



Aquino, Mark S.

MAY 22, 1986 - DEC 7, 2024



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MARK STEPHEN AQUINO
May 22, 1986 - December 7, 2024

We are saddened with the passing of our dear friend and family member, Mark Stephen Aquino on December 7th, 2024. He was an amazing son, husband, friend, relative, and teacher. He "left a Mark" with all the contributions he made to the world in and outside of the classroom, outdoors in nature, through his creativity, technological ingenuity, and his willingness to go the extra mile for all of us. He was one of the best Ethnic Studies teachers out there, and we will always be inspired by his @thoughtprovoka and #outdoorschoolofthought pedagogies.

On Becoming Mark Stephen Aquino: The Early Years

Born on May 22, 1986 to Perla Trinidad Quinto Aquino and Genaro De Guzman Aquino at Kaiser Oakland hospital. Mark's journey in education started with his parents who hailed from Santa Barbara, Pangasinan in the Philippines. Both were remarkable educators. His father was a high school Science and English teacher. and his mother was a third-grade elementary school teacher. They later immigrated to the United States and started their family with Mark and they raised him with so much love and encouraged him to pursue a life of service. Their dedication as educators clearly shaped Mark's passion for teaching and social justice. His parents not only imparted the importance of education but also instilled in him a deep sense of responsibility to give back to others—values that would guide Mark throughout his life. The values they instilled in him blossomed into a legacy that has touched countless lives.

Mark grew up in Oakland, CA. He went to St Lawrence O'Toole, and eventually Saint Joseph Notre Dame in Alameda for high school. He enjoyed video games, trading/collecting marvel cards and watching movies as a kid. In high school, he was a charismatic, caring, studious student, but a little mischievous too. During his time



in high school, he formed a group of friends, who a teacher one day coined the “Asian Mafia”. From that day on, the 7 friends—Mark, Elton, John, Chris, Francis, Alan, and Vu—called themselves AM7, a name and bond that still holds till this day. He embraced a class-clown persona, and enjoyed making education fun in unconventional ways.

Mark also loved cars. His first car was his beloved Acura RSX which he loved to work on. He would drive around the East Bay as fast as he could. He also began getting involved with computers, spending time learning how to code, building his own PC, burning CD’s with pirated music, and chatting with strangers online. His favorite computer games were Counter-Strike and Starcraft, which were often played with AM7. He really enjoyed spending time with friends, going around to different taquerias and pho restaurants, hanging out in shopping malls, or just spending time at each other’s houses to play games, talk or go online.

On Becoming a Scholar: The College Years

After high school, he attended San Francisco State University, in part because he could stay close to his parents. This is where he met lifelong friends at the infamous 41 Acevedo. It was in this corner townhouse in The Villas, Park Merced and eventually Higate Street in Daly City where Mark forged some of his closest relationships. He became a part of a tight-knit and eclectic friend group consisting of roommates, classmates, and SF State compatriots. Mark, Mike, Matt, Alan, James, Dan, Jon, and Jack infamously became known as the Good Sires.

Among his many nicknames and alter egos (College Sauce, Intellectual Marinade, Thought Provoka, Outdoor School of Thought), many of the Good Sires affectionately referred to him as “Shark”—arbitrarily swapping out the M for an SH. The name ironically fit, as Shark was always the ultimate apex innovator. From building his own computer from scratch, to developing unique graphic illustrations, to producing beats from old records, he never stopped designing and refining, cultivating art and media with a distinct and critical worldview. One of his collections of unique and otherworldly instrumentals from 2006-2009, cut from old jazz and classical records, is called “Inspiration for Angels and Demons by Thought Provoka,” a masterpiece truly ahead of its time. Shark was constantly on the cutting edge and



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ahead of the curve, always connecting with those around him through technology and creativity. Troubleshooting and testing, evolving and experimenting, he was someone who was always generous with his time and undeniable skill set. Shark was that dope smart friend with whom you could play video games for countless hours, or talk about the origins of the universe, or mob through the city in “the Bat Mobile” his jet black Acura RSX. Shark was an incredible driver, a loyal friend, and a sharp intellectual.

One of the Good Sires encouraged Shark to take “AAS 355: Psyche and Behavior of Pilipinos in the U.S.” taught by Professor Danilo Begonia which led to him taking a number of different Asian American Studies courses eventually leading to his major. Along the way, another course, “AAS 363: Survey of Filipina/o (American) Literature” taught by Dr. Allyson Tintiangco-Cubales, inspired his teaching journey which eventually led him to become one of the most innovative and impactful educators in the field of Ethnic Studies.

