

An Immigrant



I remember the day I had landed
The first thing that I wondered
Why people drove so fast?
What was the hurry? What did they have to do after they would have arrived?
I had come from the land of rickshaws, palanquins, horse carriages, bullock carts and yes there were some cars too.

I remember my first breakfast and few others at the hospital cafeteria
Several of my colleagues often joined me and made me feel comfortable
And they did not want me to be alone.
They included me in their private poker game
But there was one cardinal rule to follow
The person that would fold first would have to get White Castle for everyone from across the street.
I loved the fact that despite the meat
You could get sixteen sliders for a dollar
And even get back four cents to put back in the kitty as a bonus for the extra labor.

Some older guys who were supposed to be my instructors joined us as well
They exuded an air of superiority about themselves in their attitudes and utterances that permeated the environment so
They made me feel as though I was lacking in intelligence and I was poor in life than them
Cause I had come to America as a foreign medical graduate
As we were called then!
For further education and to improve my station.
Actually to learn from Dr. Glen Spurling
The famous neurosurgeon who had treated General Patton.

They mentioned that America had won the Second World War
However, I found out later that none of them had been in uniform at that difficult time of conflagration
And they had said that America was the most developed place than any other
I was trying to reconcile in my mind the concept of being "developed."
They said that only girls played hockey here
And football was the game for real men and not soccer as it was played over there.

They asked me about cobras and tigers
And wondered how I had managed to have survived
I had explained politely that tigers controlled the traffic
And cobras were the escorts of real men
And they caused harm only to the non vigilant and to the soporific
They didn't pursue that line of questioning anymore and I heard later that one of them had said that I might have been a bit arrogant and euphoric.

There were some that asked me as to how I had happened to have been taller than the others they had met from my original country
I thanked them for not having wasted food on their plates when they were younger
Cause surely they were taught that there were a lot of starving Indian children all over.

I still remember the home repair guy in Ohio
He had blocked my path in the driveway

I was on call for emergencies
And when I came out of my apartment and told him to move his rig out of my way
He had told me to go back to where I had come from so that he could exert his freedom the American way.

Learning to be not offended by ignorant remarks is a sign of maturity
My father had said some people would make me feel badly because of their insecurity
Dad said that some men get angry at their wives for not getting their way
Then they would beat up the family dog or make remarks to coworkers that are often incendiary
He said that it was easy to train a tiger or an elephant or a mongoose
But taming of the tongue was one of the most important requisite to success
So I followed Matthew 15:11 and James 3:1-12 as my constant compass.

I remember the times when people would ask me "where are you from?"
For a while I thought it was a genuine desire to know by some
Then I realized that on most occasions it was their way to make me feel different than them
So I would say I was Chinese or Mongolian or from Gondwana land
That gave me an opportunity to tell them how I had stood still during that cataclysmic event
And that it was long before Bob Dylan had conceived of his antediluvian song
But by then they had moved on.

Most difficult times were when later on some of my colleagues tried to shun me
Cause I wouldn't participate in their business scheme
Dad had said that I could be very powerful if I could control greed
And not chase money
He had said that there would be some that would despise me
Cause it would expose those that equated having more money as a measure of being successful
He had said that chasing money was an elusive goal
But to do my job well
And then real success would arrive at my door for sure
As a joyful heart and full of gratitude
And I would not have to have the constant feeling of needing more.

Then I met Drs. Hemmer and Colbert and Richard Roth
They taught me kindness, surgical techniques and neurology
Dr. Popham and Dr. Asman taught me the values of friendship and love besides medicine and proctology
And Dr. Charles Wilson from University of Kentucky, chose me to be his resident
And took me to San Francisco
And Drs. Hunt and Zollinger taught me to be a surgeon and fulfilled my dream of being an international volunteer
And a neurosurgeon, a dream, that I had since I was a youngster.

So today I thank America for giving me an opportunity to meet true Americans
Who gave me love and care
So I could pass it on to the other
Now I can tell the world that the pride of being an American is to be able to fulfill the dream of another.

Despite being made to feel different
And at times may be little less than equal by a few
Although I don't remember what they had actually said to me
I remembered how I had felt
Maya Angelou had said that is often true

An immigrant has to work hard and remain forthright without trying to be righteous or always be right
I was told as a child
That the luminosity of a candle depends on its ingredients.
It was better to be a spoke in the wheel of life
That must roll on
Rather than be a victim and get run over by its electrifying power to move on.
The Lord provides for those that believe
Just like Sir Galahad had said "I have the strength of ten because my heart is pure."