and visibility is still unfolding, and I very much want to be part of that whole movement.

AL: At the end of the day, it's helping out this next generation come up.

RS: If you think further down the line, I want my next generation to be proud of who they are. I want them to want to say, "I'm proud to be Filipino/Filipinx." Or if they're half: "I'm proud to be half."

I want them to be able to have pride, but also talk about themselves in a healthy way. Can we dismantle crab mentality, and colonial mentality?

AL: Not sure if this is the right phrasing, but it's not a monolith. There's so much that goes into the work that we do for the future.

RS: And we're on our way. There are amazing scholars and activists having these conversations, and I'm really just excited to be part of this network; and to have it accessible. It was because I was so angry before.

When I was in grad school, I was wondering why my community didn't know about this or have access. Why were we so oblivious to it? How can I get it to you? Were you listening? What is the channel for you to listen, and apply this information? How can we embed the information, I was learning, to our community?

I'm doing all this work for the community, and I need to remember if I'm giving this same information to my own family. How are you keeping that accountability within your immediate family?

What challenges do you face as a young adult?

RS: Balancing things like social energy, cultural aspects, time management, just to name a few. And also keeping in my mental health, and my internal dialogue.

When you're giving a lot externally, you have to make sure you're okay at the end of the day. I'm trying to balance the internal and the external. I'm also trying to maintain a healthy internal dialogue. Instead of telling yourself things like, "you could've done better," you can switch up the words and say, "you need to forgive yourself." I've personally conditioned myself to think in the way of the former instead of the latter.

To remedy it, I've been practicing Ho'oponopono, which is a Hawaiian form of meditation where you create this connection to another person. For me, it's visualizing that inner child, and you're telling it "I'm sorry," and "I love you." It's so you are able to move on and give self love.

This was brought up months ago, but considering the time we're in right now (COVID-19 quarantine), I've been able to revisit it. I feel like there's been more clarity internally, and I'm able to move through my day in a more positive manner because of it. I'm able to honor both sides of myself; the child side that needs play, and the adult side that needs to accomplish something.

Another challenge as a young adult is finances, and considering I'm transition, it's been more under my radar. Even though it is something that's external, it's a challenge I have to face.

What advice do you have for people going through their own adulting process?

RS: Forgive yourself. It's even hard for me to swallow this advice, but you have to learn to forgive yourself. It's not one story, everyone is different. Everyone unfolds in their own way, and they have to be patient throughout their whole process.

My process is never linear, and it's not always structured. Sometimes having no plan is the best plan. You have to be aware that the universe, or God, will throw something your way because it may pivot you in the right direction. It's kind like rolling with punches.

Surround yourself with loving people, like mentors and others that uplift you. In terms of who you surround yourself with, have a mentor, a peer, a coach, and cheerleader. When I look at who I'm surrounded by, I can say I have those people.

I definitely have a mentor. I'm still looking for a coach. I definitely have a peer in Trisha because we sharpen each other, and she's been by my side the longest. And cheerleaders, it's usually my friends, and other people I interact with; I can say I have many cheerleaders.

Restating this idea, you need to tap into your inner child. I feel like that level of creativity allows your life to be more vibrant, and it allows you to express it fully.

To emphasize, and to remember at the end of the day, learn to forgive yourself. Have a growth-based mindset. Surround yourself with loving people. And never forget to tap into your inner child.

A Post-Grad Process

Narrative by Alfredo Leano

“Understanding the process” has been a recurring theme in my life. At the conception of the project, I was a recent college graduate. I had all the freedom in the world, and I felt like I could do anything I wanted. I had full control over my life, and I didn’t have school tying me down. The first thing I had planned after graduation was a trip to New York at the end of May, followed by a trip to Vietnam at the end of June. Both these trips brought me joy, but a huge shift in my life happened when I came back.

