

Duty to Country

Filipino Veterans Recognition and Education Project

Interview Transcript: Pamela Tarectecan

Please Note: Due to a machine-automated transcription process, there are significant errors. The times noted are taken from the unedited audio files and do not match the edited videos.

Pamela Tarectecan [00:00:05] I was born in the United States here in D.C. and then grew up in Maryland, and then I was raised in Hittsville and P.G. County, my parents came from the Philippines and they migrated because of the nurse migration. So they worked at Howard University. And so I grew up here, stayed in Maryland, went to elementary school, high school, college right here, and stayed here ever since. So I haven't really got anywhere else besides for vacation, of course.

Pamela Tarectecan [00:00:38] I have three older brothers and we all grew up here in the United States. So as when they worked for as nurses for a long time in D.C., they eventually became citizens. I like to think that I'm still forming that idea, but it's definitely just a whole nother realm to me, at least, of what it means to be Filipino, because it's like a mixing pot in my head, like you get the experience of trying to be Filipino and experience of trying to be American. And that creates like a whole new identity that Filipino Filipino alone coming from the Philippines just doesn't really, like, match up. And I learned that the hard way kind of for a long time. And so I identify as Filipino American because I realized that I am the mix of both being from the United States and being Filipino, even though I wasn't born there. So it means just connecting two identities and trying to find your way in your place with both of them. At the same time. It's more about like the values really. Like it's the more about the feel of family than the traditions in the Philippines, because being Filipino is so heavy on like the people you're around. And for me, I didn't grow up with any immediate family in my area.

Pamela Tarectecan [00:02:01] So all my family were in the Philippines and in California. So the kind of family I grew up around were family, friends, and we call that barcados here. And so we had traditions of just having parties and having huge food parties and lots of people coming. And we just celebrated like regular holidays. And that you would in the United States. And if there were traditions, it was like going to festivals maybe, and small things like little games that we would play, I guess. And the traditions, the traditional traditions, I guess we would learn would be through the school I used to attend. Mabuhay inc is like a small little school that they tried to teach you past traditions and Philippines. But rather than that growing up, it was very minimal because I think my parents really did want me to just assimilate into what the American life is like. So it was very much just value-based. And in addition, like the religion, like being Catholic is probably the biggest tradition of all. That would be a remnant of what it was like in the Philippines, I think.

Pamela Tarectecan [00:03:21] And it's funny, I didn't really know much about them growing up. I knew that one of my grandfathers was a veteran when I was little. And then as I got through high school and college, I found out the other father was our grandfather was a veteran. So I had two grandfathers. One was on my mom's side from Manila. He

grew up in Elumelu, but he moved to Manila. And then my other grandfather grew up in Pangasinan and in the northern region. And we both families kind of grew up in pretty poor areas. And so my grandfather on my mom's side was a US scout, and when he finished, he actually got a pension from the United States. I asked my parents and they're like, he got a Social Security, he got a pension. And I was like, oh, cool. Did he get his citizenship? And they said, no, he still had to try and apply over the years. And I think up until he died, he was still like trying to apply and stuff like that. And it wasn't until my mom actually and my mom siblings, did they work, did they really get citizenship through, you know, the migrant work visas and stuff like that.

Pamela Tarectecan [00:04:42] And then on my dad's side, he was in and I'm trying to not butcher this, but it's the U.S. A FFE. And I think he was in that and he was supposedly a medic, even though he didn't really study any medicine beforehand, but. He was a medic and he was actually in the Bataan Death March and the story that my dad told me and I grew up with was that he was in the march going on his way to I think it was capacitor back to the camp and he was on his way and then him into other people were like, we're going to escape. We're just going to run. And so they're like, on the count of three, they just ran to the sugar cane fields. And my dad was telling me that, like in the sugar cane fields, they were tall and they had leaves. And apparently sugar cane leaves are like super sharp. So you would like get kites and stuff like that all over. And there are some other people I like after they try to run away who tried to follow. They try to escape too. But of course they didn't make it. But him and these two other were able to escape and had added on the funny story because he always likes to for these stories to it. But he, him and the two other people, one of them didn't know how to swim. So they had to cross the river and they actually had to build a whole raft for this guy, even though they were trying to run away from, I guess, the Japanese soldiers, like they had to still make this raft for this guy to escape. But fortunately, my grandfather made it back.

Pamela Tarectecan [00:06:28] He's my dad said that he lived in the force for a while until he can find his way back. And so that was pretty fortunate because then obviously here so and then I guess for my mom's side, my grandfather was a yoskowitz, so he worked for Intel and helped with them. And so I, I didn't know any of this really until college when and I told you before, but in college I was in my Filipino class that I decided to take and they were talking about this march. And I was like, oh, they did a march. I think my grandfather went through March. And then I was just watching the video and I was like, wait, my grandfather was a soldier in World War Two. And then they showed the whole video of the actual Bataan Death March. And I was just like sitting there watching this video. And I was like, oh, my God, that's what my grandfather went through. And like, nobody had told me my dad would just return me the sugar cane fields story. And it was just such a jaw dropping moment. I remember going home, turning to my dad, and I was like, Dad, did grandfather go through the Bataan Death March? And he was like, yeah, like just very casually. And I was like, why didn't you say anything?

