

## **WHAT IS MY ROLE IN NATION-BUILDING AS A CHILD OF AN EXPAT PINOY (OVERSEAS FILIPINO WORKER)?**

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21-year old Steffi is a marine biologist having recently graduated from Xavier University- Ateneo de Cagayan in Cagayan de Oro City.

As a child of an Expat Pinoy, Steffi believes that if all children of Filipinos working overseas strive to excel in their studies and succeed, then parents may no longer have to leave the country in the future but simply stay, and live out the culture they have grown to love and to be with the people that matter most to them.

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I could not remember the date or how old I was when one of my yayas told me my parents had arrived from Saudi Arabia. Young as I was, I managed to preserve some traces of that particular day in my memory.

It was at the airport when my parents held their arms open expecting a warm embrace from their daughter. But to their dismay, I did not run to them smiling. Instead, I ran away from them and towards my yayas crying. If only I had recognized who they were, I think I would have responded differently.

In my eyes, my parents were strangers. I did not recognize their smiles or the scent of their perfumes because I spent my toddler years in the care of yayas and relatives instead of them. That incident certainly made my parents realize that one of them had to stay behind to take care of their child. So when I was around three years old, my father stayed to take care of me and my new born baby sister and my mother flew back to the land laden with oil to support our growing family

I could say that growing up without my mom was difficult. Me and my little sister certainly missed out on a lot of things other children normally experienced with their mothers like bedtime stories, warm hugs on cold nights and kisses to ease the pain for every wound. Yes my father did take good care of us but there was simply no substitute for a mother's love and care.

One might be wondering how I was able to tell the difference between growing up with a mother around and growing up without one. It's because my mother was able to stay with us for a while when she gave birth to another baby sister who was then later followed by my brother. My mother decided to resign and stay to care for us kids and though she wanted things to remain that way, circumstances didn't allow her to stay for long. With the rising prices of needs and the unstable economic status of the country, she had to fly overseas once again. She could have chosen to stay and I

think we could have still survived somehow, but my mother was a dreamer, she was ambitious and resolute.

My mother believed in good education, which is one of the major reasons why she left and chose to be far from her family. Good education which not only means academic training, but encompasses the physical, emotional, and spiritual formation as well. She dreamed and aimed to send us to good schools so she relentlessly worked hard to make that dream a realization. If there was one thing she would never forget to remind us of, it would be to study hard. Any form of communication, may it be a letter or a text message, as long as it was from my mother would always contain a line or two about the importance of good grades and study habits.

My mother's dreams are in no doubt shared by many other overseas Filipino workers out there, especially those who are parents. They want to uplift their status in life through their children and sending them to school is certainly one step forward to reaching that goal.

It has been said that education is the key to one's success, the solution to one's suffering and that it is a step closer towards national progress. Even our national hero, Dr. Jose Rizal deeply believed that education was far more valuable and effective than the use of arms in our forefather's pursuit of freedom under colonial rule.

In our modern world, education has not ceased to play a vital role in providing a brighter future for the people. A degree could mean the difference between security, stability and success to a life filled with doubt, fear and anxiety.

Like my mother, Rizal and the many other expat Pinoys across the globe, I understand how valuable education is and I believe that it is the catalyst for positive change that could lead to nation building. As part of the youth, the hope and future of our Philippines nation, my role is to acquire this treasure so that I may be able to contribute to the progress of our country and help alleviate the pain and suffering of my fellowmen and my motherland.

My mother has sacrificed so much so that I may become a learned individual. Like millions of overseas Filipino workers scattered all over the world, she endured the pain of separation from her family, the loneliness in a foreign country and even the restraints on her freedom. As a child of an expat Pinoy, I understand the degree of their sacrifices and even their sufferings which is why I have instilled in my mind and heart, the determination to achieve, and the ever burning flame for knowledge, believing that with enlightenment, progress becomes more achievable. With progress and nation building, then we can combat the evils that enslave our people such as corruption and poverty.

Education however does not stop with oneself, it is also a tool to reach out to others. After oneself, the family is the next level where I could apply the theories I have gained from schooling. It is important to start from the core of society which is the family since families serve as the foundation in building the society.

By practicing open communication within my family, I can help promote the flow of ideas that would help mold the young minds of my siblings and even perhaps transform those minds older than me. After my family then I could start with my community. With the learning's I have acquired, I can empower my fellow youth, I can help guide them to the right perspective on why there is a need for them to be in school and to stay I school, and lastly I can help inspire them to set out for higher goals, to go beyond mediocrity and excel in their chosen fields of profession. All of which should be achieved not merely though words but by actions and example.

To concretize the points presented, allow me to bring to light how I could contribute to nation-building through the degree I have earned, that is in Marine Biology. My course is one that focuses on the environment specifically that of our marine resources. Along with my fellow Marine Biologists, we advocate for the preservation for the preservation and conservation of our luscious seas and the marine life that abounds within it. The proper management of our resources is also an essential factor to look into in nation-building and this is where I come in. With what I have learned from the academe, I can help educate our people especially those living near our coasts in the efficient use of our resources by participating in coastal management programs launched by the different institutions concerned. Such as in our case here in my locality, the local government units (LGUs), the non-government organization (NGOs) and the private sectors such as Xavier University, work hand in hand in one mission to spread awareness and sensitivity to our people regarding the rapidly declining marine resources by teaching by teaching them the proper methodology in the practice of their livelihood. One significant aspect to note in such joint effort is the fact that the youth, like us Marine Biology students, get involved. We are tapped by our leaders to be part of the work force that help bring about constructive social change in our own community which at the same time serves as a training ground for us to become future leaders of our country.

When our country achieves that state of progress and stability our neighboring Southeast Asian countries like Brunei and Singapore have done, then there won't be much need to get out of the country anymore. Families could be whole again. Children could then grow in the warmth, love, and presence of both parents thus promoting stronger family ties keeping our moral values alive throughout generations to come.

Our overseas Filipino workers would no longer have to worry about deciding to come home and staying home since they could still live a stable and secured life in out country at the same time enjoy the freedom they deserve, that is to live out the culture they have grown to love with the people who matter most to them.

No child would then hesitate to run to the open arms of their parents for they will no longer be strangers in their eyes but heroes who have finally come home from the battlefield of life outside our shores.

As a part of our country's youth and as a child of an expat pinoy, my role is to be part of the empowered group of people who thrust forward to bring about effective change and progress to build our nation for the greater good of our fellowmen, our country, and Almighty God.

