

## **Our Journey of Resilience and Strength** by Manju Markanda



Raj had completed his PhD in Mathematics from the University of Colorado and research at the University of Paris. Upon his return to India, he worked at Tata Institute of Fundamental Research and at Panjab University. We were married in Amritsar. He was invited to teach at National University of Colombia by his Colombian friend Victor A. Raj moved to Bogota early to adjust to the culture/learn Spanish and rented an apartment in a centrally located residential complex, which had a soccer field, movie theater, and grocery store.

Neha and I left India for Bogota, Colombia when she was just an infant. There were only 3 other Indian families from the Indian Embassy. I did not know Spanish, so our social circle was mostly limited to these individuals and Victor's family. However, I learned some Spanish. The Indian Ambassador used to invite us for dinner occasionally. We met with other 2 families on a regular basis. Like in the USA those days, atta and different daals were not available. Other than that, fresh vegetables and fruits were available in abundance.

Raj then got an offer to teach at Universidad de Merida in Venezuela. Merida is a University town at 5,200 ft above sea level with a student population of 30,000. We lived in a brand-new apartment building in downtown. There were no Indian families in town and so I felt very lonely. Neha learned fluent Hindi, English and some Punjabi at home and Spanish in school. Life in Venezuela was very good in those days due to oil revenues. When Sonal was born in Merida, we did not have any family members to help. We lost a lot of money because of the devaluation of the Venezuelan currency. We were

already thinking of moving to an English-speaking country because of Neha's education, which was primarily in Spanish, and Venezuela's rising economic problems.

Luckily for us our friend, Dan A., who is now the department chair at the University of Iowa asked Raj if he wanted to join the Mathematics faculty. So, we moved to Iowa City, a nice university town. We had some good times there. We then moved to Aberdeen, SD to work for Northern State University and regularize our visa status. Our green card application was approved in 3 weeks and we ended up staying in Aberdeen for 24 years. Aberdeen is in the middle of nowhere. The nearest big cities are Fargo, ND and Sioux Falls, SD both more than 180 miles away. There were 4 Indian families there. I worked in the office of senate majority leader Tom Daschle. We used to get Indian groceries and Hindi movies from Chicago by UPS.

Neha went to UMN (University of Minnesota) for her undergraduate and Executive MBA degrees. She is a Management Consultant for Cargill. Sonal went on to complete a PhD in Clinical Psychology from the UMN and is now a Senior Psychologist in private practice. She has now started law school. We moved to Minnesota after Raj's retirement in 2010. We have found a nice sense of Indian community with many friends and various activities to participate in.