

# TIMS

THIS IS MY STORY

“IT'S  
*HAPPY*  
HOUR!

In the end, we only  
regret the holidays  
we didn't take.

We're not lost,  
**WE'RE JUST**  
*exploring*

*"Travel does that to you...it's  
more like working as a team  
and experiencing as much  
as you can."*

**ON TOP**  
OF THE WORLD

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# Oh, THE PLACES WE GO



I don't know how it happened, when it happened and where everything fell into place but however it did, we will be forever grateful for this summer. The fact that something started with a light hearted, casual conversation between Lata Mami and Dad that went something like, "Saath mein challenge US ghumne", in the summers since 2016 could finally turn into a reunion of 16 people - 4 families, many a generations, countless dreams, two daughters wanting to host their parents' home over a decade and memories of a lifetime, felt utterly surreal! Such was this summer of 2019 on the East coast of a breathtakingly beautiful continent - where I realised that having somewhere to go is a home. Having someone to love is a family. Having both, is a blessing. I realised that there is only one thing more precious than our time and that's who we spend it with. I want to thank these individuals in my life who have listened without judgment, spoken without prejudice, understood without pretense and welcomed me without conditions. Family really is everything. Thank you Dhara didi, Rashu didi, Hemang and Parag jiju for being the sweetest family - unconditionally warm, inviting, embracing and unbelievably loving! So until we do travel again, let's rewind our precious summer of 2019!







*As soon as we arrived, we knew an adventure was about to start!*

**TOUCH DOWN**

# Virginia



It was for almost 30 days that we travelled across America - with family, solo, reuniting as a bigger family and here we were at Dhara didi's doorstep after 30 long days as tired tourists really craving the essence of home, and the minute I saw her and Mami, I knew it was just like spending a summer at Mama's house during our good, old childhood days when it was all about living like a one big happy family sharing laughters, great food, countless conversations, cousin connects and bliss! We all ran and hugged each other and within minutes over a cup of coffee and Mami and Dhara ke haath ka bana hua laziz nashta, it felt like our little India in the vast America. That evening will still be one of my most special evenings with a lovely dinner cooked by Hemang and Dhara, and with little Kahaan overwhelmed by so many people in the house - unpacking little gifts and gushing over his little book delights and all of us finally saying 'Goodnight' with bags packed for a trip next morning. That day was like a halt in an oasis - rejuvenating and special just as a caravan would wish on a journey across a vast desert.





# UNITED *WE TRAVEL*

Oh, what a rainy morning we woke up to! It was as Niagara falls were calling us from far away by sending a little trailer of a downpour over Dhara and Hemang's lovely Virginia home. After fixing the house, which almost felt like it was submerged like Titanic in the basement, we were finally ready to be tourists yet again - this time for a road trip across Niagara, NYC, Baltimore and everything in between. My entire night was spent in anticipation and wonder as to how the eight of us were going to be on the road for the next whole week and finally, when Hemang jiju brought our mighty black beauty, the MG wagon, all my doubts subsided with the most relaxing assurance, I knew it that time - here was our family caravan ready to ride us on a one hell of a family reunion road trip. Kahaan and I instantly knew we were going to be backseat roomies because we'd fit in without any problems. Little did I know at the time that it was about to turn out to be the best space to discover things about my little Kahaan and all the desires and playfulness his little heart held! We became the best of friends by the time the trip ended and I discovered a whole new world of his hidden talents. What started as a misty 8 hour drive to Niagara, with innumerable cancellations on the booked AirBnB confirmations, Hemang jiju's witty and hilarious commentary on suing the house owners by giving courage to Dhara to thrash them instead of sweetly accepting their cancellations, many nostalgic tales of younger days between Mami and Mommy and once in a while, with coffee and chocolate breaks, ended as we finally reached Niagara and finally had a place to call home over the next two days. Rashu didi, Parag jiju, Param, Tanaya and Radha Mami were already there by the time we reached. More than an empty house, we had more family and loved one's to look forward to as we eagerly waited to see embrace them all.





