

# SANDY TOMPKINS NAYAK

---



---

In the Words of Her Family,  
Her Friends, & Herself

# Sandy Tompkins Nayak

*b. 9 June 1945*  
*d. 9 December 2021*

*In the words of her family, her friends, and herself*

**Ranganath Nayak and Lakshmi Nayak**  
Editors

© Copyright 2023 *Ranganath Nayak and Lakshmi Nayak.*

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise, without the written prior permission of the author.



**North America & international**

toll-free: 844 688 6899 (USA & Canada)

fax: 812 355 4082

Our mission is to efficiently provide the world's finest, most comprehensive book publishing service, enabling every author to experience success. To find out how to publish your book, your way, and have it available worldwide, visit us online at [www.trafford.com](http://www.trafford.com)

Because of the dynamic nature of the Internet, any web addresses or links contained in this book may have changed since publication and may no longer be valid. The views expressed in this work are solely those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of the publisher, and the publisher hereby disclaims any responsibility for them.

ISBN: 978-1-6987-1478-3 (sc)

ISBN: 978-1-6987-1479-0 (hc)

ISBN: 978-1-6987-1477-6 (e)

Library of Congress Control Number: 2023911249

Trafford rev. 08/14/2023

# Contents

---

Acknowledgments .....v

Introduction.....vii

Part 1. Her Whole Life.....1

Part 2. Growing Up.....23

Part 3. Marriage and Kids.....73

Part 4. The Golden Years.....233

Appendix.....411



# Acknowledgments

---

Anand Nayak designed the cover of this book. Lakshmi Nayak, Anand Nayak, and Maya Nayak diligently searched through endless files and folders, both digital and paper, for photos. Santosh Shenoy discovered an immense cache of hidden and forgotten photos stored in a closet. Mike Seif used his mastery of Photoshop to repair and improve many, many photographs. Family members and friends from all over the world gladly wrote eloquent pieces recalling their associations with Sandy. Many also sent photos. A few sent poems written for this book. Deyne Meadow read drafts of the manuscript and provided many useful comments. Lakshmi Nayak curated the large selection of photographs in the book and created beautiful pictorial histories.



# Introduction

---

This book is about Sandy Tompkins Nayak, to whom I was married for 53-1/2 loving and fruitful years.

Sandy passed all too suddenly on the 9<sup>th</sup> of December, 2021, from an aortic aneurysm, leaving myself, our children, and our extended family and community bereft. In the desolate days that followed, I longed for occasions on which we could talk about her and tell stories. We had two such events with close family and friends attending.

A third one was organized on the 19<sup>th</sup> of March, 2022, by the Unitarian Universalist Church of Belmont, Massachusetts, in the form of a Zoom Memorial Service, curated mainly by my children. It was beautifully done. A dozen family members and friends spoke. In between, some of Sandy's favorite music played, accompanying a beautiful slideshow of photographs from her life. More than 400 people attended. The event was recorded, and a link to the recording is given in the Appendix. The spoken words were very moving and were the inspiration for this book. All of them are re-printed here, along with most of the photographs.

A fourth event was held at our home at 12 Orchard Street, Belmont, on the 11<sup>th</sup> of June, 2022: a celebration of life with music by Rani Arbo and Daisy Mayhem, and many friends from the local area dropping in to chat, see photographs of Sandy that my children had curated and that made their way into this book, and to share food.

Many people helped in the creation of this book, of whom I would like to call out my children Lakshmi, Anand, and Maya, and the family members and friends who contributed both written pieces and photos, and who are listed in the Appendix. Altogether, there are 127 of them, including Sandy herself, through some of the autobiographical journal entries she wrote over the years.

The book is organized into four parts.

Part 1, 'Her Whole Life', is a short account of her life by my children and by Sandy's sisters, Deyne, Wendy, and Vicki.

Part 2, 'Growing Up', covers the time from when Sandy was born on June 9<sup>th</sup>, 1945, to the day before her 23<sup>rd</sup> birthday in 1968.

