

Philippines

Archipelago of Philippine islands is part of South East Asia. Philippines consist of Luzon and Visayan group of islands and the Mindanao and Sulu islands which are generally mountainous with narrow coastal plains. Mindanao was Muslim long before the islands were named after Spanish king Philip. 400 years of Spanish colonisation established Catholicism and the America left its influence since Spanish American war in 1898.

Lisa Kennedy

I was born in Manila in Philippines. I spoke English well when I came to Australia fifty years ago to join my husband but Australian slang and phrases are often hard to understand and use for a person from another country. Many migrants speak better English than many Australians. They are more careful with words and don't shorten and mispronounce them.

Philippines consists of 7000 pacific islands speaking different dialects. The main dialect is Tagalog and they teach it at school since Philippines became independent. You have to learn Tagalog at school to be able to get a job in Philippines since Tagalog became Philippines official language. English is learned but it is no longer compulsory. I can not understand Tagalog well. I was brought up in Spanish and English.

Spanish invaders came in 1529 and ruled Philippine for 300 years. They brought Catholic religion and Spanish language. Spanish was the main language in Philippines until in American-Spanish war at the beginning of the 20th century Americans took over Philippine. Since then we all learned English. We liked Americans. In 1941 Japan occupied Philippines. American General Mc Arthur said: we will come back. Americans returned after the war and gave us ten years Transition time to independence.

I was one of nine children of a rice plantation owner. My family lived in the city but our father visited the plantation to oversee the tenant workers. Mum sometimes helped dad in the business so the children were put into the Catholic boarding school run by nuns.

I finished four years of primary, three years of intermediate and four years of high school before I began my studies at St. Thomas University run by Dominican Fathers. This is the only Catholic university in Philippines. The story goes that this building is the only one in Manila that could not be effected by an earthquake. The priest took the only set of its plans to Spain and they got lost at sea.

I graduated as a Bachelor of Science and Education. I began teaching English and drama in intermediate school but I did not like teaching much. I took a course of typing and short hand to do office work.

Filipinos pay much attention to the education of their children and most Filipino migrants are well educated.

When the war broke out my family moved from Manila to the country for safety.

In 1950 I met Ben Kennedy who was in the USA army in Manila and we got married. Ben was one of the world's gentlemen.

In 1956 Ben's father got sick so Ben wanted to return home to Australia to be with him. Ben's father died when he was sixty. Ben's brother and Ben himself died in their sixties.

I didn't know much about Australia. In Philippines we learned more about America so I was more familiar with American way of life. I only heard about Australian Aborigines but I did not know anything about Aborigines either. I learned to like Australian life, different ways of doing and saying things. I have been to Japan and Hong Kong but I have not been to America or Europe.

I came with Ben to what I always called The Never Never. After a city life in Manila the isolation of the life on an Australian sheep station came as a shock. Ben's home was between Lightning Ridge and Goodooga. As we drove to his home I said: I don't see any people. Ben said: Our neighbours are only five miles away. For a city girl five miles was a never never.

I stayed in Australia for a year but the white Australia policy was strictly enforced during the fifties. Although I was married to an Australian I wasn't allowed to stay because I wasn't considered white. I returned home to Philippines for a couple of years.

I did not want to rescind my Philippines citizenship. I was an Australian resident and after ten years I applied for Australian citizenship.

Ben's parents produced their own fruit and vegetables. They also had eggs and killed their animals for meat. I liked Ben's parents simply because I loved Ben and they gave him life. I believe that they probably resented the fact that I am from Philippines but we were friendly to each other. We went to Walgett shopping once a week. I worked in and around the house.

I met the ladies of neighbouring properties as I went shopping with Ben to Walgett. I also met new friends through the phone. There were seven of us on the same line. I met Merelyn Knight and we became friends. We still meet a few times a week and together we visit the lonely and the sick in Lightning Ridge.

We are both members of the St. Vincent's society and we help with the St. Vincent's shop. I like helping the needy.

Catholic Church brings Catholics together. At the beginning we had mass once a month in different homes but at the beginning of the sixties Waterfords began to build the Catholic Church.

