

Proud to be a Filipino

While on the August 30, 2018 Iberian Peninsula Cruise with my wife, Farida, and 21 other medical colleagues and friends, we met a friendly Filipino coffee server by the name of Jaime, a Visayan, on board the Royal Caribbean's Celebrity Eclipse. He relayed to us his humorous encounter with a female passenger from the same region aboard a previous cruise.

Jaime said the woman was talking to a companion in English with a heavy Visayan accent. Eager to meet a fellow "kababayan," he asked if she was from the Philippines. She looked at him with arrogance and disdain, to his surprise and embarrassment, and replied with a firm "No, I only leeve in Tiksas!" (meaning Texas). Jaime moved away laughing inside and wondering why she, who obviously looked like an Asian, unmistakably a Filipina, was ashamed of her heritage, had opted to re-label her DNA "made in Ameereeka," and consciously considered herself a Caucasian, when she could not even pronounce the words "live" and "Texas" properly.

Our group of 23 cracked up and started asking each other every day which "dick" (deck) their cabin or the theater was on and asking Jaime for "coopee" every morning we were at the Ocean View Café main dining hall on the 14th "dick" for breakfast.

While the jest was made only in fun, with no malicious intent whatsoever, since some of the members of our group were from the Visayas, and I, a Tagalog, spent 13 years of my professional life as a proud "adopted son" of Cebu, the sad incident related by Jaime is unfortunately not an isolated case.

Since Farida and I left the Philippines for Chicago on December 31, 1962, for her pediatric training and my cardiac surgery residency also in Chicago and fellowship in Houston, Texas, we have known and heard of several similar sad instances, even among some of our fellow Fil-Am physicians, who were embarrassed to say they were of Filipino heritage.

Today, when Americans meet Filipinos, they almost always presume they are physicians or nurses, etc. The reputation of the Filipinos abroad has evolved in a wonderful way. People in the United States and other major countries do not only respect but like Filipinos, especially by foreigners who had been to the Philippines. We, as a people, have made a good impression and reputation for ourselves around the globe, especially in America.

Countless millions of Americans have been patients of Fil-Am doctors and nurses and other healthcare workers over the past six to seven decades. Americans consider them well-educated, talented, amiable, compassionate, patient, and hardworking.

Since there are more than 10.2 million of Filipinos working overseas (more than 4 million in the USA alone, the second largest immigrants) out of the 112,712,048 total population of the Philippines (2022 report), an article was quoted as saying, "If the Filipinos around the world all left for home, cruise lines, hospitals, nursing homes, casinos, etc., would suffer greatly or be paralyzed."

As a Filipino-American, who looks at the mirror every morning (excellent for curing identity crisis), I never forget that I have Filipino-Chinese blood in me, and no matter how much I have mastered the English language, I am still and will always be a Filipino, who just happens to be also a US citizen. I go to bed at night without any delusion of waking up in the morning and finding a Caucasian looking back at me in the mirror. I am content, secure, and grateful for what the Lord has blessed me with, including this non-Hollywood Tsinoy face of mine. Nothing today, not even plastic surgery, can change our DNA. I do not wish to alter, revise or remodel God's creation of me. I do not want any of my ten young grandchildren not to recognize me or to ask me "What happened to your face Lolo?" Or worse, "We want your old ugly face back, Lolo."

After all, if we seriously think about it, we really have every reason to be proud as Filipinos anywhere we are, in the Philippines or abroad, regardless of our accent.

Even if we are not from "Tiksas".

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