

Lisa Cantrell: You're listening to Capital Storytelling Live. I am your host Lisa Cantrell. The following recording came from an event that features stories tellers who all identify as immigrants or children of immigrants.

The event was our second annual immigrant story event. And it was held on October 25th of 2023 on the campus of Sacramento State University in celebration of National immigrants Day. Capital Storytelling partnered with a dreamer resource center at Sacramento state to host the event, and we were sponsored by Capital Public Radio and funded in part by an anchor grant from Sacramento State as well as grants from Sacramento city office of arts and culture, the California Arts and Counsel and a generous donation from John Brenchley.

You will be hearing from six story tellers who got on stage that night and shared. Our first storyteller of the evening was Anmol Pavade. Anmol Pavadel is the eldest daughter of Punjabi and Tamils immigrants. As a storyteller and cultural steward, earth advocate and future ancestor, Enmol is passionate about bridging the gap between the past and the present. The title of her story was A Grand Farewell.

Anmol: So today's story is a story from my 13-year-old self, and I know when I was thinking about this story, and you might be thinking: "wow 13?" That's a time that I don't really want to remember and trust me, I really tried to push it deep down, deep down inside. But the reason why I kind of wanted to highlight this story is because 13 was a really pivotal time in my life. Thirteen was when I started to really form opinions and start to really get pissed at the world and ask questions much to my parents' disappointments, child of an immigrant. "*Hey, eldest daughter.*" Yup [Laughter]..

So, I'm going to take you guys on a journey. It is the summer of 2011. I am 13 years old. It's my summer break between middle school and High school. Yeah. I am feeling a lot of things, a lot of things are going on. A lot of hormonal changes. All that good stuff. And I'm so excited to go on our annual family vacation. My daddy mom, my dad's mom is visiting from India. On her bi annual trip, she would always come and visit every couple of years. And you know, we are getting ready to show her the coast. We are getting ready to show her California, what we really are known for.

And to give you guys a little bit of context, within my identity of being Indian, I am north and south Indian. My mom is a Punjabi Sikh and my dad is a Hindu Tamil from Tomonaru. And unless you are from India, and you know what India is like and how incredibly vast and huge India is, that might not mean much to you. But like when I say: It's the North and the South, like it's really the North and the South.

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Like, two completely different places, two completely different religions, languages, the food is completely different. The way they dress is completely different. Like everything is so different to the point where my parents were basically like my family's own Romeo and Juliet because there was that much drama involved with them getting together. And yes, they had a love marriage, not an arranged marriage. So, super dramatic. [Laughter].

So, you know, we are getting ready to go on our family vacation, and maybe a couple of days before the vacation we get a call from my mommy, my aunt, letting me know that my Biji, my great grandmother from my mom side, is on her deathbed.

Now, my Biji: she is Punjabi. She is the one from mom's side of the family. She was quite a force of nature. Later on and doing some reflecting, I see so much of myself in her. She was the eldest daughter. You know, she got married at 19, grew up in colonial British India, had to escape her village during partition when Britain decided to overnight draw a line and tell people where to go and displace so many individuals. She, you know, even though she was able to mobilize her own family after that time and was doing well, she made sure that she always, you know, invested in the community. Something that is so important to me. She was an artist. A fiber artist who was really into knitting and crocheting. Who would always make my sweater growing up? She would take to Joann's and let me pick out my own fabric for my pajamas and you know it's these little memories that like reflecting back now, I am like: "Wow, times were tough", but I never felt that. You know, I felt so much abundance in her sweater, in my handmade hand neck clothes and, you know, she was the one who moved first to California in the 70s, brought our family here which, you know, later on in the 90s when I decided to be born, you know, it was a little bit of a disruption because my mom happened to be visiting but I was like: *"Just kidding, I'm going to be 4, 3 weeks earlier. I don't want to be a Scorpio for any astrology nerds out there. Sorry, love you guys."* [Laughter].

But, you know, I was born here, America, leaving the dream. Umm, and her son, my mom and my uncle was one of the people in my family that just couldn't accept my parents' marriage. Now, there is some context to that. There was a lot of political strife and nuance in between Hindus and Sikhs post the 80s. There was, you know, a huge riot that happened that was anti Sikhs after the assassination of Gandhi, and that's a whole other historical moment that I highly recommend folks to look up. It's quite sad.

But you know, my mom would just never really accepted my family and so finding out my Biji was on her deathbed, we decided to all of a sudden scrapped our plans. Be like

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okay we are not going up the coast anymore. No, we are going to Colorado. We are going to make a crazy trip across California to Colorado and that's exactly what happened. So overnight, I am seeing my two grandmothers, my north Indian Punjabi grandmother on one side of the stove, cooking Chai on pakoras, and all these North Indian delicacies. And then seeing my other grandmamma daddy from the South making filter coffee, making Varal, all these south Indian delights. And then just packing up the chest full, I know we are all children of immigrants, we all have that chest that our parents packed out where it's like: *"We are not going to get fast food. We have enough food on this trip. We are eating good. We are eating this."*

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So, they are packing up this stuff. We are packing up our 1998 clunker of a van. It was this Chevy that my dad bought off a coworker that we used to call Bernie that we would take all over the States. But you know, we are packing that up. And we are, overnight, we make our trip to Colorado.

Now, you know, on the trip over there, being the disruptive that I am, being the pissed off 13 year old that I am, I am asking questions. Questions that no one really wanted to answer. I am, again, pissed off, 13 very hormonal. I am someone who wasn't feeling Indian enough at a lot of times, who didn't feel American enough, who didn't feel Tamil enough, who didn't feel Punjabi enough. I spoke Hindu, but I didn't speak Tamils and Punjabi and I was just confused. And I didn't understand why it was so normal for someone who was such a big part of my family to openly not acknowledge my family. And the fact that we had to go across states to go see my great grandma on her deathbed. So, fast-forward through the trip, we show up and I find out that my great grandma obviously because of morphine had been super out of it the entire time before we were coming. But that day, she just so happened to be super coherent. And we spent two days with her drinking chai, eating méties, sweets, we listened to her stories, we laughed and in between obviously I got up into my own like 13 year old shenanigans, playing with my cousins, sneaking off to 711 that my uncle owned and stealing swirly from him. This is enough reparations for me at this time. Thank you for all the swirlies. Not enough, obviously. I'm so pissed.[Laughter]

