

An Interview: The Immigration Experience

Jose Rivera

The person I interviewed shared the story of how she became a citizen of the United States. She was born and raised in Orissa, India. She immigrated to the United States in 1991 at the age of twenty-three, with nothing but a duffle bag full of old clothing. Her family did not come with her; they could not afford to. Despite the distance, however, she manages to maintain contact with them by a cell phone she bought them. To speak with them, she pays for long-distance calls, which she makes every few months. Aside from a cousin in Queens, she has no family in the U.S. or any means of bringing anyone here for a visit. A visa, required for a family member to visit, is far too expensive for the family and even purchasing a visa for one person is out of the question, so she never gets to see them.

The respondent had many memories of her hometown, some better than others. Initially, she described her life in Orissa as poor and depressing. The respondent described her parents as economically disadvantaged, yet very loving and generous. As she talked, she warmed to her subject. Her father is a fisherman who not only caught fish for dinner, but also sold it to locals as a means of income. Her mother works at the house, maintaining the chicken coop and vegetable garden in the back yard as well as taking care of her daughters. The respondent mentioned fond memories of mornings in which she would awaken to find freshly picked mangos and jackfruit in a bowl on the kitchen table. Any food that was to be prepared for dinner was cooked on an open flame in the backyard. The interviewee described the way her father would lay the large fish across his lap, running his fishing knife across the body to remove the scales before he put it on the fire. Recalling fond memories of her life in India, the respondent admitted that she misses her family above all else, but also that she misses the old times when she and her sister would sneak to the river bank and try to catch the toads after a rainfall.

The respondent, who had never watched television before she came here, thought the United States would look similar to her hometown but with better houses. When she arrived in New York City after her father saved up enough to buy her a visa, she found New York absolutely intriguing. How neatly arranged it is with its tall skyscrapers. It took her two years to adjust to life here. She wasn't used to common luxuries such as clean, running tap water, indoor heat, or even toilets. She is very grateful for her life here in America.

The respondent's father raised the money for her visa because he simply wanted her to have a better life than he did. However, she still hopes to find a job that pays well so that she can bring her family over so that they can lead more fulfilling lives as well.

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