

## Where is Home?

One day, I spoke my thoughts out loud, “When will I be able to go back home?” A friend commented, “Oh Jackie, wherever you’re living right now is where your home is. Canada is your home.” She was right. I’ve decided to move to this country, so this is my home now. Deep in my mind and heart though, I have a yearning that is difficult to explain.

I am a Filipino immigrant in Canada. I came from the Philippines, an island country of Southeast Asia in the western Pacific Ocean. It is actually an archipelago, consisting of 7,000 and more islands. Poets once call it, “the Pearl of the Orient Seas,” because of its beauty and rich natural resources. Our culture is a mix of traditions we acquired from the Chinese traders, and our colonizers, such as Spain for 300 years and the United States of America for 48 years. The Americans had a very strong influence on our people, hence, English has become our second language. Out of the 110.7 million population of my country of origin, an estimated 12 million of us are living and/or working abroad. You name a country, there are Filipino communities there. In Canada alone, according to recent statistics, there are 901,000 plus Filipinos welcomed here as immigrants, both permanent and temporary residents and some even applied for and gained Canadian citizen status.

Ever since my family and I moved here in 2012, and some of our extended family earlier in the 2000s; the question I get asked most is, “Why did you move to Canada?” Those who were wondering might also be thinking that it is an easy question for me to answer. I take no offense by it, however, explaining the reason for our move entails a long family history of perseverance, as well as economic and financial uncertainties in

the life we left behind. It was not an easy decision to make, leaving our jobs, our aging parents, other family members, and close friends. We came here determined to work harder, aiming to provide a decent life for our children and continue to help and support our family members with their needs back home. Many Filipino workers abroad send 10% and a few even up to almost 50% of their income to families in the Philippines to assist them in various ways. I know of fellow Filipinos here who work 16 to 18 hour shifts a day, moving from one workplace to another in between, not having enough time for rest and sleep, just so they can earn and save enough money.

We are known for holding large celebrations and gatherings. We believe that life events are to be celebrated in a big way if possible, and you may invite the whole community to attend. In Canada, it is our chance to enjoy our food cooked in abundance, to invite and welcome everybody who is willing to join us and experience our culture, as well as to show our support to one another as “kababayan.” The word “kababayan” literally means “fellow from the same town” or for us Filipinos living overseas, it is a special term we use when we see someone of our same skin colour and speak the Filipino language or Tagalog and other Filipino dialects; also for having a common cultural, and to some political, and religious background from the same “bayan” which means town or country.

In my experience here in Swift Current, me and my family, as well as my kababayans are treated with respect, recognized, and appreciated for our presence and contribution to the community in many different ways. We are blessed and grateful. It is heartbreaking to know though, that in our time as I speak, some of our fellow Filipinos and Asians in some parts of Canada and other countries in the world encounter racism

and are victims of hatred and violence intended towards them. I hope and pray that we all treat one another with compassion and love, no matter what the colour of our skin and social status in life are. Again, in Swift Current, we thank you for being kind to us, for making us feel safe and for offering a wonderful life for us to live here.

After almost nine years of residing in Canada, my family and I still miss our home country very much. We will be able to hopefully go back and visit, when this pandemic is all over.