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PATRIA RIVERA

LANDING AND ARRIVAL: A map of no return

1 The ugly face of fear

Fear drove us out of our homeland. The constant, nagging fear that on any day, at any hour, some frenzied military soldier would put the whole country on hold, declare a mini-coup, forever shatter the fragile peace we knew under the Marcos dictatorship. Marcos had placed the Philippines under the dragnet of martial rule on September 21, 1972, ostensibly “to keep the peace.” Proclamation 1081 suspended civil rights and imposed military authority in the country. The directive effectively barred mass demonstrations and rallies against the regime’s inaction to ease poverty in cities and on farms, improve abject working conditions, and end corruption in the government. The military incarcerated labour, farm, and student leaders who led mass protests on the streets of Manila and in other parts of the country. Although the government was ousted from power after two decades, when protest masses and mass rallies in the mid-1980s galvanized effective opposition to the government, the country continued to experience only restive peace.

That was the point at which my husband and I decided we could not live with any more uncertainty. Our four daughters were growing up; we did not want them to suffer and live the rest of their lives knowing the ugly face of fear. We would move to Canada.

2 Six suitcases and a map of no return

Six suitcases. My husband Joe and I decided we needed just six suitcases to emigrate from the Philippines in the summer of 1987. Although staff at the Canadian Embassy in Makati, the financial and commercial hub in Metro Manila, said we could send over household items and furniture free

of freightage, we opted to travel light. Our journey would be a clean break. No baggage from the past. Just our clothes, shoes, and some money in the bank to tide us over in the first few months.

We had earlier sold our house so there would be no home to go back to. We were homeless and property-less now. It would be with a certain sense of premonition and irony that 1987 also inaugurated the International Year of Shelter for the Homeless, since we would begin our first day in our adopted country without a home, without any next of kin, and just the shirts on our backs. At the same time, we were heartened that, at the beginning of the year, astronomers at the University of California took first sight of the birth of a galaxy. We had bought one-way tickets only. There was neither a looking back nor a going back.

Six suitcases. One each for me and my husband. One each for our daughters — Jenny, Kim, Isobel, and Rani. Our two older daughters were in their teens, fourteen and thirteen, and our two younger ones, eight and six. How do you leave a past lived for more than thirty years in a suitcase? How do you determine which item or belonging to keep? Or which memento or memorabilia mean the most to you and your family? Our decisions were fraught with risks and uncertainty but were founded on what we knew we wanted most for our family: some peace of mind. A good education for our children. A family life centred on simplicity. Although my husband and I were both gainfully employed and enjoyed thriving careers in Manila, our lives were forever on the brink of the next coup or the next bombing or prey to any and all of the stresses and dislocations that seethed and frothed over the cities and towns, small and big, in our old country.

In January 1987, government forces fired at a group of farmers on their way to Malacañang Palace in Manila to protest the lack of government action on land reform. In June, seventeen civilians suspected to be members of a rebel group were reported to have been killed by army soldiers in Lupao, a town near the foot of the Caraballo Mountains in Nueva Ecija. We chose to follow the map to the Door of No Return, a map that navigated rivers, mountains, and oceans ten thousand miles away from where our home once stood. We left our homeland with its storied 7,641 islands, a cacophony of voices and cultures that spoke in 186 languages (two of them now dead), a

diverse flora and fauna, and the uncertain dangers of the Pacific Ring of Fire making it vulnerable to typhoons and earthquakes.

In January 1987, Frobisher Bay, in the Northwest Territories, changed its name to Iqaluit. Iqaluit is now the capital of Nunavut, the newest, largest, and most northerly territory of Canada. On June 30, Canada introduced its one-dollar coin, which locals quickly nicknamed the “Loonie.” By early July of that year, we had said our goodbyes to siblings and their children and close relatives and friends. It was like experiencing a death in the family. My parents had died within a year of each other: my father in 1985, my mother in 1986. Joe had lost both his parents years earlier. They had been our anchors. Their loss meant breakage from our roots, our past. We felt like orphans needing to heal. We were saddened but determined, and ready to leave. For good.

3 Landing

On July 31, 1987, we landed in Vancouver, British Columbia, where our immigration papers were stamped at the airport. Earlier, we had asked friends in Toronto to help us find an apartment, but it was suggested we look for a place to live after we’d arrived. Once in Toronto, we stayed at a hotel in Don Mills and spent four days searching, but we were fortunate to find a place right away and settled in a three-bedroom townhouse in the Finch and Leslie area.

The small townhouse on Thorny Vineway in Willowdale overlooked a children’s park. It was also close to St. Timothy’s Catholic School, where we promptly enrolled our children. At the time of our arrival, the school was in the process of registering new students. It had been a fine, sunny, and breezy summer, so the children did not have a tough time adjusting to life in Toronto.

We planned our move like clockwork: house, school, work, in that order. We came a month early to allow our children to adjust to the weather and to life in a new country. We did not want any surprises. Our goal was to blend in as smoothly as possible. And we did. Our empty apartment soon filled as we went bargain hunting for furniture, kitchen appliances and utensils, fall and winter clothes and boots. Before Zellers and Winners and The Bay, there were the BiWay and Simpson’s department stores. We would scan the sales ads in the dailies and got what we needed as the seasons changed.

