



## **Lakbayin (lahk-buy-IHN)**

### **v. Journey, travel**

I come from the “Pearl of the Orient”, Philippines, an archipelago of more than 7,000 islands. A beautiful tropical country boasting of breathtaking landscapes, majestic volcanoes, powder fine white sand beaches and crystal clear waters. A country whose people had an advanced script (*Baybayin*) dating as far back as the year 900 C.E. But more than all these, a country with warm people and old fashioned hospitality. I was born in the province of Isabela, located in the Cagayan Valley region in Luzon. It is primarily an agricultural province (known as the rice granary of the Philippines, the second largest in the country). I have very fond memories at my grandparents’ farm, climbing trees and picking fresh fruits (guavas, *chico*, tamarind) off them. Our family, a brood of seven settled in Quezon City. And this is what I came to call our home. Adjoining Manila, it is chiefly residential save for some textile industry. Thus, my siblings and I grew up in spacious parks, tree-lined boulevards, and lots of commercial areas yet we get to enjoy summers in Isabela.

My journey to America started long before I physically set foot in the country. With children’s books not easily accessible, I read my Dad’s TIME magazine and Reader’s Digest as well as my Mom’s MOD magazine (similar to LHM) regularly in grade school. In those printed pages, I’ve taken a glimpse of life in the United States. With our first Sony portable 13” black and white TV set, to our upgraded bigger and colored TV in the late 70s, I’ve seen some reel and real happenings in the 50 states. Coming to America was not something I dreamt of. I knew of Laura Ingalls Wilder, Helen Keller, JFK, Lynda Carter, and the Six Million Dollar Man. I had a preconceived notion of the Smiths and the Joneses. Apple pie, equality, snow, Independence, New York, Harvard, autumn, freedom of speech and Boston, these were key words in our household.

I wanted to be a journalist, but the Filipino culture dictated that a dutiful daughter abide by her parents’ wishes. “Be a nurse so you can go to America” my father declared and my future’s been mapped out for me. I completed my Bachelor of Science degree in Nursing, worked for a year in Manila and chose to go to New England. On a chilly morning in March 1989, eleven other Filipino nurses arrived in Boston along with me. I was 22 years old, excited and eager to begin a great adventure. I immediately loved my “new home”. The apartment I stayed at was only a T ride to downtown Boston. Along the green line, between BU and BC, I rubbed elbows with a diverse student population. I worked well with other healthcare providers from different ethnic backgrounds. My first Thanksgiving Day was also the same day I first experienced snowfall. Fun, cold, beautiful and what? We have to shovel the walkway? Calendar photos of winter wonderland did not hint that such beauty involved so much work. I discovered that I liked cranberry juice. I met Joseph Bolandrina, December that year at the Wang Center, on a

date with my girlfriends to watch the Nutcracker Suite. There were no typical Smiths or Joneses in my circle. Learning to make dishes from ingredients available at Chinatown quickly solved missing Filipino cuisine. Words are insufficient to describe the explosion of fall colors. My long distance phone bill challenged what I would have paid for monthly rent had free housing not been one of my job benefits. I survived skating at the Garden! One can pick what the heart desires, strawberries, pumpkins, and apples, even cut your own Christmas tree.

Seemed just like yesterday but seventeen years have quickly flown by. I live a charmed life with a loving husband and two plus two children. We have a comfortable home close to nature, a pond in the backyard, some horse farms nearby and a blueberry farm. We attend cultural events and adhere to environmentally friendly way of life (we compost, we recycle.) We are creating memorable experiences in what our family of six now calls home in the Blackstone River Valley.



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