

# Anthology for the Rosalie Road Group

Members of the Rosalie Road Group

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# Foreward by Gouri Datta

Some thoughts come as fleeting butterflies and float away. Some turn into more solid ideas and establish roots. A few of these ideas, nurtured by the soil and water of interest, like minded friends and the desire to create, turn into a compelling call to lift their boughs to the sky and do something.

The idea of forming an English writing group with some of my friends with a literary bent - came to me over twenty years ago. However, the push to actually start a group as such came five years later. A group, writing in Bengali, called “Lekhoni” had already been established at our house and met one Sunday a month since 1999. An initial mom and pop type gathering had blossomed into a stable club of nearly twenty-one Bengali writers.

The success of that gave rise to ambitions of expanding our creative writing repertoire. Why not an English writing group for those of us who are bilingual or only English speaking. I called a few friends. The language lovers amongst my friends, both Americans and Indian, immediately formed a small ragtag group, with varying writing skills in English but all of them diehard literature lovers.

The original joiners were Manisha Roy (an anthropologist and an Jungian analyst), Carl von Essen (a physician) - a husband and wife team, Rahul Ray (a scientist and researcher for the Department of Medicine at Boston University), Abhijit Sanyal (a marketing executive), Nilay Mukherjee (a research scientist in the bio- engineering field, Kunal Joarder (a robotics engineer ) and myself, Gouri Datta (a psychiatrist ).

There were others who came for varying periods of time but stopped due to moving out of state, lack of time, or simply because they lost interest. Members who joined later included Nila Rakhit (an accountant and tax specialist), and Jia Roy (a fellow in Creative Writing and publishing at Harvard University)

This core group of members still forms the basic central axle of the entity since the last 15 years. Saborna Roychowdhury , a writer and member of the prestigious Grub Street writing club of Boston, was a member for a year, but then had to move to Houston with her family. She subsequently published a novel based on the Naxalite times in India that was well received and acclaimed. Sudeshna

Sen, an English teacher, moved to Minnesota. Fariza Hassan joined us for a few months, and then had to leave due to other issues. Srila Sridhar (a business woman) came for a few sessions, and then left to attend to family and business matters.

The group started meeting one Sunday a month around the dining table at our house on Rosalie Road in Newton, MA. This became the chosen permanent venue due to convenience of its central position and the ubiquitous availability of that dining table. Each of the sessions ran for three hours, from 2 to 5 pm, an apt time for most families involved, being after lunch and before the dinner hurly burly. In each session members' writings were reviewed on a first come first served basis, adding up to two writings reviewed per session. Almost all genres of writing were par for the course - poetry, short stories, excerpts from a novel, plays, memoir pieces, essays, all except translations.

The author would send in his or her creative writing piece to the other members, electronically, at least one week ahead of the meeting and, would also bring in some paper copies for the visual representation. On the day of the meeting, the author would read aloud to the rest of the group. The rest of the members would take turns to critique the piece in terms of language, syntax, structure of the piece, theme, characters etc. and make suggestions for improvement or to remove redundant verbiage. Refreshments were provided during the meeting, snacks brought in by turns by the members, and accompanied by tea offered by the host.

This helped to assuage the sting of the criticisms, and also to keep the mind focused on the task at hand, instead of drifting towards a well - needed afternoon rest or siesta for people busy at work all week. In the second year of its existence, a thought about giving a name to the group came up. Each member came up with a suggestion that was duly weighed by the group for acceptability. Manisha's suggestion was "The Rosalie Road Writers Group ". I jumped at that as it was the address of our house where the meetings were held. It pleased my narcissism that the house would become a permanent part of the history of this writing group, I imagined (in an inflated state of fantasy) posterity viewing it as a place of literary pilgrimage, as much as Emerson's house was the meeting place for Branson Alcott, Henry Thoreau, and other thinkers, writers and philosophers of that century! The naming of the group was done.

Then arose thoughts of publishing an anthology of the collected writings of the group, not only as a means of crowning our efforts, but also to document the progress of style and voice in our writings. We had seen other writing groups successfully publish collections of their members writings, the Bengali counterpart, Lekhoni, having already published two anthology books. Thus, was floated the plan for Rosalie Rd Writers Anthology.

