

Who tells your story?

I was born in Cochin, India. It is in southwestern India. A typical day there usually starts out with people going to Mass. Our state is Catholic, and before work, there are around 30-35 masses. Then we go to work and school. School usually starts at 10:00 and ends at 4:00. There were always the smells of spicy foods in your nose and there were so many restaurants.

Some of my favorite memories there were going to the beach, which is only a few miles away from the city, along with visiting the huge waterfalls. During the monsoon season, it would rain for 10-15 days straight, and the rivers from the mountains would flood. They were so many and so beautiful as they drained to the sea. We also have the bay area of Cochin, and going on the boats and ships there was really exciting.

The city of Cochin is in the state of Kerala. It is very beautiful. On our east side, we have mountains. Not like the mountains here, with more forest. On our west side, we have the Arabic Sea. To the south, we have the Indian Ocean, and on the east, we have the Bay of Bengal.

Fun fact, in India, every state has its own language, culture, and dress code. Even the alphabet is different. Moving from one state to another is like moving into another country. You can't understand the billboards, what people are saying, nothing! You could walk ten miles across a border and it's like you're in a different country. In my state, we speak Malayalam, Hindi, and English. Hindi and English are our national languages. Malayalam is our state language. We speak English

because once upon a time India was a British colony. Every kid is required to learn a minimum of three languages: Hindi, English, and their state language.



My dad and mom still live in Cochin. My dad worked very hard to get us money and protected us. My mom took care of us. She is a very good listener. Every day after school we would come home and we would talk to her for three hours, and she would listen. And that really hasn't changed. Whenever I go on vacation there, I tell her all my stories, and she listens. I call her every few weeks and tell her what's going on, and she listens.

My extended family is... interesting. My dad is the 10th child in his family, so he has nine siblings. I have many, many cousins. Weddings, adding in neighbors and friends and their children, got attendance close to 200. My mom only has three siblings, but altogether, family gatherings were like, man.

Eventually, I left Cochin in 2014. I am a Capuchin priest. I was visiting one of the Capuchin monasteries and I saw their way of life, how happy they were, and the joy I felt when I was in those friaries inspired me so much and I was like, I should try this way of life. That was how I decided to become a priest, and I haven't regretted my decision once since. I have been a Franciscan for 20 years now. The Capuchins share with each other. The friars here needed more people, and my state, being Catholic, has close to 7,000 priests, and we have priests all over the country too. Not only that, we have close to 30,000 nuns, though half of them are working outside the country, like me.

I was very excited to see new places, new countries, and new cultures. I was very happy to be here for about a week, then I got homesick. I am lonely here. I have friars who try their best to make me feel at home, and I am so grateful for them, but at the same time, I miss my family. They live 9,000 miles away on the other side of the world. After a month, I got used to the culture here and started my ministry. After four months I went to get my master's degree at Regis and didn't have time to think about myself with all the classes and essays I had to do.

When I finally got here after being assigned to this parish, my superior asked me if I wanted to

do ministry, and I told him that I love counseling and ministry, and wanted to do both. That's how I ended up at Regis University to get my master's in counseling. In fact, I did part of my indentureship [student loans] in this school, something like, two years ago?

I was a counselor here. I wanted to be part of the healing process. 2,000 years ago when Jesus roamed the Earth, he healed people. He healed them physically, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually. I am doing some of those things. When I hear confessions, I am healing people spiritually. When I do therapy, I am healing people emotionally, mentally, and relationally. It's a hard job, and you need a passion for it, patience, lots of patience. It's not like healing a body part. You have a cold, you take a pill, and you're all better. With counseling, it can take months for the issue to finally be gone. You also need to be able to listen to people without judging them. It's a hard job, but at the same time rewarding.

I miss Cochin, especially my parents. Also the rivers and mountains. I mean, I don't miss the mountains that much because we have mountains here. I miss the ocean and the beach because here, the beach in any direction is like 1,000 miles. I miss my friends too, you know? We've been friends for at least thirty years, but I've found more friends here. I also miss the food that my mom makes. She would make delicious fish curry, then you know, beef and chicken curry that I love so much. And not only my mom's food. At the friaries, we have chefs, and they make delicious food too. Here in Denver, we have many Indian restaurants, but I don't get that flavor because they make a mixture of all Indian food. In India, the taste of food changes from state to state, the spices, the combos, everything. We have common

foods, but it's different from our state's food. I can't find that specific food here.

