

My Story

By Tanya Uy
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At times, people try to be someone they are not just to "fit in", forgetting who they really are. When I lean towards that path of pretending, I feel guilty of lying to myself. Then I stop and look around at my surroundings and realize what makes me, well ME. Amongst my friends and classmates, I am one of the very few born in different countries. My background contrasts with those of most people at school. At times there seems to be a barrier between others and myself when communicating. Despite the differences and the fact that Terrace is not a big town, I have managed to keep myself entertained. In a small town, I find it easier to embrace diversity and for the community to be more connected with each other.

Al Ain, United Arab Emirates was my birthplace; it's in the Middle East. Out of the 15 years my parents spent there working, I only spent about four continuous years living with them. During a visit to my parents' origin country, the Philippines, I found the thought of staying there with one of my grandma appealing. So I was left behind at four years old and 2 years later my three-year-old second sister followed. For 3 more years, both of us grew up there surrounded with many relatives and only saw our parents and youngest sister at least once a year during our annual school vacation visits to Al Ain. The last few months of the year 2000 were spent getting together as a family to live in Canada. We lived with one of my mom's aunts in the Lower Mainland for a year and a half. Our visas were expiring, deportation might have been the next step for us, my mom could not find a job as a nurse, and my dad had trouble getting a full time job related to his area of expertise, civil engineering. When my mom heard of Terrace, it was the sound of hope for our family. Within a month, we were already moving into town. We moved around town a few times, but since we bought our own house, I think we are here to stay for a long time.

Though now I live in Canada and a Canadian Citizen, I am still a Filipina with a quarter Chinese background from my dad's dad. I carry my mom's Filipino maiden name and my dad's Chinese last name. Who knew two letters could be a mouthful? Well, a mouthful when repeated many times while trying to pronounce it correctly. It's fair even if it comes out completely wrong making up for the trouble I have pronouncing simple English words comfortably. Even the word "comfortable" I can't say comfortably. When I talk, I have to think hard to try and make myself clear. Words just pour out, sometimes with no meaning at all. Everybody else just nods and smiles. With many ways of communicating, smiling is one of my favourite. Facial expressions tell so much about a person, along with body language.

So when I start running out of words, I'll just smile back. That takes care of whatever barrier there was, unless something important has to be explained, like Physics.

Friends of mine from the Lower Mainland have asked what people do around here for fun. There may not be a gigantic mall, Famous Players, or other architecture belonging in big cities, but there are people enclosed by mountains. For me, it's the community that appealing in Terrace. Small communities have more of a chance to come together. Wherever I go around town, I always see someone with a familiar face and this provides me a sense of security like a blanket for a baby. There are always friends willing to give one another a ride on a rainy day. For the many rainy days in Terrace, I have been blessed with many friends. Most of the time I may not be understood but I have spent fun, countless hours spending time with friends studying, working, practicing music for recitals and Music Festivals, watching movies, growing together in faith, and hiking some mountains here in the Northwest. Other than the shared times with friends, I have shared a part of the Filipino culture by performing some of Philippines' cultural dances during the annual Filipino-Canadian Association Dinner and Dance and serving coolers of rice noodles at the Farmer's Market. Sharing cultures with each other in this community is effortless and entertaining.

Portion of past math blocks was used up explaining to some friends about where I come from. May this provide those who are still confused something to keep referring to and a reminder to those who haven't already realised the diversity in Terrace. I am only one person coming from only one of the many cultures here. Why would I change myself to fit in when I am already a part of diversity? Within this town, I have gotten to know my strengths and weaknesses and instead of changing to fit in, I am changing to be a better person. My goal: to make my corner of the world a little brighter. To my family and friends, to broken barriers, to the mountains and the community, to diversity, and to the hope of Terrace becoming an even more united society, I smile.