Pamela Tarectecan [00:07:47] Like, this was a huge moment for so many people and like such a huge thing in our history. And he was like, yeah, it happened. And I was like, oh my gosh. And I remember in that class, I, I had decided to actually write a paper about it and interviewing my parents. And really the reason that I think my parents never mention is it's such a sensitive subject. And I learned through it like after trying to interview them and learn more, it was very traumatizing even to my dad, because my grandfather would tell him, like, these are really horrific things that happened during that war. And so for me, for my dad to have to tell me he didn't want to pass on that trauma of like what my grandfather had to do an experience like I guess for us we don't we always want to kind of look on the

bright side. And so we never want to pass that kind of fear of like people and stuff like that, because now we are living a really good life. And it was all because of his effort and we want to focus on that. But knowing that history was just like jaw dropping and I felt such a weird connection to the Philippines because now I knew that, like, this was my history. I'm like two generations connected to it in that's so crazy because there's so many people who who didn't even know like that happened. And I was included in that. And now I do. And I'm actually connected. So I it was crazy. I feel like they mentioned it like one time. Or they would talk about like LaPadula and Magellan and Magellan dying in the Philippines and it'd be like, that's my people. But like no about really like the war. And I think we were like mentioned probably in like a sentence or something like that in the midst of all the wars that were happening, you know, and to hear of like all that happened between the US and the Philippines, he's like, man, there's like so much I missed out on. And like so much, I could have been like proud of if it had just been to mention like a sentence sentence or two or a paragraph just dedicated, just like the Philippines fight with the US, this is what happened. The U.S. took over for the Philippines for these many years. I think that would have been like added to an identity that I never thought I had.

Pamela Tarectecan [00:10:32] Because I think when you think of, like veterans and like you think of soldiers and like everyone who fights in the army, you have like a certain picture in your mind. You don't think of, like, some little Asian Filipino man or like Asian woman or any of those types of people fighting for this country. And like so loyalty like Filipinos, when we're over, like walking down the street, you don't think like, oh, yeah, cool. They like they they are loyal to the U.S., too, or like they contributed to their history and us contributed to the Philippine history. Like I feel like it would add on to the respect of being the Southeast Asian, of knowing that like we contributed to such a huge momentous period of World War to you. Like I feel like it's not clear that we Filipinos had a part of that. And for other people to know that just like gains the respect for the Filipino community because we're more than entertainers or like people who can help in the medical field, like we fight, we fight and we are soldiers and we have a history of being fighters. And it's not known and really like the general Asian-American stereotype as being like such a pushover, like you just if you want this, here you go.

Pamela Tarectecan [00:12:10] But like, really, we we we are fighters and we do all of the stuff and we have fought so long and done so much for the American society that, like, we don't get respected for it a lot of the time, which is kind of sad. And if, like, there's always a running joke of, like nurses in being in hospitals in the US, but like a lot of the time, they still don't get as much respect as they should, even though they were such a foundation for that medical field for so long. And I think like having people know that, I just would add on to that, like I keep saying, like respect and like the idea of us and make us more than the stereotype. I learned it through the class gym doors. He was part of the vets that's program. And then I learned it through General Taguba when he spoke for one of the conferences. And when I joined the bigger community of colleges on the East Coast, like it's called finding, we started trying to promote it, fill vets. Once I heard from General Taguba that it's it's a whole effort. So we started advertising and then we had a gala a couple of years ago where we raised money for it and just adding on to that journey of trying to, like, earn money and fund it. I started learning more from their website, just going to meetings and hearing General Taguba talk and Sonny Booza. And like all those people just talking more and more and trying to work with me as a college student, I started learning more about the program. So it was really great.

Pamela Tarectecan [00:14:00] I feel like I'm I'm giving back to my grandpa because I actually didn't meet him. I was one or two when he died. And so it feels like I'm actually like

connecting back to him and giving back to a conversation that I never got to have with him, you know? And so to really know his history is like talking to him and getting that information from him almost so. And I think I like to think that it brought me and my parents closer because I'm gaining more interest in their past to I want them to know that it's it's their story, too, that we the Philippines under the US. So it's their history also. So just because I'm talking about it as if it's Filipino history, I think it's everybody's history. So it's so many people are working so hard to just find their own identity as Filipino Americans. I think that like reaching to their past and looking at their history. Just adds like helps them along, would help them if they they started trying to look towards that, to start asking their parents, like, what is our history and what is that? Because I realized it's a two way street. No one's going to tell you. You have to look for it, too. So at some point, if you're trying to find your identity of who you are, sometimes the answers in the past.