Mark was the kind of student who you wanted in your class. He often volunteered (sometimes he was volun-told) to share his spoken word—always political and usually about the broken educational system—in front of the class or at an event. Mark would play like he was shy and then bust out with a set of rhymes in his booming loud voice and blow everyone away. He was not afraid. For every assignment and project, he always found a way to go above and beyond. He often offered to make a film, create a website, organize a fundraiser, on top of writing a paper or giving a presentation. He was unforgettable. Mark proudly received a bachelor of arts in Asian American Studies in 2009 from San Francisco State University.

As a coordinator for Pilipino American Collegiate Endeavor (2007-2008), Mark worked to transform the organization. He shifted the title of his position from Public Relations to Political Affairs. And brought PACE closer to its anti-imperialist roots. As a PACE coordinator, Mark created the most dynamic workshops, and constantly inspired his interns to think critically about what it meant to be Filipina/o/x American.

After college, he moved around several places, including back home for a short stint and eventually back to San Francisco. During this time he pursued his teaching



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credential. In 2012, Mark earned his Master of Arts in Teaching in Urban Education & Social Justice from the University of San Francisco, deepening his theoretical understanding of education as practices of freedom.

On Becoming a Critical Pin@y Educator: The PEP Years

"For me as a teacher, when I move through spaces..I'm always going back to my PEP training and it's never just a cut and dry lesson, I'm always thinking about ways of pushing the envelope in terms of getting students to be creative, artistic, and also critical." (Aquino, 2022)

While in college, Mark was introduced to Pin@y Educational Partnerships, an Ethnic Studies educational barangay (community) that focused on providing Filipina/x/o American Studies to San Francisco public schools. Mark taught in PEP from 2009-2011 at Balboa High School, demonstrating his commitment to community based education from the beginning. During his years in PEP, he wrote some of the most engaging and innovative lesson plans. He would integrate media, technology, and games.

We remember Mark for his many hats and talents that transformed our community. Mark was not only a PEP teacher, he was a barangay captain, lesson plan innovator, and someone who led with wisdom and compassion, guiding us through challenges with thoughtfulness and fortitude. Mark was a genius who seamlessly integrated innovation into education, revolutionizing the way we approached teaching and learning. His creative soul shone through in everything he did, from crafting beats and designing flyers to transforming presentations with his own version of "Presentation Zen." As an "intellectual marinade" and "thoughtprovoka," Mark constantly challenged us to think deeper and more critically, pushing the boundaries of our understanding.

Mark's relationship with PEP grew deeper and more influential over time. He transitioned from his role as a PEP teacher to becoming the sponsor teacher for the PEP 8th grade class at Denman Middle School. For seven years, Mark served as a mentor to multiple cohorts of PEP teachers at the site, generously sharing his expertise and passion for education. This pivotal role allowed Mark to amplify his impact. He not only shaped the minds of his own students but also influenced the



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teaching practices of his colleagues. Mark's commitment to PEP continued when he joined the PEP Board of Directors. In this capacity, he played a crucial role in organizing and executing fundraising events, and creating videos to capture our milestones.

Mark's dedication to PEP extended beyond his formal roles. He frequently attended and presented at PEP retreats and TIBAK Trainings, where he played a critical role in teacher development, particularly in the area of using different technological platforms and creating engaging presentations. Mark's expertise in integrating innovative pedagogical strategies into the classroom made him an invaluable resource for our community. He shared his knowledge and skills, helping us explore new ways to engage students in the digital age. These contributions at PEP teacher trainings further exemplify Mark's commitment to nurturing a community of forward thinking, tech savvy educators within the PEP family.

Mark also collaborated with Edeline delaCruz, Jeffrey Lapitan, and Aristel Dela Cruz to create PEP's Kilusan-4-Kids videos that they developed for the elementary school Filipino Language curriculum. The videos can be found on youtube and continue to be used in classrooms all over the nation.

On Becoming a Teacher Activist: The Ethnic Studies Journey

Following PEP and while in graduate school, Mark, along with his friend and cohort-mate, Jr. Arimboanga, piloted the first Ethnic Studies at International Studies Academy in San Francisco. Even though they were just students, they ran the class and wrote a curriculum that continues to be used in SFUSD, throughout the state and beyond. They were part of the OG group that created the local Ethnic Studies movement to get it institutionalized in SFUSD. And this sparked a movement that created the statewide high school requirement.

Mark also had a special role in developing the famous public service announcement (PSA) that he courageously played at an SFUSD school board meeting on the night of the big vote in 2010. The video went viral and became instrumental in the Ethnic Studies win! Years later, he created another PSA documenting the #IamEthnicStudies Campaign that pushed for Ethnic Studies at the state level.



