

From the Philippines to Santa Fe; Xandra Zubia's Immigration Story

Xandra Zubia is an eighth grade student here at Monte Del Sol, but she is also an immigrant. She moved to the United States from the Philippines four years ago. During our interview about her experience with immigration, we discussed these topics: why she moved to the United States, how it felt for her to leave her home, the differences between the Philippines and the U.S., her life now, and what she misses about the Philippines.

Xandra moved to the United States with her mother, her father, and her brother Xandro who also attends Monte Del Sol. Xandra's parents decided to move here in 2015 for a couple reasons. One reason was that Xandra's mother had previously lived in the United States. "My mom lived in San Francisco and she said it was nice so she wanted to move." Another important reason was that her aunt, her uncle, and her grandma already lived in New Mexico and encouraged Xandra's parents to move here with them. They didn't want to live so far away from each other anymore. This is similar to the culture of families in the Philippines. Families there stick together, one example of this is many family members would live in one house together. Xandra told me, "Well technically a whole family would live there, like a lot of people. Your aunts, your uncles, your cousins, grandparents, because they wanted to stay with each other and not lose each other, even the nannies would live there." So that was one important reason why Xandra's family decided to move here, and to New Mexico specifically.

Xandra said life in the Philippines was pretty different than here. One example was that there were a lot of very tall buildings. She also said it is cleaner here. And Xandra told me that even though people in the Philippines are paid more at their jobs, jobs were less accessible, so many people are poor. So many houses looked broken down and abandoned, even if there were people living in them. "Sometimes they would grow their own farm or make their own

restaurant and sell stuff. But they didn't make enough money to have a nice house." Xandra explained. But people there didn't need money to be happy. The culture was a lot more positive and happy in the Philippines. "Like people celebrate a lot more, even the little things in the Philippines. Everyone's friendly and they act like they know you." Xandra told me. Another thing that was different in the Philippines school. Schools are much harder there, and the teachers were more strict. In many schools, including the school Xandra attended, Students were only taught how to speak English. "All we could speak was english, we were taught that the most." But Xandra was taught how to speak english long before that. "I knew how to speak english since I was a baby because my mom lived in San Francisco before I was born, so since she already knew how to speak it, she taught me." This was helpful for Xandra because she already knew how to speak english when she moved here. And when Xandra left the Philippines, she had just finished third grade, but when she got to the U.S. she was placed in fifth grade, so she skipped a grade and thats why shes in eighth grade now. Many people mistake Xandra and Xandro for twins, since they are in the same grade, but Xandro is actually a year older than Xandra.

Xandra does miss some things about the Philippines. When asked about how she felt when she was leaving the Philippines, she said, "I was excited but sad at the same time because I knew I would miss some parts of the Philippines." One thing she would miss was her friends. "It was hard to leave them behind, but I had their number so I still talked to them." Some things that she currently misses are things like the positive and celebratory culture, as mentioned previously. She said holidays were much more fun in the Philippines. "Christmas is different there. Christmas was my favorite. And new year, new year there was fun!" She also misses the food. Her grandma makes her most of the foods that she loved from the Philippines, but some of it is

just not available here. “One thing I probably can’t get here is the chips, and the candy. When my aunt goes to the Philippines she brings me back chips and candy. I have a lot of it at home and I eat it everyday.” Xandra told me. She also told me how much she misses the warm weather, and the rain that kept everything green in the Philippines. It was hard for her to get used to the cold, dry climate in New Mexico.

Xandra is 13 now, and it has been four years since she moved here. She lives here with her mother, step dad, and Xandro. She believes that it was worth it to leave the Philippines and come to the United States. She is happy to be an immigrant and she is happy to be living in the U.S.. In fact, she’s happier living here than in the Philippines. “I like living here more than the Philippines, but sometimes I do miss being in the Philippines” Xandra told me. Since moving to the United States, she has not visited the Philippines, it’s just too far away for her and her family to travel. And although it does come with some plus sides, there are also some down sides. For example, Xandra is sometimes made fun of because of her ethnicity. “It offends me sometimes if it gets too far, but most of the time, not really, because I know it’s just a joke.” She told me. But other than that, she hasn’t experienced any discrimination because she is an immigrant or because of her race. Overall, she thinks being an immigrant benefits her life because she gets to have the experience of traveling almost around the world and some people don’t even get to travel out of the country. She also says that she doesn’t let the fact that she is an immigrant affect her life, “I just live my life normally, because I can’t do anything about it, you know.”

This has been Xandra’s experience with immigration. In our interview discussing the topic, she told me about why she moved here, the differences between the Philippines and the United States, her life now, and things she misses from the Philippines. Xandra was born in a different country but she has made the United States her home and she knows she and all

immigrants are welcome here. Xandra told me “I feel like people here accept all people no matter where they come from.”

Written by: Anika Griego