I felt that I went back in time when I came to Australia. The life on the land was still very primitive. We had kerosene fridge but no electricity. We had an old crank generator for light. The only general store in Lightning Ridge was run by a man from Walgett and Dawson supplied bread and meat. Later Dawson took over the store and the post office. Lightning Ridge had no police station, Angledool was bigger than Lightning Ridge at the time and they had a police station. Angledool also had an Aboriginal Mission and Anglican Church. Even when I went to Sydney I could not go to the cinema because I have seen all the films before in Manila.

In 1977 Ben sold the farm and we moved to Lightning Ridge town. Ben was a treasurer and later a president of the Bowling club for many years. Everybody respected and liked Ben. Ben and I were foundation members of the Bowling club and I joined the bowlers from the beginning. I travelled to all Australian cities with the team to competitions and I won many trophies. I enjoy the company of other bowlers, the exercise, and the competition.

I also joined the line dancing group and the walk aerobics.

Since my operation I can not walk to all my charity meetings and I can not always get the transport. Taxis are not reliable. Merelyn Knight takes me with her to visit the sick and the lonely and to go to meetings of St Vincent and to the conferences of St Vincent de Paul society, which are held in Parkes.

I lost contact with my family, my brother and sisters are dead and many of their children live in America and Canada.

Australia is my home country now. I am going to stay in Lightning Ridge until they take me to the New Chum cemetery. Most of my friends are there and the rest of them will come after me.

Elena Edgley

I was born in 1955 in San Dionisio Iloilo on Panay Island in Philippines. I am the fifth of seven children. Filipinos have large families.

My grandmother is half-Spanish, she is fair and tall and we called her mestiza, which means half-Spanish half Filipino. My one brother is very tall after our grandmother but I am only four foot eleven inches and weigh a hundred pounds, which is forty five kilograms. I am used to empirical measures because Philippines were under Americans for a long time.

The rest of my ancestors are Filipinos. My grandfather was a typical Filipino, short and dark brown. My father was a very good-looking man. I don't know his family because they come from the other island. My father died from ulcer when I was only twelve and my youngest brother was six.

I was always very shy; I grew up believing that I am ugly but I have a fine light brown skin after my grandmother. They teased me that I was picked from the river and look different than the rest of my family.

Most Filipinos are Catholic but not many go to church. My family was very religious and we all went to church every Sunday. Before bed we had to wash and then my father told us Bible stories and the stories about saints. The whole family had to kneel down and pray rosary every night. My eldest brother came home drunk one night but he still had to kneel down and say the rosary.

Our life revolved around religion. The happiest month for me was December because of Christmas festivities, presents and holidays in the city at my auntie's place.

We had a mass at three in the morning from 16 until 25 December. I loved to go because after this night mass mum bought us rice cakes called bibingka and hot pandesal, which was kind of hot fresh bread. If I woke up too late I missed out on the mass and the bibingka. There was trouble if they did not wake me up because I would cry and cry.

After Christmas midnight mass we all ran home to find presents under the Christmas tree. We got chocolates, clothes, lollies, and fruits. For Christmas we had apples and grapes especially imported from California because these were not local fruits.

My parents were well educated and one of the biggest farmers in our region. When I was about five my father sold our land and we moved on Mindanao Island, which is a Muslim territory. The land there was much cheaper. He bought a large homestead and a rice field. All of us children went to school so we lived in a small house in the town Ipel Zamboanga del Sur. My mother was a hard working woman. My father became sick with malaria and had complications. He said that he wished to live at least five more years to see us all settled. I was twelve when my father died. Our dreams were crushed.

My mother's sister sent for us and we returned to Iloilo. She adopted our family. She bought a hacienda next to the hacienda of Don Lopes who was the relative of the Philippines vice president. We had a beautiful big house

and our property measured about two square kilometres of cleared land. The highlands are used for sugarcane and the lower regions are for the rice fields and the beachside is used for the fishpond industry. Our uncultivated land was given to the poor during the Marcos reign.