But you know, there is a point where we were watching She is the Man. And I'm like watching Amanda Bynes pretending to be a boy living out her dream of playing soccer for this school. I'm like: *"wow I'm not necessarily playing soccer but like I am definitely in disguise here unmasking a lot."* It was you know, multiple moments throughout that trip where I realized I wasn't able to fully feel my grief because I didn't really know what exactly it was in that moment. But I knew there was something there and that there was something I was confused by. And so fast forward, it's the last day of the trip. I am talking to my Biji, my sister is there. We are saying goodbye which of course it's gonna

take like five hours longer than we expected cause why would they go on time. But you know my sister is there crying telling my Biji *“don’t worry I’m gonna make you proud. I am going to be a doctor.”* And I’m like: *“damn, that’s a lot of pressure. I don’t think I’m gonna be a doctor. I am gonna be me. So, I hope you like that in afterlife.”* [Laughter]

It’s moments where in sitting down and talking to her hearing her stories, I realized that’s honestly the most I really ever talked to my Biji. Often times, she was this strong stoic silent woman who I never really heard her say I love you, but I felt her love through different things like knitting my sweater or cooking me food. And, I’ll ever forget we went through the classic dance, the money dance where elders are trying to give you money when you are leaving and you are like I am not supposed to accept this. My parents are glaring dagger through my back but it’s just disrespectful if I don’t. Eventually she is like: *“just take the money and I’m like: Okay I will take the money.”*

I take this 20 dollars from my Biji, and I give her a kiss, and I tell her I love her, and she tells me that she loves me and you know eventually we make our way out of the house and back on to California. On our way back, we stopped by the Grand Canyon which is my first time at the Grand Canyon. And I stopped at the gift store. And you know, jewelry is really important to women in my family. Gold was the way that you protected yourself. So, something that I wanted to do was to honor my grandma. Actually I bought this turquoise ring that’s on my middle finger here today. That day with that 20 dollar that she gave me, and I’ve had it ever since, and yeah I shared this story because there is so many women and people in my lineage who were never able to share their stories. Who were never able to speak up, and it’s such privilege that I am able to take up space on this stage here today and for my Biji and for all those people: I am here to disrupt and to tell those stories and so I am so thankful that I got to spend that time with her that day. She is around me all the time but that’s a story for another time. So, thank you. [Applause].

Lisa Cantrell: That was Anmol Pavade. Up next, we have Victor Rodriguez Tafoya. Victor grew up in a small rural town in Central Mexico. He is a first generation immigrant, English language learner and a veteran of the US Marine Corp. He applied his unique perspectives to journalism specializing in news coverage and he’s proud to hold a degree in intercultural communications. He strives to become a communications specialist and help people from similar backgrounds, both veterans and first generation immigrants for whom English is their second language. Today, Victor creates culturally sensitive spaces for people to share their stories out loud and build communities where they feel seen and heard.

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The title of his story is: A cocktail of Experience with a Tonic with Identity. [Applause]

Victor Rodriguez Tafoya: Where do I start my story? I guess from the beginning. And for that, we will go back a few years, 38. I am mexicano born in a small pueblo in the city of Michoacán, la Piedad, and lived in a small village, rancho, and las Liebres. Right on the other side of the board of Michoacán in the state of Guanajuato. I was literally born with double identity, something that eventually turned into double identity crisis.

Nacido in Michoacán, criado en Guanajuato with ancestors from Jalisco, a whole salsa and chilaquiles. Pero, ¿de dónde eres? Michoacán and Guanajuato. Growing up, my biggest challenge was not trying to identify my geographical location. It was trying to embrace my own identity. One that was influenced and shaped by the social family and religious norms. My mother, a devoted catholic, strict and somewhat conservative and a seamstress since she was 12. I remember when I was a kid while living in Mexico, our next door neighbor asked my mom to teach her son how to sow, something my mother saw as a female role and felt uncomfortable teaching this guy. I listened to her commenting and criticizing why a mother would teach her son doing women's job. From the conversation, I understood he was gay. 'Amanerado' as they would say. But for some reason or a mother I sympathized with him.

Resources and education opportunities were not what my family wanted for us. And we moved to Sacramento when I was 12. In the land of opportunity, a new country, a new language, a new culture. A family social pressure to be all we could be. Now, growing up in California with such a diverse culture, and the freedom to be who I wanted to be, I soon understood the sympathy I had for my neighbor back home. I too was gay but afraid to say it, afraid to show it, or act as such.

One day, my brother was looking through my digital camera I had. He found a picture of me and a guy was talking to. "*You fucking faggot,*" he wrote on a yellow sticky note and left it on my Windows 98 computer monitor. I was shocked, ashamed, scared and for the first time felt one of the strongest feelings of rejection, especially coming from a family member. I started to take charge and leave home. I didn't feel comfortable. In addition, I needed to build something for myself and prove to be the older brother, son male, in the family who would give an example to the rest. I joined the military with hope of not only forging a foundation that would give me leverage in the American way but would also prove myself to be the strong male figure my family could be proud of. I needed the support as I felt rejected.

Now, this is where the fun begins. I went to basic training, boot camp as you might all know it. I graduated as a Marine, earned my Eagle, Globe and Anchor. And most

importantly, finished the crucible, one of the hardest two weeks physical and mental training courses that prove to me that I was made to be a Marine. That I was strong, and maybe the alpha male I was trying to show my family and my friends. After I joined my unit, things changed a bit. I met a Marine. Not from my unit, but whose friendship turned into a romantic relationship that was giving me hope to be who I wanted to be, to value the diverse identity that I carried and helped me protect my vulnerability to a world of ignorance and injustice.