# *Hello,*

## GLORIOUS WATERFALL!

Touching down in Niagara was more magnificent a moment than we could've ever imagined. A gorgeous three-floored mid-century house - 4 families, 16 people and many generations coming together to have a reunion of a lifetime, I can never forget that day. We were surrounded by so much love and companionship that the rented house almost felt like home with the whole family reuniting. It was never a dull moment at the house which was filled up with laughter, talking and relaxing. The men would sit in the living room and talk about politics and world views, the women would hang around in the kitchen, prepping for the meal and having a good time casually chatting. The kids would be running around the house, playing something or the other. It felt like a typical Indian family gathering. We finally had Thai for dinner like a big Iranian family feasting on one single dinner table, followed by which the men went off to sleep early as next day was one of day tripping at the Niagara Falls and as for the women and kids, how could we ever call it a day without gossiping and snuggling? We all sat on the comfortable couch by the fireplace in the lounge till wee hours of the morning with the kids dozing in our laps as we caught up on everyone's life stories and their time in America so far. Some nights are just right out of a happy Fairytale and this one sure was that and more!





# TRIPPIN' ON SKIES, SIPPIN' WATERFALLS

**"You'll find the Universe has a way of guiding you  
to the experiences it most wants you to have in  
order to become the best version of yourself."**



Today was a day we all truly felt touristy, like on a typical family picnic day! It was a Niagara Falls day and the 16 of us felt like one big flock navigated across Niagara state park in buses, boats, on foot across the Maid of the mist, zoos, cave of the winds and every touristy trail that the location had to offer - be it pristine views or windy pleasures stroking our souls. It was one of my most enjoyable days in the entire trip! And for our most enjoyable moment, it'll surely be getting drenched in the Cave of the wind waterfall point. Everyone was giggling like kids with the misty falls embracing us and wild wind blowing with all its gust and vigour! Hira Mama had fun capturing the raw landscapes, becoming an 'Adiyogi' poser against the magnanimous backdrop of Niagara; let's say each one of us found their delightful moment - be it kids always eager to indulge in their ice creams and lemonade breaks and the couples trying to get in the perfect frame-worthy image and without their raincoats with a hope to take back a picture perfect memory from their Niagaran escapade! Another day came to a close and it was time for family dinner and late-night gossip sessions. How happy we were, with life and its simple pleasures that it almost felt unreal. This was our last day together since Rashu didi and family had to return the next morning and we, we had NYC awaiting us!







It was time to hit the road yet again. This time, to NYC. Kahaan and I were to be back seat roomies again but this time around, it was just not chit chatting but Kahaan having his dearest kahaani time! It was during this drive that I realized Kahaan loves anything and everything related to drama, acting and performance and that he wanted to grow up to do just that. He told me about his time playing Romeo in one of the school plays and it was during this time that I introduced him to the world of Snapchat and each hour after that, it was Kahaan musing away with the numerous Snapchat filters, voice modulations and oh boy, what an act he put up! I still watch those videos many times and marvel at his spontaneous talent! With Kahaan and his 'kahaanis', this trip felt shorter than its real time and soon we reached yet another AirBnB this time in Jersey city - a home which was easily booked and which was almost like a cozy condo tucked away on the 3rd floor of a local residence block. We tiptoed our way into the apartment following the "No noise policy" that sometimes Kahaan had to be reminded of. Those loud, happy car performance times were over and we were in a home that welcomed only whispers! It was almost dusk and since we stayed an hour away from the Big Apple, i.e., NYC, we decided to go to Hoboken - a much more accessible location to get our first glimpse of the NYC glamour and skyline. It was a beautiful evening by the Skyline park, we indulged in a hearty Indian dinner and slept like babies tired after all those active touristy days!







