A POSITIVE CHANGE

1 dollar = 44 rupees, so whatever salary you earn in dollars times 44 would be your actual salary in rupees….WOW!!! These are the $$$ dreams that many Indians have in their eyes whenever they think of America. So, it was not surprising that my parents had similar hopes for me. They never had much education of their own, and they were really hopeful that their supposedly bright kiddo (that’s me!) would explore the big Wild West earning a five figure salary times 44.....unfortunately I had no such intention to say the least. Being shy and reserved by nature I didn’t want to leave the warmth of my family and the comfort of familiarity and venture out in to the unknown. However, the good girl in me finally took over and I decided to spread my wings and fly to America just for my parent’s happiness. In the days that followed, there was the excitement and enthusiasm of shopping, packing, friends and relatives coming to say their goodbyes, but I was unaffected by this all. Deep in my heart I was living in denial, this is not happening to me, I am not going anywhere…. 

Before I knew it, my plane was about to land in America…in my mind I went oh no I am here already. The next few days kind of flew by as classes started and I started feeling my way around. As it turned out I had a problem with everything, the food is too bland, it is too cold, nobody understands what I speak, everything is too expensive, there is too much drinking around blah blah blah. Maybe I didn’t want to admit it then, but I was too scared, too scared to talk to anybody (for the fear of not being understood), too scared to even cross the road (it took me a while to actually ‘learn’ how to cross, initially I remember just waiting at the signal for someone to come so that I could cross with them), too scared to even board a bus (not sure how to signal the bus to stop, I have had to walk quite a lot in spite of taking a bus on several occasions), too scared to just about do anything I guess. Not surprisingly, I would be day dreaming in my classes as my mind kept going back to how much fun life was back at home. All of a sudden I was missing my mom’s delicious spicy food, my sister’s jokes and laughter, even my dad’s frequent reprimanding (it’s amazing how much we take our loved ones for granted, the good thing that came out of all this was that I realized my family’s value). Each time I stepped out in
the freezing cold, I’d crave the sweaty Mumbai heat and hope to see some familiar face or speak to someone in my native tongue.

Since, class hours were spent in fantasizing, I found the class work to be not just different in structure but also difficult to grasp. Things only got tougher as I put on more pounds (15 pounds in two months), all thanks to binge eating all the fast food and also junk food (wish I had learnt some cooking). However, this drama went on for 3 months as I struggled to adjust without much success until one fine day….as I was walking past some sort of apartment complex, I slipped on the ice on the road loudly cursing the snow & cold as I fell with a resounding thud. As I was trying to collect myself, I felt several small hands trying to lift me up and before I knew it I was on my feet. Before I could thank my little saviors, I saw that the kids were back to playing snow fights. The sight of the kids all bundled up in their woolens, happily throwing balls of snow at each other, left me feeling really embarrassed. If they wanted, they could sit in front of their warm fires at home and grumble about the snow taking away their play ground, after all, they are just kids, right? Hey, but no, here they were outside playing a new kind of game adjusting their play to the weather, totally unaffected. That night when I went back home I knew what my problem was – it was not my situation, it was not America but it was the negativity in me, the resistance to change. Well, so now that the problem was identified I needed to work towards a solution isn’t it.

In the weeks that followed that incident a number of changes took place. The first thing I did was call back home and tell my family all the things I missed so much about them and how much I took them for granted. I told my mom that she was the best mom ever and the world’s best cook, my sister was awarded the title of a great companion and my best friend and my dad was told that he was a really good teacher and disciplinarian. I also added that much as I loved and missed them, I was finally learning to live on my own albeit with a little stumbling here and there. Next, I started searching for some easy recipes both Asian and American online, some turned out good, some okay and some downright yucky! However, my confidence gradually increased and now 10 months down the line I have actually cooked for large parties of friends, some as many as 30 (no I am not exaggerating). Healthy cooking coupled with exercising has resulted in me
losing around 7 pounds (I still have 8 more to go, but I am hopeful of reaching my goal soon). Another thing on my list was getting an American license, although I already hold an Indian license, it’s a left hand drive here. So, I took a couple of classes with a licensed instructor here before attempting my driving test. Guess what I passed in the first attempt. When my family visited me in summer, I actually drove them around to see all the amazing places. We had a great time visiting New York, Washington, Mackinaw and Florida. My mom actually commented on how much more friendly, warm and open I had become as a person. I give credit to the spirit of the American people – warm, friendly and filled with compassion.

This semester I am about to complete a year at MSU, and guess what I think I have come a long way from the stubborn, negative girl who needed to slip on the ice in order to appreciate the softness and beauty of snow that was so obvious to small kids! I have grown to love the progression and contrast of seasons in East Lansing, each season transforms the landscape so beautifully yet in such dramatically different ways, the added advantage being you also get to dress differently and try new fashion with each season! Sometimes, when I look back I think of how much more confident and independent I have become, learnt and mastered so many new skills, discovered some new talents and experienced an inner strength that I never thought I had. This journey of self-realization and rich experiences, although greatly rewarding, was not an easy one, but then change itself is not easy. No one likes changes because everyone is scared of the unknown, but you know if you resist a change then you stay just where you are. Sometimes, all you need to do is surrender to the changes life throws at you. Adapt, adjust and absorb the positive changes and in doing so you will not only conquer your own fear but also come out of this a better, stronger and more confident person.

Every dark tunnel has a light, maybe you can’t see it just yet but keep walking and you will eventually get there. If you lose hope and stop, you could be lost in darkness forever.