

# Fil-Am Hollywood Star Leslie-Anne Huff Her Funny Calling

by MARIAN MARAYA

IT'S often assumed that every comic has a checkered back story awash with despair and dysfunction—the perfect stimulus for sharp comedic material.

Not for Disney star and comedienne Leslie-Anne Huff. This half-Filipino, half-Caucasian actor-model-performer roots her jocose personality from an organic source: a happy childhood and well-balanced family life.

"I've been really lucky to have had a fun, comfortable upbringing...I have a very limited pool of 'bad memories' to go back to.

I truly believe making people laugh is why God put me on this planet," says one of the stars of Disney's first original web series, Tween Choice Award-winning *Mackenzie Falls*.

Born in San Fernando Valley to loving and supportive parents Larry and Babes Huff, Leslie-Anne admits she was quite the quirky kid. She'd recite self-composed drivels to inanimate dolls as her audience, while borrowing lines from Disney movies.

"I remember the first time I saw a cartoon version of Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*. I was obsessed! I used to act out the suicide scene with a giant teddy bear. I thought I was so dramatic," she said.

Leslie-Anne credits her parents for her funny gene. "My mom's a little on the crazy side and

my dad's a little on the quiet side, but they both know how to have a good laugh. It's because of them that I'm such a sucker for fart jokes."

Her industry heroines include the likes of Tina Fey, Anna Faris and Jenna Elfman.

More than being comely and funny ladies, Leslie-Anne admires them for their behind-the-scenes success as writers and producers. Something that she also wants to see happen in her own career.

Young as she is, Leslie-Anne already has a body of work to speak of scattered across many genres.

Her earliest memory of being in showbiz dates back to a photoshoot with King of Pop Michael Jackson for footwear LA Gear. "I got to meet his chimp, Bubbles. He peed on the trainer! It was quite an experience to work with someone so iconic. Michael Jackson, not Bubbles," she quips.

Since then, Leslie-Anne has steadily nurtured a career as an actor, securing roles in popular TV programs such as *CSI:NY*, *10 Things I Hate About You*, and *Days of Our Lives*.

She's also appeared on national campaigns for restaurant chains Chili's and Domino's and Cox Cable.

If she had to choose, however, Leslie-Anne definitely feels at home doing comedy. She's part of the SoCal-based Asian American improv troupe, Room To Improv.

Asked what she rates high among her slew of performances so far, the young comedienne admits she's had the most fun with *Mackenzie Falls*.

"It makes me laugh! I just had so much fun being so silly and OA with my fellow actors. It's pretty rare that you can do such over-exaggerated work. In fact, we kept saying 'This is what our acting teachers have been telling us NOT to do.' But, I also love playing the bad girl because I am so not like that in real life. I'm terrible with confrontation, but when I'm pre-



tending to be someone else, it's so fun!"

Soon, Leslie-Anne is slated for guest appearances on ABC Family's *Greek* and Disney's *Suite Life on Deck*.

### Pinoy nuances

As half-Caucasian and half-Filipino, Leslie-Anne acknowledges that her mixed heritage is a big part of her identity. Growing up she was exposed to Filipino values (prioritizing family and education) with a blend of Southern influences (her dad hails from Arkansas).

An honors graduate from UC Berkeley, Leslie-Anne spent one summer studying Tagalog and Philippine history and culture at the University of the Philippines-Los Banos.

Though her physical features are strikingly Caucasian, underneath beats a heart of a Filipino who craves for *sinigang* and mango cake from Red Ribbon.

"Yes, we had the wooden spoon and fork on the wall. I used to have this VHS tape with all the cultural dances from the Philippines. I used to watch it over and over and try to imitate the dances," Leslie-Anne confesses.

### Kikay sensibilities

True beauty, according to Leslie-Anne, is from within. "It's a certain radiance and wholeness that comes out. I think it comes from a love of life. Like, you know who's beautiful? Meryl Streep—dang that woman is beautiful! Because she just seems like she has such a deep appreciation and understanding for human nature," the young actress opines.

Leslie-Anne agrees that society (Hollywood, most definitely) puts too much emphasis on thinness and perfection. To which she offers an alternative: "I think we as a society definitely need to focus on health and happiness more."

Leslie-Anne is also a fan of Dove's out-of-the-box campaign for real beauty.

But as a working professional whose job is to be seen (and heard), Leslie-Anne does subscribe to some beauty and wellness regimens.

