

**Parliament Hill Panelist:  
for the Era 21 Networking Breakfast for Young Canadians**

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Good morning Students, Senator Poy, Fellow Panelists and Friends. Before I begin, I would like to congratulate you, the students, for your participation.

I am very honoured to have the opportunity to speak and share with you some insight on my own experiences being of Asian background and how it has helped me to be more aware and understanding of other cultures.

Today I would like to share with you, the value of wealth in three different forms.

**One—the wealth of language;**

**Two— the wealth of good deeds; and**

**Three— the wealth of diversity.**

Raise your hand if you were born in a different country.

Raise your hand if your parents were born in a different country.

Finally, raise your hand if your parents' parents were born in a different country.

Just looking at all the hands in the air, proves to us the diversity and multiculturalism of Canada.

Let me give you a brief background of my heritage and life, so you can appreciate where I am coming from as a proud Filipino-Canadian.

I am a second generation Filipino-Canadian, born in Toronto. My parents immigrated to Canada in the early 1970's from the Philippines in search of a better life and to escape from the dictatorship of Ferdinand Marcos. Marcos was a stern and cruel dictator who exiled and executed many Filipinos who stood up against his Government. My parents along with others were those who stood up for freedom and were therefore unwelcome in their own homeland.

It's very difficult for me to imagine what life would have been like had I grown up in such a hostile environment.

My first trip to the Philippines was in 1986 during the People Power Movement. It was the first time in my life that I experienced poverty, and what made it even more difficult was that I saw children, my own age, who looked the same as me, starving on the streets.

My parents wanted to teach my brother and I a lesson about how lucky we were to be living in Canada, so we all dressed in ragged clothing and took a visit to one of the poorest slums of Manila. What I saw that day is forever burned in my memory. My parents told me never to forget this experience and always appreciate all that we have in Canada.

My mother was very active in the Philippines and in Canada for the promotion of multiculturalism, civil rights and equality, which is why today I have such a passion for Canadian diversity.

Unfortunately she passed away tragically when I was a teenager. Her death was quite traumatic for me and forced me to choose one of two paths, when I should have been living a typical adolescent life.

One path was to draw from the experience and continue to be strong and work hard to accomplish my goals, which is what she would have wanted me to do

OR

The second path would be to give up, and give in to the difficulties and challenges.

I chose to be strong and fight.

My family heritage is quite interesting. My mother was Filipino by birth, but her family was of mixed-heritage. Her family origins were not only Filipino but were also Spanish and Indian. On my father's side, his heritage can be traced to Spanish and Chinese. So even if I identify myself as a Filipino-Canadian, tracing back my origins reveals a mix of different backgrounds. So actually I am a Filipino-Spanish-Chinese-Indian-Canadian!

I'm sure many of you in the room have similar stories. So really, there is no one-identifiable background of a Canadian when you trace a person's ancestry. We are all Canadian, and should be proud to demonstrate and celebrate our wealth of diverse heritages.

Like some of you here, I studied at Colonel By Secondary School. I was part of the first class to graduate from the International Baccalaureate program. Before going to Colonel By, I was fortunate to study for a year in France where I got my first taste of living in another country to learn another language. Living and studying in France was quite a challenge and maturing experience, but a fulfilling one at the same time.

Imagine, I arrived alone at the Charles de Gaulle Airport in Paris speaking only basic French, and couldn't understand the flight announcements. I was so frustrated, that I wanted to return home. To top it off, when I arrived at school, I was enrolled in the French literature program! In the end, I not only learned more about French Literature than I would have ever imagined, but I also learned about the wealth of language.

I eventually did learn to speak fluent French and upon returning to Canada, I appreciated and understood so much more about our neighbours across the river in Quebec.

Learning even basic French, especially here in Ottawa, can open your eyes to another culture that's not so far away, and open doors to opportunities that may have been closed to you before.

I have always been interested in business and anything international, so from high school I went on to study international business at Carleton University. The degree included a year abroad in South America where I studied in Chile, and all my courses were in Spanish. That was another challenge, but at least this time I studied Spanish intensively before arriving! Again the wealth of language.

