

Tap ... tap ... tap ... I looked up to see a blurry figure of my mother tapping a few fingers on my shoulder. "Sorry to wake you up, Rishi, but me and Daddy have something important to tell you." She was not smiling.

I got up, now fully awake, wondering what was going on. With my father standing next to her, my mother crossed her arms and, in a tone that I knew could not be argued with, stated, "We have decided to move to India permanently."

I was awestruck. My family is Indian, but I had never so much as considered living anywhere but Peach Tree Court, a street that had the brightest green maple trees and fields of radiant yellow and orange marigolds. India was nothing more than an old family story to me, not a place to live.

Over the next couple of weeks, I ruminated on what life would be like in India. My brother, who already attended an Indian boarding school, told me in scratchy long-distance telephone conversations how great life was in India at his boarding school.

"We have the best futbol (soccer) field in all of India," he said. "It has an electronic scoring board, and the surface is fluorescent blue astroturf." This was an enormous motivation factor, due to the fact that soccer is my favorite sport. "And the food is delectable," he went on, "They serve chicken curry with juicy vegetables four out of the seven days of the week." I ate chicken curry every chance I got, so this, added to the soccer field, made the school sound fantastic.

"The weather is remarkable. The temperature year-round is seventy-five to eighty degrees," he continued with emphasis, "just like California, Rishi." My brother knew that I loved California. He also told me that I would get to visit our parents two times a week, which is very generous compared to other Indian boarding schools.

My brother's long-distance stories convinced me. From what I had heard, India sounded like utopia.

Six weeks after my mother woke me with the big "news," my father, mother and I arrived in India. We left Peach Tree Court, with all its beautiful maple trees, and flew to India. I stepped off the airplane into the dirtiest, oldest airport I had ever seen.

A film of dirt covered everything in the airport; the windows, the walls, even the floor. And the people working there seemed more likely to shrug their shoulders and ignore the passengers than care at all if anything worked right. In order to keep my spirits high, I kept telling myself, "Things will be a lot better once we get to the school."

After a 45-minute drive through a landscape that looked nothing like California, we arrived at the school. I was starting to get uneasy. The old, rusted gate that provided entrance to the school shrieked hideously when it opened and closed. There were fifty-foot tall trees encompassing the whole campus, so it was very dark and gloomy even though it was only two o'clock in the afternoon. It was raining very hard; I suppose my brother forgot to mention that India is known for its excessive flooding during monsoon season. As we walked through the campus, I noticed that the school buildings had a common 'theme' among them. All of them had an exterior of peeling pink paint, with white blotches where the paint had fallen off. The buildings didn't even have real windows, instead they had square holes in the walls with steel bars through them.

My parents gave me hugs and then left quickly to set up the furniture in their new home. The following week was one that I hate to think of to this day. The schools only gave us one hour a day for leisure, the rest of the time being dedicated to either sleeping, eating, or studying. The 'chicken curry with juicy vegetables' that my brother tantalized me with turned out to be a gruesome soybean substitute for chicken. I can only guess that my brother had eaten it so many times that he had grown to appreciate its garbage-like taste and appearance.

My brother loved the school (for some reason), and I could tell on my visits to home that my parents were enjoying living in India, especially without any children in the house. But all I could think about were the maple trees and marigolds of

Peach Tree Court. That place seemed like utopia to me.