On one occasion as a new member of the unit along with three others, our Sargent put together a house party. They told me it was a BBQ. I was ready for some carne asada. Got ready, went, soon to realize, that in addition to us, they were also hosting some strippers. I was cool with it, not worried until my best friend put a dollar on my mouth and laid me on the floor. Everybody started chanting, excited for me to be the next in the game of seduction. My friends cheered, started saying: *"that's my boy."* While I'm over here thinking: *"what the fuck is going."* As it turns out, they sent a stripper to dance to me. Not only to dance on me but to sit on my face. "Bitch, I just got a boyfriend and getting used to driving a stick and I'm over here trying to learn an automatic weapon. I was not ready for this, alright?" [Laughter]

She put it all on my face, the entire tortilla, the whole concha bro, no mames. I put a dollar up in there and she got up right after. Not only was I breathing now but I honestly think I got an Oscar for my performance. My boys were happy for me. And I managed to cover who I really was, at that moment at least, but not for too long. One day the same guy cheering me up, picked me up to go to the base. As I was saying bye to my boyfriend at the time, I gave him a hug and a kiss right at the moment my friend shows up. He turns cold, his eyes glazed and I could see his tunnel vision. He looked at me and said: "what the fuck Tafoya, What's going on? What happened? No mames guey." Mind you, this is a Tejano with regiomontano roots. A guy from Monterrey Nuevo Leon, Mexico. Machoman. He was shocked that a fellow Marine who he trained with and even shared a shower with (not in the same shower, okay?) was gay. But what about those training days, he said. What about the time we spent together, those trips to Tijuana, to the clubs. He was literally shaking.

I kid you not, he even asked to take a shot. He couldn't hold it together. I looked at him as my boyfriend hugged me and I said: "German, I am the same person you've been training with. It does not change who I am. I can do as much as you can, and you know it." He couldn't argue with that. He's seen me perform and he knew who I was.

The following days, he was still shocked trying to understand, eventually life told him why I needed to tell him about having respect for someone like me, his brother came

out as a gay and eventually transitioned. And I felt that, in a way, my situation prepared him not to react and respect and understand, and he did. He became one of my best allies and I was his. In 2007, I was deployed to Iraq. And that's where things got a little complicated.

We were all working 18 hours a day, living with stress, anxiety and the pressure to stay alive and keep others alive. At that time, my only escape during such chaotic moments was salsa night every Saturday night at the US soil tent in the main base, yes salsa nights. A place of RNR or rest and recreation as they would call it. To release some stress, we will get out there, let go of our weapons for a few hours and just dance to melodies of Elvis Crespo, Grupo Mania, Marc Anthony and another time, Aventura with some good Bachata. During the two hour period, I would not only let go of my rank, my uniform, my stress, my anxiety, we would also disappear. One day while on a mission, a fellow Marine dared to say that Tafoya as they would refer to me by would go salsa dancing to pick up on Army chicks. It was funny for me. As the only person I was checking out there was a star Sargent and his salsa moves. But such comments helped me take the eyes away and the pressure I was getting from other Marines who criticized my image, my groomed eyebrows or the gel on my hair. This situation really messed me up.

I lived on fear and pressure of my own, not just the enemy. There was a specific Marine who I always targeted me with comments and threats... call him the bully. To me, he was the enemy and while I managed to find a safe space salsa night and the support of some of my fellow Marines, the bully's trauma, projected in direct attacks, were hitting me hard. Not everyone was an ally and just like in life not only did I have to pick my battles but also who I would feel safe with.

My journey like an orange had a lot of layers, a lot of love experiences that have shaped who I am. As an Immigrant, I faced the challenges of finding my way in a new country, in a new culture. As a Marine, I managed to navigate a male dominated system, but one that proves to me that there will be moments and people, allies, who have my back. But just like other aspects of life, not everyone will be there for me. And I had to learn to stay away and continue navigating while protecting who I am. And with that, I leave you. And if you are not in a journey of self-reflection and understanding as an immigrant, we are all like an orange or onion, your preference. Full of layers, experiences that makes us complete. My identity is diverse but not mixed. I am a cocktail of experience with a tonic with an identity. I am Mexican. I am American. I am gay, Chicano, Latino. A veteran, student, and immigrant. A salad of culture, music, food and color. I am who I am and can be when I am. Do you know who you are? Gracias! [Applause]

Lisa Cantrell: That was Victor Rodrigues Tafoya sharing his story live at our event called Immigrant Stories held on October of 2023 on the campus of Sacramento State.

Our next story comes from Monse. Monse is a student from here, from there and sometimes from every other where. With a Mexican passport, and a California driver license, they enjoy connecting through Latin dance festivals and trivial inquiries. Currently, Monse is an intern for Siemens and lives with their two cats, Jack and Sochi who keep them humble. The title of Monse's story is: In Pursuit of What.

Monse: I want to tell you the story of transition through the people I've loved. I want to start by saying I was born in this tiny town in Mexico where the first part of my childhood I was raised by my mom and my grandma. My mom worked really long hours at the local health clinic where she made about 20 dollars a month. This made it so that my grandma basically took care of me, my very headstrong catholic grandma. I remember one day when we actually picked these guava from the guava tree we had in our backyard and we filled these two buckets with them. And we were taking the 'micro', and the micro is basically this transportation in Mexico that takes people from really small towns out into the bigger city. And the reason we went to do this was to go sell these guava for profit. Actually, I kind of lied to. I said "we" but in reality it was mostly my grandma. I was actually very ashamed of having to hustle. And my grandma really noticed this. On the way back on the micro, she specifically gave me a lecture as to not being ashamed of doing the right thing, of having to hustle right? because that was my lived reality. At the end of that, she also reminded of and these were her words: *"Mijo, you are going to be the man of the family. You need to learn and you have to man up to take care of your mom, right?"* And I really enjoyed that because this was my grandma. Who am I like to test her at five years old? She is so wise. I'm not gonna conflate that. So, I am ...when I get back to home, I end up seeing my mom, I end up telling her: *"Mom, I really love you. You are my queen and I am your king and I am going to take care of you."*

Which it's not the same for my sperm donor, actually. The only time I met him, he gave me two gifts, both of which I did not actually use. The first one was a pair of huaraches. And huaraches are these Mexican sandals that have a leather strap. I actually went to visit my half siblings and since we were messing around, they actually hid them from me and a (inaudible) so lost them there. The other one was the Y chromosome and yeah I didn't use that one. [Laughter]

So, thankfully my mom falls in love with this really really witty man who ends up becoming my step father, and we end up immigrating to the US, Bakersfield in

particular. The thing about him is that he was so witty, and I really looked up to him so much that I knew that's the way he protected my mom and it came really handy.

He was kind of like this character Cantinflas, I don't if anyone knows who that is. But Cantinflas is this actor who's known for saying a lot but at the same time not saying anything at all which is contradictory. So this really helped when my mom had to essentially live in and out in the hospital because of having to medicate insulin use as a diabetic. So as I grew older, I knew that I needed to be able to help people and one way of doing that is by going to college. In order to get into a really good college, I needed to volunteer.