Two co-editors were chosen by common consensus, Carl and Abhijit - both being more diligent than several of the others, though all were dedicated to the art of creative writing. Carl had already published several books before

joining the RR group, his favorite topics being adventures in nature, namely fishing and sailing, medical themes, his Swedish heritage and spirituality. He had also spent several years in India, and a couple of the stories in this collection reflect those experiences, as in “Yellamma“. Carl had also established his own publishing company called “Shyamol Publishers “. The word Shyamol ‘derived from a Sanskrit word meaning green, a word used frequently in Bengali and Hindi speaking parts of India.

Abhijit had contributed about eleven remarkable memoir pieces, touching on growing up in Iraq as a very young child, and tongue in cheek humorous essays about various aspects of his life, including his self - perceived quirks. He is also handling the repository of the collected writings, and Carl and he are editing all pieces. Abhijit was also the pioneer in another ancillary writing project a couple of years ago, This was for a novel written jointly by all the members, with each member writing a chapter, and Abhijit choosing the title of “The Strength of Weak Ties“ and starting off with the first chapter. This novel will be our next publication once the current anthology sees the day.

Carl chose the design, color and format of the front cover of the anthology book. Abhijit whipped out his camera, went outside to the front yard and took three pictures of the house and the magenta foliage of the Japanese cherry tree, standing as a sentinel in the center of the lawn. One of the three pictures was voted in.

There was much debate on the format of the book - but finally a simple form in a binder, like the review book for schools, was selected. This was as a way to keep costs low, the group being small — a way to document our efforts without breaking the bank. We all agreed with that practical decision.

This anthology is a collection of all the writings of this group since its inception, some of us being less prolific than others. The birthing pain for this project has been prolonged and the forward progression slow, due to members having other lives. I was myself, was late in delivering the Foreword, as I was assailed by a severe writers’ block.

Moving forward the rest will be easier, and, hopefully, the Rosalie Road Anthology will be in all the members’ desks, if not in all the book stores of Boston, as is our future dream.





# Chapter 1

## Coming to America - A Prequel by Abhijit Sanyal

When I finished engineering school and my management studies I did not harbor any thoughts of leaving my hometown – Calcutta and going abroad for any work or further studies. I was fortunate that even before I joined engineering college I had travelled widely in Europe, Middle East and Asia with my parents – so the “wanderlust” issue was not important. I wanted to work in Calcutta and stay in the same city with my parents and friends and family.

I joined Dunlop India as a “Management Trainee” after my engineering degree from IIT Kharagpur (Indian Institute of Technology at Kharagpur) and was based out of the factory in a town called Shahgunge where Dunlop India maintained a sprawling factory spewing automotive and other industrial rubber products. The factory campus also included a huge township with very well maintained and manicured lawns, hospitals, club-houses and even squash and tennis courts. We stayed at the “Chummary” – a bachelor’s hostel and I went every day to the factory for some work, came back to play squash, tennis etc and then drinks at the club. In the weekends, we would go back to the city – on either the pool car or take a train. Life was comfortable but fairly boring. After less than a year of this – a group of about 10 of us – management trainees – all of us from IIT Kharagpur – decided that life had more to offer than making rubber products and we all applied for the fairly tough competitive examinations to the management schools – the Indian Institutes of Management. The results came in on a sultry summer afternoon of 1979 and we found that all of us were accepted – but in different schools across the country – Ahmedabad, Bangalore and Calcutta. The next morning – we all trooped in to the General Manager’s office starting at 8 AM in the morning at intervals of 30 minutes to submit our resignations. The General Manager – a short aggressive looking fellow by the name of Mr Gonsalves – told us later at our going away party – that he was

expecting the whole “Chummery” to leave Dunlop by the end of the day. We got drunk over the next few days at our “success” in getting out of Shahgunge – not really knowing what we are now getting into.