At school, our youngest, Rani, who had kept mum and just quietly observed her new surroundings, was abruptly hustled into an English as a Second Language (ESL) class. As soon as her teacher heard her speak the next day, however, she was promptly upgraded to the grade one class. “Why didn’t you tell me you could speak English?” her teacher asked with concern. “Because you never asked,” our tiny tyrant quickly replied.

When we moved to another townhouse a year later, our children responded to the new situation in the best way they could. There was no house help or aunts and uncles around to assist with errands and chores. The kids learned to help with the dishes, the cooking, the laundry, and the house cleanup. Initially, it was challenging. Getting up early to head to school in the middle of winter when they wanted sleep and a warm bed. Doing chores in addition to school work and assignments. Fending for themselves while my husband and I were at work at low-paying jobs.

After two years of struggling with humdrum administrative work because he did not have any vaunted “Canadian experience,” my husband decided to go to law school and etch out a new career.

Like most immigrants chasing a dream, we wanted careers we had trained for at university. A job commensurate with our education and work experience. Or if it were not yet achievable because we did not have the requisite Canadian experience, a job just a few notches below what mainstream Canadians would be hired to do. We did not want to think that our skin colour defined us when employers looked at job candidates. We were optimistic that future employers would see beyond what was visible and hear beyond the sounds of our cacophonous and accented voices.

In truth, we were given a modicum of leverage and provided opportunities to vie for employment that typical newcomers would have a challenging time with. I was hired as a telemarketer within two weeks of our landing in Toronto. Since I was still converting dollars into pesos, I felt elated that I was earning eleven dollars when the minimum wage was eight. And when I did find more stable work as a junior reporter for a national religious newspaper, my first real job just two months into my time in the country, I was ecstatic. Of course, I never let on that only four months earlier I had a driver, a secretary, and an office staff three times larger than my then employer.

Early on, the managing editor of a big Toronto newspaper whom I had written to asking for advice on how to get a start as a journalist had generously written back: “Try to get into a local paper first. That is where you will get your Canadian experience.” I still thank him to this day, for giving me the time of day to “get real,” to get my feet back on the ground. For what was real at that time was immigrant medical doctors selling insurance policies or working as orderlies in hospitals. Or PhD-holders, chemists, and engineers driving taxicabs. Or accountants taking orders for takeout. Or architects sorting merchandise in department stores. Or nurses and pharmacists tending to the elderly as caregivers. You name a service job or a low-income occupation, and there is an immigrant or newcomer in Canada, formerly a professional in their country, ready, able, and more than willing to grab and fill it.

4 First job

Before I went job hunting, I went to the University of Toronto to have my educational achievements evaluated and credentialed. I still have that certificate to this day. A document certifying that my four years of university education in journalism from the University of the Philippines and two years in graduate communication studies from the same university was the equivalent of a bachelor’s degree in Canada.

At first, I prepared a concise resumé for prospective employers with my real education and work experience. Soon, I began to realize that requests for interviews were almost non-existent. However, as soon as I downgraded my work experience and education to fulfill the basic education and work experience needed for the job advertised, I had more request-for-interview responses. To get hired, one needed to hide what one was worth. Otherwise, no employer would give me the opportunity to compete for a job. With zero Canadian experience, the best entry to the Canadian job market was to enter at the lowest level of the position one wanted.

With four daughters to raise and Joe having trouble finding a part-time job (even with his extensive education and work experience), I decided to apply as a junior reporter at a Canadian national religious newspaper. Just like my first temp position that gave me unbounded joy, working in journalism again, even at the lowest rung on the ladder, was heaven-sent. To keep me

abreast of world events, our managing editor assigned me to rewrite news stories churned out by the hourly news feed from the Catholic News Service based in Washington, DC. Then she began assigning me to cover local news. Six months later, I was upgraded to national news. I interviewed church leaders and church workers — bishops and cardinals, priests and sisters and lay people. And when the news crossed boundaries, even Members of Parliament, business and political leaders, professors and researchers, social and community leaders of every stripe and colour.

My beats and reportorial assignments became my Canadian Education 101. If I needed to draft a story, deep-digging research and interviews became de rigeur. Since our newspaper covered the whole breadth and length of Canada, from east to west as well as the Canadian North, the twelve provinces and territories became a template that opened my eyes to the reality of a nation as vast and as varied as the four seasons and the peoples that lived, struggled, and thrived in it. Even as I wrote stories about the faith life of Canadians, I was also immersed in social justice issues and the struggles of immigrant workers and labourers in the Canadian workplace: from miners and transient service and migrant workers in the Prairies to domestic workers in homes and migrant men and women working in farms, factories, meat- and fish-packing plants, and service industries.

5 Family life

My family settled into a pattern as we tried to establish a new life in Canada. We would find a habitual rhythm to our inchoate and tenuous existence, like the Kellogg's "The best to you each morning" slogan from 1958 that I first encountered when I was nine and in grade three.

This became the lore and legend of our lives:

On weekdays, breakfast-in-a-hurry, and lunch and dinner cobbled from two tins of sardines, some veggies, or a quick casserole.

Also, help with homework, clothes and school snacks prepared for the following day. On Friday nights, laundry and some ironing, if needed. On weekends, off to Knob Hill Farms in Markham to get the cheapest groceries, fruits, and vegetables.

Sundays were reserved for church.

Early on, we taught the girls easy bed-making tricks.

Fluff the pillows.

Take off and tuck in a loose bedsheet.

Tidy up the bedskirt.

Add another sheet and cover the bed with a duvet. Also,

Dust.

