

# Tim's Transformation Fil-Am turns to God after a life of drugs and gangs

by JOSEPH PIMENTEL / AJPress



**Galing Pinoy** showcases the triumph of the Filipino spirit—the Filipino's innate perseverance to rise above. A double entendre, **Galing Pinoy** literally translates to both coming from (or brought to you by) the Filipino and Filipino ingenuity.



**I**T occurred late at night. Fil-Am Tim Rabara sobering up from a drug binge walked into a Mira Mesa Church, knelt down on a pew and prayed to God for help.

It had been a while since he prayed or even set foot inside a church.

But the 19-year-old felt abandoned, alone, and just sick of the life that he had been living. He was a gang member and a drug addict. His long time girlfriend, the one person that cared about him had just left him after she gave him a stern ultimatum, "it's either me or the drugs."

He chose the drugs. And now, he was there kneeling on a pew sobbing, regretting the mistake.

"I cried out to God," recalls Rabara, now 33 years old and a youth pastor at Victory Outreach Church in San Diego. "I was tired of this life. I was saying God if you're real, I need you to change my life."

"It was the lowest point in my life. It was living life too fast and too young."

**Living the fast life**  
By the time Rabara was 13 years old, he had already experimented with marijuana, cocaine, and alcohol.

A year later, he dropped out of

high school and began to commute from his Santa Maria home to Oxnard to click up with a local Filipino gang.

"I would ditch school, go back and forth to Oxnard to party, chill, fight other races and gangs," he said. "That's when I also started using crystal meth."

He was gone four to five days at a time. His mother, a single mom trying to raise his two other siblings, couldn't discipline him.

"She couldn't handle me," he said. "She didn't have the authority to keep me in the house so I would go in these binges and come home tweaked out. I would look out the blinds because I thought cops were coming to get me."

"I was the oldest in the family but I didn't take the responsibility of the oldest. I threw my responsibilities out the window. I

didn't finish school and just kept doing drugs."

But even during his late night drug binges and criminal activity, he knew deep down inside that what he was doing was wrong.

He said that during his high school years he got involved in a serious relationship with a girl that he thought would help turnaround his life.

"I thought the relationship would help me but it was worse because we started doing the drugs together," he said.

For a good four years, the drugs and the gang life continued. Finally, Rabara's girlfriend at the time was fed up with her own life. She wanted to start over, a new clean life, get away from everything. She asked Rabara to move with her to San Diego.

He promised he would change. He promised to lay off the drugs.

But living in San Diego was just a change in scenery. It's said that old habits die-hard. After a few months of being clean, he couldn't resist the temptation of drugs when a co-worker offered it to him.

"She was doing her part but I wasn't doing mine," he said. "I started doing drugs again, another year of tweaking and getting messed up."

Finally, she had enough of his lifestyle. She gave him the ultimatum and when he chose drugs over her, she left.

And his whole life had been thrown into shambles.

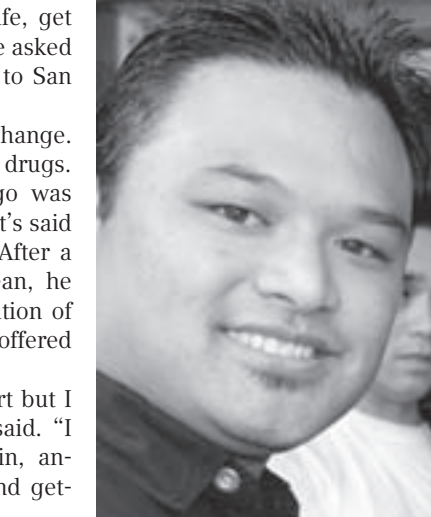
"Everyone was gone," he said. "I didn't have any family here in San Diego. My girlfriend was the only reason why I came to Mira Mesa and then she was gone. The drugs got played out in a matter of days. I had nothing to turn to."

But God, he said.

A week after asking God for help and sobbing on a pew inside a Mira Mesa church, Rabara went back home to Santa Maria. He ran into an old acquaintance, which in turn directed him to a local church.

It was February 22, 1995.

"I remember the day vividly," said Rabara. "I was sick and tired. I had no purpose. My friends were all doing their own thing. I was alone and empty. I was questioning 'what am I created for?' I should have been dead because of all the drugs I've done but for some reason I was still alive. That day I asked the Lord to be



Tim with boxing champion Manny Pacquiao

my personal Lord and savior, to be part of my life."