The two years for me at the Indian Institute of Management, Calcutta was a memorable period. The courses were fairly easy and straightforward and during placement time since I wanted a job that would allow me to stay in Calcutta – I joined “The Calcutta Electricity Supply Corporation” as a purchase executive in their headquarters at the Victoria House office. Victoria House was in the center of the city – a 6 storied imposing domed structure built during the 1930s. The name was taken from the Company’s Holborn Headquarters, in London. The company was in the business of generating, transmitting and distributing electricity to the perpetually energy starved city of Calcutta. A “pucca British” company – it was founded at the turn of the century and its shares were till recently quoted on the London Stock Exchange. Tea was served in your office twice a day by liveried waiters and a three-course lunch was available daily in the officers’ dining room. It was interesting to see these dying vestiges of post-colonial British culture in an otherwise crumbling economic situation. I was also continuously reminded during our meetings and cocktail party gatherings that I was very privileged to be working there. Most of my colleagues were the scions of the very well-connected business and professional elite class of Calcutta. I was the company’s first few MBA hires – and was a corporate orphan since I came with no recommendations.

I got bored there very quickly even though I had corporate perquisites like a car, club privileges and other such benefits. I hated the corruption, sloth and indifference around me. I also did not make much money since a large bulk of our compensation was in various perquisites – unlimited gasoline for example which would have a real perquisite in today’s world. In order to make really good money as I later found out – you had to join the dark side – which I was not yet willing to do.

Calcutta and West Bengal was then in the grips of the Communist Party of India and continues to be even today. The general economic malaise combined with the lack of opportunity and the poor quality of life were all factors that prompted me to explore alternatives. I started frequenting the offices of the United States Education Foundation in India or USEFI – to explore the opportunity of doing a Ph. D in marketing or finance. Nearly 50% of my class at the Indian Institute of Management in Calcutta – had already left for the US or were in the process of leaving. The USEFI offices were then housed in a stately colonial mansion on Outram street. It was policed by a steely eyed woman called Kumkum Mittal and her factotum a reedy fellow called Ganesh. Mrs. Mittal interviewed you and then told you what your chances of being remotely considered for admission at any American university were and thereafter of studying for the SAT / GMAT / GRE examinations in the air-conditioned comfort of the USEFI – which was a huge luxury in electricity starved Calcutta. Most of these preparatory books were not available at local book stores or were

outdated. She was withering in her assessment of her prospects and political correctness was not what she practiced. I met her with some trepidation and filled out the form outlining my education and grades – which she reviewed and deemed that I was worthy enough to borrow the books and therefore study there. I gave the GMAT and GRE examinations – the fees for which were equivalent to a month's salary. I initially applied to schools that did not require application fees since the standard application fee of \$50 was for me a month's salary. I was accepted at all of the few schools I had applied with offers of a fellowship and full tuition waiver etc. My mother very alarmed at the flow of steady US mail into our house came to know of my plans and was very upset. I shelved my plans and sent a polite regret letter to all those schools that had accepted me. This was before the advent of the personal computer and email and phone calls to the US were an unheard-of luxury. We did have a telephone in the house – which was used by all our neighbors and was even on the visiting card of one of them. Such was life in Calcutta during the late 1970s.

Two years went by and I was getting extremely frustrated at my job. I was in charge of purchase of steel and cement for building the company's 240MW power plant – which was a major milestone for power-starved Calcutta and a huge achievement for the local government and the company. I was assisted by a couple of clerks and one administrative assistant. A team of four in charge of purchasing steel and cement you might ask – that is rather ridiculous. However, steel and cement were extremely valuable commodities in India in the 1980's. There was a huge demand and tremendous short supply – which opened up opportunities for significant corruption. Even though there was domestic production of both these products they both had to be imported and I had to continuously manage my relationships with the Calcutta Port Trust, Shippers, extract permits from the Joint Plant Committee, get allocations from the Iron and Steel Controller (that is another story), cajole local suppliers etc., to ensure that they delivered the products they had promised to the construction site. I suspected that the imported products were also prized since there was lower probability of their quality being compromised on the way from the warehouses to the construction site.

One of the byproducts of a construction of this magnitude was the large amounts of very valuable imported scrap steel that was generated. I sought permission from senior management and organized the sale of this scrap steel along the lines of an auction process – making sure that I extracted the maximum consumer surplus etc. (Remember I was one of the few IIM MBAs in the company!). The company profited enormously from this sale and this was recorded as one of the highest sales of scrap steel in recent company history. However, I sensed – that something was wrong and within the month of that sale I was sent to the “Gulag” – i.e., - I was transferred out of the luxuries of the head office and sent to the Central Stores and Garage – a hazy lazy place where nothing really happened and you just had to “Wait for your retirement” – I was told. “Retirement” – I was 27 years and that seemed that to be a very long wait. I do not have any proof – but I suspect that my transfer had to do something with

the sales of scrap steel that I had organized. The volume and revenue from the sales of scrap was always very low – for obvious reasons since the surplus “not extracted” was otherwise distributed to the powers that be.

