

NO DISTANCE IS TOO FAR TO BREAK A BOND

author: Lauren Hsie
designer: Rhys Heenan
photographer: Parker Albin

The party looked perfect. Rainbow colored balloons bounced around the room, meticulously crafted art decorations lined the walls, and Hindi tunes blended in with the white noise. Bhavana's closest friends dressed in her favorite light-blue shade greeted the 14-year-old at the front door at her home in Chennai, India.

Bhavana felt like she had been anticipating this day for a hundred light years: not because it was a day to celebrate, but because it was the last day she would ever see India and her friends.

"We were doing everything we did in school for the past five years. We were dancing to the songs which we did before, singing songs, talking, playing charades. It was like we were reviving memories," she said.

As the night sky obscured the sun and the summer air waved Bhavana's long brown hair like a handkerchief, the farewell party came to an end.

"People were crying and I had to sit for an hour to console everyone," she said. "I was trying not to cry because I didn't want to leave an impression of me crying with them."

Even though it was after midnight and a deep silence floated through the neighborhood, Bhavana's friends insisted on staying because they had one last thing to do.

"My friends knew I loved books so they gave me a lot of books. They gave me "The Lady Midnight", "Eleanor and Park", and some Agatha Christie books," Bhavana said.

Through her parting gift, Bhavana continues to hold onto the connection with her friends and reminisces

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about their adventures together.

Now, a couple months later, Bhavana finds herself in a completely new country with people who constantly butcher her name, adjusts to an unfamiliar culture, and navigates a Pacific Northwest suburban high school, Newport, along with 400 other sophomores.

"After I came here, every day for the first week and every hour, I talked to my friends on the phone. All my teachers were calling me and even now I text my teachers," Bhavana said.

Although she is willing to welcome the polar opposite culture by attending journalism camp with people who share her love for words, nostalgia continues to overwhelm her. While the United States is often viewed as solely a land for opportunity, Bhavana longs to be surrounded by the people who she's made unforgettable memories with and hold onto her cultural roots.

"My family goes to a temple to pray," she said. "Last week I went to a temple and all I wished for was to be back with my friends."



Publication:
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Nationality:
Indian

Hometown:
Chennai,
India

Grade: 10th

Attends
Newport
High School

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