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In 2012, Mark was Awarded the Social Justice Award by the Teachers 4 Social Justice organization for his outstanding work in the community as an Ethnic Studies Educator.

On Becoming a Phenomenal Educator: Teaching for Life

Following his graduate studies, Mark began his tenure at James Denman Middle School in San Francisco Unified School District where he taught a diverse range of subjects including English language arts, social science, video journalism, STEM, and Ethnic Studies.

At James Denman Middle School, alike to his many positions as an educator, Mark was an integral part of the school's operation. His charisma and knowledge captivated the attention of his students like no other. His ability to advocate for his kids and make them feel represented and loved is one of the many traits that made him irreplaceable, loved, and revered in the community. He had a way of commanding a room that is extremely rare and valuable as an educator. Whenever he stepped in, all attention magnetized to every word he spoke, and his content knowledge was beyond impressive. He introduced narratives that raised critical questions about his students' lived experience, and made them feel pride in their identities. During his time at Denman, his following was beyond influential, and many students considered him to be their "go-to" trusted adult. He led the Filipino Club, Tech Squad, and many other roles that enriched student experience.

Mark transferred to Abraham Lincoln High School after Denman in 2019, where he continued his legacy as a groundbreaking educator until 2023. His influence there was immediate as he ushered in anti-racist mindsets and curriculum that drove staff-wide learning and perspective. He

taught Ethnic Studies Honors/Step to College, AVID, and Modern World History along with becoming an instructional coach. His technological expertise was pivotal in the transition to distance learning, as he helped staff-wide with digital literacy.

From day one, both students and staff clung onto his energy in so many ways.

Not only did Mark teach 6th-12th grade for 11 years in San Francisco Unified School District, he was also an adjunct professor at the University of San Francisco teaching the instructional technology class. Mark gave back to the USF educational



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community and many of his students are now contributing members of the educational community because of his influence.

The last teaching position that he held was teaching 11th grade Ethnic Studies and 9th grade Modern World History at Menlo School in Atherton, CA. Mark joined Menlo in 2023 and his impact was immediately felt both inside and outside of the classroom. Beyond his Modern World and Ethnic Study course, he fostered strong connections with students as ninth-grade advocate, advisor of the Asian Affinity Alliance (AAA), advisor to the Video Game Club, and founder of Menlo's first-ever fishing club. From his epic Ken costume during Spirit Week, to sharing his love of fishing, and his keen ability to bring out the best in students, the absence of Mark's radiant energy and smile will be a profound loss for the school community.

Mark as an educator, was truly a force of nature, whose energy, legacy, and spirit transcended the boundaries of this lifetime. His impact on everyone he worked with was immeasurable and enduring. As a critical pedagogue and one of the best Ethnic Studies teachers in the field, Mark embodied the essence of what it means to be an educator committed to social justice and transformation.

Mark was not only a dedicated teacher, but also a person whose kindness and generosity touched the lives of everyone in our community. He was always willing to lend his time, share his amazing resources, and provide a listening ear to anyone in need. His genuine concern for the wellness and personal/intellectual growth of our youth was evident in every interaction, whether it was mentoring a struggling student, organizing activities to support wellness (like his super popular Outdoor School of Thought Fishing Club) or simply being a reassuring presence in the lives of those around him.

On Becoming Outdoor School of Thought

"I enjoy spending my free time on the California coast with friends and family while camping, fishing, or kayaking." (Mark Stephen Aquino, 2023)

If something needed creation, he created it. (Aldrich Sabac, 2024)

And that is what Mark did, he created, and created, and created. One of the most recent creations was the Outdoor School of Thought. Beyond his teaching experiences, Mark was a water dweller. He documented his outdoor adventures



through his YouTube channel @outdoorschoolofthought where he teaches us poke pole fishing, sea foraging, camping, and cooking.

Excerpt from Coat of Arms Article, “Mark Aquino Has Some Big Fish to Fry.”

While Aquino’s family still spent time together, fishing was something that required a lot of free time and money for equipment. So, as Aquino got older, he wanted to make up for what he had missed. “Later on in life when I finally had a job with disposable income, I was just like, ‘Wait, [...] what did I never really learn?’ And a lot of colleagues or friends would talk about going fishing,” Aquino said.

He began to consider what might come from learning this new skill. “Maybe by learning how to fish, I could change my relationship with food, and maybe that will be something in the future that I want to pass on to my kids,” he said. He also sought a deeper connection to the ecosystems around him and a greater appreciation for taking sustenance from another life.