It was a sunny bright morning in New York and we were thrilled to be exploring the most desired city on every tourists' list. We quickly ubered our way to the Liberty State park and within no time, we were on a cruise that took us to the most iconic American wonder - the Statue of Liberty! Following the wonderful boat ride to the island, we finally reached the mammoth statue. It was amusing to watch the tourists running around to have their perfect click against the mammoth statue, and even we invented our touristy poses, enjoyed our lemonade, marveled at the souvenirs and were soon whisked away to another New York destination! After exploring the Statue of Liberty, it was time to navigate our way across Manhattan; ideally the hop on hop off would've been the best way to see this tightly woven locality of NYC, but we tried being adventurous and preferred exploring it on foot. A few hours, rain and quick glimpses of the Wall Street, Financial district, the raging bull and other random attempts making us end up at a ruin-like cathedral, we decided it was time to take a pause to rest, recharge and find a quicker way to navigate without getting completely drenched! The NYC subway was now our favorite mode of transport.

**We're not lost, we're just**  
**EXPLORING**







“Travel does that to you...it’s more like working as a team and experiencing as much as you can.”

After an hour of fretting over how to possibly move around despite the rain, finally my solo Europe trip experience came in handy – Hemang jiju and I quickly grabbed the NYC subway map, chalked out our desired route, booked ourselves one circuit tickets and then it was the family’s first experience in the New York Subway. We quickly reached every place we wished to cover that day, including Times Square. It surely wasn’t the most desired way to behold this billboard Mecca of NYC but like they say it’s in those little moments of unknown that the biggest joys are discovered! We wanted this evening to be special by cutting Dad’s 60th birthday cake in Times Square. We were enjoying like little kids in disposable raincoats spotting each opportunity to find a cake place that rainy evening. We finally got the cake and although we cut it in a mall, it was utmost special and yes, we still did have our quick trip to the rainy Times Square and admired all its glitz and fancy from the raincoat hoodie before we rushed to catch our last bus back home to Jersey city.





Waking up to yet another NYC morning was just like a dream and this time, we decided to start just as the humans of New York would typically do - a morning stroll in the Central Park. It was momentous, walking across the Japanese gardens, spotting the SRK bridge and swaying just like he does in 'Kal Ho Na Ho'. Taking a nap on shaded benches or just gazing at the cycling enthusiasts navigating through the park, we did start the day by burning a lot of calories, being a tourist on foot. With Hira Mama being an extraordinary artist himself, we decided it was apt to go explore the Guggenheim Museum. While I was delighted to admire the Frank Lloyd Wright designed wonder, Mama and everyone else did find the Art displays very disappointing. While they gazed over many modern art labelled junk displays, they really started questioning "Art" as well as the "Admirers of art" by the end of walking down 7 floors of absolute randomness. However, the coolest thing about the Guggenheim, in our opinion, was the actual interior of the building. It was one giant circular ramp around the building itself, which made for a pretty awesome backdrop for some cool photos. We really enjoyed our next stop - going to Ground Zero. It had a new structure called 'The Oculus' which connects to the memorial in all its glory. With the wish to experience the view of the city from the top, we went to the 102nd floor. This was the highest we'd ever been. A complete shift from how we started their morning walking around Central Park, everything felt so small and intimidating from up there. After Having the best Buratta on the 102nd floor café and some breathtaking birds eye views of the city, it was time for us to glide back to reality and get grounded for the evening!

“

*There were white frames hanging with just a black dot on it and they just couldn't believe how this could be called 'modern' or 'abstract' or even 'art'.*



**ON TOP OF THE WORLD**



It was dusk by then and after having a day filled with extensive sightseeing, all we wanted was a relaxing evening and some soulful supper and oh, what a supper it was! We found ourselves in the nicest South Indian restaurant in all of Manhattan! But before that, let's rewind a little bit to the evening hour when I finally met a couple of my friends after so many of them calling and texting me from the time they got to know I'd landed in NYC. Finally, Isha came to the Oculus itself and we had such a good time catching up at a local café, just like the good old college days, discussing about our fast paced lives, dreams, being in new countries and everything in between. Soon, Harshil joined us and we quickly bid adieu with a photograph that'll always be my only memory of meeting friends from home in a place far away from home. Moving on to the supper story, it was finally the day of Dad's birthday and after hopping around many options to dine at, we finally zeroed in on our good satisfying Bhartiya option - a South Indian restaurant. It was the coziest sidewalk walk place with the most authentic smells making us all nostalgic of our homeland. While at the restaurant, we were all having a good time talking and eating after a long, tiring day of touring. Somehow, the staff of the restaurant came to know about Dad's birthday and they surprised him with a huge cake of boondi ladoos. A very enthusiastic staff member came out loudly singing 'Happy Birthday' with a lit cake in his hand, not exactly knowing who Mr. Paresh Luhana was and kept singing while making random guesses about the birthday boy and surprised everyone around. It was a very delightful and humbling experience, that some stranger in a foreign land made us feel so special with such a hearty gesture.