My auntie only had one son and he was always away. My older brothers and sister got married young and moved away and the younger brothers were still little children. I felt lonely on our hacienda because there were no girls my age around.

I continued my studies and finished high school. My auntie asked me if I wanted to go to university or at least do a course for my own pleasure. She wanted me to learn dressmaking and I enrolled but didn't like it and didn't attend. I enrolled in a beauty course. At the beginning of the course the teacher asked me why I wanted to do the course. Other girls had ambitions to earn money and open the shop but I said that I just wanted to solve my own beauty problems.

I finished a Hair Science and Beauty culture course. My auntie thought I was training to become a dressmaker. When she found out she was quite pleased that at least I would know something. When I returned home they all wanted to have a beauty treatment so I had a lot of practice. For two years after that I stayed home and did my own grooming. I became bored and wanted to get away. I was getting older and wanted to break away from my family.

We had five servant girls, a houseboy and a driver to do all the jobs in and around the house. I wasn't allowed to talk to the servants because my auntie said that they would lose respect if I had fun with them. My auntie told me that I do not have to do any work but I must watch and learn how they cooked and washed and cleaned to prepare myself for marriage. She said that I wasn't a pretty girl who will get a rich husband so I will have to make my husband happy by cooking and keeping the house well. I am a good cook and I have a nice home now. My husband says that I am very pretty as well.

I did not go out with boys much. When a boy tried to get close to me I moved away. I was very choosy. People called me a snob but if I don't like someone I just don't talk to them.

I had ambitions to go to other countries. I wanted to go to America or West Germany. I did a chambermaid course and I learned to speak German. My mother and auntie told me that if I wanted to be a chambermaid I could be a chambermaid at home.

My auntie told me that I have everything I need on the hacienda. She was a lovely woman who loved us but would not let me go out. I had everything at home but I missed the freedom to do what I wanted to do. Mainly I wanted to get married and have my own family. She did not approve of any of my suitors. She wanted me to stay with her.

For holidays we went to the city and I liked the freedom of the city. I decided to go to work in a beauty shop in Manila.

My auntie asked me what would it take for me to stay with her. She promised me half of her property if I stayed with her and never got married. She said that marriage will bring me much trouble and that I was too spoiled to survive in a marriage. Especially if I married a foreigner who did not understand our ways.

My auntie and I sat on top of the hill one-day and she said: look as far as your eye can see; all this is our property and this is your home.

But the place was too lonely for me and I wanted to go.

My cousin was a first lieutenant in the Philippine's navy. He promised my mother and my auntie that he will look after me in Manila. My aunt and my mum told me to call them if I needed help or if I wanted to return. They were afraid that I would do something bad in the city if I needed money.

I found a good job in a beauty salon as a beautician. After four months my cousin had to go into the battle with Muslims in Solo. He was worried about me being alone in Manila and wanted to send me home to Panay Island into the province of Iloilo. He sent a message to his wife that he will bring me home in a private jet belonging to the Philippine Airforce.

In the meantime I found a friend which was the wife of the chief of the Filipino air force. She told me that she would help me make a good future in Manila. This lady said that I was the best in my category of beauticians. She also recommended that I should go overseas to promote my profession. She introduced me to her friend who had a Copacabana nightclub. I got a job as a private beautician for 250 girls working in the nightclub. The girls were entertaining foreigners in Angelus City Pangpanga which is a province of Manila. I had to fix their make up, do their hair and select their clothes. I enjoyed working there and I earned lots of money. After about six months the mamasan, the owner of the nightclub, told me to show my face to the foreigners so I can marry one of them. He knew that it was my ambition to go overseas. The trouble was that I was too scared to look at the foreigners. I am so very tiny and they were so very big.

Mamasan gave me a job as a geisha in a restaurant connected to the club. I was really scared and was ready to go home. Men approached me and asked me to sit down and talk to them. I wanted to run. I told my problems to the dressmaker who worked for these girls. She was a married woman and she took me home and found me work as a beautician with her niece.