Polish.

Scrub.

Sweep.

Mop.

Vacuum.

Clean the bathroom. Understand the basics about laundry and household cleaning chemicals, detergents, air fresheners, and cleaning liquids. In a way, we were mimicking the every-day-as-regular-as-clockwork chores of compatriots whose duty it was to work for, serve, and wait on others. Towel-offering house cleaners in resorts and spas.

Coffee-serving baristas.

Cocktail-serving bartenders.

Stevedores, cooks, helpers, cleaners in cruise ships.

Maids, cleaners, and laundrywomen in hotels. At the end of the school term, our eldest daughter Jenny's English teacher advised: "You should ask your parents to take you to the park or to the CNE. Go somewhere!" Little did the teacher know we only had enough to put food on the table, clothe the kids, or pay for our townhouse rental. But we managed to scrounge enough money to send our two youngest daughters for piano lessons up until they lost interest and began to gravitate increasingly toward school activities. To this day, I have never been to the CNE. My daughters have, with their dad and with their friends. We only went to Canada's Wonderland a few times: once when my youngest sister and her family visited from the United States, and the other times when we were able to get coupons for half the price of admission. I inherited thrift and frugality from my mother. She managed to put her eight children through school as well as numerous cousins and relatives who boarded with us when I was young. She collected odds and ends

of clothing and sewed them into new dresses for me and my three sisters. She went to markets to get fresh fish and vegetables to feed our huge household. I knew how to bargain because I accompanied her in her morning forays to the Blumentritt wet market in Manila. No exclusive private schools for us; my father was a product of public schools. Yet we lacked for nothing as we were well fed and clothed within modest means. Our daughters must have sensed our early struggles in Toronto and tried not to demand too much. A trip to BiWay, the cheapest department store at the time, was like a trip to a big mall. It was a cause for celebration. They did not ask for expensive toys or clothes and shoes, just what was necessary to keep warm in the winter months. They did not complain but were grateful to receive hand-me-down coats and boots donated by old friends.

Looking back, I see the years as a blur, with both Joe and I preoccupied with the business of living: children, home, work. There was no time for slacking as every minute counted. Our children grew before our eyes: their wants and needs, emotional and physical, subsumed by the nurture and love we could manage to offer them. Latchkey children — this word I learned from Isobel, our third daughter, who tried to impress us with her immense and fast-growing vocabulary — were children left at home after school while their parents worked two or three jobs. We each held only one job, but they were left on their own when both Joe and I went to work. So, every time we were free from work obligations, we tried to stay at home and be with them.

Still, our children did not have the constant companionship and care of relatives they used to have when we were living in the Philippines. There were no cousins, aunts, and uncles to chat with or visit or give counsel. It was just us, our nuclear family, with a few friends. We did not have a regular social life, let alone go to parties. Christmas and New Year we spent by keeping to ourselves, making do with small presents and simple fare: the familiar chicken adobo, the proverbial pancit guisado, and fried rice. Our goal was to survive and live as self-sufficiently and independently as possible. Home was ten thousand miles away, and early on, we set it in stone to burn our bridges once we set foot in Toronto. “Survive or perish” was our mantra.

6 Workers among us

Although we opted to migrate to another country, my family's decision to leave was no different, or more immediate, than the decision of Filipino emigrant workers who chose to leave because of the political uncertainty and economic turmoil in our homeland. The outflux of workers began as early as the 1960s but became more pronounced in the 1970s, when under then President Marcos's strongman rule, political and economic cronyism and corruption in government drove the average person to further exploitation and abuse. Since civil liberties were suppressed, the rights of workers and farmers to organize and work for reforms were effectively scuttled. Faced with a fast-increasing population, high unemployment, and poor living conditions, and to relieve his government of the need to spend on development projects and social support for the people, Marcos launched a massive labour export program. It began with sailors, then domestic workers — nannies, caregivers, cooks, and cleaners — then migrant workers to fill the lower paid and unskilled sectors in countries in the world with chronic labour shortage.

Before this, the Philippines had already sent doctors, nurses, and allied medical professionals to other countries, in a brain drain that, to this day, robs the country of trained and much-needed professionals. In his book, *Migration Revolution*, Filemon V. Aguilar Jr. sums up the phenomenon: "If Philippine society was ever a cauldron about to boil over, overseas migration has taken the lid off and released the pressure."¹ In 2012, the economic planning ministry reported that the Philippines could not do without the remittances from overseas Filipino workers (OFWs).² Even the World Bank agrees that cash sent to the country — about \$24 billion, or PHP 1,178 trillion, in 2014 alone — is a "key factor" for the resilience of the Philippines.³ Remittances from the country's close to two million overseas Filipino workers (1,844,406

1 Filemon V. Aguilar Jr., *Migration Revolution: Philippine Nationhood and Class Relations in a Globalized Age* (Manila: Ateneo de Manila Press, 2014).

2 Jodesz Gavilan, "What you need to know about overseas Filipino Workers," *Rappler*, December 5, 2015, updated December 19, 2016, <https://www.rappler.com/newsbreak/iq/114549-overseas-filipino-workers-facts-figures>

3 *Ibid.*

OFWS in 2015) have enabled the country to withstand recession amid the economic crises of the previous years.⁴

7 I Just Can't Stop Loving You

In 1987, the world's population reached approximately five billion. A rare earthquake that peaked at 5.0 on the Richter scale on June 11 affected fourteen states in the Midwest of the United States and parts of Canada. At the same time, Supertyphoon Nina hit the Philippines, submerging fourteen fishing villages on the Philippine coast under water, leaving one thousand dead.

