

The Poudels – Their Journey to HOME

A father, mother and small son live a simple existence in Bhutan on a small fruit farm that has been passed father to son for three hundred years. The family's ancestors migrated there from Nepal in the seventeenth century. One day, the government passes the "One Nation One People" proclamation that decrees only people of Bhutanese descent can remain in the country. The other "illegal immigrants" must leave under threat of death. Even though this family and their ancestors have lived in the country for three hundred years, they are still not considered Bhutanese. Days later, they flee to a United Nations camp in the forests of Nepal. Fearing for their lives, they take only important papers and some clothes. Everything else is left behind: their home, their family mementos, life as they know it. They spend the next 20 years in this camp. Minimal electricity, rationed water, occasional delivery of bags of rice, dirt floors, etc. Three other children are born in the camp. It is estimated that people in these camps consume less food daily than the average American house cat.

But they are lucky. While others remain in the camps still today, this family, after twenty years in the camp, was offered a chance to go to another part of the world, where, they are told, life will be better. They agree as a family to go. In August of 2010, they arrive in Dallas, Texas, exhausted, and probably a little bit dazed and scared. But they were met by some new friends and taken to a new comfortable apartment and served a hot meal. Exhaustion was evident on the faces of each family member and soon the new friends left so they could get some well deserved rest.



But their journey was far from over. As is the case with all refugee families accepted for resettlement in the United States, they had only three months to become self-sufficient, earning their own way in a strange world where they didn't know the language, had no money nor specific job skills with which to earn some. But charge ahead they did, with each of the family members (Mom, Dad and all kids) working. And the kids attended school too. The family moved to a less expensive, two bedroom apartment to save on monthly expenses. It was a small space for a family of six, but never was a complaint heard. And as is the case with most refugee families, they successfully became self-sufficient quickly. The industrious manner in which they did it is reminiscent of the original immigrants/refugees that settled this great country.

They quickly became Americans, but they did not forget from whence they came. They are resilient. The memories of their homeland remain. Their cultural traditions continue to be an important part of their lives. Yes, as they begin life anew, somehow they are able to combine the new with the old. They revel in the new traditions while honoring the old ones. Time passes and the children marry and have children of their own. When the children marry, they remember the traditions of their original homeland with lavish fanfare and radiant and colorful attire.



Surya (son) marries

As time passes, the family moves to Iowa to pursue other opportunities. The entire family moves as one unit. Mother and father and children, some with their own families now, relocate to Iowa together. An uncle also moves because family is crucially important to them. Everyone works to support the “family.” After some time, with disciplined saving, the family is able to buy a small farm. Father and uncle manage the farm, raising goats and chickens, something with which they are quite familiar. Throughout this arduous 30 year journey from Bhutan to Iowa, this family has persevered, with grace and dignity. Their outlook on life, at least to those of us that know them, seems to be one of perpetual optimism. Their spirit and joy for life endures. They hold no bitterness for the life they have endured. And their happiness is contagious. With God’s grace and with their stoic determination, I think they are at last HOME.



Dawa (father) at home on the farm