One of my customers was a lady who was an attorney of the one of the stockholders of the restaurant. She told me to apply in the gymnasium to be trained as a sport's masseur. I enjoyed my work in the gymnasium. Every Friday and Saturday we had women's day and many women came for a workout.

By 1980 I was trained as a sport masseur. I worked in one of the biggest hotel restaurant in Angelus City.

The owner-boss warned me not to marry a foreigner specially an Australian but he himself introduced me to his best friend who was a rich businessman from Mackay. I did not like this old man with a large belly. I wanted a good-looking man not too much older than myself. My boss then introduced me to a widower who was a supervisor in a mine in Mackay. I promised to come with him but I changed my mind. Bar girls laughed at me saying that I had a strong gut but weak knees.

I met Shortie in the restaurant. He was with an old foreigner who knew me well. The old man asked me to join them and have a drink. I ordered a glass of milk. I liked Shortie and agreed to meet him the next day. Shortie is very fit and strong. He is an ex boxer. He asked me if I would marry him and go to Australia with him. I agreed.

Shortie's real name is Robert but he is only five foot three inches tall and someone in Coff's Harbour gave him a nickname Shortie. His relations call him Bob. My friends in Philippines couldn't believe that I found a good-looking man like him.

I went home to ask my mother for permission to marry. Mum and aunty said that Australians were ex convicts and would mistreat me or even kill me. If I was to marry a foreigner I should marry an American.

If I were you I would not marry at all, said my auntie.

I said that I liked Shortie very much and wanted to live with him. This was also the only way I could go overseas. They said that if I marry him I should never return home. Those words hurt me very much. I only invited my friends and club members to my wedding. Shortie was very happy but I was sad because my family wasn't with me.

The emigration people did not accept my birth certificate so I had to return home to get my baptismal certificate. I asked Shortie not to come with me but he said that whatever happens he wanted to be by my side. I planned to let him stay in a hotel but he wanted to come home with me. I rang my auntie but my sister answered that my auntie went on holidays with all the family. When I arrived home only my first cousin's son was there with the housemaids and my sister. My mother was very sick. She already had the first signs of Alzheimer's disease.

We stayed with mum for three weeks and she saw that Shortie was a very nice man. Mum died a few years later but I had no money to go to her funeral.

Mum was a high school mathematics teacher before she married. She worked as a private teacher to Russian and American children in Negroes Occidental where the sugar milling company is. The owner of the mill was American so mum spoke English with them.

Now mum spoke English with Shortie.

Shortie was thirty-seven and I was thirty in 1985 when we got married in Philippines registry office. Australian embassy gave us permission to marry so I could come to Australia.

In Philippines we were not allowed to marry in the church without papers from my husband's parish in Australia.

Shortie is Australian born Presbyterian of Scottish ancestry. His first wife was Catholic. Shortie's first marriage was annulled because he was considered too young when he married the first time.

Shortie's first wife was fifteen and he was seventeen when they got married and had a baby. They divorced after three years.

Shortie and I married again in Lightning Ridge Catholic Church.

My aunty later realised that my prayers were answered and I found a good man. She wrote to us that we should visit when we return to Philippines.

We returned three years later and we had a big party. Mum did not recognise anyone any more.

My husband and the rest of my family accepted and liked each other.

Before we married Shortie told me that he was not rich.

On my first day in Australia I looked around and believed that everybody in Australia was very rich; everybody ate steak, wore nice clothes and lived in nice houses.

I asked Shortie if everybody in Australia was rich.

Shortie said that one day I would find out for myself.

Shortie was worried that I will get bored and demand to go home. His friends told him that I would never get bored because I communicate well with everybody. I learned English at school.

After a few days we flew to Shortie's home in Coff's harbour. I was impressed with his beautiful clean house. He took me into his commercial fishing boat, he took me shopping and to RSL club where he taught me to play bingo and poker machine. I was never a gambler. I won lots of money but I lost it too so I decided that gambling was not for me.

Shortie went to work and I enjoyed my time at home. Many Filipino ladies came and I gave them fish Shortie caught. Every week we had a party and I was very happy.