Part 3, 'Marriage and Children', starts with my account of how Sandy and I met in 1963, and five years later were married on her 23<sup>rd</sup> birthday on the 9<sup>th</sup> of June, 1968. It ends roughly in the mid-1990s, when Sandy had turned 50, Lakshmi and Anand had finished college, and Maya was in her mid-teens.

Part 4, 'The Golden Years', covers the rest of her life, including most of the years at Penny Lane, our beloved home in Brewster, MA, and her magnificent creative work costuming and helping to produce children's musicals and community theater at the First Church in Belmont and various schools in the area.

On the cover of the book is a design created by my son Anand. It is meant to convey both the complexity and harmony at the intersection of Sandy's far-reaching and multifaceted values and interests.

The words in slightly larger letters are some of the aspects of humankind that interested her the most: religion, especially the history of any particular branch; history, or really historical anthropology, "across space and time", as she liked to put it, or the big picture view of how cultures have formed; family, in the form of ancestors, whose records she studied, and contemporaries and descendants, whom she loved; and culture, which fascinated her, leading her to study archaeology and social anthropology, not just in college, but throughout her life. (In her mind, it was a hard choice she made not to pursue an academic career in archaeology or anthropology, which would have required endless time away from home for field work but, instead, to devote herself to family and community.)

In smaller letters are the roles she played in her life, all with great enthusiasm. The only two meriting some explanation are Girl Scout and Crafter.

Sandy was an enthusiastic Girl Scout while in school, and the story is told in this book of how and why she appeared for her admissions interview at Radcliffe in her Girl Scout uniform. Later, as our children were growing up, she became a Girl Scout leader and then a docent at the Girl Scout Museum on Beaver Street in Waltham, MA.

"Crafter" refers to her uncanny ability to learn to do things with her hands, from making complex and historically accurate costumes, to crocheting and knitting shawls, to cleaning and fixing our cuckoo clock. I have seen her stare at a tangled skein of wool for a bit, figure it out, and then start pulling here and there. In minutes, the tangle would unravel, and she would be rolling it into a neat ball.

Despite all her intellectual and practical prowess, her legendary ability to read a book at high speed and then recall forever what she had read, her ability to see to the heart of a problem (like that skein of wool) and simplify it and offer advice, Sandy remained always unproud, rejecting glory and putting the well-being of others before her own. Sad as I am to have lost her, I am so glad to have had her in my life for almost 60 years.

To catch a glimpse of the great good fortune I have had in sharing my life with Sandy, please read on.

Ranganath Nayak  
Belmont, MA  
June 2023





# Part 1

---

Her Whole Life



# Her Whole Life

---

Anand, Lakshmi, and Maya Nayak

January 2021

Sandy, as she was known to all, was born in Media, Pennsylvania, on June 9, 1945, to Howard and Elizabeth (Betsy) Tompkins. She passed away on December 9, 2021, in Belmont, Massachusetts.

The eldest of four sisters, she enjoyed a vibrant childhood rich with family (her maternal grandmother was a constant presence), music (she played the cello in a string quartet with her sisters), education, and travel. Her parents' practice of hosting friends and strangers alike at their table would have a deep and lasting effect throughout Sandy's life.

Possessed of an innate intellectual capacity, a no-nonsense attitude, and curiosity tempered by core Quaker values of integrity, equality, simplicity, community, stewardship, pacifism, and truthfulness, Sandy grew to be a true student of the world. She attended her beloved Verde Valley School in Sedona, Arizona, for two years, enjoying many adventures, practical lessons, and interdisciplinary academics. After high school she went on to study anthropology and archaeology at Radcliffe/Harvard in Cambridge, Massachusetts, participating in archaeological digs in Wyoming and elsewhere in the western U.S. She graduated summa cum laude in 1967.

She was by now engaged to her Indian fiancé, Ranganath, whom she had met at an Israeli folk dance in Cambridge.

