2023 Art on Market Street
Rina Ayuyang
FINDING FILIPINO on Kearny St.

Walked up Kearny all the way to Jackson to go to the Komiks Expo at the International Hotel Manilatown Center -- more widely known as I-Hotel.

Wow, is this an original Alfredo Alcala?

This building is practically the last remnant of the neighborhood once known as Manilatown which in its heyday stretched for 10 blocks right next to Chinatown.

There's so much history of an entire community within its walls.

It's been the home to many Filipinos who came to the U.S. as far back as 100 years ago.

In 1977, its tenants were forcibly evicted and the building was demolished to make room for a parking lot. It took community organizing and activism to reclaim and rebuild I-Hotel in its current iteration.

I think about the Filipinos who lived in this neighborhood in the 20s-30s. Did they dare to dream that their grandkids would someday get to call Manilatown their home too?

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FINDING FILIPINO in the Park

Victoria "Vickie" Manalo Draves was born in South of Market.

Her father was Filipino and her mother was English, because of their inter-racial marriage, their family encountered much discrimination.

She was introduced to diving at age 16.

Since she was Filipino, Vicki had to train at segregated swimming pools in the city.

In fact, she is the first Asian American to win gold in any Olympics, and the first woman to win both springboard and platform diving events.

Her strength, determination, and perseverance led her to two gold medals at the 1948 London Olympic Games.

My family are sports fans, and whenever we discover that an athlete is Filipino, we immediately feel empowered and inspired.

It is exciting to see us represented in an industry that you typically don’t see Filipinos (especially in the States).

I think of my teenage nephew who participates in local basketball and baseball leagues in the city...

On Folsom and Sterman streets, you can visit the Victoria Manalo Draves Park.

...and how an opportunity to make it to the NBA, major leagues, or the Olympics doesn’t have to be a fantasy.

It's right next to the Besse Carmichael School, named after the principal of the former Franklin Elementary School, which Vicki and her sister attended in their youth. Besse Carmichael School is also the home of the Filipino Educational Center.

The center was founded in the 70's to help newly immigrated Filipino kids learn English, and get acclimated to life in America.

Today, the center which Vicki advocated for, lets students learn tagalog and Filipino culture, while giving them a chance to make their dreams a reality.

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During the dot-com days, I would take the old 101 bus to get to my job at a software startup on 2nd Street. I would walk over to South Park for lunch.

This tiny circle of green has been here over 170 years, but is now nestled between slender towers of steel, concrete, and glass.

There is a building quietly nestled between a crowded Cap and restaurant both frequented by engineers who work for the software and web design agencies nearby.

The building once had an iron gate and art-deco style because that always stood out to me.

The letters, gleaming from the noon day sun, stoically marked the entrance of a Filipino community that made its home here since the 1930s.

Because Filipinos were barred from buying houses, Filipino merchant families rented and eventually bought the building as a hotel to live near their jobs.

Their Masonic Temple across the park was used for meetings, cultural celebrations, and for harboring their community. It was the first Filipino Masonic Lodge in the United States.

Through the years and the endless rush hour traffic, surrounding them, they have been able to keep this tiny block of San Francisco their home...

...even as tech companies and trendy businesses come and go, and the neighborhood constantly changes around them.
ON I-101, YOU CAN SEE A HUGE MURAL CASCADING ALONG THE SIDE OF A TALL APARTMENT BUILDING.

IT'S LIKE A BEACON MARKING THE EXISTENCE OF THE FILIPINO COMMUNITY IN SOUTH OF MARKET.

WHO WERE THESE FIGURES DEPICTED ON THE CONCRETE WALLS?

BETWEEN FREeway ON-RAMPS AND CONVENTION CENTERS, SOMA FILIPINAS RECLAIMS A PIECE OF FILIPINO EXISTENCE IN THE HEART OF THE CITY.

AT THE FOOT OF THE BUILDING, THE BLOCK OF STREETS ARE RENAMED AFTER REVOLUTIONARY HEROES.

AS THE EYES OF THOSE WHO CAME BEFORE LOOK DOWN ON THEM.

THEY CONTINUE THE STORY THROUGH ART, MUSIC, DANCE, AND WRITING.

SAYING, "HERE WE ARE. HERE WE THRIVE. HERE WE STAY."
MISSION ST. STRETCHES FROM DOWNTOWN TO NEIGHBORING DALY CITY AND THERE ARE GLIMPSES OF FILIPINO NEIGHBORHOODS ALONG THE WAY.

MOVIE THEATERS IN THE EXCELSIOR DISTRICT LIKE THE GRAMADA AND AMAZON THEATERS SHOWED POPULAR FILIPINO FILMS IN THE 70's AND 80's. THE AMAZON THEATER WAS NAMED THE APOLLO THEN. IT'S NOW A WALKER THEATER, BUT PIECES OF THE OLD MARQUEE STILL PEER THROUGH.

WHEN MY PARENTS ARRIVED IN AMERICA, THEY STAYED AT THEIR AUNTIE'S APARTMENT ON MISSION. EVERY MORNING, MY MOM WOULD SEE MY DAD WALK TO THE 14 BUS STOP FOR WORK.

MY MOM WAS PREGNANT WITH MY OLDER SISTER AND WENT TO THE MISSION BRANCH LIBRARY TO STUDY FOR HER COURSES.