It wasn’t just Aquino’s past pushing him towards fishing. In his adulthood, he grew consumed by working multiple jobs and struggled with his mental health. “It was like [fishing] is my chance to afford myself like a mental escape from these things. I’m going to dedicate all my energy to focusing on how I make myself a better person. [...] How do I get myself to a point of peace where I can process these things? Because when I go out fishing, it’s the most mindless thing I do,” he said.

He started a YouTube channel called “Outdoor School of Thought” to document his fishing adventures, including all the inevitable and comical mishaps of fishing. “My channel is pretty goofy. Like, if I fall in the ocean, I keep that footage to show that [...] it’s not always serious or it’s not always easy,” he said.

Spreading his passion didn’t stop at YouTube. Aquino began teaching his family and even his students how to fish. He organized a fishing club at his previous school, Abraham Lincoln High School, where he would take his students out fishing on Sundays. The next day at school, he would teach them how to gut and prepare the fish they caught together. The club’s fish tacos were a hot commodity at lunchtime. He hopes to bring this club to the Menlo community if he can find students interested in running it.

Ultimately, though, fishing is something Aquino does for himself. He enjoys delving



into fishing techniques beyond the traditional rod, like Poke Pole fishing in tide pools. “The more involved type that I do is I actually wear waders up to my chest. And I’ll be in the water almost up to my belly, and I have this long bamboo pole and a coat hanger. And then I’ll go into these rocks and I’ll be able to pull fish out,” he said.

On Becoming Mark & Nadia: The Love Story

From their wedding webpage:

In the enchanting world of digital connections, where virtual paths often lead to real-life journeys, a unique bond emerged between two kindred spirits named Nadia and Mark. Their story began on Hinge, a platform that turned the art of matchmaking into an intricate dance of fate and circumstance.

Nadia, an individual with a flair for vintage charm and a heart that sought warmth and comfort, uploaded a photo on her Hinge profile that would set the tone for their entire adventure. Clad in a multicolored grandma sweater, Nadia's eyes sparkled with a playful defiance against the

fashion norms of her time. Coupled with the image was a caption that revealed a delightful truth: "Embracing the grandma aesthetic, one sweater at a time."

As fate would have it, Mark was immediately drawn to the whimsical photograph. His attraction to Nadia's unapologetic uniqueness was undeniable, and he couldn't help but be charmed by her sense of style and confidence. But it wasn't just the sweater that caught his attention – it was the subtle narrative it told about a person who embraced life with a sense of joy and authenticity.

On the other side of this digital connection, Nadia was scrolling through profiles, sifting through the sea of potential matches. And then she came across Mark's profile, and her heart skipped a beat. His primary photo displayed a captivating smile that radiated warmth and genuine happiness. His profile also bore a witty line that instantly brought a smile to her face: "I'm down for the struggle, and the snuggle." It was a blend of humor and vulnerability that hinted at a personality she wanted to know more about.

Their connection was ignited when Mark decided to make his move. His first message was playful and engaging, perfectly in line with his profile's spirit. "That



grandma sweater is a mood, and I'm here for it! Have you perfected the art of baking cookies too?" he typed. This message struck a chord with Nadia, and she eagerly replied, sharing her affinity for baking cookies that could transport one straight to the nostalgic comfort of grandma's kitchen.

Thus, the conversation flowed like a harmonious melody, full of laughter, shared interests, and genuine curiosity. Days turned into weeks, and they found themselves gradually building a connection that transcended the confines of the digital realm. They talked about their favorite books, exchanged quirky stories, and discovered a mutual love for the simple pleasures in life.

Eventually, they decided it was time to take their connection from virtual to real. They chose a Tiki Bar for their first date – a place that echoed their shared enthusiasm for unique experiences. As they sat across from each other, sipping on exotic drinks adorned with umbrellas and fruits, the conversation flowed effortlessly. Their rapport only deepened as they shared stories of their respective lives, families, and dreams.

As the evening began to wind down, Nadia gathered her belongings, ready to bid Mark farewell. But before she could make her move, Mark's voice interrupted her thoughts. "Wait, you're gonna go home without eating ice cream?" he asked, a mischievous twinkle in his eye. His simple proposition swayed Nadia's decision, and they found themselves heading to Mitchell's for a late-night ice cream indulgence. As they stood in front of the colorful display of flavors, Nadia's heart swelled with affection for Mark. His willingness to accommodate her taste preferences and his humorous dedication to making sure she had the perfect experience left her feeling both touched and intrigued. When he ordered a scoop of rum raisin, a flavor he openly detested, just so she could have a taste, she felt something stir within her. Over time, their connection deepened into a love story that neither of them had anticipated. From a grandma sweater and a captivating smile to shared ice cream adventures, their journey was marked by genuine understanding, selflessness, and a deep appreciation for each other's quirks. The simple moments they shared, like choosing ice cream flavors and embracing each other's idiosyncrasies, were the building blocks of a love that defied



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expectations and flourished in the most unexpected ways. And so, their love story wrote itself, page by page, as they continued to explore the chapters of life together, hand in hand.