I went, opened the dance hall door, and felt shy and bewildered, never having asked anyone to dance with me, and surprised that what I saw was unlike any folk dance I had seen in India. Suddenly, a petite, barefoot young woman in a white dress came running up to me and said, "Would you like to dance?" I said I didn't know how to. She said, "I will show you," grabbed my hand, and led me onto the dance floor." (Ranganath Nayak)

Sandy's instinct for helping people by inviting them in and making them feel safe and comfortable was to become her hallmark.

She earned a Fulbright scholarship in order to go to India for a year to get to know the country and Ranganath's family while he stayed in the USA to complete his studies. She was assigned to teach English at Allahabad University in Uttar Pradesh. As fate would have it, the students kept striking against the English language that year. Sandy, as was typical of her, made the best of it, traveling with her Fulbright partner throughout India by third-class rail each time the students went on strike, experiencing and learning as much as she could. After returning to the U.S., she went on to earn an MA in social anthropology from Brandeis.

After living in Pune, India, for several years in the early 1970s, Sandy and Ranganath returned to the U.S. and settled in Belmont, Massachusetts. There they set about raising their three children—Lakshmi, Anand, and Maya—and bringing the seeds of hospitality, inclusivity, and openness from Sandy's childhood into full bloom. They ran an open house, acting as host-parents to a succession of international students, known as

the hostees, which would grow over the decades into an international network of friends close enough to be family. It was a warm and welcoming place for many.

It is rare to be in a house that belongs to people not immediately related to you, and be completely at home. To be at home to such an extent that even if you are visiting after a number of years, you know which drawer in the kitchen has the big pots, and where the tiny blue espresso cups that get pulled out only for big parties are stored. That wonderful sense of familiarity of sinking into a couch and knowing just how far down your body will go. Or what the evening meal is going to bring. Knowing too, that just like being in your own home, you can be your complete self—no veneer of cautious politeness, no need to be on best behavior. If you are feeling grumpy, it's OK. (Suchitra Shenoy)

Sandy was the seemingly tireless facilitator of what she would sometimes wryly call “the circus.” She welcomed new arrivals at the airport, bringing them instantly into the fold. She helped them find housing and furniture, supplied them with winter clothing, and provided transportation, food, conversation, care, and community to students, immigrants, and travelers from all over the world. Before long, the network included friends and relatives of the hostees, and eventually their partners and children.

Attracted by its music program, her children pulled Sandy into the Belmont Unitarian-Universalist congregation. Thereafter, for the next forty years, Sandy poured her time and talents into making meticulously researched, historically accurate costumes for the church's musical theater productions. She worked hand in hand with the music director as “backstage director” for the shows, teaching the children both how to move and hold themselves in a period-appropriate way and how to work together both on stage and off to make the productions hum. Her costuming talent and hard work led her to be involved in many theater programs at local schools. She firmly declined all suggestions to make money from her creativity, preferring instead to offer it as a community service.

A lifelong Girl Scout, Sandy led a close-knit troop of Senior Girl Scouts, co-led younger troops, and worked with the Girl Scout Museum at Cedar Hill, guiding visitors through Girl Scout history and teaching them about the wider world of Girl Scouts and Guides. She liked to teach outdoor skills too, like how to build a fire or construct a stretcher out of branches and bandanas that could safely carry a fallen comrade.

Throughout her life, Sandy remained close to her parents and sisters and was lovingly involved in caring for all of them. She maintained close ties with her Indian family and friends. She was a loving mother, a devoted wife, and a doting grandmother, affectionately known as Adi to her grandchildren. Her big brass cookie jar was almost always filled with her special recipe “Adi cookies,” and the sound of somebody trying to surreptitiously lift the bell-like lid was a constant.

In addition to her warm hospitality, Sandy is remembered for her love of children and helping them to learn and to grow, her generosity with her time, and her inexhaustible knowledge of history “across space and time” as she put it, and of world religions, both of which she taught in courses at the Unitarian church. If she was in the room, as many have said, you did not need Google or Wikipedia. Just “ask Sandy.”