When I came back, I was hit by the realization I was jobless, and the income stream I was getting from my financial aid was now gone, and just like everybody in my class, I had to start my journey for financial sustenance. It took about four months from my graduation date to find something stable. Not going to lie, now that I’m looking back at it, four months doesn’t seem too long. I’m thankful that I found a job in such a short amount of time, but the process was torture; it was longest four months I’ve ever had in my life.

The process of looking for a job in post-grad felt endless. I went through multiple interviews, and although I felt confident about each interview I went through, not getting a callback or an email was a really big blow to my confidence. Was I doing something wrong? Were my skills not enough? These were the kinds of questions that were going through my head in the process. And these questions weren’t even half of the struggle.

The struggle I was going through was a financial one. The demand to finish up my program was so great that I couldn’t even have a job during my final year in college, so I had to rely on my savings and the financial aid I was receiving to get me through the year. Now that school was over, the money flow was at a halt, and I was essentially broke for four months. I had to rely on whatever was left in my bank account, and being a capitalist society, money doesn’t stop for anyone. There was a point in this process where I thought there wasn’t a light at the end of the tunnel. It wasn’t until the end of August came an interview that showed me different.

After filling out countless job applications, and failing several, my light at the end of the tunnel came to me when I needed it the most. I interviewed for a company that aligned perfectly with my mission and vision, and I was lucky enough to be onboarded in this space a week after I was interviewed. Fast forwarding to February, the space I’m in has felt like home, and I love everything about it, and I’ve grown so much in the short time I’ve been here. With the love I’ve been given, and all the love I was giving back, I was not prepared for the situation I would be put in next.

At the time of writing this portion, the COVID-19 pandemic has affected the world, causing many people to be jobless, including myself. I'm back in this situation where I'm struggling to make income, and I'm struggling to find a job that fits me. I may find one by the time this launches, but who really knows? I'm not sure how long this will last, but I'm okay with facing the reality of my current situation.

I'm not here to provide some happy ending but I am here to provide a sense of reality. I may be in this situation at the time I'm writing this, but it is a reminder, to myself, that I've struggled like this before, and that struggle was temporary. What I'm going through right now is another part of my process. It's just a temporary bump on my path, and I will get through, just so long as I remind myself that there is a light at the end of the tunnel, and I continue to push myself in that direction.

If there's anything that I've learned from my process, is that things take time. Whatever dream you're pursuing, I encourage you to keep pursuing, but just know that you won't always get results overnight. These overnight successes that you see aren't the reality for everyone, and it may not be yours. The truth is it may take a lot longer for you to achieve what you, and it'll be a bumpy road ahead.

You may experience hardship. You may experience tears, You may experience people leaving you. And you may experience times when you want to give up. These are real feelings that you may experience when you want to achieve your dreams, but I'm here to remind you not to succumb to these situations. You may not know it, but you're stronger than what your situation tells you. This is just another bump in the road.

I will continue to say this again and again, "that bump in the road is temporary." The bump is a temporary reminder to trust your process. It is there to test your remembrance of your trust. And it is also there to teach you something for the rest of your path. What is this bump telling me to remember? What is the bump trying to teach me?

You won't realize it until later down the line, but you'll grow so much from the experiences in your process. You'll look back at that one time you encountered that bump in the road, and you'll realize how small it is compared to the obstacles you're facing now. You'll remember how troublesome those past obstacles were, but you'll also remember how you got past them. And you'll remember how much you've grown, and learned, since then. Then what you're facing in the present won't seem as scary. What you faced was temporary, and what you're facing is now is temporary as well.

Whatever you may be going through, whether it be big or small, you'll make it.
Wherever you are in your process, I promise you'll make it through.