I settled down to life at Central Stores – there was virtually no work and I used to go home for lunch, a two-hour long siesta. I also spent a lot of my time in the evening watching old black and white Fellini, Truffaut and other movies by obscure Russian, Swedish and Czech directors at the Max Mueller House, British Council and the Alliance Francaise and other local movie halls. I had no girlfriend and did not even know how to acquire one – but that did not matter. Most of my friends left in the city also did not have access to any female company. My Calcutta based friends were few and dwindling since most of them had either gone abroad or were working in other parts of the country.

One day I came to my office and found that the office and workers I was in charge, was closed and still not open at 8 AM. I asked the “Chowkidar” and the security personnel to open the office and get it ready for the day’s work. They said that there was a union meeting planned at that time and they were told not to open up the office – till the head of the local branch of the union instructed them to do so. I told them – that I was running this office and not the union and they reluctantly opened the office and the warehouse. At about 8.30 there was huge commotion outside my office and I looked outside my office windows which was on the second floor to see that about 100 workers had gathered in the courtyard below and led by the local union leader, were all yelling – “Sanyal Sahib Murdabad”, “Sanyal Sahib – Nipath Jao”. It did not take long for me to realize their ire was obviously directed at me and was loosely translated as “Death to ...” and “Go back....” The local police force was called – and after an hour of protest and more death threats I was spirited out of the back door and was told to go on administrative leave for a week. I was later charmed by the fact that even though they wanted me to die – they would still attach the honorific – “Sahib” to me.

After nearly 4 years in this job – I thought it was now time to think of other alternatives. Opportunities in Calcutta were non-existent and based on my judgment and most of my friends I possibly had the best job in the city given my education and values. I could not argue with that – since I had a car, some nice perquisites (a gasoline allowance among other things), a nice salary and no work. I started writing to business schools in the US expressing an interest in applying for a Ph.D. program. My mother distressed at the resumed flow of large envelopes from the US filled with glossy brochures and forms again into our house told me that I had to get married – which I did in the winter of that year. I had to again put a hold on my plans and asked my bride to be during our first conversations (at the local tea-room called Flurys) whether she would be willing to move to the US if I decided to leave for further studies. As far as I can remember she agreed.

After my wedding, I went back to Kumkum Mittal and USEFI and started preparing for the GMAT / TOEFL examinations and again applying to US

universities. I also bribed the postman (compromising on my value systems) to ensure that my mail would be delivered regularly and not stolen because of the US stamps. My marriage and honeymoon expenses along with the subsequent application and examination fees had depleted my meager savings. I was accepted at a few US universities along with offers of a fellowship and tuition waivers. The fellowship stipend seemed rich – once translated into the weaker Indian currency. I went and perused the 2 months old New York Times and other US newspapers to determine the cost of living from the grocery store sales and coupons that were still available. I kept a detailed chart of these costs and was able to determine that even eating shrimp everyday and a glass of wine – I would still have \$50 left from my fellowship stipend. Life would be good – studying, eating shrimp and drinking wine – no militant unions and recalcitrant office “babus” to handle.

Soon after I also came to know that my wife was pregnant which now definitely complicated matters, throwing all my shrimp and wine calculations awry. I wrote to friends in the US to determine my chances to survive (now with a family) on the fellowship amounts. Most of these letters would take about 2 to 3 months to get a reply. Some of these replies came after I had left for the US.

Finally, my visa papers arrived, and I went to the US consulate for issuance of a student visa. A woman called Laura Livingston was in charge of issuing visas. She had a reputation of terrorizing the local “US aspirants” with her ability to withhold or issue student visas. The local grapevine had rumors of what were her decision criteria – which were according to most people who went through the experience, fairly arbitrary and ambiguous. My interview with her was for about 5 minutes. She asked where I had studied in India and what my GMAT score was. She then asked me whether I was going to ever come back to India. I said – “I am going to try – but I can only give you a hypothetical answer”. She replied – “I do not think you will ever come back – you will very much enjoy studying and staying there in the US”. I left the consulate with my visa and grim forebodings.