Three years later Shortie's business collapsed. He borrowed twenty thousand to fix the boat but he got sick and could not run it any more for a year. The government took his licence. We were in big trouble because without a licence we could not sell the boat for the right price. We ran out of money. We were not eligible to go on the dole because Shortie was a professional fisherman.

I looked for a job to help out. I found a job in the printing press printing magazines and ads; I worked eight hours a week at five dollars an hour. I couldn't find a permanent job.

We decided to sell the house before we went bankrupt so that we had at least some money left. We moved to live in the boat for two weeks and I cried every night because I felt sorry for myself. I felt disappointed; I wasn't used to poverty. We bought a caravan and stayed in a caravan park for six months. I tried to get a good job or open a business so we could get back on our feet.

I began to cook spring rolls for the local bowling club. Everybody loved my cooking but the trouble was I had no licence. The chief cook picked spring rolls in the middle of the night to be safe. I had too many orders and could not cope. I realised that I will not get rich cooking so I decided to join retired Australian women living in the same Caravan Park. I watched what they were doing every day while Shortie was in the pub. I wanted to learn from the old people so I made friends with them. On Wednesdays and Saturdays they left in the bus to do art and craft activities. They learned pottery and lapidary. I was interested in cutting stones. I hoped to earn money by cutting diamonds. I had no driving licence yet so I joined the old people on the bus and we went to the lapidary club. I enrolled because I wanted to do something for myself. I would have a go at anything to help out. I asked my husband to join us instead of sitting in the pub every day. He agreed. Shortie had no patience but he tried to please me and be with me. We learned and I made a collection of all different stones shaped into different styles. Shortie cut one agate stone.

My mother in law came for a holiday with her boyfriend and I very proudly showed her my collection. She knew about stones so I asked her to price them. She said that the most expensive stone was only three dollars. I realised that I am not rich yet and that I wasted my time. After my mother in law left I searched through the books to find where they mined diamonds in Australia. I wanted to cut diamonds. I found the book with opals. I loved the beautiful colours of Lightning Ridge opal and was impressed with how expensive opals are.

I bought the book Lightning Ridge opals and forgot about diamonds. When Shortie got home I asked him if he knew where Lightning Ridge is. He said that he had never been there but knew about it. His friend told him that it was very hot in Lightning Ridge and that we had to wait until winter. We bought a tent and loaded everything we needed for mining into our station wagon. We planned to stay for winter and return later to Coff's Harbour. First we went to Glengarry opal field but did not like it because there were no shops. We stayed in the Caravan Park in a tent and it was very cold. They told us that we have to register a claim. We got a generator and bought a camp on the claim in Pumpkin flat for four thousand dollars. We started mining with a hand windlass. I pulled out the dirt and I also went down twenty-five foot to work with pick and shovel in the shaft. Shortie and I did not even find a trace of opal the whole winter. We sold the claim and the camp and bought another claim with the camp on it at Bold Hill field.

The hole was ready for mining. We didn't find anything for six months. Shortie found me crying in the shaft one day. He asked what was wrong and I said: tell me who I am where I am and what am I doing. I cried feeling sorry for myself. Shortie told me to go home to rest. He said that every time he looked at me digging hard his heart was crying.

After a month he found a pocket worth about five thousand dollars. It was exciting but it could not repay what we spent.

I stopped mining and began looking for work using my qualifications as a masseur. Shortie did not like me working on men but allowed me to massage women. Shortie's friend asked him to massage his sons who were football players. Women asked me also to massage their husband so I asked Shortie for his support because we needed money. He asked what kind of support I needed and I said just your trust so he said OK. I massaged full time and made money.

Lightning Ridge community was very supportive. I was amazed how many customers I had. I never advertised it was just the word of mouth publicity. One customer gave me lots of towels and made a beautiful massage table for me. One lady also gave me a towel so I had enough. The men on my massage table were well behaved and very nice. I was so happy. I can't express enough gratitude for the big support of Lightning Ridge community. I will never forget that.

During the first year in Lightning Ridge Shortie wanted me to go to the Bowling club to socialise. He said you have to go out sometimes you are not an Aborigine to live in the bush. Gradually we made many friends and love being here.

