

Where I'm From

“It was like paradise,” my grandmother said as I asked her what she thought of her hometown. That alone was enough to make her smile. As a person, lola, which is the Filipino word for grandmother, serves as my source of motivation. She inspired me to be honest and true to myself every time she tells me bits and pieces of her story as I grow up. I learnt everything from her, whether it be old traditions, beliefs, and any advice she gives. I am glad I got to experience those times and felt a sense of nostalgia while interviewing her since it helped me understand more about our family's history. We have a story that may seem common, but lola made it unique. She made countless sacrifices at such an early age, but her biggest sacrifice was leaving her hometown to move to my birthplace, where she now resides.

Her hometown was a place filled with everything she knew about. It is called Iloilo City, a beautiful place where everyone knew each other. She had many memories about what her daily activities were as a child. She liked fishing. She would go after school near her house to a lake where she could catch mudfish or catfish. When she moved to Palawan, she felt out of place, which was completely

normal. Her parents, my great grandparents, became busy on the farm. They had to work extra hard to settle down properly which left lola to take care of her younger siblings. She was the eldest of the eight children and that big responsibility rested upon her. Lola was in her teens at the time and was forced to mature early by the situation. "I had to cook food for us as the eldest child in the family and take care of my younger siblings," said lola. She never finished high school because of this, and because of financial problems, but she had no regrets.

"In the past, life was extremely hard. 5 cents were my school lunch money, which was not bad at the time as I could buy enough food for a small meal but sometimes there is none," lola said. My great grandparents did every work they possibly could. Farming became their biggest source of income while doing a variety of side jobs like a *sari-sari* store, sewing clothes, taking care of animals, and other things. As the time passed, they slowly rose from poverty, which she was thankful for. She learned a lot growing up in a new place to call home. "It was all God's plan for me, I just know it," she says.

Our family is a strong and devoted Roman Catholic. It is what helped her through life. She learnt many important lessons as she grew older. "Be fearful of God" or "always be respectful and prudent, that is what helps you through life." These words were her motto, it gave her strength which is why she teaches her children and grandchildren to always be grateful and not be greedy. Because of this, she met my grandfather, lolo. "It was love at first sight," she says. When they got married, my great grandfather leant them a female cow as a start since they had no money. My lolo worked extremely hard to provide for the family he built with my lola. He went from having almost nothing to possessing sizable farming land. Lolo became well-known in their community for all that he had accomplished. It was admirable.

If she had stayed in her hometown, she would have kept on living close to where the rest of her friends and relatives were. Lola would have finished her education. She would not have met lolo. I would not exist, and so would the rest of my family. There are so many what ifs that she has pondered a lot of times, but she is happy with the choices that led her to where she is today despite the many obstacles she faced along the way. "We made a lot of friends, and this is home for

me,” lola says. Her hometown will always be a part of her, and she will always cherish all the memories she created while living there but she is happy where she is right now.

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