I flew out of Calcutta airport on a gloomy monsoon night in end August 1987 en-route to New York. There were tears all around and in spite of my assurances to my parents they felt that I was abandoning them. I had tried for 10 years after finishing my engineering degree to build a career in India but could find little to look forward to or hope for.

I had with me about US \$250 after cashing out my retirement savings which was also the maximum that the Indian government would allow. That would be about 2 weeks of living expenses at rates well below US poverty levels. Throughout the long plane ride – I thought - how do I bring my wife and unborn child to join me and .... what next?



## Chapter 2

# Penurious Graduate Student by Abhijit Sanyal

My old expired passport has on page 15 – “Sept – 5 – 1987 – Admitted” over the full signature of “Laura Lee Livingston” – consular officer of the US Consulate General, Calcutta. I arrived at JFK airport on 5th September 1987 after a long flight from Delhi on now defunct Pan Am Airways. A friend of mine who received me at the airport – and I spent a night at his apartment in Manhattan. The next day he drove me and my two puny suitcases to the University of Massachusetts at Amherst. He knew a professor out there who was also in the business school and he decided to meet him as well. On the drive to Amherst – we drove through all the places that I read about – Pelham, Greenwich, Stamford, New Haven and Hartford. I noticed that as we went through the toll booths – he greeted and was also being greeted equally vocally by the toll booth collectors with a big “Hello” and a few seconds worth of conversation. I asked him if he personally knew the toll booth collectors – and he said “No” – “This is the US – there is optimism everywhere”. It seemed to me that the sun never sets in this country.

I joined the business school thereafter and started getting busy with classes and some other “Fellowship” responsibilities. I talked to my wife as much as I could afford, long distance calls were very expensive. I placed my name in the queue for the University married students housing. There was considerable demand for this housing since the rents were cheap – but the waiting list was over a year long. In the meantime, I arranged to rent an apartment at a housing complex called Puffton Village.

I witnessed my first New England snow fall during the month of October 1987 which everybody said was very early for that time of the year. I still remember working in the Computer Lab room and looking out of the window as the snow started to fall. In the next few hours everything was covered in white and

what was previously ugly now looked beautiful and what was beautiful was now absolutely magical. I marveled at the snow and still remember walking back to my graduate dormitories, with my feet completely freezing. I still had not bought any winter clothes and I still had my new shoes from India made by the famous Indian company – Bata. Within a few days the soles of the new “Bata” shoes came apart completely and I desperately needed new shoes. I went to a local thrift store and bought winter shoes. My professor friend from Albany called me one day to check how I was doing and I told him that I never realized that winter would be so severe. He came the next weekend and he took me shopping to “Steigers” and bought me nice warm “London Fog” coat. Steigers was a fancy store at the mall but is no longer in existence, a victim of the creative retailing destruction that continuously goes on in the US.

I also arranged for my wife’s visa papers. I was nervous that the “Visa Gods” in Calcutta might deny her a visa since she was pregnant and advised her that she should wear loose clothes, so that her condition was not immediately discernible. She said that she would try, but she also said that it was getting very obvious that she was expecting. The first time that she went to get her visa she was denied. She tearfully called me and said that they wanted some confirmation from me that I was a genuine student at the University. I ran to the International Student Office and explained my situation to Fred Schulten – the student advisor and he promised to send a message to the US Consulate General’s office in Calcutta. The next time she went to the visa office, she was awarded the visa and she arrived just before Thanksgiving, 1987 to the JFK airport at New York. I received her at JFK and the next day we boarded the Peter Pan service that ran from the Port Authority to the town of Amherst. I did not have a car and I asked a friend of mine to receive us at the bus stop. I did not realize that it would be getting bitterly cold and his car – an old Volkswagen Beetle had as he described it “Non-functioning heat”. Both of us froze but thankfully the trip was short. That would explain as to why my friend kept extra blankets and warm clothes in the car.

We settled down to life at Amherst – I was busy with my classes and seminars and my wife was also busy making friends and finding out about groceries, how the bus system works and building relationships with the UMass medical system. I also started looking at my desperate financial situation. My fellowship stipend was \$650 – out of which I had to pay \$400 for rent and \$100 for medical insurance that left us with about \$150 for groceries, utilities and entertainment – which consisted mostly of meeting at friend’s houses for dinner or movies. Contrary to my expectations, life no longer consisted of affordable “Shrimp and Wine” that I thought would characterize my student life.

