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## 2nd-generation Americans find ways to remember their cultures

**Angela Cara Pancrazio**

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They are the children of parents who have come from every corner of the world to remake their lives in America.

Pushed out of their homeland by oppression, persecution or lack of jobs, their parents were pulled to their new country by the notion of opportunity and freedom. These freedoms were outlined in the Declaration of Independence, adopted on July 4, 1776.

As we celebrate the Fourth of July, second-generation Americans, those with one or both parents born in a foreign country, number 30.4 million, or 12 percent of the population.

The immigrant's story is centuries old.

The first generation faces prejudice and discrimination. Those immigrants struggle to assimilate into American society.

The experience of their American-born children, the second generation, is much different. Their native language quickly fades. By the third generation, the language dies out.

As children, second-generation Americans identify with American life. They may be embarrassed of their parents and want to forget their culture. But as they get older and more secure, some become more attached to their cultural identity and the ways in which they can connect to their parent's story.

In Arizona, many second-generation Americans keep something that reminds them of their parents, of where they came from.

One man plays his father's Lebanese music; another treasures his high school graduation picture. One young woman finds symbolism in a necklace given to her by her father. For another woman, it's her mother's *dichos*, or sayings.

And two brothers perform the traditional Chinese lion dance.

**- Angela Cara Pancrazio**

### **Marcus and Erik Ong**

They are twin brothers.

Sons of a father who came alone from the Guangzhou province in southern China when he was 12.

Their parents ran the family's Chinese restaurant and worked hard at assimilating.

Marcus Ong is named after NFL football legend and Heisman Trophy winner Marcus Allen.

Erik Ong is named after Erik Estrada, the actor who played a California Highway Patrol officer on the television series CHiPs.

They are lucky.>

The oldest link to their culture, their grandmother, Wan Gin Ong,4 lives in Glendale. She still cooks for them and warns them in maternal ways: "Don't marry a real pretty girl. You feel like she might leave you. Don't marry a very wealthy girl, she'll want more from you."

There was a time when they didn't realize the significance of the Saturdays spent at the Chinese school practicing their language and karate or the traditional lion dance they learned when they were 7.

There is a green-eyed papier-mâché lion stored in their mother's garage in Chandler. >

Marcus wears blue contact lenses over his brown eyes. The brothers pick out their clothes from Abercrombie & Fitch and American Eagle Outfitters.

But at weddings, grand openings, holidays and even the Fourth of July, they bang their pigskin drum. They shake the lion.

They greet their culture.

## **Nure Elatari**

Nure Elatari keeps the diamond-shaped pendant from her father locked in a bank safety-deposit box.

The necklace, a high school graduation gift, is a symbol for Elatari of how her father wanted to give her a good life in America.

In high school, with her olive skin and dark hair and eyes, her classmates assumed she was Greek or Italian. It didn't matter to her that nobody knew her Arab background or about her Muslim faith.

"I liked it that way," Elatari, 25, said. "I really was different from my classmates, and I felt it."

The necklace has become more precious with time. In August 2001, her father died. The Sept. 11 attacks followed.

After high school, Elatari started wearing a head scarf, or hijab.

Her mother was frightened for her daughter. She wanted her to quit school and take off her hijab.

"Instead, the American part of me stepped forward, that pride and strength really stepped forth," Elatari said.

When she spoke, she sounded American. Wearing the hijab, she was a visual

Muslim, and when anyone asked her where her family was from, in spite of all the conflict in the Middle East, she answered, "Palestine."

"The melting pot of America had to become me," Elatari said.

She lost the necklace once. She doesn't want to lose it again.

## **Derwood Anter**

It's a small document.

But Derwood Anter framed the sheet of paper and nailed it to the wall above his desk inside his warehouse.

The piece of paper "officially certifies" that his father, Monsouer S. Anter "came to the United States of America from Lebanon joining those courageous men and women who came to this country in search of personal freedom, economic opportunity and a future hope for their families."

"I'm proud of that," Anter said as he gestured to the wall.

Then, he shuffled through a few snapshots of his parents, the sepia-toned faces of the great migration during the industrial age in the early 20th century.

When he was a young boy, the Anter family lived on a street lined with Lebanese immigrants. The ethnic enclave was nicknamed kibbe after their staple of ground lamb, bulgur and onions from the old country.

Kibbe street is where Anter first heard his father play Lebanese folk dances with his flute-like migwiz.

Monsouer brought his migwiz to America. He taught his son how to play. When he died, his son buried his father with his migwiz.

"I put it in his hands and wrapped a rosary around it," Derwood said.

Every now and then, Derwood pulls out his own migwiz.

A man with a snow-white beard becomes a 6-year-old.

And Dahlia Drive in Glendale becomes kibbe street.

## **Jason Tena**

Jason Tena is a grown man who keeps a high school graduation snapshot on his headboard.

In the photo, his mother is standing next to him.

They're both grinning.

Everything he has is because of her.

The color snapshot is shiny and small. Not the typical family heirloom that symbolizes cultural identity.

Someday, when Tena has a family, the picture will start the telling of his story of his mother's sacrifice.

From Hermosillo, at 17, Teresa Sanchez paid a “coyote” to help her cross the border.

At night, she cleaned office buildings in Phoenix. then, while she raised her son, she worked as a housekeeper in Scottsdale.

Tena didn't learn English until he started school. But he mastered the language quickly and worked himself into English and math honors programs.

“We are that story. We are that American dream,” he said.

The story started with his mother:

“My mother was an immigrant who came here and chipped out a little corner for herself to give me an advantage that she never had,” he said.

She was the first.

Tena is taking his mother's story along with his own.

“I'm of Mexican-Indian ethnicity. As far as who I am, I am an American.”

## **Sandra Torres**

Sandra Torres remembers how as a young girl, she prayed for some kind of intervention.

She daydreamed that she would wake up one morning and hear her parents speaking English, that the Torres family would be living in a house instead of a duplex, they would drive a newer, bigger car instead of the dinky old Dodge and that a sandwich would miraculously replace the tacos her mother packed in her school lunch.

“Was I that burdened by them?” Torres asked herself.

By 5, Torres was interpreting English to Spanish for her parents. Her Mexican-born mother, Natalia, always reminded her American-born daughter that she was the only one in the family who could become president of the United States.

In high school, Torres rolled her eyes whenever her mother repeated a dicho, or saying.

Torres is 31 now. She keeps a black-and-white portrait of when her mother was her age, about the same time she came to the United States.

The photo is part of/ a small altar on a nightstand in Torres' bedroom. There's a Virgen de Guadalupe candle, a cross from her burial, a rosary and a few other trinkets.

Torres has kept her mother's words, too. She repeats them to her friends.

“Te pareces tanto a mi que no puedes engañarme,” Natalia Torres would tell her daughter.

“You are so much like me that you cannot fool me.”

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