

So much to learn by Swati Swami



In my first year of marriage, we travelled a lot internationally. We finally decided to settle down in August of 1995 as I was five months pregnant with my first child and I also had USMLE exams coming up. I was an anesthesiologist in India, but had to redo the residency in Boston.

I had my first child in January 1996, between two USMLE exams. That year was a record breaking winter for Boston. I had never experienced snow before. It was magical but also scary as it made everything slippery.

It had taken some time to find an OBGYN doctor and it was an adventure to shop for baby items as we did not routinely use carseats, strollers or bassinets in India. I was not even aware of the pink and blue color codes and bought some cute pink clothes for my son. I learnt a lot over the phone from a school friend who lived in New Jersey. In all this initial phase of settling down, a new baby, exams; my family gave me the shocking news of my mother's breast cancer. I just wanted to drop everything and rush to India to be with my mother, but I couldn't.

I waited till my baby was three months old and I had recovered from surgery. Phone calls to India were not cheap then and there was no Facebook or WhatsApp, which we now take for granted. It was difficult.

I started residency in 1997, had my second child during residency. My mother's cancer had returned and spread, so I went to India with both my kids as soon as I finished residency. She passed away the following year. I have always regretted not being able to be with her when she needed me the most, especially since I am a doctor. She was and will always be my pillar of strength.

On a lighter note, there were so many new things to learn about life in the United States.

Learn to use a dishwasher, washing machine, dryer.

Learn about home heating; to leave the heat on at all times in the winter.

Learn to drive in the exact opposite way of that in India and to always wear a seat belt.

Learn to order at a cafe - coffee, latte, cappuccino.

Quickly learn about fire alarms when you burn something while cooking.

Learnt that one needs seasonal clothes and footwear.

Learnt that I was not allowed to write prescriptions for my family members or myself.

Also learnt that one cannot leave a baby alone in the car even for a few minutes.

Most importantly, I learnt to make new friends who eventually became my new family in the United States and learnt to live with and accept people from different cultures and religious beliefs.

There are so many other things that I have learnt over 23 years which now seem second nature.