



Nanette Franzuela

Filipino Traditional Dress and Religious Celebrations

Nannette Franzuela was born and raised in Manila in the Philippines. She speaks English, Spanish, and Tagalog. Nannette holds a Bachelor of Science degree in nursing as well as an MBA. She came to the United States in the 1980's and moved to New Orleans in 1988.

Filipinos in Louisiana maintain many aspects of their traditional culture, including the celebration of religious and seasonal holidays. Most Filipino-American celebrations in the New Orleans area have several themes in common. Religion is an important aspect of these festivities and a mass is often held. Family participation is strongly emphasized. Sharing is an important part of Filipino tradition and traditional foods are plentiful. Dishes served usually include Filipino roast pig (*lechon*), noodle dishes (*panzit*), and sweet rice-based dishes. Music and dance are also part of most celebrations, both popular American songs and dance, and traditional Filipino dances and songs in Tagalog.

The Filipino festival of Santa Cruzan is observed by many New Orleans area Filipino-Americans. Santa Cruzan is traditionally observed in May in honor of the Blessed Virgin Mary, often merging with another Filipino celebration called Flores de Mayo. The regional festival's roots are Spanish-Moorish and Malaysian occurring at the beginning of the rainy season in the Philippines, when flowers are in bloom.

Details of the Santa Cruzan/Flores de Mayo festivities vary from group to group. At the center of the celebration, however, is a procession of Reinas. Reinas are beautiful young women representing biblical characters or "accolades of Our Lady" such as Morning Star, Mystic Rose, and Queen of Justice. The highlight of the event is the celebration of the Elena, a Reina who represents the long-ago Empress Helena. The Reinas are accompanied by flower girls and pages. As the Reinas are announced one by one, they proceed under arches decorated with flowers, and are carried by male escorts. Many of the young women in the procession wear long Filipino gowns or white embroidered clothes.

Mrs. Franzuela and her family are active participants in the New Orleans area Santa Cruzan/Flores de Mayo celebrations. She is also involved in organizing the Feast of San Lorenzo Luis celebration, another Filipino holiday taking place on September 27. The Franzuelas sponsored the 1999 Feast of San Lorenzo Luis.

Nannette Franzuela has been involved in Santa Cruzan/Flores de Mayo celebrations for many years. She learned to maintain these festive traditions through practice of the rituals since childhood. At home, her parents and grandparents passed along their knowledge of cultural traditions like Santa Cruzan by word of mouth, example, as well as learning from teachers and other community members. Mrs. Franzuela supplements her first-hand knowledge of Filipino traditions by reading sociological books.

Although a nurse by profession, she is mainly occupied these days with raising her children. Her oldest son was born and brought up in Manila. Her daughter participates in festive Filipino traditions wearing clothing that Nannette decorates. She is eager to give her daughter the opportunity to participate in these celebrations, because only the well-connected were able to participate in Manila when she was growing up.

As a Roman Catholic, Nannette enjoys singing at church and at Filipino gatherings. She is an active member of the Philippine-American Women's Association, the Philippine-American Sports Association of New Orleans, and the Philippine-American United Council of Louisiana. She and her family attend functions put on by all Filipino organizations.