

# LAVENDER Godzilla

Voices of the GLBTQ+ Asian Pacific Alliance

Winter 2022



## Christmas Day

by Tony King

“Merry Christmas!”

“Merry Christmas to you, dear brother! Saw your Facebook post. You got Mom to have Christmas dinner with Alex?! I just missed two Christmases with you guys, and you pulled off a miracle?”

“Yea! That was the best Christmas gift I could have dreamed of, for her to finally acknowledge Alex as my partner.”

That dinner was indeed a great surprise, even for me, especially in contrast with what happened exactly 21 years previously.

### Christmas Day, Year 2000

The day that Dad passed away, I stayed with Mom to keep her company.

That night, as I was crawling into Dad’s bed, Mom suddenly said, “Tony... I know you’re gay. You’re still my son and I still love you. But I don’t want to know and hear anything about your ‘lifestyle.’ It’s a *sin* that I will *never* accept.”

I bit my tongue, figuring the night of Dad’s passing was not an appropriate time to confront her about my sexuality.

Besides, I was happily living in Asia with my partner Andrew, staying as far away from family’s judgment as possible.

Fifteen years later, one day Mom called me.

“What happened, Tony? You haven’t called for months. Are you alright?”

Choking back tears. Voice shaking, “No, Mom. Andrew’s got cancer.”

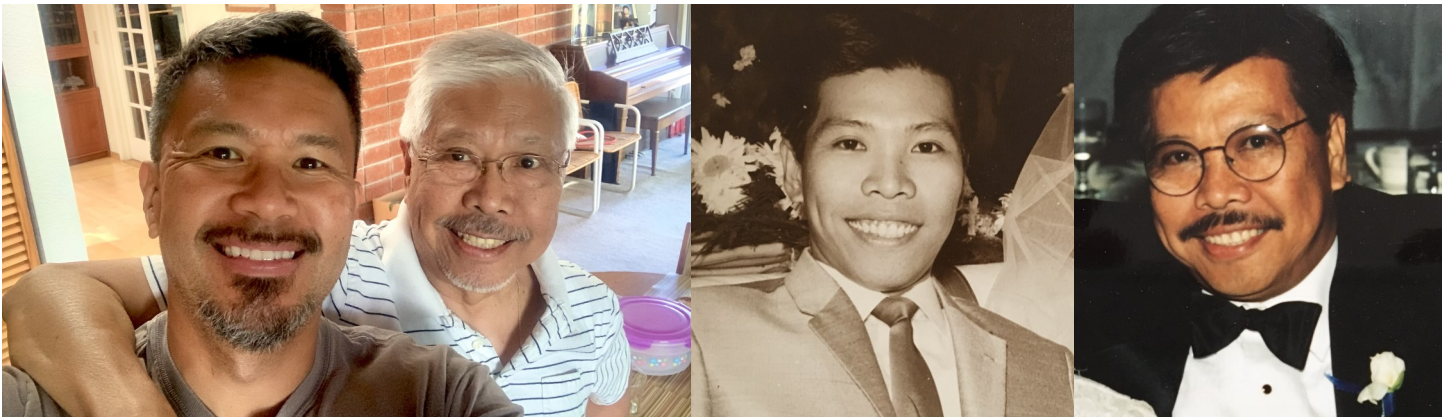
“Aiii yaaah .... It’s going to be so very very tough.”

After asking a lot of questions about Andrew’s conditions, she ended the call saying, “You take care of him and yourself. I’ll pray for him every day. You should do the same too.”

Two years later, Andrew passed away. All along, Andrew and I made plans to come back to San Francisco to take care of Mom as she got into her 90’s. He reaffirmed that he wanted his ashes to follow me to California. So, I interred him at the same cemetery as my Dad’s.

At first, I thought Mom would understand my grieving, now that we’re both widows. But Mom just wanted to

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# Papa Don't Preach

by Lewis Fernandez

I've heard it said that a mother always knows if her son is gay, even if he tries to "act straight." As for me, when I was growing up, I *did* exhibit a few behaviors that would make one wonder: I never had a girlfriend, I loved to dance and sing, and I once videotaped a Miss Universe pageant and watched it over and over again one summer. My mom was painfully aware of my "phase," and asked me if I was gay when I was twelve years old. I quickly said No, so as not to disappoint her or create drama, even though I felt I was gay by that age. She never brought it up again, though she suggested that I become a priest at one point.

But what about my dad? Do fathers have some innate sense of their child's sexual orientation or identity? I'd like to think that a dad would know if his child were queer, that any parent or adult caregiver paying attention would know.