I realised that we did not like this town because we always planned to move out when we got money.

I bought potch and colour to cut and sell stones. I learned to cut opal from Sally Hall. I was cutting all the time. I knew that I wouldn't be able to massage all my life because my hands get sore so I started to buy and sell opal. I go to America every year and I made contacts there that buy from me. It's not a big business but it helps us to get through..

Shortie and I tried to have a baby. I went to see a doctor but he could find nothing wrong with me. The doctor called my husband and he said to Shortie that if he wants babies he had to stop smoking and drinking. Shortie couldn't. He is still drinking and smoking regularly like most Australians.

In Philippines not many people can afford to drink and smoke. They drink coconut wine but beer is a luxury. Only very rich can import wine but others drink rum made from sugar cane. We have tobacco plantations in the part of Luzon and most of people in the country grow their own.

I never smoked or drank alcohol.

I am grateful to my husband because he trusts me and lets me be independent. I am very honest and faithful to him. I meet lots of respectable,

nice men on my travels but I am always honest and true to Shortie because my marriage is very important to me.

Shortie has a bad back and can not work. He is on the health benefit and I am his carer.

There are about thirty Filipinos in Lightning Ridge. They are all my friends and sometimes we meet. We are happy in Australia. Most of the girls are young and have old husbands but our culture prepares us to marry older men to have a stable relationship and a family.

I am the breadwinner in my family and I try again and again to earn my living. If I fail I try again and never give up.

I experienced being rich and being homeless. I always wanted to have a home of my own and now I am happy in my camp.

People in Philippine cities live much like Australians, they rent a flat or a house.

My auntie's brick hacienda had six bedrooms and upstairs we had two bathroom and one for visitors. We had separate rooms and toilets for the servants. Working people have to pay social security for their retirement. They also have a limited and inferior health cover and free medicine.

Schooling is free since Marco's time. Cory Aquino made reforms and provided free public schools. Good students can study now and pay later for university courses.

Many people are unemployed so they look for casual work cleaning or farming. Many try to become domestic helpers overseas to Saudi Arabia or Hong Kong, Japan or Singapore to feed themselves. In the country there are many squatters. They are people who ask if they can build their stick house on your property. In return they do some work for the landowner. My family lives in Philippines and I miss them. I try to bring my nephew and his wife as a skilled immigrant. I support my grand niece who is nine with school things and whatever else she needs. I would like to adopt her.

We from Iloilo speak Ilongo dialect; every province has a different dialect but we all have a national language Tagalog so we can understand each other. We learn Tagalog at school. Most people learn English as a second language. When we go to Manila we speak Tagalog or English. My parents can not speak Tagalog but they spoke English fluently because in their time they learned Spanish and English and did not learn Tagalog.

The life and nature are abundant where I came from in Philippines. People eat good fresh fruits and vegetables and lots of fish. We grow tropical fruit like mango, banana, jackfruits and many other fruits. We import potatoes but grow all green leafy vegetables.

Those of us, who could afford it, have American, Spanish and Chinese foods. The poor people eat cheaper food like vegetables and dried fish, rice and sweet potato, cassava and boiled green banana. The really poor would only have boiled rice and maybe fish sometimes.

Common breakfast for the rich in Philippines is garlic rice, eggs, fried fish and adobo. Adobo is meat cooked with spices specially garlic and vinegar. You boil the meat in water, add vinegar, spices, soy souse and seasoning; when the water reduces it becomes a sauce to go with the meat.

Very few people in Philippines are fat because their food is always fresh and people are always active. Most Filipinos live with one hand scratching and with the other feeding, a kind of hand to mouth existence. They work in the morning to eat lunch and work in the afternoon to eat dinner.

Filipinos are very hospitable and the house is always open and everybody shares food. Everybody in Philippines would feed you if you are hungry. Family kinships are very strong and family is always there for every member. Parents are strict with their children. Our lives were very restricted. We were allowed to go dancing but had to come home at prearranged time.

I was a rich girl and enjoyed my life in Philippines but I am happy in Australia as well.