The opportunity that presented itself was to actually volunteer at this really nice hospital in town where I essentially worked as a volunteer for the gift shop. Actually for records burst, but since I enjoyed that they gave us free meals at the cafeteria and I really wanted Hot Cheetos, I kept on going more so I worked in the gift shop as well. So, I was literally volunteering Tuesdays and the weekends. So, that was my high school life. There, I actually met this wonderful person who I just was head of the heels for. And she would not pay me any attention. I would try to be super witty, and she would just brush me off like it was nothing. And it wasn't until the last day of my volunteering that she actually gave me her number and thankfully she let me take her out on a date and she mentions that the only reason why she actually agreed to date was because I was super witty. So: *"wohoo, one point for witty."*

So as I get to know her, she tells me that she is the youngest of three daughters from her parents and that she wants to be a therapist. And I tell her that everyone told me that I'm good at math so better be an engineer. I tell her that that I want to be an astronaut and I want to be able to help people with medicine up in space. Essentially that relationship ends up developing.

During this time, my mom's health started to decline and in order to take my mind of my partner at the time ends up trying to make this plan to travel all over the worlds. She wants go to Europe. She wants to go to Indonesia. She wants to go to Latin America. And she starts to ask all these questions and tries to take my mind off of bit. So, unfortunately that was the time that I needed to disclose a little bit about me. You know in old witty fashion I tried to pull a John Lennon and tell her you may say I am a dreamer but thankfully I'm not the only one. Yeah I know

That was a super vulnerable moment for me because I knew that that put us a strain on the relationship itself or it would potentially put a strain on the relationship because it required her to essentially be the protector in that case because I was helpless to

whatever bigger issues that there was. And it may make me fall for her more. Needless to say that unfortunately my mom ends up passing away and because my step dad is so striking he ends up passing away six months later.

I really didn't have anyone else to protect so I realize that I only have my partner. And I know that is the person I'm gonna end up with. So invited her to my best friend brother wedding. Too complicated. It's okay. We end up going to Vegas, Memorial Day weekend. I don't why this man chose to have a memorial day weekend memorial but that's what he chose so the traffic on the way back added an additional 3 hours so being the smart person that I am I was like why don't we take a short cut.

Well, if anyone has traveled from California to Vegas there is basically one of two ways to get her and this highway was basically a two lane road. I ended up taking the mountains and I ended up making it to right outside prim. Outside of prime there is this solar panel plant and because I was driving so fast I ended up getting stuck in this right up river vet. So we are basically a mile outside of prim and the only two truck companies are the ones in Vegas. So we legit spent 4-5 hours trying to find a tow company who actually has the truck to pull my car out of the sand. And at some point, I ended up just giving up because I just couldn't do it anymore and it was only because of her basically calling in calling in, she was doing the protecting role and I was basically the one being protected which made me really think. So we ended up making it home and this is the point where I realized I'm gonna marry her. What ends up happening is I start...I am this very mathematical person or I'm this very technical person I don't really believe in superstition or any of that sort. But at this time, I start having these dreams where I'm marrying this partner in particular and I go dress shopping with her. The stereotypical dress shopping right? Which didn't make sense because there just is..In Mexican culture, you are not supposed to see the bride right?

The dreams end up morphine and morphine to the point where I am wearing a dress at that point and I tell my partner this and her face was as shocked as mine. It was at that point that she mentioned that if I began transitioning that we would split up. So I made sure to suppress it.

Surely, there after a certain presidential candidate gets elected and I decide that I want to actually ask her to marry me. And when I ask her I set it up very nicely specifically the way that she requested it. (Laughs) You talk about these things right? You talk about them.

Unfortunately she says no. So what ends up happening it's that basically all of the plans that I had really pivoted upon this partner and I needed to essentially reflect instead

trying to continue down that path. Because what ended up happening that I tried to recreate that situation over and over for the next 5, 6 years. Because I didn't take that time to really grow and come into my self, I didn't get to really realize that this protecting (inaudible) I didn't need to be a man to do it. I can just be myself.

Later on I end up transitioning and part of that for me involved going to hospital again. I was very thankful that I had a friend who reminded a lot of my grandma. She was very jovial. She provided me with a lot of wisdom. At this point, hadn't talked to my grandma for about 2, 3 years. So I ended up deciding wanting to call her. I tell her about what had been going on with my life and where everything had been going on. And I tell her that because of telling me and giving me her wisdom about not being ashamed to do the right, I did the right thing for myself and thankfully she called me "mija". [Applause]

Lisa Cantrell: You are listening to a recording from a live event called Immigrant Stories which was held in October of 2023 as Sacramento State.

Up next, we will hear from Abril Rodriguez. Abril is originally from Nicaragua. At the time of this recording, she was an 11th grader at Richmond High at the Bay area of California. And she was by far the youngest storyteller of the evening. She is a member of the Spanish debate team at Richmond High and she says she doesn't like when things come easy. She enjoys dancing and is passionate about law and human rights. Abril was selected by her peers from her Spanish debate team to represent them on stage that evening. She shared her story in Spanish so that is what you will hear first, her entire story in Spanish. And then right after, you will hear our host Diana Medina translate Abril's story.

The title of her story was: My Immigration Experience: Before and After.

Abril Rodriguez: Mi vida en Nicaragua era muy bonita. Mi vida se trataba en la mañana ir a la escuela, en la tarde ir a las prácticas del coro de la iglesia y en la noche, si me daba tiempo, salía con mis amigos a comer o a jugar. Mi papá y su esposa trabajan mucho. No compartíamos tiempo juntos porque su trabajo era desde las 7 de la mañana hasta las 11 de la noche. o nos comunicábamos

La decisión de viajar a los Estados Unidos fue muy difícil para mi porque soy una persona muy apegada a la familia, a los amigos y a los lugares. Treinta y cinco días difíciles de viajes. Tres países por cruzar. Momentos difíciles para llegar a la meta pero estamos aquí. Como por ejemplo, el momento más difícil que me acuerdo fue en Veracruz, México cuando migración nos estaba buscando para deportarnos, cuando la

mafia en México nos cayó para secuestrarnos. Hubieron muchos niños perdidos, muchas mujeres secuestradas. Muchas personas muertas y heridas. Pero las cosas al camino se ponían más difícil pero seguimos hasta llegarnos.

