

Balancing the old and the new culture

by Suresh Bhardwaj



Moving to a new country on the other side of the earth is not easy and is full of uncertainties, especially if you do not know anybody in that new country. I landed in JFK Airport in New York City in October of 1970. There was no internet and no smart phones in those days. The only way to prepare for the move was by reading books. Since I did not know anyone in the US, I had decided to stay in YMCA. I hailed a cab and asked the driver to take me to the YMCA. The driver asked me, “which one?” That was the first shocking lesson. Delhi had one YMCA. I thought New York would have one too. I asked him how many YMCAs there were in NYC; his answer: “I know of at least 12”. The cab driver understood at once that I was new to this country. He said he would take me to a nice one. That is how I ended up at the YMCA on East 47th street, very close to the UN. I reached the Y around 8 pm and went to sleep right away. As a vegetarian, the first problem was what to eat for breakfast when I woke up that first morning. After breakfast I started to look for a job, and started to learn how to move around the city. I had no knowledge about the subway or buses. One old gentleman walked with me to a subway station and got a map and explained everything. There were very few Indian restaurants in NYC at that time. I used to look forward to weekends when I could go and eat Indian food, after eating boiled vegetable and toast everyday in the cafe at the Y.

I stayed at the YMCA for 9 months and then moved to a three bedroom house with two Indian friends. After 3 years, I went back to India and got married.

We decided that Nirmal would not work until the children we planned to have had grown up. She stayed home to raise our two sons. It is to her credit that we have two wonderful sons. Both of them, and their spouses, are doing very well in their professions. We have four grandkids: one grandson and three beautiful granddaughters. I could go on and on, but have to respect the 500 word restriction. I just want to finish

with one comment: I always received help when I asked the right questions, and mostly got rewarded for hard work.