



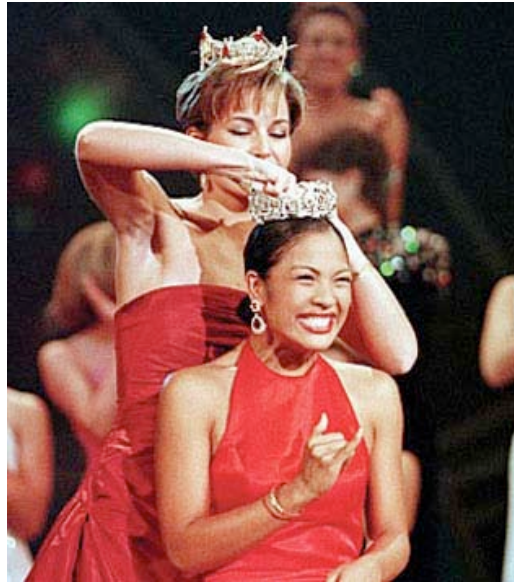
# Main Feature

## Move Over Mulan

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By Paul E. Pratt, Jun 10, 2005

There's a reason Angela Perez Baraquio-Grey describes herself as "a Cinderella story." From her historic rise to Miss America, to her high school sweetheart's onstage proposal, to their new lives as parents and co-founders of an educational foundation in her name, Baraquio-Grey's life has all the trappings of a fairytale.

Disney could not have scripted it better. The child of immigrant parents, Baraquio-Grey has truly lived the American dream. Born to proud-but-humble beginnings as the eighth of 10 children, three born in the Philippines and the remaining seven in Hawai'i, our 29-year-old heroine never imagined the history-making string of "firsts" which define her climb from middle school teacher to Miss America 2001.

Winning Miss Hawai'i 2000 on a dare from her students — they would try out for the basketball team if she entered the pageant — our princess was on her way. Competing under maiden name Perez Baraquio, the odds seemed stacked against her.

"A lot of people just set me aside and said, 'You don't look like a Miss America,'" she recalls. People asked: "You would be the first Asian one — *Why you?* You'd be the first Filipina, what makes you think *you'd* win?"

The 5'4" beauty asked, "Why not?" And besting Miss Louisiana and Miss California — another Asian American, concert pianist and Stanford valedictorian Rita Ng — Baraquio-Grey was the belle of the ball in Atlantic City.

"I know now it's not just a blond-haired, blue-eyed look [they are after]," says Baraquio-Grey. "I know they are looking for someone to fill the position there who is qualified."

Baraquio-Grey also became the first queen to win using the hula as a talent. Equally important is her place as the first teacher ever to take the crown.

"I was inspired not just by my upbringing," she shares, "As a student teacher, I experienced the whole Columbine incident. It was life-changing for me."

Baraquio-Grey was forever moved by the tragic events, which saw two young men enter their rural Colorado high school, shoot a dozen other students and a teacher before ending the killing spree with suicide.

Baraquio-Grey began educating students on character-building. "Know what's right, care about what's right and do what's right," she explains.

The Miss America Pageant offered her the opportunity to take these teachings even further. Under the program "Character in the Classroom: Teaching Values, Valuing Teachers," Baraquio-Grey criss-crossed the nation, giving seminars in 40 states as well as her family's homeland, the Philippines, where she was definitely given the royal treatment.

Baraquio-Grey met with Philippine President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo at a palace in the nation's capital. More exciting, she says, was the opportunity to meet her grandfather for the first time.

"It was very emotional," she says. "It was his 80th birthday, and the 80th year of the Miss America Pageant, and our first time ever

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meeting.”

The Hawaiian beauty was amazed to be in a country where, unlike the U.S., she had no problem blending in with the crowd.

“When I landed on the soil, I was thinking, ‘Wow, I don’t even look like a minority here! This is great!’” she says. Then when people pointed her out as Miss America, the reality set in. “There are 70 million people in the Philippines, and we all look alike. To be recognized, I just thought, ‘This was a really big deal to these people.’”

The storybook life continued when she returned to her home state to help crown Miss Hawai’i 2001. As Baraquio-Grey performed her award-winning hula, her prince emerged from the musical group backing her. On bended knee, in front of a national television audience, he asked the reigning Miss America to marry him. When America’s crowned princess accepted, it kicked off a media fervor.

“Newspapers read, ‘Who does this guy think he is asking Miss America to marry him?’” Baraquio-Grey recalls. The media was equally appalled by her acceptance. She reflects on headlines asking, “What is she thinking?”

But this knight in shining armor was no stranger. It was actually her high school and college sweetheart, Tinifuloa “Tini” Grey. He had planned to propose to her before the Miss America pageant, but that was put on hold when she won. Of her reign, she admits it was the couple’s most trying time — in nearly a decade of dating.

“We met when we were 15, in our church choir,” she says with a laugh. “We actually have such a beautiful love story. We went to each other’s proms and winter balls. We waited for each other through college.”

A year later, the couple married. They bought a house — not quite a castle — last November. She received her master’s degree in December and then rang in 2005 at the hospital — with her husband and newborn son, born New Year’s Eve 2004.

Baraquio-Grey’s Miss America experience goes on. Many former pageant competitors have come to see the baby. “We’re like a big sorority,” she giggles. “You really *do* make life-long friends.”

Baraquio-Grey also remains dedicated to her platform of character education. The Angela Perez Baraquio Educational Foundation ([www.APBEF.org](http://www.APBEF.org)) was founded in 2001. The nine-person Board of Directors includes Billie Takaki, who became Miss Hawai’i when Baraquio-Grey was crowned Miss America, Angela’s sister/manager Tess Baraquio and husband.

“It’s really a challenge when everybody is volunteering,” she admits. “Everyone has other jobs to do, so it isn’t first priority sometimes. It’s *my* passion, though!” This turns our princess into a cheerleader at times. Says Baraquio-Grey, “I’m like, ‘Come on, gang! We need to do this.’”

In January 2004, Baraquio-Grey was invited to participate as part of a character education resource group meeting with the U.S. Department of Education, and has met President George W. Bush three times.

“To whom much is given, much is expected. My parents taught me that,” Baraquio-Grey says when asked by people why she has not returned to active teaching. “I won Miss America and was given this huge opportunity to do more for people, to give back.”

“Why would I continue to be kept in one little classroom, to be confined, when I can do more?” she asks.

Like many storybook princesses, though she grew to love her given lot in life, she recognizes the need to move beyond it to have the greatest impact.

“Of course I’m still teaching,” she says happily, “Now my classroom is just much bigger.”

And they all lived happily ever after.