I'm a Fil-Am who grew up in the Bay Area in the 1970s and 80s, a few years in San Francisco's Sunset, and then in Union City, California, which has a large Filipino population. I had a feeling that I was gay at an early age, but kept it to myself, hoping that I'd grow out of it. I'm sure many of you went through a similar struggle.

I finally came out to my family when I was twenty-two. First to my brother, and then to my mother, on separate occasions. My mom reacted like she knew all along, though she was still disappointed, of course. But she seemed resigned to the fact that I was different. She told me not to tell my father, fearing he would freak out and wouldn't be able to accept it. I had no idea how my dad would take the news; perhaps that's why I told him last. Which is kind of weird because my Mom is much more religious than my Dad, and he's even a liberal Democrat. So it shouldn't be a big deal for him, right?

Fast forward a couple of years when I was living at my parents' house. I still hadn't come out to my dad, though I'd been going to SF almost every weekend to go clubbing. There was a period of time where I would go up to Sacramento to have sex with a Filipino guy I had met who lived up there. I'd drive up there Saturday night, spend the night, and come back home early Sunday morning.

One time I came back home a little later than usual. I never considered my commute back from the hook up as a "drive of shame" or anything, but I guess my mom was feeling morally superior that day and had to let me know about it.

We got into a huge argument, my mom saying I was disgusting as she hurled other hurtful words at me, disapproval and intolerance spewing from her mouth, her face full of revulsion. My dad dashed into the living room, wondering about all the yelling and crying. He grabbed my mom by her shoulders and shouted at her, telling her to stop, not to call me such horrible things. Then he ran to the bedroom and started crying, screaming loudly in emotional pain.

I chased after him, mixed emotions churning within me. I was grateful that he defended me from my mom, but were his tears a result of his own disappointment with me? I had never heard or seen my dad so wracked with sobs before, his heart bursting with hurt. I felt a bit guilty for possibly being the cause of his pain.

He lay crumpled on the bed, his hands covering his face, crying softly. "I'm sorry," he moaned. "I'm sorry."

Why would he apologize to me when he had just stopped my mom from berating me? Or was he regretful about something else, about the fact that I was gay? Maybe he was sorry that, in his mind, my life would be filled with suffering and stress due to my homosexuality.

Those questions were never answered. Like most Filipino families, after that huge, cathartic drama erupted and receded, it was back to keeping quiet about feelings and no talk of anything related to sexuality.

My dad and I have a good relationship now, actually better than when I was a young boy or teenager. We still don't talk about the intimate stuff, but we're very comfortable with each other. He's finally accepted my orientation, and even read from the Bible at my wedding ceremony when I married my husband.

When my dad and I get together, we talk about current events and politics, and share what's been going on with our lives. Never sports, though; he knows I'm not really into that stuff. Unlike my mother, who still lectures me

and treats me like an immature kid much of the time, my dad acknowledges that I'm an adult, and treats me as such, which I greatly appreciate. He recognizes and respects my husband and our relationship with each other. He was also accepting and encouraging when my husband and I adopted our two sons.

As a father now myself, I'd like to think that I've taken the best of my parents' child-rearing lessons and incorporated them into raising my own kids. Still, it's difficult to shed some of the "tiger parents" behaviors that were pressed down upon me. Though in retrospect, having had to navigate the stress of pleasing parents with high expectations, I sort of shifted towards the other end of the spectrum, being almost too lenient and laid back with my sons. It's definitely been a challenging balancing act.

Unlike the generation before us, my husband and I were pretty open talking about sexuality with our boys. Given that they were raised in a two-dad household, the questions were bound to come up. This is a sharp contrast from my dad's avoidance of sex talk. I feel it's because my husband and I both didn't have many discussions with our parents regarding sexuality when we were growing up, and we wanted to ensure our boys were comfortable talking about it, and free to ask questions. Also, society

nowadays is more open to communication about this topic, so everyone is more comfortable talking about it.

So even though my dad never talked about me finding a girlfriend or questioned my sexuality, I do feel that he had some inkling that I was gay. He and my mom probably talked about it, hoping that I was just a late bloomer. Well, I definitely *bloomed*, honey, but not in the way they had hoped.

Maybe he wanted to let me be, and find my own path, and not influence how my orientation or identity would develop. Or maybe he just didn't want to deal with it, uncomfortable with the subject. I don't know; in typical Asian fashion, I had never asked him or brought it up. I guess the apple doesn't fall far from the tree. Or in this case, the coconut.

From my own perspective, I feel that most parental figures, if they cared enough and paid attention, would know if their child were queer, at least back in the 20th century. Today, it seems more likely that a kid would come out to their parents as gay, or bisexual, or non-binary, etc.