*Today's evening was a story of celebration of life and everything in between. A family collectively coming together to celebrate a person that has many tags - husband, father, friend, brother, uncle. It was where all their loved ones and strangers came together to give him what can be best described as 'an unforgettable night', with many memorable moments, multiple cakes and an infinite amount of love.*



IT'S !  
**HAPPY HOUR**







We finally said goodbye to NYC. Hemang and Dhara being spontaneously adventurous and wanting to not skip a single opportunity of maximum exploration on this once-in-many-decades family vacation, decided to drive us all to Baltimore before we reached back to our home in Virginia. It was about late afternoon by the time we reached the Baltimore dockyard and what a spectacular vibe it had! Picnic benches and eateries all around, a central waterbody with docked fancy yachts and small ships, it all looked just like a mini entertainment park but like no other! Everyone had their own ways of enjoying the evening breeze and relaxed vibe but Hira Mama was in a Mecca of opportunities of capturing the humans of America! Mama was like a child in a candy store, not missing a single frame which could be his next great capture. So much so that we had to pull him away for our ice cream and food stops. One iconic activity in Baltimore was renting an electric scooter and riding your heart around the picturesque Dockyard bay. Kahan was so thrilled to witness this that he also tried his first scootering experience with me, Mom, Mama, Hemang jiju. We were all in line for this innocent, childlike fun experience!

*In the end, we only  
regret the holidays  
we didn't take.*

*Picturesque*  
**BALTIMORE**



*Let's click the*  
**‘SCARECROW’  
WAY!**



“  
*Taking photographs has  
nothing to do with the things  
you see and everything to do  
with the way you see them.*”

Baltimore will be a bay of discoveries for our tourist diaries. Apart from Mama's fixation to click every inch of it and Kahaan's Scooter affair, we landed onto one more fun episode, all thanks to Hemang jiju and his quick, witty playfulness! During the entire trip, Jiju noticed my peculiar way of posing and Baltimore was his chosen land to have a take on these observations. He made so many jokes on it that it became a thing and eventually everyone would pose for pictures by standing and walking the way I did and it became our most clicked 'Scarecrow' pose. My theory behind standing that way was that it made me look slender and taller than I actually was and no matter how annoyed I was during that moment, of everyone mimicking me, I cannot help but crack up while seeing the pictures now. This is where Hemang jiju and I bonded, without us even realizing that. Sometimes, things fall into place so smoothly and in a way that the transition goes unnoticed and the feeling just comes naturally.



