

## A Shared Breath of Humanity: Verses of Heritage, Healing, and Harmony

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*The work of the team that put together this Commemorative Booklet represents our shared breath of humanity across generations and geographies—thank you, team, for helping us all unite in this moment.*

Growing up in a South Indian family, my mother laid the foundation for the discipline of daily rituals which included chanting shlokas; Carnatic music practice; and singing of ancient lyrical compositions like Soundaryalahari, Abhirami Andaadi, Andal Thiruppaavai, and Meera Bhajans. Singing thus became my primary tool to navigate new life-experiences—and eventually find healing through musicality—after landing in the US about four decades ago. Writing poetry became my secondary tool for coping. I share with you three of my published poems:

### Healing in A Thousand Ways

The scar that shows on your wrist  
Was not there as you were birthed

Life's journey  
Cracks our hearts  
In unknown spots  
Leaving us to stumble along  
Warmed alloys of memories  
across time.

### Wisdom Steps Up

Out on a walk  
My trusting shadow  
Truncated by the light  
Has me  
Stand taller  
Lean less  
Grow up more.

### Rejuvenation

My worn clothes  
Rinsed cold, spun warm  
  
Dewed layers of homey bonds  
In laundered youthfulness  
  
Life's attires  
Shed in timed cycles  
  
Dawn the hues of another day.

As an immigrant, I have continued to be curious about how our priorities and interests (especially in collaborating with others) diverge and/or fuse through the influence of innovation, arts, culture, and charitable endeavors. Recognizing the critical role of community collaborations in our daily healthfulness, I have encouraged intergenerational conversations through simple questions like:

- What does music mean to you? Who sang the first lullaby to you? What is your favorite song?
- What is your favorite food-memory from childhood? Do you sing or listen to music while cooking?
- What are your coping skills? What makes you un-lonely? How do you connect with Mother Nature?
- What are your aspirations for humanity? How did you find the kindred spirits in your life's journey?

The process of asking, reflecting, responding, and listening—kindly and without judgment—seems like a “collaborative art” in itself, especially since there is no right or wrong answer as such. It is this art form that led to new friendships and a sense of belonging for me in a place almost 7,000 miles away from where I was born and raised. I invite your responses to any of these questions or suggestions for new ones to ponder on.

In the spirit of unity as Iowans in America—and given our shared childhood memories of growing up among people of Indian origin—I wish all of you good health, harmony, and meaningful friendships throughout your life! With warm regards,

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