All in all, parenting is challenging and has a lot of ups and downs. I hope as society moves forward, and that fathers (especially Asian ones) can be more open and comfortable discussing sexual topics with their teenage kids.



### **Christmas Day**

*continued from front page —*

brush aside any mention of Andrew and my *lifestyle*. "Everyone dies someday, what's so sad about it?"

When I mentioned I was seeking a therapist, she asked, "Isn't it just talk talk talk talk? What's the point? You should just come back to church with me."

No no no no no! No way I would set foot in a church that still taught Mom homosexuality should be cured by studying the Bible.

Later, when a good friend of hers died and Mom told me how she missed her, I bit my tongue again. I just couldn't call her out on her double standards when she was grieving.

During March 2019, thanks to a lot of encouragement from GAPA Theatre, I performed a tearful piece in memory of Andrew's passing. As though it was a bless-

ing from Andrew, on that very evening, I met Alex. We hit it off immediately and, after dating for a few months, we moved in together... just before the pandemic lockdown.

Indeed, during the pandemic, together with the wave of anti-Asian hate crimes right in front of our apartment in Oakland Chinatown, we cut back on socializing and even just going out. It was a real blessing that Alex and I had each other, and we became the whole universe to each other. As a result, isolated even in our

familiar hometown of the Bay Area, Alex and I quickly developed this strong bond and interdependency, reminiscent of when Andrew and I first moved to Thailand as complete outsiders, totally reliant on each other.

As for my mom, during the pandemic I became the only person from outside her retirement home that she could see... outdoors in the parking lot. Every week, I'd bring take outs of her favorite dishes. Every day, I'd call her just so that she's not completely isolated. And at every chance, I'd tell her how Alex and I were building our lives together to survive the pandemic – but I could never tell if what I said simply fell on deaf ears.

### **Christmas Day, 2021**

After a scrumptious dinner of take-out food and some mahjong games, I heard Mom explaining to my cousins, "Yea! I remember Alex. A couple of years ago, he came to help Tony remove a messy pigeon's nest from my patio. Looks like a good guy."



# Out in the Rain

by O.V. Cácananta

Evening fell as we descended along Interstate 580. Heavy dark clouds hung in the horizon. My brother and I were heading to the Berkeley Repertory Theatre where I volunteered as an usher. I couldn't drive then, so like the responsible surrogate father he was, he wanted to drop me off, and then see me home.

That night, something occupied his mind. He was driving slower than usual and muttering to himself. He kept fidgeting with the radio until he settled on classic seventies soft rock. He was predictable, if not for his moods that spun wildly as the windmills we were zooming past by the Altamont Hills. One day it's flights of fancy, the next he was in bed from sunup to sundown. His temper blew in like a summer thunderstorm. He could be fun, funny, and frightening all at once. So, I let him be, so I could wander in my own thoughts. Then Freddie Mercury began to sing –

*Is this the real life? Is this just fantasy?*

*Caught in a landslide. No escape from reality.*

The humidity in the car spiked, I could feel it, and from my peripheral vision I could sense him holding his breath.

*Open your eyes, look up to the skies and see*

"I love this song," he said, as he turned it down to a whisper. "Ading, adda ibagak kaniam."

Uh oh, I thought. He had something to tell me. He spoke our language only with our parents, or when he was cursing at the top of his lungs. And he called me *ading*. A term of endearment, which he never does. I looked at him. He grimaced.

"I'm..." he mumbled. "I'm...I'm gay."

I looked away. My own breath escaped my chest, and a deafening silence filled the car. Almost on cue, the sky opened, and rain came pouring down in sheets. Brakes, red lights. He veered to the slow lane and cranked the windshield wiper.

Gay, he said. I was confused. Then our childhood flashed into focus. His play dress ups in bathrobes and heels. His fascination with figure skating and *Golden Girls*.

Did that make him gay? We depended on someone for so long, we became blind to the smoke and mirrors. Then, Freddie crooned –

*I don't want to die. I sometimes wish I'd never been born at all.*

Freddie who died of AIDS.

"Are you sure?" I uttered weakly. "How do you know?"

"I am gay," he said once more, this time with more conviction.

"Are you healthy?"

"I don't have HIV, if that's what you mean," he said. "I've never slept with anyone. Like, nobody."

"Virgin Mary," I said out loud. I didn't mean to, but it came out of my lips.

"Yeah," he chuckled, putting him at ease. "You're the first to know. In our family."

Our family, I thought. I wonder how they would react. I might have to... oh. It dawned on me. "You are telling me that you're gay because you want me to tell mom, right?" I asked. I could hear a defensive excuse formulating in his head. For all his cleverness, I know him. "No, no." I stopped him before he could say it. "That's what you want me to do."