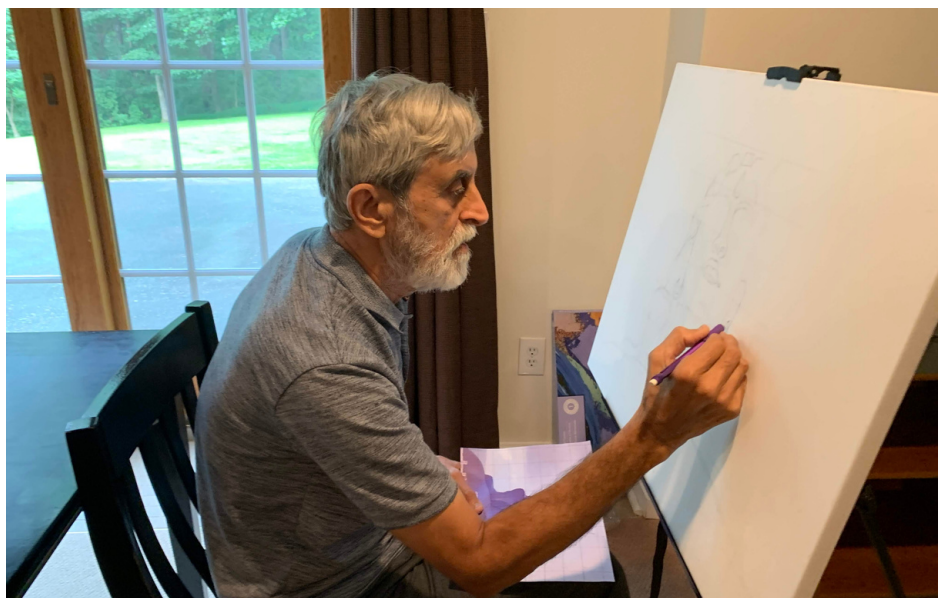


# I Love YOU

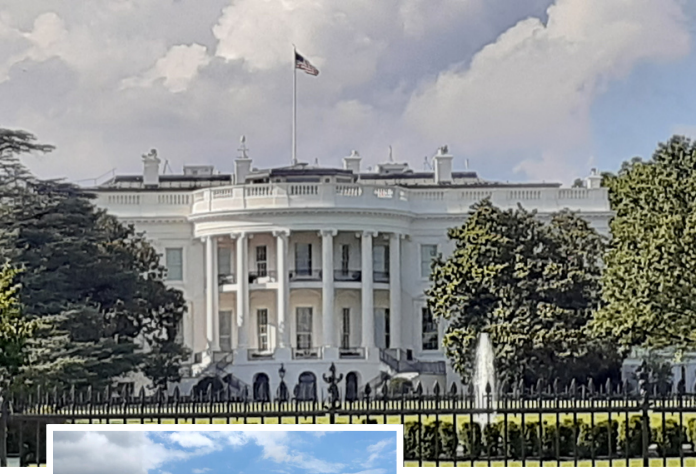
## MORE THAN THE NEW YORK SKYLINE

At last, we were back home after almost a week of circuiting across New York, Niagara and our dearest DC. We were back at Dhara and Hemang's humble abode, which now felt like ours too. When you see most of your extended family in weddings, it's difficult to get to know them on a personal level. But a trip like this opens so many doors and builds relationships that will surely last a lifetime. Kahaan and I were more like friends than nephew and Masi, Hemang jiju was our messiah of DC, Dhara didi was love defined and for Mama, Mami, Mom and Dad - they were as if on their second honeymoon, this time with their kids and grandkids! How we loved our times in Dhara's home! We all broke bread together everyday. On the evenings that they were at home, we'd hang around, open a bottle of wine. Their house was so cozy and tranquil that all you'd want to do was cuddle up on the couch and watch a film or play a board game. My most vivid memory is Mom playing Xbox with Kahaan. Everyone would play bowling and snooker and other fun activities that were included in the video game.

Seeing all the adults become children again, just for those few minutes was so refreshing since they never got to do these things in their own childhood. While days were passed Xboxing with Kahaan, nights were filled with Dumb charades and crackling laughter on old stories from here and there! Since the house was near the woods and a bit isolated, the vibe was very fresh and countryside. Hemang and Dhara's place smelled of great coffee and felt so much like a country side family home that no one could imagine ever leaving it. It seems a very normal activity in the grand scheme of things but these are the moments that they will remember when they think of each other and that's what matters most.