He immediately enrolled in a men's drug rehabilitation program. He stopped partying. He stopped hanging out with people who were bad influences.

His old friends doubted his transformation. Some gave him a week before he turned back to drugs again. But the weeks, turned into months, which became years.

"All of a sudden one year of being clean, became two, then three, five years, now it's been more than 10 years of being clean," he said.

Those old friends were also gone. He became active with the church.

Giving back to the community

Once he got back on his feet, Rabara felt he had to give back. He went back to school and earned his GED. He's currently working on bachelor's degree in Theology. He realized that his experiences with drugs and gangs are not unique. He knows there are a lot of Filipinos and Fil-Ams in the gang life and addicted to

drugs.

"There are thousands of Filipinos out there in gangs and addicted to drugs," he said.

Rabara felt compelled to help the greater Filipino community. For the past few years, Rabara has run a local youth ministry in San Diego with Pastor Al Valdez. The group meets every week with 50 to 100 kids.

He also travels around the nation and occasionally to the Philippines to speak with other at-risk youths about the dangers of drugs and gangs.

"I'm being used by God," he said. "We're human so we're going to struggle because I was there myself. I know what it was like being influenced by *barkada*. If I could be a role model, if I can plant a seed of hope to those kids and the mom's out there. My heart goes out to them."

He said drug addiction and other temptations are hard to overcome.

"But there are success stories like me," he said. "Some are more open to listen. My whole goal is to plant a seed of hope." ■

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## Immigrants fearful English classes could be cut

*States across the country are slashing budgets for adult literacy classes*

**N**EW YORK—Farzana Morshed arrived from Bangladesh three years ago without any real grasp of English. Her husband had to help her open a bank account, an interpreter was necessary when she needed medical care and she couldn't go anywhere by herself for fear of getting lost.

Morshed soon got the language lessons she needed through her local library and a community-based nonprofit organization, and her English is good enough that she can work as an interpreter at a hospital.

But other immigrants around the country are worried that they won't have the same chance as Morshed because states are slashing budgets for adult literacy classes—an important lifeline in immigrant communities.

The New York state budget proposed by Gov. David Paterson would cut three programs that contain an English education component. The proposed budget takes funding for the three programs from nearly \$13 million down to \$8.6 million, a cut of about 33 percent.

Cuts in adult literacy programs At the city level, Mayor Michael Bloomberg's budget proposal doesn't include two City Council streams of funding that support teaching English, said Anthony Ng, deputy director of policy and advocacy at United Neighborhood Houses. Those

programs currently receive almost \$7 million.

It's an issue in other parts of the country as well, said Margie McHugh, co-director of the National Center on Immigrant Integration Policy at the Migration Policy Institute. She said there is great concern in several states that budget shortfalls will cause cutbacks in adult literacy programs, noting that it already has happened in California.

Immigrants in New York hope the money will be restored by the time the state and city budgets are finalized. The city programs also were not included in Bloomberg's proposals in previous years, but they were added in during the budget process, Ng said, although not at the funding levels advocates hoped to see.

At a rally Wednesday, March 27, at a park in the Jackson Heights section of Queens, immigrants spoke out against the funding cuts and carried signs reading "Rebuild, Invest in Adult Literacy" and "More Education for Parents, Better Future for Children."

Among them was Gustavo Medina, 72, wearing a top hat his granddaughter made for him that said "We Want To Learn."

And that, he said, would be good for the country, since a higher income would have him pay more in taxes. "If I learn English, more money for Uncle Sam,"

he said. **Resources outstripped by demand**

Advocates say the resources for teaching English to immigrants already are vastly outstripped by demand. At the Shorefront YM-YWHA of Brighton Beach in Brooklyn, several hundred students are taking English classes at any given time and easily that many more are on a waiting list.

Susan Fox, executive director of Shorefront, said immigrants are eager to learn English, recognizing how vital it is not only for economic advancement but to be fully engaged in life in the United States.

"Every cut in the adult literacy world will mean fewer people helped," she said.

In California, those cuts are a reality. Adult education there is run through two systems, community colleges and programs administered by school districts, said Matthew Smith, president of the California Council of Adult Education.

The recently approved state budget cut funds for adult education run by school districts by 15 percent and an additional 5 percent cut is coming, he said. Also, whatever funds districts do receive can be used at their discretion, so they could decide to use the money to plug holes in their K-12 programs and not fund adult programs at all, Smith said. (AP)