"Would you?" he asked nervously. "Don't tell anyone else, please. Just mom."

*I'm just a poor boy, nobody loves me*

*He's just a poor boy from a poor family*

*Spare him his life from this monstrosity*

Argh! I turned off the radio. He calculated that I would be okay with him being gay because we were close. Or maybe he didn't care if I wasn't okay with it, but that I would have to report it to mother anyway. Scared little mama's boy. He was using me. He could be such an asshole!

We remained silent for the rest of the ride. The rain drizzled as we sped past the Oakland redwoods and then entered the streets of downtown Berkeley. We found street parking on Addison Street and walked slowly to the theatre, then stood at the entrance for an awkward moment. He finally asked me if I was okay, and I was fine, though I was processing it at the time.

"Mom has you on a pedestal" I assured him. "She wouldn't care. You shouldn't doubt it. But I'll tell her. And, you know, I don't care either. Just concerned."

I was going to say I loved him, but that vocabulary doesn't exist in our family. You show love by driving them to the theater and making sure they were safe.

He nodded. The theater marquee lights illuminated his face and I saw him for the first time. Tired and spent, yet relieved and free, as if he just pushed himself out of a cocoon. I was still irritated at him for using me, but I was glad he came out to me first.

"Do you want to come in and watch the play?" I pointed at the poster as I motioned for the door. "You can wait for me after the show."

He glanced at it. The Laramie Project. His eyes glistened, he half smiled, and then walked up to the box office for a ticket.



# A Feast for Amah

by Edward Gunawan

i.

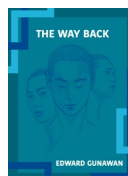
Thick congealed slab of yellow margarine then a rainfall of coarse-grain sugar on plain white bread. You didn't know we had no jam or butter in the cool box. You didn't know this was luxury for her — squatting down in shelters, air raids thunderous above. To this day you still ask for packets from flight attendants frowning at you funny before their carts of coffee and tea roll down the aisles. When the plane dips, she holds your hands steady as you pry in half the dinner roll from corners of tin-foil trays — slathering and sprinkling, biting off a piece of that salt and sweet sinking soft in your belly.

ii.

By the early morning light, she hauls that sack of sweet potatoes off our kitchen floor stocked seemingly just for this occasion. Peeling and dicing them into cubes before washing a cup of jasmine rice in the sink three times as she'd instructed you before. One to clean two for taste and three for luck. Then boiling them into gooey mush. No doubt your fever will break and cough dissipate as she nurses into you that spoonful of porridge streaked orange from sinewy fibrous roots. We come from a long line of peasant farmers after all — her hands alchemize comfort out of crumbs, and sustenance from scraps. Sick days are your favorite.

iii.

Long sweaty dusty walks back from school are tolerable knowing you'll sink your teeth into those juicy treats she has prepared. Every day, without fail, a bowl of ripe oranges sliced into quarters, de-seeded and chilled in the fridge, waiting. Over and over again, you'll chase after this pulpy parade of icy fireworks in your mouth — a chance to sketch once more the ghostly scent of citrus sunbeams exploding in the air.



"A Feast of Amah" is collected in Edward's award-winning recently-published **The Way Back**, now available for purchase: <https://foglifterjournal.com/2022/10/11/the-way-back-a-hybrid-chapbook-by-edward-gunawan/>



# When I Told My Mom

by Dino Duazo

I get COVID in January during the first Omicron surge, before it seems like everyone else finally catches it. With shots, booster, and mild symptoms, I'm not too worried. But the thought crosses my mind — should I tell others? It brings back familiar and uneasy feelings. Feelings of fear, shame, uncertainty...

A lot has been said about correlations between COVID and AIDS, but for me one of the most basic and potent parallels is the decision to share your status.

*Do you let other people know you've caught the virus? Is this an admission that you did something wrong?*

So, let me reframe the scenario...

I get HIV during the worst of the AIDS crisis. I'm 26 and emotionally wrecked when I find out, crying over a future that is lost to me. No chance at being a father. No lover to grow old with. No more monthly dinners simply connecting with family. I see myself dead by 30.

But life goes on... and I outlive my predictions. With no major complications, HIV just becomes another part of me, like being gay, or being Asian — more up front at times, receding at others. I find support within GAPA's queer API community, and become so open about my status that eventually it feels as if everyone knows — everyone but my parents.

I'm not so worried about my dad, he's laid back and mellow. But my mom is a different story. She is the stiff pillar of the family, ever focused upward. At home, she is often absent as I grow up, working multiple jobs, driven to better our family situation. I lack her ambition, and wonder if I ever live up to expectations.

