

Nicholas Tungol

ENG1101

Unit 1: Education Narrative Essay

Word Count: 1,013

October 19, 2023

### Home is Where Your Community Is

Queens, New York was lively and full of culture, where I once found comfort within my small Asian community. It was a tough cultural adjustment for me to move away from Queens to the suburbs of Westchester. The suburbs brought the promise of a new town with new friends, and I was quickly disappointed to realize how different kids would act in what was fated to be my new home. Life in Queens was easy; I could easily befriend anyone and knew many people like me. On the other hand, Westchester was a dull area filled with small towns where most people were too privileged to acknowledge problems they decided didn't matter. I remember how small and alien I felt when I realized I was one of the only few Asian kids in a tiny majority-white neighborhood. I was only nine years old, and I hated being Asian. I hated how my hair fell straight, hated my tanned skin, and hated how I couldn't get my eyes to look like the other kids. My discomfort grew so great that my parents began questioning why I was so embarrassed to bring my smelly ethnic lunch to school.

The same year as moving to Westchester, my parents decided to spend our summer on a trip to the Philippines, so I had the opportunity to meet my extended family. Most days, we would stay at my grandparents' houses and feast on a massive selection of Filipino delicacies. Visiting my grandparents who lived in different provinces allowed me to explore an entire part of myself I didn't know existed. Some days, my family would plan to take us out to the beach and occasionally take the boat for fishing. My family knew people who owned a resort on a

mountain with plenty of fresh exotic fruits I'd never tried before all along with small huts by an open beach. Although we didn't stay long, the trip opened my eyes to how my parents lived and how different it was back at my new home in Westchester.

Somehow, this resort is where my cousin's college commissioned my uncle to host and be the judge of a drag show competition for their students. A drag show competition. Not only was there a drag show but my dad was invited to be one of the judges. While initially opposed to the idea, my dad was quickly convinced when he saw the judge's table exclaiming, "What the hell, it'll be fun!" As soon as the show began, it hit me that this was the last thing I would've expected from my family. From what I had gathered throughout the trip, my Filipino parents grew up in a very different time and a very different place. They could barely grasp the idea of people being gay let alone drag shows. I was so confused by the very idea of drag shows at the time that I only saw the performance simply as cross-dressers on stage, but for my dad to judge the show was too big of an idea for a nine-year-old me to comprehend. My humble dad who barely understood fashion or comedy was just thrown in there as a judge and it was almost unreal watching. I was surprised to see how much he enjoyed the show despite his initial unwillingness. I'll never forget his reactions to the campy fashion, skits, and stupid dance challenges.

That summer, I returned to the lonely town of Westchester transformed. Although it was deeply buried in my mind, this transformation never crossed my mind until I got much older. After my senior year of taking advanced art and gaining an interest in fashion, I finally found a sense of community among my friends. My friends, who also happen to be bisexual, decided for us to hang out and watch '*RuPaul's Drag Race*' on the TV. Never since the trip to the Philippines did I see or even think about drag for a second. The experience of drag for the first

time since my trip to the Philippines made me realize what I had missed this whole time. Watching the show made me feel like I was one of the judges, but it was somewhat different. This time my viewpoint was changed; I grew up to enjoy the value of the confidence and creativity that surrounded the art expression of drag. Watching drag shows with my friends was the first time I had felt a sense of home since I was a kid and the first time I felt comfortable with myself again. I was shown time and time again that people shared similar values as me and expressed themselves, giving me hope that it was okay to be myself. Having friends who understood the same things I did allowed me to be more open to those around me with my newfound self-confidence, expression, and community. Drag is where I first found a middle ground with my intersectional identity of being Filipino and queer.

Now I'm able to look back at my trip to the Philippines as to when I first caught a glimpse of my culture. This small glimpse allowed me to truly understand myself with a new frame of mind and transformed me to open up to others as I finally knew others like me existed. I learned to connect to my culture in a way I had never known was possible where I could be unashamedly myself. Where the Philippines taught me my heritage, Drag taught me community. As someone entering a Business of Fashion and Technology major, I can appreciate Drag for giving me this newfound freedom to explore myself further within my community and my art. I look back now at when my parents took me to my first Drag show in the Philippines, reminding me how my brother and I sat quietly shocked in the crowd as confused as ever. If not for drag queens with their charisma, uniqueness, nerve, and talent, I would have never learned to align myself as an individual and be comfortable within myself.