One of her favorite ways of sharing knowledge and caring for people of all ages was through storytelling. Throughout her life and travels, she collected a vast store of personal experiences and stories to support her

insights into the commonalities and connections of human existence. Invariably, if someone at her table was grappling with an issue, no matter how big or small, she would have a personal story to tell of a similar struggle she had faced or witnessed. Her face would light up, and she would commence with an exclamatory “Well! Of course, there was the time . . .”

With seemingly effortless cheer, Sandy put herself at the service of all and rejoiced in the family and community she loved so dearly.

# Room, Ruana

---

Anand Nayak

December 2021

Keep a room in your house  
For sadness, keep a room  
For loss. There is space  
For all at this table

By no means let them rule  
This is your house, your guests  
Must respect your wishes  
And your boundaries

Be calm, shield your candle  
Stand tall in your mind  
Shawl around your shoulders  
Look your guests in the eye

Ask them questions, give  
Attention to their needs, listen  
And learn from their stories  
Tell them yours

The ones you've chosen, woven  
Together in colors that dress  
Your clear eyes, complexion  
Your silken tresses

All you have been given  
Your size, your wit  
That capacity for love  
Those limitations

You've struggled against  
And learned to manage  
The body that has borne you  
The home you've built

Of rooms full of stories  
People, laughter, lessons  
Loss and sadness  
Gratitude

And that inner sanctum  
With bell and incense  
Where a deity might feel  
Safe to enter

And grant you your wishes  
Of life, love, and happiness  
And receive the sacrifice  
Of all you have to give

# My Sister Sandy

Deyne Meadow, with Wendy Tompkins and Vicki Smith

Sandy was born in 1945. By the time she turned five, she had three little sisters.

By the time she was six, we moved from our tiny half-house by the railroad tracks, in Ridley Park, Pennsylvania, to a small bungalow a block away from the tracks, on the same block as our maternal grandparents.

We girls shared the upstairs, and Sandy had a little alcove off of the big room where we three younger girls slept.

We were a set. Dad said we were “batch processed,” and we were raised to be a team, looking after each other, with Sandy as our undisputed leader. We remained close all our lives.

Sandy was the big sister and took her responsibilities very seriously.



It was no surprise to us that Sandy did well at school. Of course she would! She was a natural scholar, inquisitive about her subjects, and always wanting to learn more. Sometimes she knew more than the teachers expected her to!

When Sandy was entering the seventh grade, we moved to Swarthmore, Pennsylvania. We already knew a number of kids there, as we had been attending Swarthmore Quaker Meeting from the beginning.

Sandy thrived at Swarthmore, joining a Girl Scout troop that stayed close throughout high school, even after we moved away.

Our parents signed our family up as a United Nations host family, and we visited back and forth with a family from India, who were living in New York City. This may have started Sandy's fascination with India.

Her fascination with world religions also started to show. Her ninth-grade class was responsible for opening the weekly school assembly with a reading from Scripture. When it was her turn, she chose a selection from the Bhagavad Gita, knowing that this was not what was expected, but willing to risk that. Her fellow students appreciated it. She faced some push-back from the authorities, but she had stayed within the letter of the rule.

Sandy also started making costumes for dolls, correct in historical and ethnic detail.



*Two dolls that Sandy costumed, in high school*

In 1960 we moved to Albuquerque, New Mexico. This was a different world! Academically bored, Sandy dived into learning about the cultures. She also made it into the New Mexico Youth Symphony. None of us would ever forget the 100+ repetitive measures of the cello part in the *Carmina Burana*!

After one year, Mom's illness prompted Dad to move the family to Bethesda, MD, so that Mom could be treated at NIH. He was a computer scientist, and easily landed a job there. They took the two younger girls, while Sandy and I were enrolled at Verde Valley School in Arizona. This was a progressive boarding school with an international focus, and Sandy loved it. Academically challenged, she was in her element. The school took us to the Navajo Reservation, where Sandy stayed with a Navajo family for a week and learned to herd sheep, card wool, and weave rugs. They took the students to Mexico, staying with families to learn the language and observe the cultural differences. We camped at the Grand Canyon, and we studied anthropology. It opened our eyes to a broader worldview.

