



Video Story Transcript

Becoming a Woman of Color: Discovery in the Philippines

By: Storyteller Rebecca Mabanglo-Mayor
www.rebeccamabanglomayor.com

Link to YouTube Video:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jKRP_oVppu8

Note: The following is a transcription of a spoken story performance and may not reflect textbook perfect English. It will guide you as you listen (or read) along.

Hello, my name is Rebecca Mabanglo-Mayor. My parents left the Philippines in 1955 and moved to Seattle in the Duwamish territory. Now, in that time there was a lot of prejudice against Filipinos. The old timers -- the ones that lived in Seattle before World War II -- told my parents don't teach her your language ... let her just learn English so she will be successful in school. I was their American Dream. It was important that I succeed. And so, we moved to a suburb of Seattle called Federal Way. I went to in mostly white schools, attended a mostly white church and I lived in a mostly neighborhood. So, growing up, Filipinos were my parents and my relatives and the people who lived in Seattle. I was American.

My parents wanted me to succeed in school and they encouraged me to not just do better than the girls in my class, but to do better than the boys in my class. I was accepted into the physics program at Washington State University. My dream was to be Carl Sagan's assistant. I did well, but not well enough to finish the program. Eventually, I went into literature and studied under Rosanne Kanhai, an Indo-Caribbean woman. She saw something inside me. And she invited me to a Woman of Color Conference. I thought it was interesting; I would go see what the women of color did as academics.

1

© 2011-16 RaceBridges Studio. This lesson plan is part of an initiative for educators called RaceBridges Studio. It is a project that seeks to provide free tools for teachers and students to motivate them to build stronger and more inclusive communities. This transcript may be freely used, reproduced and distributed for educational purposes as long as this copyright information is displayed intact. The transcript included in this unit is copyrighted by Rebecca Mabanglo-Mayor. Used with permission:

www.rebeccamabanglomayor.com

I didn't see myself as a woman of color. No, I actually saw myself more as a white man, because that was the only way that I could succeed. It was on the way back from that conference, that I realized my internalized oppression had gone very deep. And I began a journey to understand what it meant to be a Filipino.

There is this old story of three artisans who carved and created a beautiful statue of a woman. And that statue came to life. Those three artisans argued over who would get to marry the beautiful woman before them. They went to a Babaylan, the Wise Woman to get a judgement on who this new woman would marry.

The carver said, "I had taken a branch of a tree and carved her, so I have the right to marry her."

The tailor said, "I clothed her and made her modest. I should marry her."

The jeweler said, "No, I arrayed her in the most beautiful jewels and made her a queen. I deserve to marry her."

And the Babaylan considered each of them carefully, but then asked them, "Did you ask her who she wants to marry?"

The men were surprised! Ask this made woman what she wants?

But the Babaylan wisely looked at the woman and said, "What would you like, my dear?"

And the woman turned to the carver and said, "Thank you for creating my body. And I thank you, tailor, for clothing me and making me modest. And thank you jeweler for making me a queen. But I wish to be as I have always been...myself...a tree." And she reached her arms to the sky and her arms became branches and her body became the trunk of a tree and her feet rooted to the ground. She became as she always had been, a tree.

This story helped me to understand that I had been shaped by many different forces. The dreams of my parents. Society's expectations of what a woman, an Asian woman, a Filipina, should be. But those are all external. All of those things are not me. The stories of my ancestors helped me understand that I am first myself. I am Filipino, and I am American. I am who I am. And as I express who I am. And I do...as I am... that is all that is needed.