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opinion

Why I love America

By Anushka Anastasia Solomon

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I love America because the people who got here before I did, paved the streets with gold, built the cities on rock and roll, opened the windows, created open space parks and arranged for Emma Lazarus to greet me with open arms.

At the time, in my country and culture of origin, perhaps due to the stiff lipped Brits, and the sobriety of Hindus" and Muslims, no one hugged. So, it was nice for me to walk into a nice warm hug in America. It didn't matter that Emma was tall, green and a statue.

I was a Hindu. Our gods are all stone. We are accustomed to stone Gods. I just read her lips like I was deaf, believed in the American Dream, saw the beacon, that city on a hill and came to America. Just like Eddie Murhy did in the movies, much later, after me.

I fell in love on the plane. It was TWA. The air stewardess came by and asked chicken or beef?

"Oh. I am sorry, but I am vegetarian," I explained.

"Oh. I am sorry, honey. I will see what I can do for you," she said, kindly, without blinking.

I forget what she fed me but I got chatty after I ate.

"This is my first trip to the USA, I am Hindu, we

don't eat meat, I'll be studying Journalism at the University of Missouri, I am going to change the world and my parents said, 'no wine, women or song for me in America, "I laughed. I was eighteen.

Her blue eyes got warm and again, I felt like I was walking into a hug. Then I got sleepy and snuggled down to sleep in my seat with the TWA blanket.

Finally we arrived, and the pilot announced our arrival. I jumped up excitedly and said, "Yes! I have arrived." The Americans in the seats at the back broke into applause. I felt like I had come home.

Then of course, the realities of international student life on a large mid-western university campus set in. The choices and friends I made, my roommate, the professors, my trips back to Malaysia, and the courses I took all shaped my ideas of both countries. There were significant differences.

That world I was going to change was changing. Eventually I transferred from UMC and completed my education at Hampshire College, Amherst, Massachusetts, and returned for good, I thought to Malaysia. (to live happily ever after).

September 11th was planned in Malaysia. 2001 brought us (the world) together in ways no one could have imagined. We identified the enemy as Islam, terrorists, the global network of Al Qaeda, the police state of Malaysia and evil. EVIL. And E.V.I.L then proliferated our consciousness.

Overnight, American churches previously a haven for the alien, and the oppressed, the poor, the naked and the hungry began to preach in addition to the prosperity gospel, a peculiar gospel of fear, helplessness, suspicion, and a barely there, but there anger. American politicians, senators and educators now teeter tottered with the information they now received from other countries about the

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struggles of other countries.

Information that previously actually entertained them in diplomatic and literary circles, over tea, wine, cheese and crackers, now produced this -fear, anger, and threat. That normal precondition of human life in countries outside America -alert-now had colors assigned to it. For most Americans, the colors all bled into one word - fear.

In this environment, I found myself back in the US as a Christian, and again got to walk into the arms of Americans, total strangers and former classmates and friends.

Notably, when I showed up at offices of The Denver Post to deliver my mug shot, the late Sue O'Brien got up and embraced both my husband and I in a big bear hug. Before that Angela Cortez, a former DP editorial writer had extended a warm welcome. Despite painful, personal experiences as a person stripped of all that is important, I found, always in the hearts of ordinary Americans a home.

This is not to say that my family and I do not experience the painful realities of being immigrants to America. Greedy, exploitative, careless people continue to exist, but faith in a God who can change hearts and minds carries us. Fear affected our lives but Faith changes it.

Watching the American Presidential debates, once again I see the world changing and the people who are making it happen. Change is good. It is happening in Malaysia as well.

Malaysians are rising up and challenging the Malaysian government to abolish the Internal Security Act and the Social Contract that renders second-class status to minorities. As a Christian poet in exile, neither here nor there, and part only of change, I am learning.

The key to life must be to look in the eyes of strangers and see neither Hindu nor K.G.B. The key to life must be to catch the dream and let it shine in our eyes.

The key to life must be to let it open the door to possibilities and journey on in faith, hope and love. Somewhere along the way, God meets us. Because, really, in God we trust .

-Anushka Anastasia Solomon's (2002-2003 Compass/Voices Columnist) second poetry chapbook, "The Hindu and The Punk," Pudding House Press 2008 chronicles the friendship and faith of an International student and an American, who met in a world that never stopped changing. (<http://www.attthewindow.us/>)

Anushka Anastasia Solomon, (www.attthewindow.us) is a Malaysian poet and writer in exile. She was a Colorado Voices writer in 2002. Her chapbook, "Please, God, Don't Let Me Write Like A Woman," is scheduled for publication by Finishing Line Press.

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