During one of my wife’s regular check-ups the nurse showed us the ultra-sound results on the screen and told us that it was a boy – “See you can see his weenie!” and we squirmed in our Bengali middle class embarrassment. There was now a concern whether the medical insurance would cover the birth of our child – since it was a pre-existing condition. I researched the issue and found out at



the average cost of a child birth was about \$30,000 but if you were indigent then the Commonwealth of Massachusetts might pay for the cost. We did the round of all the doctors and the other officials – but nobody could give us a clear answer. One night a few weeks into her stay while returning from the local mall sitting in a bus on Route 9, my wife very excitedly pointed to a blinking neon sign in red – which said, “FAST FREE DELIVERY”. [Psychology – when you are hungry everything points in that direction] She said that should surely solve our problems. I reassured her that it would not. The sign was for a local pizza shop and they would not take responsibility for the birth of our child.

In the meantime, I was thinking of ways that I could earn some extra money to alleviate our dire financial situation. The baby was on its way and we needed a crib, a stroller and other “baby” stuff. We had no furniture except for a mattress donated by a friend which we used for sleeping. A friend in the Ph.D. program got a job and donated his sofa set to us. The sofa had unfortunately one leg broken and I had to somehow prop it up and had to warn visitors to our home not to lean too much on the “broken” side. I bought a desk and some chairs from a used furniture store. My academic advisor donated his child’s crib to us. We painted it and it looked like new. I could not work legally anywhere outside the campus and most on-campus jobs would conflict with my classes and academic schedule. Somebody however said that they needed tutors in the minority education program and I applied there. The pay was \$10 per hour and you had to make appointments with your students and help them with their homework and classes. I started teaching these students multiple subjects – Mathematics, Physics, Chemistry, History and Psychology etc. A young girl once came to me and said that she needed help in French. I drew the line there since with my full course Ph.D. program workload I did not now want to learn a new language. In a very mildly entrepreneurial fashion I would organize three to four students together in a single hour session and teach them simultaneously various subjects. There was no rule that said that I could not do this and over the next few months, juggling my classes and my students I was able to save some money with the ultimate goal of buying a used car.

We were poor but happy and the days seemed to fly fast. Winter had turned to spring and the birth of our child was due in end March or April. We went for Lamaze classes and the couples we met were all uniformly friendly and helpful. Since we did not have a car they volunteered to pick up and drop us off after the classes. Some of the male partners of these couples were also introduced as a “coach and a friend”. My wife would ask me – who is therefore the father and are they not married? I told her that it takes all sorts of people and relationships to make the world. It was end March and I was busy with my classes and examinations and during one of Anuradha’s regular examinations the doctors advised us to go to the Cooley Dickinson Hospital at Northampton for a few check-ups and to make ourselves familiar with the hospital. The hospital was about a mile from the bus stop near Smith College and we had to walk the rest of the way there. There was about two feet of snow on the ground and it made for very heavy trudging to the hospital. I helped my wife walk the distance. I

told her it was good exercise and she would enjoy the walk. Till this day she says that she has not forgotten that walk but hopefully she has forgiven me for making her endure that walk.

The doctors at the hospital after examining her said that she should be admitted immediately since the baby was on his way. She was admitted to the hospital and I went back to our apartment and brought her suitcase that she had very carefully packed in preparation for this event. She went into labor that night and our son, Aniruddha was born on the morning of April 2nd. We were deliriously happy and I held my son in my arms. I looked at my wife and she looked tired but was otherwise calm and at the same time exultant considering the labor pain she went through over the last eight hours. I wondered at the amazing process of child birth and what a miracle I had witnessed. My wife told me that she had a list of people to call and I should go to our apartment and start calling these people. I thanked the nurses on duty and told them that I would be coming back in the next few hours. The nurse on duty said “There has been some more snow and the roads are slippery. Drive safely”. Smiling to myself, I thought that was not yet a worry for me as I trudged through the snow towards the Smith College bus stop.