Between her junior and senior years of boarding school, Sandy's Girl Scout troop, from Swarthmore, Pennsylvania, took their long-planned trip to Europe. They returned just in time for Sandy to have her application interview for Radcliffe College (now part of Harvard). We all drove up from Maryland, picked up Sandy at the airport in New York City, and went right up to Cambridge. Sandy had arrived, but her luggage had not, so she went to her interview in her well-worn Girl Scout uniform. The admissions officer was a little surprised but delighted, and the interview was a success. Sandy went to Radcliffe, where our mother had gone a generation before.

Sandy spent college summers on archaeological digs, in Wyoming and New Mexico. Wendy and Vicki joined her on some of these. We all tried to be home for Christmas, and bits of summers and visited each other as often as possible through the years.

Sandy married Ranganath, had Lakshmi, and moved to India. We, sisters, visited there, and Sandy helped facilitate the adoption of my first child, from an orphanage there in Pune.

Sandy and Ranganath moved back to the U.S. in 1976, and the house in Belmont soon became a hub. Over the years, we raised our children and formed new family traditions. Sandy and I alternated hosting Thanksgiving and Christmas celebrations at our houses, often with upwards of forty people from many faiths, countries, and backgrounds.

And as the grandchildren started to arrive, she rejoiced and welcomed each new addition to the greater family. To the grandchildren, all of them, Sandy and Ranganath were Adi and Ajja, beloved by all.

Wherever our paths led us, however individual we all were, we were still the four sisters: a unit, a team.

We were the four sisters.

Now we are three, here, but still four in our hearts and minds.

So much of what we are came from being Sandy's sisters.

# The Four Sisters, over the years



*Season's Greetings!*

*for Howard, Betsy,  
Sandra, Deyne, Wendy, and  
Linden Victoria Tompkins  
(born Nov. 30, 1949; wt. 6 lb, 5  $\frac{1}{4}$  oz)*

*"NOW WE ARE SIX" ...A.A. MILNE*



Season's Greetings, Christmas, 1951,  
from the Tompkins; Howard, Betsy,  
Vicki, Sandy, Deyne, & Wendy







*Brooklyn, New York, late 1950s: Mommy (Betsy), Sandy, Grandma T, Aunt May  
Wendy, Vicki, Daddy (Howard), Deyne, Uncle Bill  
(Aunt May and Uncle Bill were Grandma T's siblings.)*















# Part 2

---

## Growing Up



# Fond Memories of Sandra Tompkins Nayak by Her Uncle Mac

---

Malcolm Cross

“Lives of great men (and women) all remind us we can make our lives sublime and, departing, leave behind us footprints on the sands of time.” Sandy left many footprints on the sands of time. Many students from India and other parts of the world came to live at Sandy’s home in Boston, where they pursued higher education.

When my grandson, Randy, was looking for a college, we sent him to Boston to live at Sandy’s home. He stayed several years. He completed his undergraduate degree and left Boston to earn his PhD in psychology. He is currently working for NASA in Houston, Texas. I believe that the loving care and guidance he received during his time with Sandy played a major role in his success.

When my mother was diagnosed with terminal cancer, she was living alone in Philadelphia. It was soon obvious that she would have to have constant care. No one in the immediate family was in a position to take care of her. Sandy volunteered to have her come to her home in Boston so that my mother could spend her final days with loving family members.

Sandy was always a wonderful hostess. She always made her house guests feel welcome. I always enjoyed my annual visit with Sandy and her family.