For the first four months I was here I was living with Americans. There was one friar with me. He was from my state and he spoke the same language. Then I moved to another friary in Colorado Springs. I stayed there for three months and at that time there were only white people with me. There were ten of them and only one of me. I ate American food. I did not see any Indian people. But when I came here, I started to go to an Indian Community Church, and that is where I realized, "Oh, there are people from my state. That's cool." Then we started to meet every week to hold Sunday mass, and we'd bring South Indian food, which I liked. For three or four months, I only interacted with Americans. I mean, it was good. It helped me pick up a lot of the culture and helped me speak English better. But I had to adjust.

Life here is different from Cochin. In India, especially in my state, men do not cook, so when I came here it was hard for me to learn how. I had to practice making recipes over and over again, and even now I am not that good of a cook. I want to get used to American food. In India, we use a minimum of 12 spices in daily currys. Here, not so much. Also, in India, we are brutally honest with each other. We don't sugarcoat anything. Like, say if I saw someone -especially someone I knew, or my friend- doing something wrong I would say, "Hey bro, what you're doing is wrong."

Another challenge was learning the language. In India, I knew English, but I never spoke it. We spoke English in our seminaries on account of our

foreign mission, but outside of that, we were allowed to speak our state language. In addition, I thought I would never make friends at Regis University because I was from India, you know. The first class or so was kind of traumatic, because of the new culture for me. I was scared to talk to my classmates because I was scared of how they would respond to me. For the first two or three weeks, I was kind of alone in the class. I thought that I would never make any friends here, but after three weeks I started saying hi to people and they were like, "We thought that you didn't want to talk to us," and I was like, "Oh, I thought it was the other way!" After that, I finally started to make friends, and we are close friends and they are like, "Oh, Job, we are glad we have a friend from India." Sometimes I even make that so-called "Indian Food" and it's not... it's not bad. So I made friends and that was truly a good experience, making friends here. Now I have some good friends because I have been here for six years.

I was surprised at what Denver was like. Whenever we talk about America in India, even in the media, they only show two places: Los Angeles and New York. Those are the megacities of America, so whenever they talk about New Year's or something like that in America, they show LA and New York, and as a result, we think that all of America is New York City. But when I came here, I realized: "Oh, ok, there are places here, it's not just a city." There are farmlands, empty, barren lands, and there are many places that look like India too. Once I drove from here to New Mexico. I felt like I was driving through some of the Indian states. It was dry, there were almost no people, and anyone that was there had a small house.

We also saw homeless people, and I never expected homeless people in the U.S. I always thought, “Oh it’s a very rich country.” And then I saw homeless people and I thought, “Oh, ok, there are poor in this country.” For me that was shocking. But I enjoy Denver too. Everyone here is very health conscious. I’ve been to so many other states and in many states, the people are more... round. I learned to eat healthier. Once I came to Denver I started to enjoy hiking. In India, we take motorbikes to the mountains. I also love the parks here. Since my state is small, every single space is used for buildings, but here, all the parks are very pretty.

But I learned a lot from this country too. I learned to respect people. I mean, respect the privacy of the people, respect the secrecy of the people, you know. Respect the individuality of people, the differences of people. In Indian culture, we don’t respect it that much. We think everyone should be the same. So when we see people going off track we are like, “You should come back to being normal.” Here, people respect the individual.

Counseling helped me learn this. In counseling, cultural difference impacts the effectiveness of counseling, so we learn about the cultural differences and the inclinations of people, and we have a lot of exposure that we have to go through. We went to a homeless shelter, we went to a counseling center, where they counseled people with different attitudes, gender, mind, and sexual orientation.

After all of my time in America and India, my one big takeaway is to respect the individuality of

people and their differences and to accept them as they are. And you can’t forget to eat healthily.

story told by: Abraham Morginsky