We had arrived in Toronto in late July, with the top billboard song "I Just Can't Stop Loving You" by Michael Jackson high-pitched and spilling in from everywhere. The air steamed with purpose when summer meant another life to live. From every corner, a mirror to reflect on. Outside our window, the children's park, though treed, appeared bruised from the dark slits on the windowpanes. *Thorny Vineway*. Did our new street name augur of tomorrows yet to come? Would our life in this new country lead to a path laid with thorns? We were young at the time, and everything looked promising. We were alive in this new country and were no longer afraid, the years in the future distant and to be savoured. We were ready to be every person we chose or wanted to be.

The days shortened in late October, when the sun sank deeper and the leaves fell on the ground: at first, mustard yellow and blood red; later, turning brown, purplish, and ragged. People here called it mid-autumn. At St. Timothy's Church, Joe and I and our children filled the half-sung hymns with thoughts of the past we had left behind. The shade of leaves falling, hung in mid-air, marking our days.

But those early experiences were mere spots in our post-arrival years. They would be subsumed by the tracks in the snow when our first winter came. We would remember the pride in the little fire we stoked three decades later. We knew we could get lost on every road and never find our way. We could run out of a country and never leave it. Memorize the shape of our name and never recognize it. Something so clear could be something so vague. Like

⁴ Ibid.

knowing and not knowing at the same time. Like the day that drowns in the bones. Like the night growing into shadow. Like names echoing many towns, burrowing through stones and fragmentary rocks.

Everywhere was where we wanted to be.

RANI RIVERA

All Violet

I used to think
verandahs were a construct for contentment
instead I'm here
extrapolating on the reversal of repute,
50 years from now,
Jilly's on Queen and Broadview
will receive from future Torontologists
on a pretentious but never watched
literary newsmagazine
vis-à-vis a red-flamed editrix
having settled herself appropriately
in a brown leather club chair
kissing faux mahogany shelving
hiding a deficiency of real gilt-edged books
but still standing and making do
with a room full of interns.

It's enough for a person to say
they've done it,
acquired national opinion rights
on the precise amount of cheese
and study needed
for poutine and Stendhal.

Charming the dress socks off
the resident poetry-loving investment banker
just enough to reward me a fat cheque
and another 500-print run.

Ingratiate myself to book club admin groupies
by owing a big thanks
to incest, milliners, and Sioux Lookout.
Warrant a cropped likeness
of my insulated, too-big-for-my-snow-pants head
drawn beside a weekly column
in the Arts section of one of the dailies.
Make a dark chocolate–munching émigré of distinction
fall off his chair in round-bellied laughter
at yet another awards dinner.

Forget what CC and soda taste like
on a budget.

Take in a mangy stray and call her Maurice
Show her off at the Jazz Festival
and be extra careful she doesn't get stepped on.
Write a poem about love, jazz, and Maurice, and how she's
so cute, I could eat her.

Night and Day

I'm getting off the 501 streetcar
and stomping my big, black boots into the sidewalk.
Surprisingly, my posture is perfect,
unburdened by a knapsack full of poems
and one vintage men's Burberry trench coat.

I'm heading home on Queen West
in an asymmetrically zippered coat
and a Northbound Leather shopping bag in tow.
Carrying war wounds and forgotten accessories.
Feeling confident, cocky even, assured.

Even after it occurs to me I've never even considered
daylight before.

Relegated mornings to that dead air
occupied by
waiting for coffee to be made for you
while Cole Porter sings the blues away.

Sends your lover away.

Mornings are anoxic and pure,
full of phatic lovers and shared baths.

I'm seated at a new dining table
you salvaged from the street
and my bottom is cozy on a once-white chair
but now a sunburnt polypropylene
and showing that sickly pallor of disease.
I'm trying to believe that I will remember this night
as a pleasant evening of tea and innocuous banter.

Blocking out
that after pushing aside
our worn Cohen vs. Dylan debate
I ask to use your bathroom
and find a tin cup of makeup brushes by the sink.
A full set.
Professional even.

There's a loofah sponge in the shower
and I'm livid.

Angry that my mother never warned me
to stay away from
men in leather pants
who wear metallic nail polish
better than I ever can.
From men who tell you:
"you smell like bamboo and freshly cut grass."
From men who trek all the way to Scarborough
to find tiny D-rings to make your four-inch stiletto boots
look couture.

I'm getting off the 501 streetcar,
feeling confident,
cocky even, dammit
assured.

A Dereliction of Line

All I see now
are tuck shops full of ginsengs
the preliminary "g" pronounced hard
and false by a friend who thought
me fearless.
Announcing gutturally it's time
to clear the detritus
too many hours have passed
tableside over a paltry purchase
she's spent and the lights are giving way.

One red
two black

starts a lazy exquisite corpse,
lying unfinished in a haze
of the recognizable smoke and scent
of hard-topped construction cut
with digestives and filler.
Inclined to rush out
with trusted PIN codes and
newly acquired phone numbers.
Quashing old allegiances
and established sponsorships of
rehabilitated behaviour.

Contributor Biographies

Editors

Teodoro Alcuitas is the publisher and editor of *Philippine Canadian News*, an online paper linking the Filipino diaspora. He founded *Silangan*, the first Filipino newspaper in western Canada, in 1976. He lives in Vancouver, British Columbia.

