



The Horizon Newsletter

March 2021

The Duality of a First-Generation Immigrant **Sruthi Anne**

I was born into a world with bright colors, pounding music, and especially fried savories, with two smart, supportive, loving parents from South India to always show me the way. While they officially called the United States their home, my parents never hid their pride for their homeland, a state called Andhra Pradesh in Southern India. This was why it had always been a point for Amma and Nanna to be sure that my brother and I gained our heritage. Every week, we participated in several Indian dance classes and veena classes, as well as Sunday school to learn how to read and write Telugu, our language. By speaking my language at home to friends and relatives, as well as to grandparents, I maintained my fluency. I fell in love with Indian food quickly and watched Bollywood movies almost daily.

After spending 11 years of my life comfortably in Fairfax, Virginia, my family was given the opportunity to relocate to Wisconsin. So on a chilly, snowy day, my family of four and I landed in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. At the time I was in 5th grade and had no idea what Wisconsin even was. In fact, I didn't even know the state existed. I remember one of my first thoughts as I came out of the airport was that a lot of the people here weren't of the same skin color. My eyes were glued to the window, shocked at how much diversity I saw, as we got into the taxi that came to pick us up. We passed churches, Hindu temples, and

mosques, which fascinated me more. I turned to listen to our taxi driver as he explained that there were many cultural differences in Wisconsin. I was excited but also a little nervous at the same time about starting school in Wisconsin, and my curiosity led me to fall asleep thinking about who I was going to sit with the next day at school.

I accompanied my brother the next morning as he climbed the bus stairs and waved farewell to our parents as we were about to begin a new journey. I walked into school thinking I also was going to be absorbed in the same diversity I saw on the taxi trip, but I was wrong. I would soon discover that I would be considered instead, part of the minority at school.

It wasn't long before the teasing and bullying began. My classmates started making fun of me because of my non-Eurocentric characteristics. They began commenting on my braided hair and my darker skin.

They would call me names like, "Curry girl!" Mocking the food I ate.

They would ask me clichéd questions, like "Is your dad a software technician?" or, "What's that dot in the center of your forehead?", or even, "When'd you move to America?". These words stung my heart like a swarm of angry bees. That was my first experience with discrimination, a theory I'd never faced before.

So I went home and I cried and I cried and I cried, and because of how much bullying I was going through, I was scared to go to school the next day. I just wanted to be liked. I wanted to be popular. So I began to change myself. I started straightening my naturally wavy hair in hopes to fit in with the girls around me. At age 11, I started using lightening creams to lighten my skin. I stopped speaking my language, stopped watching Telugu serials, and even stopped taking my beloved South Indian food to school.

My cultural detachment, in fact, got so bad to the point that I started forcing it on my family. I recall telling my mother that if she was wearing Indian clothes, I would not go out with her. And I also begged her to take off her religious pieces, afraid of what my peers would say. I started to feel confused as I grew older. It was more like the way I looked in the mirror, and couldn't understand who I was. I had lost what made me special.

About two years later, my family decided to move again. But to North Carolina this time. When I started middle school in North Carolina, I made it a point to accept my

differences and unique culture, in hopes to broaden my knowledge of my roots and where I came from, so that I can connect more with my grandparents in India. To reconnect with my culture through my love of art, I started practicing mehndi, fusing my art skills into Indian body art. It was through this experience where I could see that the same culture I once had been embarrassed by and made fun of was now something that people really wanted to be in and learn about.

Oftentimes, first-generation immigrants are torn between two cultures. We feel the duty to pay homage to our heritage, but at the same time assert the society in which we were born and raised. This is what produces a gray area, causing us to believe that we just have to choose one, inevitably leading to a lack of cultural fluency. While trying to match up to the dominant culture, I just lost my Indian identity. By proudly displaying who I was and where I came from, I was not only contending to my best self, but I also was giving the people around me the idea that they can be culturally fluent too. By being culturally fluent, I gained strength and insight, from other cultures as well as creating a pathway that led to more meaningful conversations. In a country where 40 percent of the population are people of color, it's important that we acknowledge the diversity we interact with on an everyday basis. Many of us fail to make sense of our bi-cultural backgrounds, but I was able to use mine to fulfill my love for art. Cultural fluency is a power, not a flaw, for us as a group and, at the end of the day, we are just part of the human race.

Deadly Viruses: A Look into the Past

By Aaryan Kumar

Many today look towards COVID as the major virus of the day, but if one went back almost 100 years ago, they would also find a world in turmoil and chaos, but under the name of a different virus and a different time. The Spanish Influenza is widely acknowledged as one of the deadliest viruses in history, 50 million are considered to have perished at the hands of this feared killer. The name itself was misleading, as scientists still do not know where it originated, although they did agree that it did not originate in Spain. The virus earned the Spanish nickname when it was widely reported in the press, while it was not as widely reported in other countries. This was because Spain was neutral in WW1, a war that had pulled most of Europe in and nations involved in the war, to keep up troop morale, played the effects of the virus down.

Many lessons were learned from the Spanish Influenza and one of them was time response. It was statistically proven that those cities which chose to respond quickly to pandemics were much more likely to have lower deaths from the pandemic as opposed to those who chose to wait. Another proven fact was that those who lifted restrictions after the peak passed faced rising rates and sicknesses.