

Roots and Wings by Mike Chari



I ran away from home when I was five years old with a little red suitcase. For no reason, really, other than that I was annoyed with my mother. My sister and mother brought me back from the bus stop. I wanted to go to Kashmir, where there was snow and it was beautiful. Maybe that incident was an early indication that I will end up here, in Minnesota, and fall in love with the snow and the seasons!

When I look back at my happy childhood, my loving and stable family, a good education and great weather in India, I wonder what made me leave India 35 years ago. I was in IIT Madras and then the craze was to go abroad to study. I got into Wharton for a PhD in Business Economics. While my parents were supportive of my desire to study abroad, they really felt that at 23, I should not be going to the US alone and therefore scrambled to find someone to marry me. Along came my husband, who met me and proposed to me on the same day – he gave me a long speech about how our families are sufficiently similar in so many ways (economic status, cultural values, religious and social mores) that we were bound to get along -- and any differences we might discover along the way would be part of our exciting adventure.. Luckily for both of us, it has been a wonderful ride.

Our reasons to come to the United States were to study further and explore the world. Since we went to English speaking schools in India, language was no problem, and accents were something that we had to work out – to be understood and to understand. The West was refreshingly different in its attitudes and outlook, the political and legal systems seemed to be functioning more efficiently. While we missed our family and friends, we were busy gaining new experiences.

Life became busy when we had our two girls. The Indian community was then much younger, most of the families had to integrate with people from all races. What we had in India that our children did not have was people who looked and acted like us. Did diversity make my girls feel less grounded? I went to an all-girls school and wore uniforms. Did that help me feel less insecure in my growing years?

I feel like I got the best of the East and the West. Technology has enriched our lives by helping us stay in touch with our family and friends. We had more education than our previous generations. We made more money in our thirties than our parents did. But how will education, money, social connections affect our children's psyche in this world? Will they be happy? Well adjusted? Successful? How did we raise our children? Our parents gave us roots and wings. What have we given our children? It is their story to tell.