Ahora mi vida en Estados Unidos pues es cansada, es difícil pero me gusta porque algo que...me gusta es lo difícil. Me gustan los desafíos. Ahora aquí hay muchas más oportunidades de estudio, de trabajo. Estoy feliz porque cierta parte de mi familia estaba aquí y desde pequeña pues no los conocía.

Cuando vinimos aquí era muy diferente. Mi papá trabajaba más cerca. Nos mirábamos todos los sábados, compartimos más tiempo juntos. Aprendimos a tomar las decisiones juntos, a comunicarnos como familia y para terminar. No esperemos a viajar para comunicarnos con nuestros padres. Esta idea y este consejo especialmente importante porque uno en el camino de migración, uno no sabe qué puede pasar. Uno no sabe si va a venir completo con su familia o alguien más va a faltar y después podemos lamentar el hecho de no haber comunicado con nuestros padres y de haber compartido tiempo juntos. Muchas gracias. [Applause]

Diana Medina: So I am going to... yes a round of applause for Abril. [Applause] I am going to go ahead and translate Abril's story and she is going to stay up here with me.

I am Abril Rodriguez. I am from Nicaragua. I am 16 years old. I am an 11th grader at Richman High school. And my story is about before and after traveling here. My life in Nicaragua was very beautiful. It was based on going to school in the morning, going to choir practice at church in the afternoon, and then at night if I have time, I would go out to eat or play with my friends. My dad and his wife worked a lot. It was a job from 7 in the morning to 11 at night. We didn't communicate. We hardly spent time together.

The decision to come to the United States was difficult for me because I had a lot of emotional attachment to family, friends and places. We spent 35 days of travel. It was not easy to get to the United States. 35 days where we realized the fact that a coyote guided us to not mean that we were not in danger. The scariest moment was in Veracruz, Mexico where there were immigration officers and the mafia. All the people had to run so they would not deport us or so the mafia would not kidnap us. We crossed three countries. We learned to be father and daughter and how to communicate. My life in the United States is tiring, difficult but it is something I like because I like challenges.

Here, there are many study and work opportunities. The relationship with my parents has improved a lot since we have been here. We've learned to communicate and made decisions together and when we came here it was different. Dad works closer.

Sometimes we would only see each other on Saturdays. Now, we see each other more often. We have more time together. To conclude, let's not wait to travel until we communicate with our parents. This idea is important because this type of immigration journey, one does not know what could happen. Later, we may regret the fact that we have not been able to communicate with our parents and not be able to share time with them. Thank you. [Applause]

Lisa Cantrell: Our next storyteller is William Trann. William is an educator and facilitator who is passionate about creating spaces where people can utilize their lived experiences to understand themselves, others and the world around them. As the lifelong learner, William is deeply interested in infusing universal human traits such as laughter, play and music into the spaces that he facilitates. He believes that learning can be a powerful tool for self-discovery and community building. In his free time, William enjoys reading, drinking coffee and taking nature walks with his adventurous daughter who at the moment has a deep admiration for throwing rocks into rivers.

The title of his story was: Golden Thread.

William: Traditions are the thread that ties people together. As a child, my family would go to San Francisco twice a month and everybody had a role to play. My mother would pack the car with food and water. My dad would always bring a magazine to read in the car. My sister had to finish her breakfast before she left the dining room table. I had to use the bathroom before I had to leave the house. But as soon as the car was turned on, so was the radio. And the radio station that was always on was 100.1 KCST also known as Kanye's radio station.

Me and my sister played this game whenever we recognize a song that came on, we will sing it at the top of our lungs. [Starts Singing] *"Back when I was a child, before life removed all the innocence"* I must be honest with all of you: my sister has the prettier lovelier singing voice. But I will also admit to you that I sing with way more soul.

Now these trips to the city were meaningful for me because my father worked all the hours growing up. When I was at school, he would be at home sleeping. And then when he was on his way to work, I will be coming back from school. And then once in a blue moon, we would cross paths and then we would say hi and bye to each other within a millisecond we were off on our way. So these family trips provided an opportunity where everyone in my family was in the same place at the same time going to the same location.

My favorite part of this trip was driving over the Golden Gate Bridge. My father as soon as the car hit the Golden Gate Bridge would crank down his window and the cool crisp air of the bay would *phewww* flow into the car. I hated this as a kid because I always wore shorts. Nothing really changed. And then the temperature of the car would drop by 15 degrees. But my dad would stick his hand out and go: ahhhhh {{Cantonese phrase}} which meant cool and refreshing.

You know dad if you wanted to freeze your ass, you go ahead you do you. These family trips occurred all the way from Elementary until the time I graduated High school. When I graduated high school, it was expected of me to go to college. However, all these family trips made me want to live in the city by the bay? And then, puuh a light bulb popped up in my head. I realized that if I applied to a college in San Francisco, I could live in the city of my dreams. So I applied to San Francisco State University and through divine intervention I got accepted. I was proud that I got to live in the city of my dreams and I wanted to show of my pride.

So I did it in the best way that I knew how. I decided to root for a sports team. So I became a Golden State Warrior fan in 2006. And then as a Golden State Warrior's fan, I promised myself that I would wear blue and yellow whenever the NBA season would start. And I would go to at least one Warrior game every season. Honestly, I would have gone to more, but I was a broke college student so one was all I could afford.

My pinnacle of being a Warriors fan was 2019. Not because the Warriors won three NBA championships by that time but because I was able to go to six warrior games a month and that I was living on cloud nine.

Unfortunately, my life was turned upside down like the rest of the world because of the COVID-19 pandemic. No longer was I able to cheer, celebrate with 18,000 other people in an open arena. But now, I was quarantined in my small San Francisco apartment with my wife and even though we were socially isolated from everybody else we somehow welcomed our new born daughter into the world. Shout out to all the quarantine babies out there. [Applause]

And lastly, we had the opportunity to buy a house. But in order to provide a home to my daughter, I would have to leave the place I called home for the last 17 years. The place where I had countless childhood memories. The place where I found the love of my life, my wife. The place I thought I would turn old and gray like Carl the fog.