Emotionally, she doesn't give hugs and never says love. But, I see it in her drive and determination for her family. It shows in her quiet acceptance of my sexuality, introducing my partner to colleagues as her son. It shows in her urge to make food for me whenever I visit, or to hem my pants whenever I ask, and even in her amused smile when she does my makeup for the first time I do drag.

Despite these signs, my feelings for her are conflicted. When explicit declarations of love are hard to come by,

getting approval and avoiding disappointment become more important. It creates this aching need for validation, like having a magic glass that never gets filled. Being gay is an intrinsic part of me, but HIV could have been avoided. Will HIV make me less in her eyes?

Years go by with this dual existence — out to the world, hidden to my family, until finally an opportunity comes along where I'm interviewed by a Filipino news station. I tell my mom I'll be on TV, but I don't explain why. I wait for the right time to tell her, and wait, and wait... Until seconds before the show starts, I say "Mom, the interview is about me living with HIV."

A look of shock, then silence as the program begins. The host asks all the questions my mom needs to have answered, and when the show ends, all she says is "Are you healthy?" She doesn't reach out to comfort, but I know she's there for me. An anti-climactic ending after all my anxiety.

If she were alive today, I know I wouldn't have the same hesitation to let my mother know. Time softened her walls, like sandstone exposed to the elements.

When my father died, her façade completely crumbled, as she freely displayed grief, regret, anger, petulance. In her recovery, she would share how my father courted her, her initial resistance, and the abiding love that grew over time — unfiltered expressions of loss and longing that were surprisingly surprising for me to hear from her.

Washed by her sadness, I feel the need to be by her side, never complaining, propping up the pillar that she had been for me.


\* \* \* \* \*

I was traveling when I found out she died. In an airport surrounded by strangers, my body crumples in tears. I thought I had learned how to numb all superfluous emotion, but the news felt like a muffled blow to the chest, as I was struck by alien and consuming pain.

Years after her death, I still crave the lost time we could have had, no matter how frustratingly hard it might be to read her. I picture telling her my status — HIV, COVID, or whatever fate brings along, and seeing her reaction. Hearing her simply say "Are you healthy?" would be enough for me to know that things are all right.

# The Light

by Kunal Prasad



He thought about taking a selfie.  
That's how good the lighting was.  
The light glowed and he thought,  
“they got good lighting in here, this is good, I could take a picture.”

The light was soft  
and white like daylight,  
“I should ask the nurse what lighting they use, cause...  
there're no windows in the room, no windows in the ICU.”

And he looked towards his Mom in her hospital bed  
and he saw the light and the light was good. And he thought,  
“Oh, she'll be going soon.”

Now was the time  
The time to say goodbye  
for good.

Urmila looked asleep.  
He said he loved her.  
He said she could go.

He said they could go on without her.  
And not to worry. They were okay.

He said she would go back to the earth  
Back to her essential parts her chemicals  
Her molecules back to nature she would go.  
Back to the clouds, the ocean

To the sound of rain hitting the ground which she loved.  
And then he left

He had to go He needed space  
He couldn't go the distance it needed to take  
So he left the room the ICU  
Before she had left the room.

And why is that what pulled him away  
To take his leave two moments too soon?

Mommy loved makeup  
Lancome Clinique Mary Kay  
Off 5th — Saks 5th Avenue  
Mommy loved perfume  
Black pearls white diamonds  
The smell could make you come to  
They both loved Roses  
Baby roses pink roses  
Red roses of course And blue  
They both loved saris  
Silky salwar kameezes  
wool acrylic too

They both loved stories  
Legends of birth and rebirth  
Of people—gods born anew

To talk about their love however  
Wasn't a thing they'd do  
Love was actions  
Obeying and following through  
Of working

A history born in Fiji  
A history born of indentured servitude  
The Fiji Islands under British colonial rule  
A place where slavery was born anew  
A place where great-grandpa came by mistake Tricked grandpa said  
Into cutting sugar cane half a world away  
And how he fought for great-grandma's hand  
With a stick

See that is love  
To be tough and fight With a stick  
And now how about now? What is love?  
What would he have said if he stayed in Mommy's Room in the ICU?