## A DAY IN DC

# THE TOURISTY WAY!

After spending a weekend at home, we were back in our tourist mode, this time, ready to explore Washington DC with our ace guides - Hemang and Dhara who'd lived about 10 years in and around DC! As a quick circuit, we'd listed Capitol, Botanical garden, Lincoln memorial, the White House and Kennedy Center on our to do list while in DC. While the Capitol and White House were just a quick check-in on a sunny afternoon and ideal photo clicking backdrops, the places we really enjoyed was the Botanical Garden. We spent an entire afternoon here, navigating our way across unbelievable indoor garden scapes, from arid cacti to the tropical lush green expanse, lost in the floral walkways and even taking lessons on how to make chocolate the correct way from the best cocoa beans in the world. Kahaan loved getting playful in the indoor fountain courtyard and as for me, I just felt that it'd be my biggest inspiration for all my wedding décor flora and fauna setups for years to follow! The Kennedy Centre, our evening pick on the list was an iconic centre. We witnessed a Spanish musical performance here which climaxed with the audience spontaneously dancing their hearts out as if no one was watching them. That's the thing about foreign lands - inhibitions are few, memories many! We enjoyed our evening walk on the terrace of the Kennedy Centre with a panoramic view to Washington DC and by dusk, Kahaan had yet again found a scooter to ride his heart out and end as a happy kid on a perfectly happy touristy day!







When you are tourists living with locals in a city which is iconic in the world canvas, you'd always view it more candidly than most tourists ever would. Thanks to Dhara and Hemang, another day in DC started with us being guests at the prestigious World Bank. To Hemang, it was his second home - it was his beloved workplace and trust me, if I ever worked at such a mammoth, inspiring institute, I'd never return back home! Lunch was at the World Bank cafeteria and each experience, right from entering it with our special ID's up till seeing its various zones of operations, it was an honour to be able to have such a candid experience. We were all so proud of Hemang Jiju! After such a spectacular start to the day, the afternoon had to be relaxing and easy breezy. While Dhara didi and I just strolled around the DC Downtown, the elders excitedly went to the Wax Museum and had the time of their lives there. They were so thrilled seeing the wax statues of their favorite celebrities that they clicked each one of them and their favorite task of the day became sending pictures on the family WhatsApp group of their rendezvous with these wax legends - it surely was an afternoon they enjoyed most! Dinner was as legendary as our lunch - Dhara and Hemang being foodies and having ataste for the finer things in life, took us all to their favorite Michelin star restaurant in DC called Zaytinya. It was the best Mediterranean Mezze place I'd ever indulged in. We had a gala time trying more than 25 different small meze plates and it truly was a la dolce vita time for the family in DC.



THE WORLD BANK GROUP  
*Another day*  
 IN DC - NOT SO  
**TOURISTY WAY!**





It is rightly said people who love food are the best kinds, I'd say people who can cook good food are a bliss to every guest who is lucky to be hosted by them. And we were super lucky when it came to being hosted by Hemang and Dhara for they not only admired and had a flair for the finest dining experiences but Dhara was our very own MasterChef at home! Right from our day one when Lata Mami and Dhara wholeheartedly welcomed us with a most drool worthy spread of snacks and tea, to cooking some of the most nostalgic Indian meals that I used to savor at Mama's place as a kid during summer vacations, to the best spicy curry Momo's I've ever had and a Malai kulfi and chocolate cake to die for, the list can go on and on. Despite such culinary skills, they not only indulged us all with ace home cooked meals but so lovingly took us to a variety of their favorite world cuisine restaurants in town! Be it lip smacking Chinese with a tease session of setting me up with one of the youngest Mama Chang staff to an Ethiopian place which was Indian styled African version of a Thali - how unique and homely it was. How could we ever forget the Mezze platter experience at Zaytinya or for that matter, gorging on some of the best Italian gelatos at the Sunday Family Getaway Plaza. This vacation was not just happiness for the soul, it was heaven for each taste bud and appetite for good food and great company! My favorite moments would be Mama trying to master the art of eating with chopsticks, Kahaan playing Street games with kids while the elders were gossiping over dripping gelatos!

**DHARA AND**  
**DINNERS**  
ON A TRAIL WITH OUR  
VERY OWN MASTERCHEF!

*"At the end of the day, we didn't know we were making memories that we will cherish a lifetime. We just knew we were having fun."*





# next stops IOWA

It was time to leave Dhara's home and take a trunkful of memories of the lovelytime we all spent together as one big family that ate together and stayed together. Everyone took up one role or the other - cooking, cleaning, booking tickets, preparing itineraries, etc. We were so many people, it was like a whole team putting together the best vacation experience with shared skills! So now, after road trips, it was time for flight trips.