She admits to being obsessed with eye creams,

though she has yet to find the perfect one. Keeping hydrated and fish oil supplements are also A-list in her beauty book.

On matters of the hair, Leslie-Anne trusts Monet Lu of the Monet chain of salons. "I definitely go to Monet. He's been styling my hair for years and years now. He's always on top of trends!"

For fitness and beauty, Leslie-Anne practices yoga. "I admire all the older women in my yoga classes. They are older but so healthy and flexible. Some of the prettiest people do yoga," she declares.

### Humanitarian-comedian

With her own brand of upbeat, non-acerbic humor, Leslie-Anne hopes to make a difference in the world. "I believe in the power of love and laughter," she resolves.

Leslie-Anne co-founded a nonprofit organization called Kamay at Puso (Hand & Heart) which supports a community center in the Philippines.

The nonprofit under Leslie-Anne's leadership as executive director spearheads different events that charity-supporters can relate to, such as comedy shows and concerts.

Last August 28, Kamay at Puso successfully held a Michael Jackson tribute benefit dubbed *Rock With You* at the M Bar in Hollywood.

"I have always thought it was important to give back. I learned about the community that Kamay at Puso serves while I was studying in the Philippines. All of us in the group couldn't bring ourselves to go home to our nice lives in the US without doing something to give back. We have been an official non-profit for four years now," explains Leslie-Anne.

She adds that it is important for people in the public eye such as herself to be conscious of their influence on younger generations.

"I believe its important for people who live with privilege to give to those who are less fortunate." ■



Galing Pinoy showcases the triumph of the Filipino spirit - the Filipino's innate perseverance to rise above. A double entendre, Galing Pinoy literally translates to both coming from (or brought to you by) the Filipino and Filipino ingenuity.



## Vegas weddings abound as numbers align on 9-9-09

LAS VEGAS—Two years after Las Vegas chapels hit the wedding date jackpot with lucky sevens, it's all eyes on the nines for 9-9-09.

Wedding officials in Sin City and elsewhere staged a marathon set of nuptials and vow renewals on Wednesday during what was anticipated to be of the busiest days of the year—the quirky date of Sept. 9, 2009, or 9-9-09.

The New York City Clerk's office said 200 couples had wed by midday at its refurbished marriage

bureau—about four times the Wednesday average. Nine couples in Hollywood spent 99 cents each to get married at a 99 Cents Only store on Sunset Boulevard.

Jessica Skrutvold of Las Vegas said she and her husband-to-be Chad Lyons were expecting nine guests for their 9 p.m. wedding, which coincidentally celebrates her favorite number

"The easiest day for my poor memory to remember was 9-9-09, and we've been doing everything

last-minute ever since," said the 31-year-old who works for a local insurance agency. "It was easy, and both of us can remember it and never forget."

Skrutvold called to book a chapel in March and found the only open slots were for 8:30 or 9 that night.

Gambling on nines wasn't limited to casino baccarat tables in Las Vegas, where players try to beat the house by getting as close as possible to a sum of nine using cards.

The consecutive nines turned out to be really lucky for Corey Aldridge and Gwendolyn Whitmore, one of the couples who won a 99 Cents Only Stores contest for their five-minute ceremony.

The couple, who originally wanted to wed last Valentine's Day, were returning from a trip to Texas last year when their car collided with an 18-wheel tractor-trailer rig. (AP)

## Obama tries...

PAGE A3 ◀ with car insurance. Obama rejected a mandate, and fines, during his presidential campaign.

The plan does not include a government-run insurance option.

Baucus asked his "Gang of Six" bipartisan negotiators to report back with suggestions by Wednesday, hoping for an agreement before the president's address.

Few appeared ready to move that fast. "That's the cart before the horse, as they say in Maine," said Sen. Olympia Snowe, a moderate Republican being courted by the White House.

There was little sign by midday that an agreement was in the offing. One of the negotiators, Sen. Charles Grassley, R-Iowa, said talks were ongoing and included "some things that are very central."

On the House side, Democrats met to plot strategy and set another similar meeting for Thursday morning. "Clearly failure is not an option here," said Rep. Xavier Becerra, D-Calif., a member of the Democratic leadership.

Obama scheduled his address for a day after lawmakers returned from an August recess marked by contentious town halls and much misinformation and confusion about what a health care overhaul may look like.

White House officials said the president will "answer all the major questions"—including the sticky issue of how to pay for getting coverage for the 50 million Americans who lack it. ■

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