

Benjamin Ahumada  
Boston Latin School – Grade 8  
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### **A Heritage of Resilience**

Growing up with a diverse cultural background has always made me curious about my family's history. While others may trace their heritage to one or two locations, I can connect mine to at least four countries – Mexico, Spain, India and the Philippines. My favorite stories are those that describe how my family experienced major world events, so it was amazing to speak with my grandparents about my great-great grandfather, Andres Macapagal. He lived in the Philippines during World War II and overcame many challenges in his life. Besides interviewing my grandparents, I also researched the war and Japanese occupation of the Philippines using Britannica and National WWII Museum websites.

Before the war, Andres was a wealthy man who owned a well-known construction company. He had a beautiful house and a lot of property all over. He grew his construction business to the point where he would get large customers asking for his services every week.

However, everything changed in 1941. Just a few hours after the bombing of Pearl Harbor, the Japanese began their land invasion of the Philippines. This was part of Japan's plan to expand their influence and control resources in Southeast Asia. While American and Filipino forces led by General Douglas MacArthur put up a strong defense, they were eventually overwhelmed by

Japanese forces. The US evacuated and Japan was able to fully occupy the Philippines within a year. The Japanese seized control of the Philippine government and the properties of many Filipinos, including my great-great grandfather's. After spending his entire life building his legacy, everything was taken away – his company, his land, his whole life.

The Japanese occupation was brutal. Filipinos were subjected to poor living conditions, inadequate food, and extreme harassment by the Japanese. Like many other Filipinos, Andres was forced into hard labor. He worked in dangerous and difficult conditions like building roads and bridges without proper equipment or protection. Any little money he earned was taken away, continuing a perpetual cycle of pain and misery.

Throughout the occupation of the Philippines, the Japanese committed many human rights violations. The Bataan Death March was one of the largest atrocities. In April 1942, the Japanese army ordered the removal of 78,000 prisoners of war. American and Filipino soldiers were forced to march 70 miles from the city of Bataan to a former American military camp named Camp O'Donnell. Over 10,000 people died weakened by disease, malnutrition, and horrendous treatment by the Japanese. People were rarely given anything to drink. Anyone who broke formation would immediately be shot or stabbed.

Although my great-great grandfather wasn't directly involved in the death march, the news of Bataan and other horrors spread quickly and led to a breaking point for the Filipinos. Guerrilla armies were formed to fight back. My great-great grandfather did what he could to help the guerilla armies. He provided supplies and information to the resistance. Eventually, guerilla

warfare helped American and Filipino forces return and remove the Japanese from the Philippines after they surrendered at the end of World War II.

While the liberation of the Philippines and the end of World War II brought a sense of joy and relief to the Filipinos, they knew that rebuilding their lives was not going to be easy. The Japanese occupation had severely damaged the Philippine economy. Shortages of food and other resources had led to widespread poverty and hunger.

Thankfully, Andres had already earned himself a reputation for quality construction from his previous business. He started reaching out to former clients and offered to help rebuild their damaged homes and buildings at a discount. There was a lot of demand for his services and he worked hard to rebuild his company to surpass the one he lost during the war.

Andres' life is a testament to the strength and determination of Filipinos to overcome tragedy. Because of his success, Andres was able to financially support his nephew, Diosdado Macapagal, who climbed up in the Philippine government. He started in the Filipino House of Representatives, moved to Vice President, and then was elected in 1961 as the 9th President of the Philippines.

Speaking with my grandparents about my great-great grandfather's story has helped me to understand resilience and perseverance. His journey from wealth to devastation and back to success has taught me that even when everything seems lost, we can endure and rebuild. What impacts me most is how he transformed tragedy into opportunity, not just for himself but for his

family including those of us he never met. His legacy reminds me to work hard to overcome adversity. I am so grateful to learn my great-great grandfather's story. It will always inspire me whenever I face challenges in my own life.

## References

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