

Saskatoon Shines and Celebrates! – In recognition of Filipino Heritage Month In Canada, Filipino-Canadian Month in Saskatoon in commemoration of 122 years of Philippine Independence Day- June 12, 2020

Series #1: The Roots of Filipinos in Saskatoon



Where in Canada did you say, you are immigrating to? That's what they asked me then. I said, Saskatoon. In the boondocks? Nah! Flat.. flat .. as in really flat- Prairies that is. And that's not all! The first winter comes, and it is cold.. not only cold but mighty cold! What are we doing here, anyway? That was then.. now decades later, we are still here. There must be something special in this city. Let us enumerate--first, it is in Canada-the land of opportunities for us. All of a sudden, life drastically changed. We do not have to

worry where to get food to feed yourself and your family. Now comes a different problem. Let's see, as in what "ulam" are we preparing for dinner. Nothing in the fridge or freezer, head out to the store and buy whatever you want or if you do not want to cook, go to any Filipino restaurants or check out what's cooking at home-base food businesses, click, order, and pick up. Aren't we lucky? Or should I say aren't we blessed? The latter it is, I must say. Second, the people with warm heart. Presto! Now we know the reason why we are still here even with harsh winters—it is the people with warm hearts. There are other reasons why we stay in Saskatoon. What is yours?

Almost forty years ago, my family (eight all together) emigrated here from the Philippines. It was my sister who was working here five years earlier as a seamstress, and she sponsored us. She is our lifesaver. The one who brought the bacon back home or was it daing or tinapa? That's beside the point. It was indeed that having someone from our family already an immigrant here or a naturalized Canadian citizen that allowed the family reunification program of the Canadian immigration. My sister was included in almost one hundred ladies who were recruited by Wescott Casuals. And the rest is history or you can use a calculator and find out how many of us have been provided with the good life that this country has offered. Here's a hint—just in my immediate family alone now have over 35 members. Don't forget the connections of relatives too.

When we came to Saskatoon, we got to know every Filipino—by names, by relations, by the neighbourhood of residence. There were already Filipino doctors, nurses, medical technologists, researchers, engineers, teachers, seamstresses. Then came the international students who later found work and stayed. Now to add to the work force are university professors and priests/pastors, caregivers, truck drivers, welders, food service staff, and miscellaneous jobs in other industries brought by the Saskatchewan Immigrant Nominee Program (SINP) and through federal program. Many of those who came in the last decade became entrepreneurs and operate their own businesses. Some of the second generation of Filipino immigrants have followed the footsteps of their parents to become doctors, nurses, engineers, teachers, and business owners while others compete and occupy some of the most exciting and intricate professions. A lot of our dreams turned into reality.

With the current situation due to COVID-19 world crisis, our health care and other essential workers continue to give their best in their field because of our Filipino culture—the love for our family especially the sick and the elderly, the exemplary work ethics we learned and exercise, the perseverance in each of us to improve ourselves. Kudos to your hard work and dedication!

Well, what do you say? Not bad.. not bad at all! We have gone far, really! We have immersed ourselves in this society and participated fully in its functions by being productive. We contribute in the economic growth of this city we call home. We became community leaders and volunteers. On the celebration of June-Filipino Heritage Month in Canada and City of Saskatoon's proclamation, Filipino-Canadian Month in Saskatoon, let us be proud of who we are and what we contribute to this society. Let us remember where we came from. Let us be thankful for peace where many walk in fear. Let us be thankful for friends and family where many walk alone. Let us be thankful for food that we have where many are hungry. Let us continue to preserve and promote our Filipino heritage to our young and future generation. *Nagpapasalamat ako sa marami kong kababayan na nagsasaya sa buwan na ito. Nawa po ay magkaroon tayo ng pagkakaisa at pagtutulungan. Ako ay Pilipino—sa isip, sa salita, at sa gawa.*

By: Felicitas Santos-Vargas, 2020 President
Filipino-Canadian Association of Saskatoon, Inc. (FILCAS)
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