## Chapter 3

# Job Hunting During A Recession by Abhijit Sanyal

It was the summer of 1990 and we were on our way to Washington, DC for the annual American Marketing Association conference. The main objective of the conference was to act as a job market with employers – universities and business schools to meet and interview prospective employees – graduate students who were close to finishing their PhDs, as potential faculty starting in the fall of the following year. The business school had graciously decided to fund our hotel expenses for the duration of the conference, but we had to pay for own travel and meals. I decided to take my wife and our three-year-old son – we would all stay in one room and have an opportunity for a low cost vacation. The hotel where the conference was being held was the Hyatt Regency Capitol – a grand hotel near the US Capitol and other Washington attractions.

We arrived in the afternoon after nearly an eight-hour drive from Amherst, Massachusetts. My old 1983 Toyota did not have very efficient air-conditioning and also had a leaking gas tank which would leak minute to alarming amounts of fuel depending on the incline of the slope where it was parked. The mechanic who used to repair my car said that the cost of repairs was higher than the replacement value of a car of equal vintage but assured me that it was very safe to drive. I decided to keep on driving it till it fell apart. I arrived at the hotel and noticed that there was valet parking. Our arrangements included hotel parking and I parked my car behind a silver Porsche 911 after dropping my family at the reception area. I handed the keys to the parking valet and told him that if possible he should avoid parking on a slope. He took the keys with a quizzical look. I did not explain the details.

The conference was interesting, and I met many potential employers including faculty from across the country and even as far away as the University of Waikato in New Zealand. However, the mood among the graduate students

was very somber, unlike the buoyant attitude during last year's conference at Boston. There were rumors that all the schools and departments were interviewing prospective students but there was going to be no real hiring since most University funds and jobs were being cut back. However, in order to "keep face" the employers continued to meet "employees" in a comical hiring kabuki dance. We had a great time in Washington, saw all the museums, the Lincoln Memorial, took pictures near the White House and drove back to Amherst with the hope that I would be employed within a year during the Fall of 1991. That would mean a befitting end to our current poverty-stricken way of life and many years of struggle.

That did not happen. The recession of the 1990's wiped out most potential academic jobs in 1990 except at the top research-oriented universities. The next year in 1991, I went to the AMA conference in San Diego and again interviewed with many universities. In anticipation of a job in the fall of 1992, we had even planned our second child to coincide with an expected upsurge in our income that year but that did not happen.

Ever optimistic I went in 1992 to the AMA conference which was held in Chicago that year. My wife Anuradha was pregnant with our second child and was due on any day. I returned home on the night of August 11th but my flight was delayed. I called from the airport and my wife said that her "water had broken" and she was going to the hospital with her friend. I hurried to the hospital as soon as I landed and our second child – "Ayan"anghsa was born during the early hours of 12th August, 1992. My wife asked me after we came back from the hospital as to how the interviews went and I said that I was very hopeful that we would be in a much better place during the fall of 1993.

That did not happen either as none of the universities that I had interviewed that year called me back. I was living the adage – "The rich get richer – the poor get children".

I had finished all my course work and my qualifying examinations by 1991. I had also completed most of my dissertation work and was ready to defend my thesis but without a job and a completed thesis, I would be "out of status" and would have to leave the country according to the immigration rules. I continued to be a student and the department chair, and the university authorities graciously continued to extend my fellowship which meant that I could continue to take classes across the university departments. I started taking courses in the departments of psychology, mathematics and engineering. In order to earn some extra money since I could not work outside the campus, I also started consulting at the statistical consulting center (SCC) which was attached to the Department of Mathematics and Statistics. The SCC was set up to help the student and academic community with all their statistical programming and software problems and applications. I had some experience in using statistical software through regular coursework, but it seemed that there were few takers for the job – so I got the position and was soon very busy working there or taking classes.

After 6 months into the job – I was approached by a few graduate students who said that they needed help with the analytical work on their Ph.D. thesis. They were worried that they could not defend or graduate until they finished all the required analytical work. They offered me reasonably handsome sums if I would “consult” with them on completing their Ph.D. requirements. I had now entered the shadowy world of “analytical gun for hire”. I readily agreed with their request but told them they should inform their departments and their academic advisors that they were taking assistance from the SCC. I ended up doing most of the analytical work for their Ph.D. thesis and also wrote up the relevant chapters. I now think that there are at least three currently tenured faculty members who were able to graduate after I spend sleepless nights analyzing and modeling their data and writing up the results. *C’est la vie*.

