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COMMUNITY VOICES: Finding my life's passion in school

By Gian Gayatao
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Gian Gayatao

If you asked me as a kid what I would be doing today, I would probably have given you the same answer any kid would. I would shrug my shoulders and say, "I don't know." The key difference here is I would have imagined my life to still be in the Philippines, not in a little town named Bakersfield.

My childhood wasn't a typical one. My life started in the Philippines, raised by my grandmother, as my parents were physically absent during my early years. To say my childhood was horrible would be an insult to my grandmother, as I owe her everything because she set the foundation of who I am today. I grew up with discipline and respect for others, and for that I adore and love my grandmother.

Life would change drastically for me when I moved to Bakersfield. My parents were suddenly back in my life, and while it was something I had always wanted — to have a mother support me at a sporting event, a father by my side — it was anything but comforting. I found myself living in a house of conflicting values, adapting to cultures and learning the norms of the American lifestyle. I felt cheated as I envisioned America as a paradise where all problems would be solved, but instead was hit with the harsh reality of a broken home.

It was that reality that framed my resilience and optimism. I decided in that moment that nothing would bring me down. I would find the good in any situation. After all, life was going to keep moving, and so would I. In that pursuit is where I found my refuge: school.

School was where I discovered my passion in life: public service. High school tested my limits and my persistence as I lost not once, but twice, to be elected on the Associated Student Body. But I didn't let this keep me down, as I knew I was meant to help others and if it wasn't in high school, it would be in my next journey at Bakersfield College.

I'll be honest, BC was not my first choice. However, I decided to take a practical approach and make the best of my situation, but what happened next was unimaginable. BC had so much to offer that I was blown away by the entire campus. BC was not only providing me with a great and stable education, it was providing

me with opportunities to work on building great relationships with my peers and faculty. This would eventually lead me to the BC Student Government Association.

I finally achieved what I had always hoped for — to serve others as a senator with BC SGA. Not only do I get a chance to help the student community, but I can also serve the greater student population in California. BC SGA thus far has provided me with opportunities to attend conferences, along with the other 114 California community colleges, to discuss and develop action plans on how to serve all community college students in the state.

BC SGA set me on a path of purpose to help students while working cohesively as a team from very different walks of life. I participated in making a survey for all students at BC to optimize our events on campus, see the issues being presented to us and to understand students on a deeper level. I sit on committees such as Student Health and Wellness and Accreditation and Institutional Quality to provide a student perspective. I have finally hit my stride and found my purpose to better BC.

My time here won't last forever, but I believe BC is currently setting me up for success. My next chapter in life is to join the Naval Academy and become an officer in the United States Marine Corps. It's not about wearing the uniform but more about serving and protecting our country, my ultimate passion in life. My future has yet to come, so for now I will spend the rest of my days at BC helping every student thrive and take pride in what it means to say "We are BC!"

Gian Gayatao is a student at Bakersfield College and serves as a senator on the Bakersfield College Student Government Association.