That sometimes love hurts when one is not accustomed to it  
That sometimes to love is impossible when one has learned to avoid it  
That sometimes it's easier

To hold your chest and throat tight  
Than to let in the light  
of love  
and forgiveness

To let them know how much you care  
Because too many times you're hit  
For being who you are  
And told to stay in your place

That sometimes sitting with your mother  
Bathed in her light  
Her love

Is impossible to do  
when you haven't fully accepted  
and forgiven yourself  
for realities both real and imagined

Because  
Because  
Letting go is the hardest thing to do

He would say  
I am who I am  
and who I am not  
I will hold myself  
up

to the light  
which is me  
And you  
and mommy

And you  
and everyone  
Everything  
Anew



# Lola x Kenneth

*In 2014, Filipino-American artist and LGBTQ Ally Kenneth Tan moved back home to San Jose to help care for his lola (grandmother in Tagalog). One day, while sitting at the kitchen table, he asked her what she wanted to do. She said, “Something that is for a purpose.”*

*Reading somewhere that painting was a form of therapy with seniors, Kenneth and Crescenciana got to work. She made paintings in watercolor, and when they dried he drew on top of them based on the stories and memories she was sharing with him. That’s how they started creating together, and the **Lola x Kenneth Collaboration** was born.*

*Multiple generations are common in API households, with extended family members making an important and lasting impact. When Lola passed, she left Kenneth with her paintings and a purpose — he made a promise to finish everything she started. Kenneth’s work has been to tell the story of a lifetime, the story of the work his Lola left behind.*

*Most recently, Kenneth released **Crescenciana**, an art book and memoir which weaves together their artwork, conversations, and memories to tell his grandmother’s life story. In an exclusive with **Lavender Godzilla**, Kenneth shares some of his favorite pieces and the stories behind them.*

*For more information about the Lola x Kenneth Collaboration, including how to order Crescenciana, visit [www.lolaxkenneth.com](http://www.lolaxkenneth.com)*



## Anihan

“Anihan” is Tagalog for “harvest.” When Lola and I were making this piece together, I kept her childhood in mind.

Lola was born and raised in the village Villasis in the Philippines. Hers was a farming family, and she once explained to me how they grew rice, from start to finish. “You are in the field all day, you are bent over, your knees ache, your back ache. Oh, I miss it,” she said.

When I think of Lola now, I remember a woman who embraced the amount of work it took to plant a seed and make it grow.





## Dancing Shoes

During World War II, Japan occupied the Philippines. At that time, Lola was in her hometown. One day, she heard that a neighboring village was hosting a fiesta. Outside Lola's bamboo window, Japanese soldiers patrolled the streets. Still, she was itching to dance. She strapped on her shoes and set off for the fiesta.

In the middle of the dance, someone alerted the crowd that Japanese soldiers were approaching. Everyone bolted. Lola hopped onto the back of a cart and started her long journey home. She told me she lost her earring. The cart jounced so much that it jolted right off her ear.

When Lola reached home, she removed her shoes to wash them. In the morning, she would remember to bow to the Japanese soldiers when they filed past her nipa hut. But at that moment, there in the moonlight, I wonder if Lola, stooped and standing on stones and shells, was rinsing dirt from her hands and already planning another time to slide her feet into her shoes, slip away into the night, and dance.



## Banig

When I started working on this piece, Lola's red and blue watercolors felt American and patriotic, so I drew in weaving patterns to create this Filipino American banig – a large handwoven mat for sleeping or sitting.

In the Philippines, Lola inherited her family's nipa hut. That's where she raised my mom. Inside, the hut was really just one room, which I think a real estate agent would rebrand as an "open floor plan." At the end of each day, they rolled out a banig and settled in for the night.

When Lola and Mom immigrated to America, they moved into a house with rooms, plural. At night, we'd retire to our own quarters and lie on our own mattresses. But I remember Lola would sometimes still prefer to unfurl a banig and sleep on the floor.

I wonder how much a room is defined by its contents. If a dining table makes a dining room, and a bed makes a bedroom, then maybe Lola's banig spread out there on the ground somehow marked our house as a place where, at the end of the day, we could all lay together. Lay together and dream.

I once asked Lola whether she considered herself to be American or Filipino. She said, "I feel more like an American. I live like a Filipino, but I feel American because I am free."



# A Parenting Journey

by Es Esposito

Mohammad Pourshams and I have been together 16 years. We are lucky enough to have two wonderful and rumbunctious boys, Ronan Ezra (10) and Evan Reza (5). We always wanted children. In fact, it was one of our first conversations when we met. The topic of did we want children and how many. He wanted one, and I wanted as many as we could have. We compromised and decided on having two. So that if we made a mistake on the first one, we had a backup plan.

After being together for 2.5 years, we decided to get married and start our journey into parenthood. My family was pretty supportive and encouraged us to have children. They welcomed the idea of having little ones run around again. I was the last one to have children among my siblings. Mohammad's family was still processing his coming out to them. We tried for a year and a half to adopt a child. It was just too overwhelming with all the roller coaster of emotions. We would get a call, then they would change their minds. Other times, we felt it was not a good fit based on visitation rights the birth mom wanted.