So in love and the happiest Mark has ever been in his life, they married on August 3, 2024 in Saratoga, CA amongst close friends and family.

On Becoming an Ancestor: He left a Mark on all of us

For Mark, M.A. stood for Mark of All (trades).

For Mark, A.I. stood for Aquino Intelligence. (Jhulsany Futol, 2024)

Mark was a hip hop enthusiast, a beat maker, and a hardcore wrasslin fan, often catching WWE, AEW, and Independent shows all over the Bay Area with his good friends, the PEP fam and beyond. Mark was truly a force of nature, whose energy, legacy, and spirit transcended the boundaries of this lifetime. His impact on everyone he worked with was immeasurable and enduring. As a critical pedagogue and one of the best Ethnic Studies teachers in the field, Mark embodied the essence of what it means to be an educator committed to social justice and transformation. Mark has transitioned to join our ancestors, leaving behind a void in our community that resonates deeply with all who had the privilege of knowing him. His departure is not just a loss, but a profound shift in the fabric of our collective experience, reminding us of the lasting impact one individual can have on so many lives. Mark's impact on our communities is immeasurable, and his absence will be felt deeply. Mark's legacy will live on through the countless students he taught, the colleagues collaborated with and mentored, and the transformative educational praxis he embodied. We are all better for having known him, and we will honor his memory by keeping his legacy alive.

Mark is survived by his parents, Perla Trinidad Quinto Aquino and Genaro De Guzman Aquino, and his loving wife, Nadia Sophia Perez.




Contributions to this obituary include words from Nadia Sophia Perez, Allyson Tintiangco-Cubales, Arlene Daus-Magbual, Rod Daus-Magbual, Elton Fong, Anthony Biles King, Nikhil Laud, Matthew Laurel, Aldrich Sabac, Jhulsany Futol, Tatum Herrin, Than Healy, and Mark Stephen Aquino, himself.

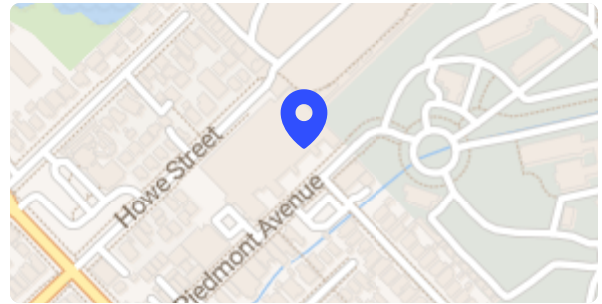


Events




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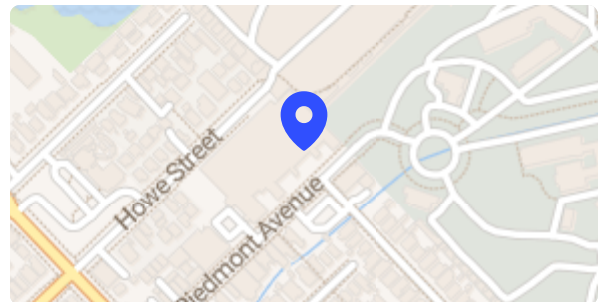
Visitation

-  **Saturday**, December 21, 2024
-  3:00 PM - 7:00 PM PT
-  **Chapel of the Chimes**
4499 Piedmont Ave, Oakland CA 94611



Funeral Service

-  **Sunday**, December 22, 2024
-  11:00 AM - 2:00 PM PT
-  **Chapel of the Chimes**
4499 Piedmont Ave, Oakland CA 94611





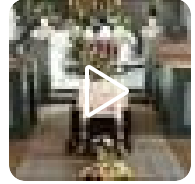
Tribute Wall

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Chapel Of The Chimes Oakland shared a **Webcast Video**.

December 15 at 8:44 AM



Anonymous sent a Beautiful Dreams to the Aquino family.

December 20 at 4:22 AM



Pace Core 2007-2009 sent an Ocean Breeze Spray to the Aquino family.

December 19 at 11:33 AM



Pace Core 2007-2009 planted a Memorial Tree in honor of Mark.

December 19 at 11:33 AM





Media

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Chapel Of The Chimes Oakland shared a **Webcast Video**.

December 15 at 8:44 AM





Memories only last if you share them

Join us in honoring Mark by contributing to a collection of shared memories.



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