

STOCKTONSpeaks!

GLORIA CARIDO NOMURA

Gloria Carido Nomura was next to the youngest in a large, close-knit, loving family. Until she was about 11 years old, Gloria spent her days as did many youngsters, doing a few chores but mostly going to school and playing with her friends. And maybe even sometimes daydreaming about what she would do when she got older—places she might visit, where she might go to school, jobs she might get. As a child, there always was an adult or adult figure to supervise and guide her.

But the day soon came when she grew up—fast. When Gloria was in the sixth grade, she was given a major family responsibility. Not yet in her teens, Gloria became the household cook. Her carefree childhood days thus quickly ended. No longer was her day filled with her own choice of activities and playmates. No longer was she free to read her books, visit with her friends, or play with whatever was at hand, whenever she wanted. She had, in a way, now become an adult.

Camila and Manuel Carido, her parents, were both agricultural laborers. During the spring and summer growing seasons, they usually spent long days working crops in the fields around Walnut Grove, an hour's trip from Stockton. Their family consisted not only of their own six children but also two of Camila Carido's younger half-siblings. To keep food on the table and the household running, everyone had to pitch in. Some worked alongside the parents in the field; others found jobs elsewhere. Young Gloria's role early on, from the age of 11, was to do the cooking for all the family. Later, the duty of cleaning the house was added.

It was an abrupt transition from girlhood to adulthood for young Gloria, but with it came a new respect from her elders. She remembers that it was about then that her parents, older siblings, and other relatives began to treat her differently. As a result of her adult roles, they considered her more as one of

them than as a child. It was an attitude that continued to the day she legally became an adult.

Because of her parents' occupation, Gloria became acquainted with others who toiled in the fields as they did. When the family was living in Stockton, Gloria was part of a large Filipino community. The children were never exposed to any racism that the parents might have encountered. For a period of time during her early elementary school years, Gloria and her family lived in a farm labor camp near Walnut Grove.

Living in the camp during tomato season was when she encountered racial prejudice for the first time. Gloria says, "Until I went away to a country school, I didn't realize I was any different from anybody else."

Many of the seasonal farm workers were known as "Okies," poor white migrants driven from the drought-stricken Dust Bowl region of Oklahoma and the Texas panhandle by economic adversity. Earlier in the century, these people had fallen on hard times caused by the double whammy of the Great Depression and a three-year period of drought, storms, blizzards, and other bad weather which destroyed their farming livelihood. They came to California looking for work. The "Okies" were joined, during World War II, by Mexican labor that was imported to California to work on the state's farms. The state's agriculture was an industry where members of both groups knew they could earn money for their families.

They were people who worked alongside her parents, and their children went to the local school with Gloria. She remembers the prejudice from the permanent resident population that prevailed against the farm workers, particularly the migrant workers who followed the crops. They were all considered at the bottom of both the economic and social class.

But, Gloria noticed differences in the way she, as a Filipina, was treated. There appeared to be an ethnic-based hierarchy among the groups, as far as the locals were concerned. She sensed that Filipinos were considered a "step up" from the Mexicans and the "Okies." Gloria had made friends with some of

the local children whose parents owned the farms. At school, the Caucasian farm owners' children would call to Gloria, "Come sit here. You can't sit with them over there." Contrary to the attitude of her young playmates, knowing all four groups—Filipinos, Mexicans, "Okies," and other Caucasians—inculcated in her the appreciation of similarities and laid the foundation for bridging differences among people.

In Stockton, Gloria and her family were part of a Filipino community that formed close relationships with each other through St. George's Catholic Church. Her parents also belonged to various social and service organizations that strengthened their cultural identity and ethnic ties to their Filipino heritage. Her parents, who were bilingual and spoke both English and their native dialects, were leaders in the Filipino community. Their active participation in the church and other organizations brought Gloria into contact with many other Filipino families. The interaction with other Filipino families reinforced for Gloria and her siblings the behaviors that her parents modeled, their expectations of their children's behavior, and their aspirations for their family—all the expectations were mirrored throughout their social circle. The young Filipinos, including Gloria, knew that their community had hopes for them and would encourage them to reach their goals.

"My parents wanted me to get an education," Gloria said. "They did not want me to end up like them, as farm laborers, with all the hardships they endured. They wanted me to have a good job." Even though they themselves had meager formal education—Mr. Carido possibly went to the 4th grade, Mrs. Carido to "about the 8th grade"—the parents impressed upon them the need to stay in school and get an education. As a young girl, Gloria Carido was proud of getting good grades, and her academic achievement was a source of status in her parents' eyes. In their opinion, scholastic achievement was a bridge to higher economic status.

"But my parents told us we didn't need to be rich to have all the blessings. We were taught that we should always be grateful for what we have and to

take care of others.” Gloria recalls. Mr. and Mrs. Carido lived their own advice. Much of their life, while Gloria was growing up, was a matter of hardship and survival. But they always managed and did more than just get by. Although they were poor, the Caridos shared what they had with others. Gloria and her siblings helped out when her parents took care of the children of other families, children whose parents were working in the fields. This was their contribution to keeping those families together. And their home also became a place where single Filipino laborers who had no other place to go could congregate socially, get a meal, and sometimes a bed as well.

English was the language spoken in the Carido household between the parents and the offspring. Although both her parents were bilingual and spoke their native Filipino dialect as well as English, they encouraged their children toward English fluency. While Gloria did not learn to speak her parents’ native language, she learned to understand the language from hearing it spoken among her elders. Occasionally, it was difficult for her to engage in an extensive conversation with some of her older relatives who spoke little or no English. “Now that I’m older, sometimes I think I should have learned the dialect,” Gloria says.

But there were other bonds that cemented Gloria and her siblings to their culture. One such bond was the church.

Their religious faith was a great source of strength for her parents. The busy Mrs. Carido was also a church leader and did novenas—special prayers of entreaty offered for nine successive days as a sacrifice and show of devotion—on behalf of others. St. George’s parish and its activities became a central part of the family’s lives. In addition to filling their spiritual needs, the church was also a haven of social activities for its prayers, fiestas, other annual events, and even funerals when friends and extended families gathered.

“My Dad expected us to go to church,” Gloria explained. “He may not go to church himself; he frequently was working. But we had to go. It was a simple equation. Even as adults when my sister and I were still living at home, if

we wanted to go to the movies or do something particular, we had to go to church first. He would tell us, 'If you don't have time to go to church, you don't have time to go to the movies.'"

Being poor, encountering economic deprivation, and growing up with little in the way of material things are not bad memories for Gloria. They were good years, she says, and though the Carido family did not have much in the way of material possessions, what they did have was invaluable. Being poor was probably even an advantage, she believes, for it made them treasure each other. Their days were filled with the love of family, friends, and the community. Gloria says she would not trade her experiences for anything in the world. Her background and the influence of her parents led her to acquire a college education and become a successful teacher. And it likely was a motivating force for public service, which she did by being twice elected to the Stockton City Council, also serving terms as the city's Vice-Mayor.

There are lessons from her parents which she would pass on to future generations. Each generation should respect, appreciate, and learn from their elders. Material things are not needed for happiness and fulfillment. People and community are important, and the most important of all is family. In her opinion, a positive attitude helps deal with adversity and overcome obstacles. For her parents and her family, religion was also a support, something they could always turn to for guidance and strength.

And above all, Gloria firmly believes: "Being a woman and a minority should not stop you from accomplishing what you want to do."

Author: G. Lee
Interviewer: Dianne Gini
Ethnic Group: Filipino American
Generation: Middle