One day during the month of March, 1993, our supervisor at the SCC – Trina Lemeshow said that there was a Boston based strategy consulting firm looking for statistical consultants and would I be interested in the position. She said that the salary was at about 9-month faculty salary levels. I leapt at the chance and applied for the position. The next day I got a call asking me to drive to Lexington for an interview. It was a wintry, snowy day in March and I drove to Lexington in my “leaky” Toyota. I spent an entire day at the offices of Mercer Management Consulting meeting about nearly everybody at the office and was entertained with a very nice lunch. Ever optimistic I started the drive back home to Amherst on route 2 in the late afternoon.

The snow was falling very heavily by that time accompanied by heavy winds. My windshield wipers were wiping away furiously as I crawled back home. Suddenly without any warning both my windshield wipers came loose from their moorings and continuing their furious back and forth motion disappeared into the swirling heavy snow and the ongoing traffic. I pulled onto the side of the road and tried desperately to search for the errant wipers –but they were nowhere to be found. I ended up driving a few miles – stopping to clean the snow from the windshield and then continuing for the next few miles till the visibility had deteriorated to a point where I had to again repeat the process. As I was continuing this process, I suddenly heard a crack on my driving seat and the back of my seat fell back onto the back seat. It appeared that the driver’s seat of my Toyota had suddenly lost its “backbone”. I continued the “stop and go” process except that now I was driving hunched forward with my son’s car seat wedged behind me to give me support. A normal two-hour journey from Amherst to the Boston suburbs took me six hours that night. That winter storm of 1993 was one of the heaviest recorded snow falls in the history of Massachusetts. On the drive back home, I thought the god’s portent well for me – only out of such great pointless struggles can there be genuine achievements.

The next day I received a call from John, the head of the analytical group at Mercer, saying that they were ready to make me an offer and he went on to describe details with regard to the salary (which at that time seemed astronomical), signing bonus and other benefits etc. On hearing the salary, I blurted

out that it seemed to be too high since I was told that this was a 9-month faculty salaried position. He ignored my comment and told me that if I accepted the offer over the phone they would start the paperwork. Anuradha standing anxiously next to me, signaled to me: “Say Yes – Accept the damn offer”. I accepted the offer and the next day all the paper work was completed, and I had a job to fulfill my vision of the American dream, about 3 years late.

We were very happy and celebrated by going for dinner in a Chinese restaurant in town and ordering regular food from the menu. We were not going to do the \$9.95 buffet any more. The day I received the appointment letter, I took it to the local credit union and the Ford Mercury dealer and we purchased a mini-van in keeping with our demographic status as a single income family with two kids. I was also informed that Mercer had a dress code and my wife went into a pleasurable tizzy of shopping for suits, shirts and ties. All this spending was even before I received my first pay-check.

At school the graduate students and faculty members started asking me questions as to how I had got the job and whether I had any connections in the management consulting world — ‘Mercer only hires from “Harvard Business School” and never from the University of Massachusetts’. I gave everybody different mysterious answers with reference to my Karma and the “leaky” Toyota. Even my faculty advisors were mystified and made oblique inquiries as to the salary levels and benefits. I only told them that the firm would be paying my moving costs as well as hotel expenses till we found a suitable apartment. I think that made quite a few people jealous, but I enjoyed the fleeting moment of perverse pleasure. It was worth a three year wait.

The movers called and asked me how much “stuff” I had. They asked me whether I had any horses or boats since they are only going to move one horse and one boat and two cars. Rather flabbergasted, I said we had many books, all my academic stuff and toys and no furniture since all the furniture we had were hand-me downs or picked up from the dumpster and my wife did not want to take them. They seemed to be relieved that I did not have any horses or boats. The movers came – a group of heavily muscled large men and said that they would take care of everything. They literally did so and all we did was to pack enough clothes for a few days stay in a hotel till we signed the lease for our new apartment.

We moved from the hotel to our new apartment within my first week of work. The movers unloaded our stuff and arranged it to the best of their ability and my wife’s instructions. On the second day of our stay we notice a terrible smell coming from the kitchen. Further investigation revealed that the movers – who said that they would move everything, had also moved our garbage from Amherst to Lexington.