We were 8 of us flying to Iowa this time to meet Rashu didi and family before we concluded our legendary US trip and flew back home from Chicago in about a week's time! We rushed to the airport at 3 a.m., just in time to catch our first family flight. It felt like a scene out of Home Alone with everyone at the airport curious to see such a big family travelling together. We had one heck of an airport adventure until we reached Midwest Iowa, which included changing two flights, the latter almost like a local AMTS bus and a transition layover at the Denver airport for 5 hours which gave us ample time to do all random time pass - right from playing games to window shopping at the airport stalls to taking a few naps and of course, running finally to catch our flight at changed terminals.



Finally, it was such a relief to land in Iowa and nowhere else. This city that we had landed in was like a little American town with only a tiny downtown surrounded by a serene countryside and the most beautiful family homes to spend a relaxed life! In no time, we were at Parag and Rashu's home and what a welcome we got! Cute little Tanaya ran and hugged her favorite Kahaan, the Ladies were thrilled to finally have a larger flock to indulge in all things girly, the men embraced each other and me, I just stood at a distance,

wishing I could pause at this surreal moment wherein 5 families were reuniting for an exceptional vacation where Rashu and Dhara waited a decade to live this day and me rewinding 9 years back in time when I had come here alone and had stayed with my favorite sisters. I'd had the best moments of our sisterhood and left them with a promise to return back soon with the whole family along. I couldn't believe it finally did happen even if it took 9 long years to shape up and how delighted we were, those 9 years gave us our adorable Tanaya to welcome us back home!





Rashu didi and Parag jiju's home was a big family house with sun decks, a basketball court, family rooms, an entertainment basement, pool tables and just what a perfect, warm, inviting family home would feel like. Since Iowa was a city with a relaxed pace of life, our days here were all about relishing the sweet life - starting the morning with leisure sundeck hangouts over 20 cups of tea, the kids waking up one by one and snuggling around with their Bournvitas, the ladies teaching and exchanging their food recipes all day long and evenings spent with men and kids playing Basketball at home or going out for tennis - it was a perfect summer week! My favorite afternoon will have to be the Burrito bowl for lunch wherein we were prepping up for this massive recipe for two days and cooking nonstop since morning to have a feast worthy of an American royalty, with its big family with the best cooks in it - it's essentially always about food and very good food! And once our tummies were happy, it was all about online shopping, packing picnic baskets, noon and evening chit chat sessions and me always snuggling and sleeping in Rashu didi's lap with conversations around me as lullabies. One couldn't not only miss but have a moment of absolute awe when Tanaya, the cutest little baby of the khandan and Kahaan's biggest fan would follow him around to the point where he'd go and hide in the house to escape her chewing gum like hugs. And once she spotted him, she'd force him into giving her horse rides and they'd both jump onto the bean bags and play their hearts out and then Param and Kahaan bonding like real brothers through various games all through the day!



*Sometimes it's the little things in life that take the largest space in your heart, these kids and their priceless gestures were just those little treasured moments!*

# Escaping the ORDINARY







# BRING OUT THE **CHILD** In you

*When the dust settles, is the point you realise how much you would miss all the craziness.*



It was a picnic day today and like an ideal picnic gang, we packed our picnic baskets with sandwiches and munchies and went off to the most scenic park with shady trees and wild expanse to indulge in candid outdoor fun! We played everything right from cricket, frisbee to Chinese whispers - age was surely not important and fun was plenty! It was so cool to see mom bat, Dhara didi bowl, me fielding and the men and boys really trying hard to teach us amateurs all the fun outdoor feats and all of us trying our best and once in a while, leaving them to have their raw fun. Hira Mama, Motamummy, Lata Mami and Dad all wore their picnic hats and tried their way of enjoying the outdoor life with a stroll on the bridge and a badminton game here and there. We all became kids at some point in time in those lighter moments of life, be it the outdoor picnic time or the entertainment park Go karting or golfing time - it's truly said age is just a number, there's no bar to embrace life childlike and get lost in the simple pleasures once in a while.