C.E. Gatchalian is the author of six books and co-editor of two anthologies. He is a three-time Lambda Literary Award finalist and received the Dayne Ogilvie Prize in 2013 from the Writers' Trust of Canada. Originally from Vancouver, British Columbia, he now lives in Toronto, Ontario.

Patria Rivera is a poet and writer who has authored four books and two chapbooks of poetry. Her first poetry collection, *Puti/White*, was shortlisted for a Trillium Book Award for Poetry, and she was the recipient of the Global Filipino Literary Award for Poetry. She lives in Toronto, Ontario.

Contributors

Jim Agapito hosts *Recovering Filipino*, a podcast from CBC Manitoba featured on CBC Radio One, in which he reconnects to his Filipino heritage through self-discovery. Jim is a Filipino writer, producer, and filmmaker from Winnipeg, Manitoba. Jim's passion is storytelling, and his specialties include producing, screenwriting, and directing documentaries, short films, and music videos. He has worked in the Canadian film and television industry and with several independent production houses since obtaining diplomas in journalism from Durham College. When Jim isn't working on his multimedia projects, he writes, boxes, wrenches on his motorcycle, and sings in a punk band.

Hari Alluri (he/him/siya) is a migrant poet of Pangasinan, Ilokano, and Telugu descent who lives, loves, and writes on the unceded Coast Salish territories of the Musqueam, Squamish, and Tsleil-Waututh peoples, and Kwantlen, Katzie, and Kwikwetlem lands of Hənq̓əminəm-speaking peoples, a.k.a. New Westminster, British Columbia. Siya is author of *The Flayed City* and the chapbook *Our Echo of Sudden Mercy*. Recipient of the Vera Manuel Award for Poetry, among other prizes, grants, fellowships, and residencies, his work appears through these venues and elsewhere: *Apogee*, *Marias at Sampaguitas*, *Michigan Quarterly Review*, *Poetry*, *poetry in canada*, and — via *Split This Rock* — *Best of the Net*. @harialluri.

Christine Añonuevo (she/her/hers) is a community organizer, writer, and educator who has worked in rural and remote communities across British Columbia and internationally in Ukraine, South Africa, and Japan. Her poetry has been shortlisted for *Prism International's* Pacific Poetry Prize, *Malahat Review's* Long Poem Prize, and *Room Magazine's* Poetry Contest. She is completing her PhD in Human and Health Sciences at the University of Northern British Columbia. She lives in the unincorporated community of South Hazelton, British Columbia.

Kaia M. Arrow (she/her) is an artist, educator, and advocate. Kaia uses her writing to process and portray her experiences as a neurodivergent, sick & disabled, queer, Filipina settler. She applies structural understandings of power with an anti-colonial and anti-capitalist approach to her life and art. Kaia is privileged to be a part-time wheelchair user and full-time shit disturber. She dreams of supportive communities for all. Kaia writes from her apartment in Tkaronto (colonially known as Toronto), which she shares with her Bunny and her partner, Peter. She carries lineage from fierce and tender ancestors in Pampanga and Aklan.

Isabela Palanca Aureus, from Toronto, Ontario, grew up in San Juan and San Mateo, Isabela, in Northern Philippines. A lover of books, she graduated from the University of Toronto, specializing in English. Isa's Filipinx-Canadian pride was nurtured during her tenure as board secretary and, later, board

chair at Kapisanan Philippine Centre for Arts + Culture. This work led to her board advisory and associate producer role at Carlos Bulosan Theatre. She usually writes about technology and business as a product marketing leader. Isa's favourite story is the one she is still writing with her two sons, Leon Victor and Anders Noel, and her husband, Leon.

Leon Aureus is a writer, actor, director, producer, and community leader dedicated to creating and supporting proud and diverse stories. He is currently the artistic producer of Carlos Bulosan Theatre, a founding member of fu-GEN Theatre, and the associate producer of the inaugural theatrical run of *Kim's Convenience*. As a playwright, Leon adapted the novel *Banana Boys* for the stage, and he wrote and directed the children's play *Kaldero*. He also co-wrote the plays *People Power* and *In the Shadow of Elephants* and is a Dora Award-nominated actor and filmmaker with multiple credits in theatre, television, and film.

Jennilee Austria-Bonifacio is the author of *Reuniting with Strangers: A Novel Told in Stories* (Douglas & McIntyre), which was a finalist for the Jim Wong-Chu Emerging Writers Award. As the founder of Filipino Talks, she is a speaker and school board consultant who builds bridges between educators and Filipino families. After completing her Masters in Immigration and Settlement Studies, she studied at the Humber School for Writers and completed a residency at the Banff Centre for Arts and Creativity. Born and raised in Sarnia, Ontario, she now lives in Toronto. Follow Jennilee at @jennilee_a_b, or visit <https://jennileeaustriabonifacio.com> for more.

Jellyn Ayudan is a recent graduate of the University of Regina with an honours degree in English. She currently works at University of Regina Press as an editorial assistant. Born in Pateros, Metro Manila, Philippines, she now resides in Treaty 4 lands in oskana kāasastēki (Regina, Saskatchewan) with her close-knit family and their dogs, Max and Rocky.