Notes and References

A Sociologist's Process

1. Paulo Freire is a Brazilian educator and philosopher well-known for his book Pedagogy of the Oppressed (1972). See <https://www.freire.org/paulo-freire/>
2. “The Values of Independent Hip-Hop in the Post-Golden Era” is a text by Christopher Vito that focuses on the relationship between Hip-Hop culture and U.S. culture. See <https://www.palgrave.com/gp/book/9783030024802>

A Process in Academia

1. Pin@y Educational Partnerships is an educational program started by Dr. Allyson Tintiangco-Cubales, alongside her students at San Francisco State University. The program focuses on having critical dialogue with students ranging from elementary school all the way to college. The program covers multiple schools in the Bay Area. See <http://www.pepsf.org/about.html>

A B-girl's Process

1. Freestyle Session is an international Hip-Hop event hosted by Chris “Cros1” Wright. Originally hosted in San Diego, the event has expanded to international venues in Korea and Los Angeles. See https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Freestyle_Session
2. Eddie Styles is a bboy based out of San Diego representing Rock So Fresh crew, and was a former member of the Jabbawockeez. See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v-AT7MfTxrw>
3. Dyno Rock is a bboy based out of San Diego representing Cypher City Kings/Cypher State. See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=upfo1BkZWdU>
4. Iron Monkey is a bboy originally from San Diego, representing Rhythm Bugz and Renegades Rockers. See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MFblOvPX6ZI>

5. Beta is a B-Girl based out of Miami and San Francisco She represents Heart Breakerz Crew and Street Masters. See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S2GQFRw1ZBE>
6. Cypher Adikts is a Hip-Hop cypher jam founded by B-Girl Jeskilz of Rocksteady Crew. See https://www.facebook.com/cypher.adikts/?ref=page_internal

A Process of a College Student

1. Texas A&M Philsa is the first Filipino Student Association (FSA) between all the other FSA between the colleges of Texas and Oklahoma. See <https://www.philsa.org/>
2. UniPro Texas is the Texas chapter of Pilipino American Unity for Progress. It was founded on August 31, 2016, and launched on September 23, 2017. See <https://www.unipronow.org/texas>
3. Lumikha is an annual cultural art showcase created by UniPro Texas that started in 2019. See <https://www.unipronow.org/artshowcase2019> and <https://www.unipronow.org/lumikha2020>
4. The Kilusan Workshop Series is an educational platform, created by UniPro Texas, collaborating with multiple Texas universities. See <http://voyagehouston.com/interview/meet-mark-sampelo-rea-sampilo-unipro-texas-pilipino-american-unity-progress-inc-greater-houston/>

An Event Producer's Process

1. The Burning Man Project is a 501(c)(3) based out of San Francisco. The Burning Man Project showcases events based on their Ten Principles of culture. See <https://burningman.org/network/about-us/> and <https://burningman.org/culture/philosophical-center/10-principles/>

A Writer's Process

1. Filipino American National Historical Society (FANHS) Houston is the Houston chapter of FANHS. Their mission is to collect and educate on the Filipino American history of Texas, See <https://fanhshtx.com/>

2. Filipino American History Month was introduced as a month long celebration by FANHS founders Dr. Fred Cordova and Dr. Dorothy Laigo Cordova. Since 1992, October has been referred to as Filipino American History Month. See <http://fanhs-national.org/filam/about/>
3. “Images of America: Filipinos of Houston” is a book put together by Christy Panis Poisot and Jenah Maravilla. The book features images of Houston’s Filipino history from the 20th century to present day. See <https://www.arcadiapublishing.com/Products/9781467129688>
4. Filipinx Artist of Houston is an artist collective founded by Matt Manalo and Bridget Bray during June 2019. The mission is to give voice and space to artists based out of Houston. See <https://fxahouston.org/>
5. Jenah Maravilla. (n.d.). Retrieved from <https://fxahouston.org/directory/jenahmaravilla/>

An Adulting Process

1. GoodPhil is an annual three-day conference and competition originally created by Texas A&M PhilSa. The purpose of this event is to bring together the FSAs from Texas and Oklahoma in the spirit of culture and competition. See <https://www.philsa.org/goodphil>