DECADES LATER, MY MOM IS NOW A LOLA (GRANDMOTHER), STILL ENJOYING THE COMFORTS OF HOME FROM THE VARIOUS FILIPINO BUSINESSES ON MISSION STREET.

THOUGH SOME OF THEM HAVE MOVED AWAY OR JUST CLEARED IT A DAY, THEY HAVE MADE THEIR MARK IN THE VIBRANT, THRIVING THOROUGHFARE.
Many moons ago, I went to San Francisco State University. Everyday I would sit at the S.F. State Muni stop under the metal roof shaped like a dragon. I was always lost in my thoughts, waiting for the M Train to arrive.

I got to take classes alongside other Filipino students who wanted to know more about their history, culture, and heritage. I was introduced to authors and artists who embraced being Asian and Filipino.

In Our Image

- Strangers from a Different Shore
- Asians in America
- America is in the Heart
- Making Waves

Here, I learned that I was more than a "model minority". That I could be an artist, a writer, an athlete... anything I wanted to be.

On Strike!

These classes would have never been available without the work of the Black Students Union and the Third World Liberation Front protesting for a college that truly represented and served the city's diverse population.

They led a student strike that lasted for five months, the longest at any college. Their perseverance led to the creation of a Black Studies Program and the first ever college of Ethnic Studies in the nation.

Nowadays, students can get lost in their thoughts right outside the Ethnic Studies Building, admiring "The Garden of Remembrance," designed by Ruth Asawa.

At the Cesar Chavez Student Center, they can look at the many murals for inspiration. Each one commemorates groups that came together to fight for social change and educational reforms that would impact the rest of the country.
WHENEVER WE'D VISIT SAN FRANCISCO, WE WERE ALWAYS INVITED FOR DINNER AT OUR AUNTIES' HOME NEAR GEARY.

ALL I KNEW WAS THAT MY AUNTIES MADE THE MOST UNFORGETTABLE FILIPINO MEALS, AND THEY HAD A DOG NAMED CUGAT, NAMED AFTER THE BIG BAND LEADER.

WHAT I DIDN'T KNOW WAS THAT THEIR HOME WAS A HUB FOR MANY RELATIVES JUST ARRIVING FROM THE PHILIPPINES.

MANY FILIPINOS CREATED INFORMAL SOCIAL CLUBS TO HELP RELATIVES AND FRIENDS GET ACCLIMATED TO LIFE IN AMERICA BOTH SOCIALLY AND FINANCIALLY.

MANY GAMES OF MAHJONG WERE PLAYED.

AND MANY DINNER PARTIES REQUIRED FOR YEARS TO COME.

THIS CONTINUED INTO THE 1970'S DURING THE FOURTH WAVE WHICH INCLUDED MY PARENTS. THEY CREDIT MY AUNTIES FOR MAKING THEIR BEGINNINGS IN THE BAY AREA LESS LONELY AND INTIMIDATING.

FOR OUR FAMILY, SUCH A SUPPORT NETWORK STARTED IN THE 1960'S DURING THE 2ND WAVE OF FILIPINO IMMIGRATION INTO THE U.S.

100 YEARS LATER, THE HOUSE IS PROBABLY A BIT MORE QUIET NOW.

...BUT PERHAPS THERE IS STILL THE FAINT WHISPER OF GENERATIONS PAST REVERBERATING THROUGH ITS WALLS.
Every year, the Filipino community converges on Yerba Buena Gardens for Pistahan to celebrate our culture and history. Filipino businesses, community organizations, artists, musicians, and food vendors participate in the festivities.

The first Pistahan was in 1994.

Coincidentally, that was the first year I attended Pistahan. I was fresh out of high school, and had just moved from a suburb in Pennsylvania.

Is that Jose Rizal?

The simple act of eating Filipino food outside of my house or cooked by someone who wasn’t my relative was thrilling!

In fact, it was the first Filipino festival I attended ever in my life.

Just to see anything and everything Filipino in the spotlight was empowering.

Today it is not lost on me that thousands of Filipinos were displaced to make room for this venue where we come to celebrate our very existence.

But Filipino festivals like Pistahan remind us of the community that came before and motivate us to make our presence felt more than ever.
Finding Filipino in the Fi Di

When I was a kid, the only time I saw a Filipino Parol was when my dad decided to make one out of the blue. It was definitely a lot of work, but the end product was amazing and stood majestically on our porch next to the Santa decorations.

San Franciscans are lucky! They get a chance to see parols and learn how to make them at the Parol Lantern Festival every year.

It's one way, especially during the holidays, that Filipinos hold onto and treasure traditions to bridge the two countries that they call home.

Even though Filipino immigrants have made a new life in America, they never forget about family back in the Philippines.

This reminds me of my dad's process for packing balikbayan boxes for our cousins in the Philippines.

Hurry! Tell me what you finally decide.

Hi, bub!

And then I think about the times I'd meet my dad and mom for lunch at the International Food Court on Bush Street.

There was a Filipino food stand and of course they had the most amazing Chicken Adobo.

Pareho pa rin.

My dad would always strike up a conversation with the cook/joiner, as if they were cousins too.

I realize that home is where you make it, and as long as Filipinos nurture a sense of community in this city, then the feeling of home will never be far away.

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