Hannah Balba was born in the Philippines and immigrated to Richmond, British Columbia, in 2001. Inspired by her deep involvement with Filipino

community groups in Vancouver, her research interests centre around Canadian foreign domestic worker movements, with a special emphasis on the socio-economic impacts of caregiver programs on Filipino-Canadians. She holds a BA in History from the University of British Columbia, and she will begin her legal studies as a JD candidate in September 2023. She speaks Tagalog.

Monica Anne Batac (she/they/siya) is a teacher, community organizer, and PhD candidate at the School of Social Work at McGill University. Monica identifies as a second-generation Filipina/x in the Canadian diaspora, born and raised in Tkaronto (Toronto). She is currently residing between Whitehorse, Yukon; Montréal, Québec; and Winnipeg, Manitoba. Monica's writings include *Growing Up Pinay*, published in 2020 as part of the *Home is in the Body* anthology by ANAK Publishing, and "'Failing' and Finding a Filipina Diasporic Scholarly 'Home': A De/Colonizing Autoethnography," published in 2021/22 in the academic journal *Qualitative Inquiry*.

Alexa Batitis is a second-generation Filipino-Canadian writer living in Ottawa, Ontario, where she was born and raised. She holds a Bachelor of Arts degree in English Literature from Carleton University and a diploma in Professional Writing from Algonquin College. Alexa's published works include poetry, fiction, and non-fiction. She is a proud federal public servant and amateur astrologer, and hopes to visit the Philippines one day. She lives with her husband, Shane, and their two cats, Kiwi and Kochi.

Mila Bongco-Philipzig has published five children's books, four of which are bilingual (Filipino-English). She also translated two children's books from Filipino to German, which were included in the Frankfurter Buchmesse 2022. Mila has poetry, personal essays, and articles published in various magazines, anthologies, and podcasts in the Philippines, Canada, and Germany. In 2021, Mila was an Edmonton Arts Council's Featured Artist for Asian Heritage Month and the first featured reader for Edmonton Public Library's Multilingual Storytime. When she is not writing or painting, Mila is busy organizing community events, running long-distance, and helping various organizations promote human rights and social justice.

Isabel Carlin is a librarian and archivist in the occupied territories of the Musqueam, Squamish, and Tsleil-Waututh Nations (so-called Vancouver, British Columbia). They are a Filipinx poet and activist who writes and struggles for the national democratic revolution in the Philippines. Their research and writing focus on the intersections of imperialism, resource extraction, record-keeping, and class struggle.

Rachel Evangeline Chiong is an author, poet, and happy person. Kabangka, a Canadian-Filipinx not-for-profit, was named after her poem, which encapsulated the values and hopes of the community. She has published a comic book based on her poem “Dark Magic” with illustrator and absolute lad Sven (@svencomicsart). Currently, she is working on her fantasy YA novel, *Doctor Daniri and the Mythical Beasts of the Mundo*, which was awarded the Ontario Arts Council recommender grant (2021–2022) and long listed on Voyage’s First Chapters Contest (2021).

Kay Costales is an author and poet represented by Lesley Sabga of the Seymour Agency. She is based in Toronto, Ontario. Her poetry collection, *the EMOTIONS series*, is available now, and her debut novel, *WHEN THEY BECKON*, will be released by City Owl Press in late 2023. As a child of immigrants, it is important for her to always provide Filipino diaspora representation in her stories regardless of genre. You can usually find her constantly daydreaming about monsters, magic, and romance.

Gemma Derpo Dalayoan was a high school teacher in the Philippines and immigrated to Canada in 1976. She finished a BEd and a master’s degree in English as a Second Language (ESL) at the University of Manitoba. She was one of the founders and a three-time president of the Manitoba Association of Filipino Teachers’ Inc. (MAFTI). She served as vice-principal of three schools in the Winnipeg School Division from 1994 to 2004. She has received several awards for her community work and is the author of four books. She lives in Winnipeg and is currently finishing a memoir.

Ariel Dela Cruz (they/he/siya) is an educator and care worker based in Toronto, Ontario, Canada. Currently, they are a doctoral student in the Department of Performing and Media Arts at Cornell University in Ithaca, New York. Their current research project focuses on alternative modes of care performed by tomboy and transmasculine caregivers across the Filipinx labour diaspora. They hold a BSc with Honours in Neuroscience and Psychology as well as a MA in Women and Gender Studies from the University of Toronto.

Nathalie De Los Santos is a writer and creative based in Vancouver, British Columbia. She created *PilipinxPages*, a bookstagram featuring Filipino/a/x authors. She has written for or appeared in interviews for the following publications and festivals: *Kapwa Magazine*, *TFC*, *Marias at Sampaguitas*, *Ricepaper Magazine*, *Gastrofork*, *Chopsticks Alley Pinoy*, CBC, Cold Tea Collective, Sampaguita Press, *Filipino Fridays* podcast, *Stories with Sapphire* podcast, UBC's Games in Action conference, and LiterASIAN Writers Festival (2020). She is also the creator of the podcast, *Filipino Fairy Tales, Mythology and Folklore*. She is the author of *Hasta Mañana*, *Alice's Order* and is working on a Filipino fantasy novel, *Diyosa Mata*.

Sol Diana is a spoken word artist and teacher born and raised on the traditional, ancestral, unceded, and occupied lands of the Musqueam, Squamish, and Tseil-Waututh First Nations. He is of mixed Filipino and Scottish background and credits the Filipino artists he grew up around as his biggest influences. Sol's passion lies with empowering youth through art and education. His biggest hope is for a future where diasporic Filipinx youth are connected as a cohesive, safe community; their voices are heard; and their humanities are affirmed.