Finally, my mother stepped in and mentioned surrogacy. She commented that she was not getting any younger and would like to be a grandmother soon. She even had a surrogate in mind. So we started the process, and it was not easy. We found a clinic that worked with gay couples and had a high success rate. Then, we had to find egg donors and surrogates. We consulted with lawyers — we had to provide a lawyer for the surrogate, another for the egg donor, and finally for us.

Once everyone was selected, it was not easy. Two of our gestational carriers failed the physical, our egg donor became barren during our wait period, the egg donor missed the final shot to align their menstrual period before the transfer, and during our pregnancy with Ronan, we lost one after a month and a half. Ronan was a miracle baby and hung on. When we finally gave birth, it was not a very joyous occasion. Since the new Kaiser was not familiar with the process, we could not bring him home. Admin had mentioned that both

fathers could not have their names on the birth certificate. We specifically went before the judge to have this done. Luckily our lawyer showed up and was able to clear the whole thing up and got the state involved. We went before the judge again and we got our names on his birth certificate. We were pros by the time Evan was born. A much easier process than before.

Having children helped heal the relationship between Mohammad and his family. There was quite a bit of tension between families before then as well. One is very Catholic and the other Muslim. Having gay sons was a tough process for both families. Becoming parents and having children too has a way of smoothing out the relationships between parents and their gay child. It also aided in relieving the tension between the two families. It all sort of worked its way out without any big blowout. Both families came together to celebrate the birth of their new grandchildren and that was all that was needed. We all now had a common ground.

To say that our boys are a blessing, is an understatement. Mohammad and I were happy to see both families come to terms with each other and set all our differences aside. Both our cultures value family and education, we had a lot in common. At the end of the day, I think our families were worried that their gay child would not have the same opportunities that their straight children had. Seeing that we are in a loving relationship and having children made them realize that we could carve out our piece of happiness in this world. As a parent, I now understand this need to protect and make sure our children will be okay when we are gone.

As the children started to grow up and venture into the real world, we made sure that they were informed of who their parents are and where they came from. We consciously made them aware in order that they will never be blindsided by uncomfortable questions. We also have an attitude that we are no different from other families. Sometimes we do sense people are uncomfortable and we just go about our business. We feel it's their process not ours. We surround ourselves with very open-minded people anyway, so it was never really an issue.

The children's school is very welcoming and supportive, as well as the parents and children going to their school. We try to expose them to as many things as we can. If they ask why they have two dads, we tell them there are different types of parents. We are not as common, so that makes us even more special.

We try to teach the boys to be confident and it helps that we reinforce that feeling by being confident and unassuming as parents as well. They feed off of our personalities and I see them holding their own when asked awkward questions. It's also really important that they know they are loved, and they can come to us with any problem they may face. I will repeat to them over and over, that I may get angry at their behavior or actions, but I will always love them.

Raising the boys, we both definitely have fallen into our roles. Mohammad is the more doting father. He lets them get away with murder. He takes them shopping, buys them clothes and provides their physical wants and needs. Where I tend to be more old fashioned and play the traditional "Asian disciplinary" dad. I will play sports with them, go hiking, camping. But we both show they are loved very much and there is nothing they can do to ever change that. With both of us working, we both have to work together to meet their needs.

The biggest struggle is definitely scheduling. There is only so much time in the day to do everything. Our son's school is a mandatory volunteer school, where a parent has to attend one day a week on campus to help in class. Since we have two kids and I have the more flexible schedule, I juggle between Ronan and Evan's classes every Wednesday, my hump day. Every morning we lineup in front of the office 8:15 to check in for parole and see what our schedules are like for the day, also answering questionnaires making sure we don't have Covid. I also have an assigned job for the school, as lunch time yard duty (which I love because I get to know all the wonderful kids and their Dr. Jekyll/Mr. Hyde personalities during that 45-minute mind altering experience).

Also the school doesn't provide buses. So, every year all the parents ogle each other's cars, to see how many kids they can stuff in your car. They rank you based on what car you drive, Mini-vans and SUV's ranking high, sports cars being bottom of the barrel. How I wished I still had my old 2-seater Fiero. I take pride in the fact that not only do I belong to the largest carpool van every morning with seven kids ranging from kindergarten to 5th grade, but also fulfilled my childhood dream of living up to the stereotypical Asian driver traveling in a van full of people. We all have to turn in insurance forms, driving records, health records and finally fingerprinted all because we get to drive these little brats, I mean beautiful kids around. Yes, I would say scheduling between work, carpool, after school activities has been the biggest challenge.