# EVERYONE'S

# Family

*What are happy times,  
but to pack in as much  
joy as possible. To take  
note of all the positives –  
the smiles, the  
appreciation of what is  
around, the lovely  
moments with loved ones.  
To try not to let any  
desire go unspoken.  
Mainly, to have no  
regrets; and very little, if  
anything, left unfinished.*

Rashu didi and Parag jiju had been living in Iowa for over 13 years and so they had many Indian friends who had become their family. Iowa, being a close-knit community, everyone invited everyone's guests over whether it was for lunch or drinks and dinner. Surekha Aunty and Rohit Uncle were one such lovely couple and very dear friends of Rashu and Parag who hosted us multiple times, be it dinner or high tea and spent many hours having wonderful conversations, talking about their love for India and their journey of shaping a life in this American land, missing their roots and always striving to stay connected in every way they could. And it was this love of preserving their culture that made them all such close friends where now Surekha aunty and Rohit Uncle were Nana-Nani to Param and Tanaya and somewhere bountifully filled the love and presence of an elder who was a guide, celebrator, supporter and showered some love in Rashu and Parag's life too! It's over these lovely, friendly dinners and conversations I realized that family doesn't necessarily have to be blood bound - sometimes, life gifts you with precious friendships that become more than family. When during this brief visit we visited Parag Jiju's hospital, it brought us all immense joy and we felt so proud of him making his mark in an absolutely foreign land and contributing his life to a profession so noble and selfless. It was in those moments that I thought - a lifetime goes by in creating our own little world bit by bit and when the moment finally arrives when you can host your family and let them savor your new reality, they feel so proud of you for being self-made, it defines bliss and in that moment you truly feel like you've arrived!







This one is for my darling little Tanaya and each moment of unprecedented joy that I've spent with her. It was over a Sunday morning of puzzle solving that Tanaya and I became friends. She grew fond of me as a friend more than her Masi and ever since that morning, she'd turn to me just like a gummy bear - inseparable for innumerable play hours all through the day. We grew so close that she wouldn't leave my side, didn't even let me pack my bags, she'd sleep with me in her room, cycle around, sit in my lap, play with my hair, having our endless cuddle hours and watch cartoon videos endlessly. Such was my precious time with my adorable little chipkoo Tanaya! It's funny how things come full circle - at one point, the roles were reversed as Rashu didi, Dhara and I were in the same situation when I was around Tanaya's age. I was the same chipkoo little girl, not wanting to miss a single moment with my beloved sisters. These were such innocent moments and seeing them come around in this way was heart-warming and pure serendipity!



TAKE ME BACK TO  
*Childhood*





Catching flights and

# CAPTURING moments

*Before going and after coming back, I saw a huge change in myself. As if it was a different me, I stayed with so many people, understood life, shared their worlds, celebrated joys, sharing deep conversations, understanding blessings of having such a loving family - that now I don't like being alone anymore. They welcomed us into their homes and their hearts unconditionally and gave us a trip of a lifetime, it made us appreciate life more than we ever did before, we felt bliss and unmatched gratitude for each person and every moment on our 50 days of Summer sojourn! We do not know if we'll ever get to relive these wonderful times with you all. I can't wait to play host when you guys are back in India so until then, sending a little 'Thank you' for all the great things that each one of you did for us and this little book of memories which hopefully will always be a reminder of the wonderful summer we all spent together.*

*-Love, Bittu.*



And just like that, in the blink of an eye, we'd outlived our 50 days of Summer. We took a taxi from Rashu's home to Chicago to catch our flight back home and suddenly, the whole trip flashed back in nostalgia on that 5 hour long drive to the airport. It might have been just 50 days wherein we started as clueless tourists with a dream of meeting our loved ones across America and traveling to some of the most iconic spots but on the 50th day of our unforgettable trip, we realised how this trip turned out to be beyond all our expectations, dreams, wildest fantasies, secret wishes and once-in-a-lifetime dream come true! We don't know how it all happened, we don't know what we did to deserve so much love and happiness, we just know that all of the people we spent time with were unconditionally loving and welcoming and we'll always cherish our times together for a lifetime ahead!





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