Erica Dionora is a Filipina poet and illustrator. She grew up in Saipan, Northern Marianas Islands, and migrated to Canada in 2008. Erica studied Publishing at Centennial College and completed her MA in Creative Writing at the University of Gloucestershire. She is currently based in Scarborough, Ontario, where she is working on a collaboration for an illustrated poetry book.

Based in Toronto, Ontario, **Carolyn Fe** is a trilingual actress (English/French/Tagalog), award-winning singer-songwriter-lyricist, former contemporary dancer-choreographer, and in a former life owned and operated a science and technology human resources firm. Her continuous pursuit of artistic evolution adds new instruments to her creative portfolio as a published writer and emerging playwright. Some TV/streaming credits include Lola in Nickelodeon's *Blue's Clues & You!*, Madame Z in the award-winning French series *Meilleur Avant*, and voices on animated series on DreamWorks' *Pinecone & Pony* and PBS Kids' *Work It Out Wombats*. More of Carolyn at <https://linktr.ee/TheCarolynFe>.

Renato Gandia, born and raised in the Philippines, emigrated to Canada in 1997 when he was twenty-seven years old. He studied theology and holds a Master of Divinity degree. He worked as a journalist for daily newspapers in Alberta for several years. He became a Canadian citizen in 2007. He currently works as a communications advisor in the oil and gas industry. He lives in Calgary with his husband and their fourteen-year-old dog.

Kawika Guillermo is the author of *Stamped: an anti-travel novel* (2018), which won the Asian American Studies Book Award for Best Novel, as well as the queer speculative fiction novel, *All Flowers Bloom* (2020) and the prose-poetry book, *Nimrods: a fake-punk self-hurt anti-memoir* (2023). Under his patrilineal/legal name, Christopher Patterson, he is an associate professor in the Social Justice Institute at the University of British Columbia in Vancouver and is the author of the books *Transitive Cultures: Anglophone Literature of the Transpacific* (2018) and *Open World Empire: Race, Erotics, and the Global Rise of Video Games* (2020).

Award-winning playwright & author, **Primrose Madayag Knazan** (she/her) has been featured at Winnipeg Jewish Theatre, Royal Manitoba Theatre Centre, the Winnipeg International Writers Festival, CBC Radio, the Winnipeg Fringe, and the Tales from the Flipside Festival of new Filipinx-Canadian Plays. She won the bi-annual Canadian Jewish Playwriting Competition and her plays have been published by Scirocco Drama and Playwrights Canada

Press. Her debut novel, *Lessons in Fusion*, won the Manitoba Book Award for Young People, and was nominated for both the Manitoba and Saskatchewan Young Readers Choice Awards, as well as the Manitoba Book Award for Best New Book.

José Romelo Lagman hails from Angeles, Pampanga. He graduated cum laude from the University of Santo Tomás (Manila) with a BS in Mathematics degree in 1989. He has since worked as a computer programmer in the Philippines, Malaysia, U.S., and Canada, arriving in Toronto as an immigrant in January 1994. José is also an internationally published sports and travel photographer. He started writing during the pandemic lockdowns, and he is nearly finished with his first novel — a multilingual historical fiction piece set in Manila in the tumultuous 1890s.

Yves Lamson is a second-generation Filipino-Canadian writer who takes from the Philippine oral tradition to spin tales of fantastic creatures. He also enjoys writing around the historical elements of the islands he is wistful and wondrous for. He is a writer by profession, but at the core, he is a storyteller. Interested in preserving the intangible histories, he writes the stories down as a tool to not forget, to keep the precious things safe.

Grace Sanchez MacCall (she/her) was born in Manila, grew up in Calgary, and went to university in Vancouver. She currently splits her time between Toronto, where she lives and writes, and Tatamagouche, where she tries not to do anything at all. Her work has appeared in the *Capilano Review* and *Hamilton Arts and Letters*. She is a founding member of the Eastwood Writers Collective and is currently working on a novel. Her writing explores themes of power, culture, construction of knowledge, inequality, and strategies of resistance.

Lorina Mapa was born in Manila in 1970 and at the age of sixteen moved with her family to Washington, DC. In 1990 she graduated from the Kubert School of Comic and Graphic Art in New Jersey, where she met her husband, artist Daniel Shelton. They have four children and live in Hudson, Québec. Her

graphic novel *Duran Duran, Imelda Marcos, and Me* was nominated by the American Library Association as a Great Graphic Novel for Teens. Lorina was featured on the CBC's 2017 list of Writers to Watch and nominated for the Joe Schuster Award for best writer.

Deann Louise C. Nardo is a poet, interwoven artist, and cultural worker living and napping in Tiohtiá:ke/Montréal, Québec. They work as mycelium: connecting, decomposing, metabolizing, and regenerating nutrients for/with their community. Their practice thrives on the thin line where questions live and curiosity flowers.

Rafael Palma (he/him) is an English major at Brandon University, with a minor in Creative Writing. He was born and raised in the province of Laguna, in the Calabarzon region. As a kid, he read science fiction and fantasy novels and started writing short stories in his elementary days. He immigrated to Brandon, Manitoba with his family when he was fifteen and continued his studies. He discovered Western Poetry in high school and has been writing poetry ever since. He follows the styles of Margaret Atwood, Mary Oliver, Sylvia Plath, and Robin Morgan, his favourite poets.