The biggest joy of parenting... everything!!! I mean that. Even the worst is a joy. We chose to have children. It's everything we ever wanted, to be fathers. We both feel privileged and honored to be dads to two wonderful kids. The morning hugs from Ronan, the random butterfly kisses from Evan, or just knowing that they look for us to give them a sense of security and unconditional love. Every sleepless night when they are sick, the rush to the emergency room, the panic of losing them in the store, all the tribulations are worth the joy of being a parent.



My biggest advice for new parents and future parents is to be patient with yourself and forgive yourself for mistakes. No one is a perfect parent, you can't hold yourself to that unattainable standard. You will make mistakes, you say the wrong things, you will react, you will lose your temper, you will argue with your kids, your partner. But at the end of the day, just remember why you wanted children in the first place. Children are a lot more resilient than you think... they will adapt, they will understand. We survived our childhood with all its ups and downs, they can too. As long as you love them unconditionally and forgive yourself for your shortcomings as a parent, you will be fine.

As a parent all we want is to raise strong, loving, self-aware, happy, respectful and resilient young adults. Once we do that, we did our job and can send them off to the world with tools they need to survive. We have them for such a short time, so don't fret on the small stuff... just enjoy every minute while you can.

# Contributors

**O.V. Cácananta** first volunteered for GAPA in 2006 as a way of coming out to his community. To further his activism for the LGBTQ+ Asian and Pacific Islander community, he joined the organization in 2015 first as a member of GAPA Men's Chorus, as a playwright for GAPA Theatre, and as a board director for GAPA and its charitable culture arm GAPA Fund from 2016 to 2022. Outside, he is a biotech executive, a family historian, and an ardent advocate for the use and development of his native Ilokano language. All these streams of identity find themselves intersecting in his work. He lives in Oakland with his husband.

**Dino Duazo** is a founding member of GAPA and has long been involved with its cultural programs, including GAPA Men's Chorus, GAPA Theatre and GAPA Dance Company. He helped produce *Lavender Godzilla* during its launch in 1988, as well as over extended periods during GAPA's history. He recently returned as Editor of the [revived publication](#) once again.

**Es Esposito** and **Mohammad Pourshams** have been together for 15 years, married 12 years. Es is a broker in real estate and loans and Mo is a Sr Quality Engineer at Infinion. They reside in Santa Clara, California with their two sons, Ronan and Evan.

**Lewis Fernandez** is a gay Fil-Am living and working in the East Bay. Father of two and husband of one, he enjoys singing, dancing, reading, movies, and playing Overwatch 2 on his PC.

**Tony King** first moved to San Francisco in 1988, joining GAPA in its first year. As a member, he helped with producing GAPA Dance's first *ExtravaGAPA* show and a couple of GAPA Runway shows. He moved to Asia for 24 years, and returned to the Bay Area and GAPA in 2016. He served on GAPA Board from 2018 to 2021. With no writing or acting experience, he joined GAPA Theatre in 2018. Tony is looking forward to forming a GAPA foodie group at some point.

**Edward Gunawan** ([addword.com](#)) is a writer and a filmmaker who tells interdisciplinary stories of kinship and belonging. The author of two chapbooks *The Way Back* (winner of Start a Riot! Prize, Foglifter Press, 2022) and *Press Play* (Sweet Lit, 2020), he has completed over 25 feature and short films as writer, producer, actor, and/or director in his 15+ year career. A queer immigrant from Indonesia and of Chinese heritage, Edward now resides on Ohlone land in Oakland, CA where he also curates and hosts community gatherings.

**Kunal Prasad** is a California native and a child of immigrants from the Fiji Islands. His ancestors were from India and came to Fiji during the British Raj. His creative spirit springs from the colors, stories, music, and beauty from California, Fiji and India. An Actor, Artist and Educator, he loved having his creative mind and heart blown during GAPA Theatre's Hearts & Minds 2022 program, working with Cesar, Kat and Joel and the amazing cohort of beautiful individuals. Ram Ram and Bula Vinaka.



GAPA envisions a powerful queer and transgender Asian and Pacific Islander (QTAPI) community that is seen, heard and celebrated. Our mission is to unite our families and allies to build a community through advocacy, inclusion and love.

**UNITY:** We connect, organize, and advocate to band together our community identities in the interest of creating a powerful and united QTAPI nation. We are strongest together.

**VISIBILITY:** We show pride and resilience in everything we do for our community and each other. We are present; we are seen and heard for our diverse individual and collective truths.

**ABUNDANCE:** We act and react from a place of plenty, strength and hope. We add to and amplify the efforts of allies. We believe that opportunity is limitless, and that yes, we *absolutely* can.

**INTEGRITY:** We are guided by honest and strong principles. It shows in the accuracy and truthfulness of our work. We set a great example of how to be an active member of the community.

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## LAVENDER Godzilla

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