So I did what I had to do. I left my heart in San Francisco. Within a month and a half, we moved from San Francisco to Sacramento. And I spent so much time packing that I didn't have a proper goodbye. I felt like everything was so abrupt. And I miss the city by the bay. And [Starts Singing] *"overtime I close my eyes, I think of you."*

After two years of the pandemic, me and my wife decided to re-integrate into society and we thought the best way to do so was to go to a Warriors game. So, we booked tickets to go watch the Warriors in February 2022, and on the day of the game, I packed the car with food and water. My wife dressed my daughter up in a Warriors shirt that I insisted on. And we hopped into the car and made our way there.

[Starts Singing] *"Put your pinky rings up to the moon...what you're trying to do."* Get hyped.

But I actually didn't know how excited I got until I actually saw the Golden Gate Bridge. When we got to the Golden Gate Bridge, it was clear and sunny. Those once in a moon occasions, right? What? And as the tire of a car hits the Golden Gate Bridge, I roll down the window and : phewww the cold crisp air of the Bay flood my car and the temperature car drops by like 1 degree, but I had never ever felt so warm.

[Starts Singing] *"Reunited and it feels so good. Reunited because we are understood!"*

I was back at home and as we drove to Chase center, I get a phone call: Ring Ring. It's from my sister. *"Hello!! I answer the phone. Hey what you doing?"*

I am going to the Warriors game. What's up? Oh just to let you know dad went to the hospital. Dad went to the hospital? Is he okay? Yes, they took him to the hospital as a precaution because his blood pressure dropped. But they are taking him to hospice.

Hospice? Wait. Isn't that where you go to die? Is dad going to die? No no. They are just taking him there as a precaution. Okay. I will keep you update. Alright. bye.click.

Now, sometimes I get my words mixed up and jumbled up. And I need to find a way to make sure that I understood what I understood. So I took my wife to make sure if I had my understanding right. So I asked my wife: *"Hey, did you hear that dad is going to die?"*

No, it sounds like something is up with him but you what? It sounds like they are taking him to a hospital as a precaution. Yeah that's what I heard too."

Now, healthcare is nothing new to my dad. I remember summer he lifted up his shirt. He had a scar that went from his Adam apple all the way down to his belly button because he had to flee Vietnam. He gone in a boat but he fell off the boat and he got hit by the boat. Then he had to go to the Philippines to get fixed up. When he finally got the land of the free, he got to do whatever he wanted. And went to the Golden of McDonalds. And man o man did he really live a bigmac and fish fillet.

Unfortunately for him, his body didn't love the high sodium content that he was in taking and he had two strokes. His second stroke left him partially paralyzed on his left side to where he had no mobility. He slipped and fell and broke his hip. Then had to live in a senior home but time to time again after all the trial and tribulation he found his way to get all his health scares. You know what? This is just another health scared that dad is going to ...he's going to be. He's a fighter. He is a Warrior. Now I had no idea how I made it to Chase Center. Luckily for me, technology brand new and they had this called thing Siri that guided me there.

As I got to Chase Center, I was static because I see seas of yellow, seas of blue. People walking to the arena. I drive to the parking lot. Get out my car, slammed it and let out: *Let's go Warriors!!*

And as soon as the last syllable leaves my lips, I get the chill that runs up my spine and looked up and quickly reminded how quick the San Francisco fog can rode through the bay. Unfortunately for me, Carl the fog did not stay outside the arena but he followed me inside as well. I had no idea what happened at that game because I was too busy looking at my phone. I was checking to see if I got a text message and the only thing that I could remember is that the Warriors lost which I thought it was very fucking fitting.

As I make my way back to my car, I see that my sister has sent me a text message: Hey just to let you know dad went back to the senior home. Wuu! What a sign of relief. You know, they will let my dad go back to the senior home if nothing was wrong. So me, my wife and my daughter hopped in the car and we drove back to Sacramento in silence.

"Ring, Ring, Ring", I see that my phone is ringing. I went to pick it up. It's three in the morning and it's my sister: *"Hello. Hey, dad just died."* I had no idea how long I was on the phone with my sister and I had no idea how long I was talking to her because when I started talking to her, it was pitch black but by the time I ended my conversation, It was bright. And as I began to wake up, all these stars started to pah pah pah pah into my mind does dad live a happy life. Does dad know I love him? Does dad have any memories that he was happy of. I can't believe I miss dad again. I realized that right next to me, my phone had a little bit of juice and I needed some music to kind of fill the

space. I pick it up, click on the YouTube app and chuck it across the couch. And the next thing I hear is: If I could get another chance, another walk, another dance with him. I play a song that would never never end how I love, love, love to dance with my father again.

It's been two years since my dad passed. And the grieving process is hard because a [Starts Singing] *"a part of me wants to move on but the other side I want to break down and cry uhhhh I'm twisted. One side of me is telling me that I need to move on but on the other side I want to break down and I cry."* Music is my last thread to my father so in memory of him I will sing with soul to my last dying days. Thank you. [Applause]

Lisa Cantrell: Our last storyteller for the evening was Kevin Aliado. Kevin is a Philippine immigrant who moved to the US in 2004. He spent a total of 18 years living in Vegas and the Bay area before happily settling down in Sacramento in 2022. After working in software and technology industry for over five years, Kevin has recently started a career change to become a mental health therapist focusing on serving the immigrant community. He's very passionate about poetry, spiritual healing and diving head first into an immersive solo travel adventure.

The title of his story was: Everything is Going to be Okay. [Applause]

Kevin Aliado: Good evening everyone. Thank you so much for holding this space for me and for all the other storytellers tonight. It's been such a pleasure and an honor to stand up here.

And as you heard, my name is Kevin. I am a Filipino immigrant. I was born in a city in the Philippines called Baguio city. If you are a Filipino, you might know that it is a very popular city out there. I was raised by a single mother. My father was never in the picture and life back home was incredibly hard. Tomorrow was never guaranteed. We were never really sure what to do next because it could lead to our death. That was kind of our mindset every day. And for us, the ultimate, as fast as I can remember, all I can think about, all I can kind of recall was that we were always in survival mode. And the ultimate form of survival has always been to escape.

We realized...we always knew deep down that there was nothing we could do to really improve our situation back home. It felt like it was instant death for us, an instant failure. There was no hope. And so, just when it felt like all hope was lost and there was nothing

we could do, miraculously in 2002, my mom who is a nurse like many Filipino moms are nurses, she got a job in Las Vegas, Nevada in 2002.