Remilyn “Felix” Policarpio is a Filipino transmasculine artist, musician, educator, and storyteller. Member of the Filipino artist group Dupil Collective, he performs in charity events and arts shows around Ottawa. The oldest of four siblings and first in his family to be born on Canadian soil in Toronto, and inspired by a thirst for learning, he grew up reading encyclopedias for fun. He attended the Iona School of the Arts, specializing in instrumental works there before later transferring to visual arts. He moved to Ottawa in 2015 to study philosophy, stopping short due to mental illness but continuing his work as an educator. Felix currently resides in Britannia, Ottawa, lurking around as a member of the Haunted Walk and learning how to be a death worker.

Leah Ranada's stories have been published in *On Spec*, *Room Magazine*, *Santa Ana River Review*, *emerge 2013*, and elsewhere. Her writing is informed

by her childhood in Metro Manila and eventual move to Vancouver in 2006, where she made writing her permanent home. She now lives in New Westminster, British Columbia. In 2013, she attended the Writer's Studio (TWS) at SFU. She released her debut novel, *The Cine Star Salon* (NeWest Press), in 2021.

Alma Salazar Retuta, MD, a veterinarian and a doctor of medicine, works in Calgary, Alberta, as a physician. She came to Canada in 2011 with her husband and five children. She loves cooking, reading, camping, and singing. She also adores babies and children. She hopes to uplift the lives of close family members by assisting them to come to Canada to build a new life here.

In her brief life, **Rani Rivera** (1981–2016) experienced moments of darkness and light. She worked among the marginalized in two of the neediest neighbourhoods in Toronto: first, at St. James Town, where she organized after-school activities for children and youth, and later, at the Community Place Hub in the Weston and Mount Denis area. She enrolled in the English program of the University of Toronto on a bridging scholarship. Her poetry collection *All Violet* was published by Caitlin Press (Dagger Editions) in 2017. For a review of Rivera's posthumous collection, *All Violet*, please go to: <http://themaynard.org/views/rivera0218.php>.

Aileen Santiago (she/they) is a teacher in Toronto, Ontario, with a background in languages, literacy, and social justice education. Born in the Philippines to Filipino and Chinese parents and coming to Canada at the age of seven, Aileen has some understanding of what it feels to straddle diverse cultures, embrace shifting identities, and the discomfort of learning how to unlearn. Her ongoing journey of reconnecting to her Philippine Taga-Ilog and Chinese Fukien roots has led her to curriculum writing projects, poetry performances, building the Fil-Can Educators Network, and research in anti-racist and decolonizing pedagogies. She shares her story as a racialized settler who is always ready to learn in community with others.

Angelo Santos is a writer, filmmaker, and physiotherapist who spent his formative years living in many places around the world — namely, the

Philippines, the Middle East, the United States, and Canada. He now lives in Oakville, Ontario. Angelo's work has been published in various outlets including *Ricepaper Magazine* and *filling Station*. He is currently working on a collection of essays.

Carlo Sayo is a cultural worker engaging in diverse artistic disciplines such as visual and installation art, poetry, new media, and performance work. Drawing from experiences as the child of Filipino immigrants who left the Philippines during the Martial Law era of the 1970s, Carlo's creative endeavours delve into themes of culture, identity, migration, and settlement. His work is rooted in community building, striving to foster a greater understanding of the Filipino settler experience on unceded territories. Born in Montréal and later moving to Vancouver during Expo 86, Carlo's imaginative spirit grew partly from being a child of the 1980s. As a youth, Carlo grew up in and around the Kalayaan Centre, a Filipino community centre based in Vancouver's downtown eastside that was the heart of Filipino political activism in the late 1990s and early 2000s. Alongside his artistic pursuits, Carlo takes immense pride in being a devoted parent to two curious children.

Maribeth Manalaysay Tabanera a.k.a. **Kilusan** (siya/sanda/they/she/he) is a Tagalog Visayan filipinx queer non-binary multi-hyphenate artist, educator, and community organizer. They were born and raised on Treaty 1 Territory (Winnipeg, Manitoba) and spent thirty-five years based in this community. They have presented their work as an educator, dancer, and DJ at events all over Turtle Island (North America). Maribeth is now based in Tkaronto (Toronto, Ontario) completing their Master of Education in Social Justice Education at the University of Toronto and working part-time as a research assistant for Elevate Equity. For more information about them, please visit: <https://www.maribethtabanera.com>.

Born and raised in Manila, Philippines, **Steffi Tad-y** is a poet and writer based in the territories of the Musqueam, Squamish, and Tsleil-Waututh Nations, also known as Vancouver, British Columbia. Her chapbook of poems *Merienda*, published by Rahila's Ghost Press, was nominated for the 2021

bpNichol Chapbook Award. In 2022, she published her debut book of poetry, *From the Shoreline*, with Gordon Hill Press. Steffi's poems often reflect on kinship, diasporic geographies, and formations of the mind.

Vincent Ternida is the author of the novella *The Seven Muses of Harry Salcedo*. His essays, articles, and poetry have appeared in several publications, including *Polyglot*, *British Columbia Review*, *rabble.ca*, *Rappler*, *Voice and Verse Poetry Magazine*, and *PR&TA Journal*. His short story "Elevator Lady" was long listed for the CBC Short Story Prize in 2019. He is currently completing a short story collection. He lives in Vancouver, British Columbia.