

## From the Philippines to Singapore to the United States

The room was crowded with hundreds of people standing up. They were shocked with their jaws dropping. Watching a girl on stage singing, this beautiful song made them wonder who was this girl?

Alexandria “ Nicole “ Pe -- was born on May 19, 2001, in Manila, Philippines. At a young age, Nicole was shy and not very social. She chose who she wanted to talk to. She was so close to her cousin Lana in The Philippines that they were more like sisters. Lana helped Nicole deal with shyness and become more open. She would help Nicole find her first Barkada, which means a close group of friends that hang out together.

Along with Lana, Nicole had two friends from preschool, Sabine and Serena, who remain her best friends even today They thought of themselves as a pack.

“My friends there, I know them for a very long time, and they are the closest friends I ever had,” she said. “We called each other Barkada, meaning a group close friends hanging out together.”

When Nicole was 12, her family moved to Singapore. Everyone felt very sad. Lana and her Barkada made an iMovie for her about how they much they would miss her and wish her good luck.

When she got to Singapore, she loved the culture and the local communities and food. But everything changed when she went to school.

School in Singapore was very rigorous. Nicole’s grade began to slip. She was held behind in Singapore’s tough academic system. She was bullied because of her academic troubles and her foreign culture. Her schoolmates avoided her. Nicole became depressed and afraid that she was alone and had no support. She hid in corners and dark places at lunchtime to escape the bullying. It got to the point where she sometimes skipped school entirely.

“I hated being at that school in Singapore, and I missed my friends back home. My parents were very sad and disappointed in me,” she said regretfully.

The bullying continued throughout 7th grade. But in eighth-grade humanities class project, in which she was supposed to introduce something from a different culture. Nicole decided to research on her own Filipino culture. Specifically, she wanted to focus on Filipino music. It took a full month to finish the project. Next came the big challenge: She would need to present this project in front of a school crowd.

“The biggest fear of mine was showcasing singing in front of everyone,” she recalled.

In early 2014, Nicole performed a song in front of everyone called “Pinoy Ako,” which translates to “I Am Filipino.” She sang in a beautiful, calm tone. She was nervous at first while everyone stared at her. But then she sang. The crowd responded with awe.

Everyone, in the end, roared, and cheered for Nicole. The same students who had bullied her now marveled at her performance. Now they felt ashamed for avoiding and making fun of the girl from The Philippines. Nicole felt vindicated. On this day, she had proved she was not afraid of anything, even the bullies who doubted her.

“I wanted to prove that I can do this and prove the bullies that they were wrong to doubt my ability to show off my skill,” she said.

In late 2014, Nicole and her family moved to the United States. She started school at Cedar Park Middle School as an eighth-grader. When people began approaching Nicole, she didn’t know what to do. Once again, she felt shy and anxious. But soon she found that the people at school sincerely wanted to help her. She began to open up and make new friends.

Her family adjusted here well, as her brother felt that America was the land of opportunities and it felt that he had a chance. Her mother had a job at Nike and this was the reason they all came to America. Her father is also happy with the number of opportunities America presents.

In Singapore, Nicole had felt frightened about performing in front of the same people who had bullied her. But she found the courage needed to overcome this obstacle. She faced the light and the crowd. She learned then that she needed to communicate more and show her skills. She would carry this accolade and memory for the rest of her life.