

FE BENITO Social Worker, Mother

by JOSEPH PIMENTEL
AJPress

When Fe Benito arrived to the US, she was a young Filipino on a mission. It was 1964 and she wanted to make a difference.

"I loved to travel and I went all over Europe [but] I wanted to reside and become an American citizen," she said.

"This is a country of opportunity, a country where you can advance socially, educationally and professionally...the US is the greatest nation in the world."

Once Benito arrived to the US there was no question about what her profession would be.

She wanted to help those who were less fortunate.

"I really loved humanity," said Benito. Benito said she decided to pursue social work after being orphaned and left to care for her younger brothers and sister. "I believe I was created by God to serve humanity."

Fe Benito was part of the initial wave of Filipino social workers here in LA that included Royal Morales, Albert Mendoza, Connie Guerrero, Angelina Alpuerto – the "old guard" of Pilipinotown and predecessors to the Joel Jacintos, Jocelyn Geaga Rosenthals and Susan Dilkes' of today, according to Fe Benito's son, Ted.

"It was great because during that time because we had plenty of resources," recalls Fe. "The government was more willing to help the poor and the needy so it was fun in the 60's, and 70's."

She said the 1990's were the hardest hit decade when it came to funding social work.

"You had to lobby, go to congress and city hall to ask for money," said Benito who served as social worker, counselor and administrator.

She did not let the lack of funding get in her way of continuing to help those around her.

In 2007, her hard work and help with those less fortunate was recognized.

Cardinal Roger Mahoney awarded Benito the Cardinal's Award Recipient for Contribution to Los Angeles in Community Service.

Despite receiving the prestigious award, Benito said that the most joy she's ever had was raising her son, Theodore.

Motherhood is a lifetime career and should be taken very seriously, said Benito.

"I want to emphasize the importance of motherhood," said Benito. "It's very, very challenging and rewarding. It's challenging because it takes a lot of strength and courage, understanding and sacrifice anything you have for your children."

She said that she's most proud at not only raising her son American but raised him with Filipino values.

"I wanted him to be part of the Filipino culture so he knew where he came from," she said. "To me, it's very important [for him] to acculturate with American culture because when he goes back to the Philippines, he can share that with the Filipinos. And when he's here with his American friends, he can share his Filipino culture."

She said children are a gift from God. It's the reason why she named her son, Theodore, which means "God's gift" in Greek.

"I'm very blessed," she said. ■



Fe Benito receiving the Cardinal's Award for Community Service from Cardinal Mahoney

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AVE JACINTO Nurturing Fil-Am Culture Through 'Kayamanan ng Lahi'

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It's always been Ave Jacinto's dream of sharing Filipino culture through dance and performing arts.

She remembers the times when she was a UCLA student in the early and mid-1980's. She would share her vision with husband, Joel Jacinto, now the Director at Search to Involve Pilipino Americans (SIPA).

"At UCLA, we were involved in Samahang Pilipino," said Ave. "We were the dance coordinators during our whole time there. We always did PCN (Philippine Cultural Night). When we graduated, we wanted to continue to share our culture and tradition in dance and music."

In 1990, Ave realized her dream.

She along with husband Joel and another couple started the Kayamanan Ng Lahi, a non-profit folk art organization that is committed to presenting, promoting and preserving the richness and diversity of Philippine culture through dance and music.

Every weekend the group organizes workshops at SIPA in Historic Filipinotown.

She said that it's important to share Philippine history through dance especially to Filipino Americans.

"There's this basic need of knowing where you come from," said Ave. "You want to learn about it and search for it."

"There's such a resurgence amongst Filipinos especially the younger generation," added Ave. "They are learning so much about the culture - language, hip hop dancing, PCN it's wonderful."

Ave who was born in the Philippines but raised here can relate with many FilAms.

"I was born in Pampanga and came here when I was five-years-old," said Ave. "Growing up I felt more American than Filipino. I never learned Tagalog since pampangan is my native language."

She said college is usually the time when Fil-Ams begin to search for their history.

She hopes that Kayamanan Ng Lahi would help them with their search and teach others about Filipino culture.

A mother of two, she said that her two sons wouldn't have to wait until they are in college to learn about their Filipino roots.

It's something that she's going to make sure she teaches at an early age. ■

A TRIBUTE TO HARDWORKING FIL-AM MOMS



Belle Sison with Jessica



Ivy Manalang with kids, Tristan (left) and André (right)



Charina Carrera with kids, Lee (left) and Missy (right)



Jherlyn Meneses with Karl

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