Studying and traveling in South America opened my eyes to new cultures and I realized that being of Asian background can be to your advantage. I fit in as a native in many South American countries, so I blended in with the population and was less likely to get in trouble. Tourists often asked me for directions when I was also a tourist!

A highlight of my stay in Chile was being able to help abandoned disabled children in an orphanage celebrate Christmas by giving each of them stuffed animals that I brought from Canada. I will never forget their smiles and their tears. I learned the wealth of good deeds that day.

After graduating from University in 2004 I was chosen to participate in the Global Vision Junior Team Canada trade mission to China and Hong Kong. I represented the Canadian forest and softwood lumber sectors.

Arriving in China was overwhelming but at the same time intriguing. I never would have imagined it to be so modern, to see so much construction and development and to see so many people, yet there is a clear distinction between the old culture and the new.

A perfect example is the famous Tiananmen Square in Beijing. On one side is the Ancient Imperial Palace known as the Forbidden Palace, and on the other side is a modern monolith of a building. Another example is a MacDonald's at the foot of the Great Wall of China. It's hard to believe.

China is the future global business and perhaps cultural centre, which is why I am currently learning Chinese. It is a tough language, but so beautiful when you start understanding the origins of the words. Did you know that the Chinese characters are actually pictures?

Our Canadian economy is dependant on international trade, so I urge all of you to learn as many languages as you can!

Following the trade mission, I was an international trade consultant, and was fortunate to often travel to Asia. My last trip to Asia was last December, where I was a Canadian youth delegate to the World Trade Organization conference in Hong Kong. There I helped develop Youth Inside, an online project to educate youth about the WTO.

I can't get enough of school, so this summer I'll be studying economics at Georgia Tech in Atlanta, and in the Fall I'll be pursuing a Masters in International Trade Policy and Law.

Continuing with the theme of languages, I was raised in English and Tagalog, the national language of the Philippines. But aside from different languages, I grew up with 2 very different cultures.

I'll give you an example...

As a child I was taught to eat a meal with a fork and a spoon and to have rice for lunch, which is typical in South-East Asia. In elementary school I brought a lunch of rice and adobo. Adobo is roasted chicken marinated in soy sauce and is really delicious. But I remember being teased because I didn't eat a sandwich and I ate this "smelly" chicken with a fork and spoon. I came home crying and begging my parents for a sandwich the next day. My parents told me "No Patrick, this food is good for you and you will have to stick up for yourself." The next day I went to school proudly with my Filipino lunch.

Again I was teased, but this time I challenged them and said, “I dare you to try it?” They tried my Filipino food and ended up loving it...And from that day on, many of them became my friends, perhaps so they could come over to my house and eat my mom’s cooking!

The theme of our panel today was **The Global Power of Young Canadians.**

What does this mean?

Canada has people from every region on the globe and it is a great accomplishment that these groups co-exist peacefully together. This is the wealth of diversity.

The challenge for you as Young Canadians is to keep on building a better Canada, and to continue to be an example to the world, and be a strong voice on the global scene. I am not here to preach to you that we live in a perfect multicultural society. Racial or cultural clashes do exist, but that is an issue that can and should be addressed, by youth and adults, and eventually be eliminated through proper education and positive example.

That is why it is so important for all of you to reach out and learn about cultures other than your own, learn other languages, and try new things. I can see from all of you in the room that you will be the future leaders of Canada, and may one day eat in this very restaurant on a more regular basis as an MP or even as the Prime Minister!

In conclusion, let us all continue to promote, support and be ambassadors of Canadian diversity. Each and every one of us should set an example of understanding, respect and love for one another. By expressing these values, we can overcome any differences between us.

The golden rule is to “**Treat others as you want to be treated**”, but I challenge you today to carry out the platinum rule, to “**Treat others the way that they would want to be treated.**”

Always remember to set goals, keep focused, and dream.