And her job was to start in 2004. So leading to that point, we would always fantasize living in the US. It was always something that we saw everywhere, in fashion, in food, in the way people carry themselves in the Philippines. It was an American colony and it shows. So I'd always fantasize about owning an Xbox, meeting Bill Gates, meeting Kobe Bryant. For some reason, I thought if I landed here, he would greet me at the airport or something. [Laughter]

Having American friends, and by American I mean white friends, really. I didn't really know anything else but that. And you know in other words, live the American dream as they say.

So my mom got the job against all odds. I remember the ensuing two years was just utter chaos. Immigration processes are some of the most difficult things to through and what I went through, I don't even remember the most of it. What really stands out though are the immunizations you have to take, going to the doctor so many times to make sure you don't pass whatever you have to folks in another country. I remember all the goodbye parties. Philippines love goodbye parties. It's a thing. With all that, I still had to live my life which I hated back home.

All this chaos, and I still had to make sure I was living day by day. And all that chaos kind of culminates with me being at the airport in Manila, capital of the Philippines. I remember I was boarding the plane and this was my very first 16 hour nonstop flight anywhere. Actually, it was my very first flight anywhere. I've only driven in a car before. So I was flooded with this excitement and fear and basically all the emotion altogether.

The flight is long. It's incredibly exhausting. Even though it was kind of boring and all I do was sit there, it was really magical to me. It felt like I was riding on top of the American Eagle itself, taking me to the promise of life to heaven. I was in hell. And there is heaven and here's this plane ride straight there.

So that was magic to me. When we landed in Las Vegas airport, I was exhausted. 16 hours. I didn't sleep at all. I was that overwhelmed with emotions. I remember being really exhausted but still being really really excited because here I was. I left my home forever. I'm 12 years old. It feels like I just landed on the moon. And I'm finally, finally ready to live the American dream.

So, as my mom and I are walking through the airport we go through baggage claim, we realized something different. Nobody was bothering us unlike the airports back in the Philippines people usually try to scam you. They tried to grab your luggage for you and they say: hey give me a tip. No one was doing that. They kind of were leaving us alone. We were like: *okaay. Are people watching us? Are there cameras around? What's going on?* Just super weirded out. So we make our way to the baggage claim, get our baggage. We then go to the exit area and once I exit that airport. This was the beginning of summer in Las Vegas, alright?

So, when I exit the airport this rush of dry heat just hits my face. 102 degrees Fahrenheit which apparently according to the locals is cold for the time. And I'm 102 degrees is cold! Alright. Interesting. [Laughter] I come from a tropical weather a kind of climate. So this is completely different from what I was expecting. And so you know we get into the cab, we drive into the apartment that we were going to move into. And before we even do anything, we drop our stuff and the first thing we did was go to MC Donald's because when I was in the Philippines I'd always dreamed of eating real MC Donald's. I always thought Filipino MC Donald's was fake and disgusting. I was like real Mc Donald's must be the bee's niece. It must be amazing. So we got to Mc Donald's. I order a big mac and fries and a coke.

As you all know when the food comes out, it doesn't look like the menu photos at all. I thought it would be... that's not even real food, that's plastic or whatever they use. The food comes out and my big mac arrives at my table and I notice something different. It's just bread, bread, and bread. Where is the in between the bread? I'm like: Alright. I'll eat the bread I guess. The fries? Soggy as hell. Like I mean, it's wet and it still tastes like the oil that it was cooked in. It didn't taste nothing like potatoes.

So I was disappointed. At least the coke was good. I mean if you mess up coke, I mean... I don't know what to tell you. The coke was good. At least there was one good thing about that meal. I was a little disappointed. I am not going to lie. The first couple of things I experienced in the US so far have been kind of a little confusing. I was a little upset.

But it was okay. I was still in the US. I wasn't in the Philippines anymore. I'm still very very excited to kind of just move forward and forget the past. So, priority number one for my mother was to get me enrolled in school ASAP, the following fall that same year. And I always loved school. It was always my escape. Domestic life was bad so I went to school. That's where I kind of was myself. I was in my element when I was studying. I was a scholar. I was very academically driven. I was so good at school that I was

actually teacher's pet. Every single year of grade school, I was teacher's pet. And everyone was haters. They all...I was bullied and I was made fun of because I was so smart, and I was always sitting right next to the teacher. That what was what teacher's pet did back in the Philippines. We actually sat next to the teacher every day. And so, that's how much I love school and my grades obviously reflected that. And they were so good that, and my English was good enough too that I was admitted into middle school like that fall.

Great! I was like: *this is like a dream come true. I get to start school and make white friends. This is going to be amazing.* Fast forward to the first day of school. So first day school is for a lot of us back then the biggest day of our lives. And there are three main things that mattered and they will carry you forward in your first day of school. Number one: your outfit. Number two: what you bring with you: your backpack, your lunch, whatever it is. And number three: Your swag. How you carry yourself, how you walk, how you talk. How you look in general

I'm gonna start with my outfit. My mom back then was my stylist and put way too much faith in her to be my stylist. She dresses me...she laid out my outfit. It was a white t-shirt. They got holes in my armpits but you don't even know because I kept my arms closed the whole time. So it looked like a new white t-shirt. Cappuccino brown sweats. I can't even find those anymore today. And this dad's sandals that are closed toes that had those little slides. You know what I'm talking about? Hey but listen I thought I looked fly as hell back then. So fresh and so clean, clean was ringing in my head the whole time as I was putting my clothes on. And yeah, my swag was just like...it just reflected in my perception of my outfit.

My lunch was packed by my mom. It was a really really popular Philippine breakfast dish called duyoh. If you are Filipino in the audience, you might know what duyoh is. But for those who don't know, it's a dried fish that is usually haring and it's fried. And so, it's the most delicious fried fish ever. It's very savory. It's very flavor full but it stings. You can smell it from the exit sign. If someone is cooking it over here, you can smell it all the way...as soon as you enter the room you can...it's just like: uh. Okay?

It's served with garlic fried rice and two eggs. Breakfast food for lunch. It's very common us for Phillipinos. And with my lunch, my backpack, my outfit, I was ready. I was leaning to the door as I was walking like this like Snoop Dog. I was like: Yeah! I'm ready to go to school. And that was my only knowledge of Snoop Dog back then. I didn't know anything else. [Laughter]

School was only a 15 minute walk away from my house so I walked to school and as I enter the school grounds, I remember feeling this sensation of awe and marvel. I could not conceive how big the school was. It was like a sprawling metropolis of children running around, teachers, faculty walking and it just felt like bees and flies flying around.

And I just didn't care. I just tried to make my way to my home room. I was just focused. I wanted to learn. I wanted to make friends. I kind of just let everything passed by. I go to home room. Usually, I'm very a shy person. I am a huge introvert so first few classes I am dead silent. I sit in the very back. And I'm just mouth shut. And I can notice the eyes looking at me because probably my outfit and actually not. It's probably the smell of the fish. I think about that now and yeah that's what it probably was. I didn't care though. I just sat there and just let the classes go.

Math class comes. I get to math class and I tell myself: This is the time when I want to participate. I really got to get it together. I wanna be teacher's pet again. I really miss it. So I gotta show teachers I'm a good student. And so I decide to sit in the middle of the class, not the back. And teacher asks a warm up question: It's multiple choice question, very easy. 6×7 . I knew instantly, raised my hand real quick, big smile on my face. Teacher calls on me: Yes, Kevin. I stand up, jump on, actually. Hand still raised and I say: *Forty two (filipino accent)*

If you didn't catch it. That's forty two. [Laughter]. Thick Filipino accent, but I'm still there, and I say that. It's silent for two seconds. All of a sudden the class starts laughing at me and pointing at me and being like: what the hell did you just say? All these comments. And the teacher says to me: *"Kevin, I don't know how you do it back where you are from but here in America we don't stand up to answer questions. It's really disrespectful. Please, have a seat."* And I'm over here smile turn upside down. I freeze. And I sat. And as soon as the laughter dies down, a few minutes later, my classmate to the right of me drops his pencil and asks me to help him pick it up. So I bend down, and before I even touch the pencil, before I pick it up, I feel a bunch of hands hitting me in the back of the head like this: Pah, pah , pah.

And I'm down there bent down and it just felt overwhelmed, so much emotion at that point. I was sad. I was shocked. I was angry. So many things happening all at once. And because I was so overwhelmed, I let out a loud cry. I was crying. And I am not talking about thug tears. I am talking about loud baby crying like ugly crying. (Imitates cry) like that. And I was crying so loud in fact that the teacher even said: *"Kevin, you are disrupting class. Can you go to the principal's office?"* And so I get sent to the principal's office and actually from that moment on to the end of the day I just dissociated. I didn't

even care what was happening. I just could not wait to leave school, and go back home and find my solace again.

So, I leave school. It was dismissal. It was the end of school. And I am walking back home, finally... What a day that was. I'm ready to just like sit and just processed whatever just happened. And just go about my day cause that was rough. I am walking home and my day wasn't over yet, apparently because I hear footsteps behind me and I didn't pay any mind. I just kind of let it go. In my head, they are just fellow students walking the same direction. But it was a gang of them. It was like six or seven of them. Pitter-patter, pitter-patter, I'm just walking. Out of nowhere, I hear a punch into my head. Immediately, I am blacked out. Unconscious. I don't remember what happens for the next few minutes but I wake up and I feel them kicking me in the stomach repeatedly. Kicking me in the head repeatedly. Actually, kicking me everywhere repeatedly. I black out again. Then I wake up and they are gone.

Down on the pavement, there is a pool of blood in front of my mouth assuming that it came from my mouth. And the first thing that comes to my mind isn't I need to ask for help. The first thing that comes to my mind is how I am going to lie to my mom that I just didn't get up on my way home from school because weakness in my family is the ultimate sign of you want to die. You have no will to live. So you had to always show, present strength even though you felt weak inside. Always present strength. Lie if you have to. Otherwise, you won't survive. There is no time to be weak if you are trying to survive. My mom would draw that into my head over and over and over again as a kid. So when I go home, I tell my mom: Mom I fell and I hit some rocks. And my mom got a little bit angry but she didn't really. But she wasn't her usual angry. Like she didn't beat me, she didn't do her usual kind of tired. She was just like: be careful or else...and I'm like: ohh thank God she just did much less than her usual and I kind of just went to my merry way and walked to the room.

To this day...So my mom and I never developed an emotional connection, so to this day I actually never told her the truth. You all are hearing this first before my own mother. And she still thinks I fell that one day. And I look back at that moment now. I look back at that little kid in the pavement and all these years of sweeping that memory, that moment under the rug and just forgetting about it. I realized that kid is still here. That kid is still a part of me. That kid is me.

He eventually in life he would go through much worse pain, much suffering than that. But he'll also experience love and calmness and peace for the first time. So, he eventually will not just survive but he will thrive. I am happy to report that I'm thriving right now. I have more money than I could ever imagine as an impoverished kid in the

Philippines. I have I think I have better clothes. I've had the privilege of eating much much better food than Mc Donald's since I had that meal. I have the honor and privilege of sharing this story with you all and sharing the space with you all which is absolutely beautiful. And I think the ultimate sign that I am thriving is that I can share this with you all.

So I want to wrap up my story with a little something I want to do with you all, actually. If you could all join me in doing this. I'd love it if we collectively do this together. If we could all close our eyes and just take a second. Put your hand on your chest. It doesn't matter which hand. Think of a moment in the past just like me when you felt like you were hopeless, you were hurt, you were alone you were unsupported. It could be 20 minutes ago or it could be 20 years ago. It doesn't matter. And once you have that moment in your mind, on the count of three I want all of us in this room collectively to say out loud and say it to your past self that everything is going to be okay.

One, two, and three: (everyone in the public) *Everything is going to be okay.* Thank you [Applause]

(Guitar music starts)

Lisa Cantrell: You've been listening to a live recording from the Capital Storytelling Stage from an event we hosted in partnership with the Dreamer Resource Center of Sacramento State called Immigrant Stories.

It's an annual event held each year in October to celebrate National Immigrants Day. The event was sponsored by Capital Public Radio and funded by grants from Sacramento State, The Sacramento City's Office of Arts and Culture, the California Arts Council and a generous donation from Jones Brenchley.

You can hear all of the recordings from our past event on our website at capitalstorytelling.com and you can also go there to find out about our classes and workshops as well as some of our other resources including work books and storytelling games.

Well, that's it for this time. Don't be a stranger. We hope to see you soon.

(Music in the background)