I have many fond memories of my times with Sandy. One of my favorite times was when my mother and father and I took a very bright, very grown-up little girl named Sandy on a long sightseeing trip from Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, to the south end of Florida and back. She was a joy to have as a travel companion. She was excited to see so many new things. She never gave us a bit of trouble. Like any child, she kept asking, “Are we there yet?” My mother told her she would be there only after jumping over a log. On the last day of our journey, we stopped at a restaurant. In the parking lot, there were wooden logs being used as parking blocks. We got out, went to one, and she jumped over it. Oh joy! We were in Florida!



*Four-year-old Sandy with her Uncle Mac and Nana in Florida, 1949*

After we got home, a friend of my mother was astounded that we took a four-year-old child on such a long trip. She obviously had never met Sandy.

Sandy is no longer with us, but she will remain in the hearts and minds of the many people who loved her.

**Uncle Mac passed away on December 15, 2022. We loved him dearly and miss his gentle, curious, loving, funny, and delightful presence.**



*Sandy is a bridesmaid at Uncle Mac's wedding, wearing a dress made by the bride.*

*Back row: Albert, Edith, Mac, Roseann, Betsy*

*Front row: Vicki, Wendy, Sandy, Deyne*



*Visiting Uncle Mac in Chattanooga, Tennessee, 2003*



*Sharon, Randy, Sandy, and Uncle Mac, Chattanooga, 2003*



*Sandy, Jack, and Uncle Mac in Belmont, reading Ten Little Dinosaurs*



*Randy, Sandy, and Uncle Mac on the dock at Penny Lane, Brewster, Cape Cod*

# Drama While Camping

---

Sandy Nayak

2021

My father was a city boy, born and raised in Brooklyn, New York. In college at Swarthmore, he learned about camping, and when I was ten, he decided that the whole family should learn how to go camping. He bought a canvas tent big enough for all six of us—two parents and four little girls, aged ten, eight, six, and five. He bought a little propane camp stove and a lantern, and sleeping bags for everyone. We were equipped!

Then we planned a trip. Living near Philadelphia, we planned a trip to Niagara Falls, where we would stay in a motel, and then cross into Canada and camp for three days at Presqu'île Provincial Park on the northern shore of Lake Ontario, before crossing back into the USA at the eastern end of the lake. It was 1955 so crossing the border was easy, but credit cards were rare and were only good for the specific companies that issued them.

We followed our plan. Niagara was impressive but looked just like all the pictures. We arrived at Presqu'île late in the afternoon. We very efficiently set up the big tent and a camp kitchen, and had dinner. The sky looked heavy with rain, so Daddy trenched the tent according to the directions and checked all the supporting guy ropes, to the gentle teasing of the big bluff man from Quebec who had set up camp next to us. We all settled down to sleep. It started to rain and the wind came up.

Then a couple of young men arrived and started to ineptly and audibly set up a tent on our other side. We four little girls woke up and started asking questions. Daddy reluctantly heaved himself out into the wind, as did our Québécois neighbor. The newcomers finally got settled, and Daddy came back into the tent. Suddenly there was a yell from the man from Quebec, followed by a stream of the most amazing French. It turned out that when he left his tent, he had forgotten to secure the flap, and in his absence, a raccoon had moved into his warm sleeping bag!

Daddy refused to translate the French.

On the last day, we left after breakfast and stopped in the little town of Gananoque to do some greatly anticipated shopping. I bought a red Hudson's Bay point blanket, which I then used on my bed until I graduated from college. We got Mommy a Wedgewood teacup. We all got ice cream. We successfully crossed the border, and after a little while, Daddy pulled into a gas station. Then we discovered that everyone had spent all their cash, and neither parent had a gas credit card. We searched our pockets and the car floor for spare change. Daddy talked the gas station into cashing a check for five dollars because they said he looked and talked like a minister. Combining all of that, we could buy enough gas to get us all the way to Albany, where Daddy had a credit card that would be honored at the Sheraton Ten Eyck Hotel, though we would not normally have even dreamed of staying at such a posh place. But there was no money for any food.

After nine that night, one tired and very hungry family straggled into the hotel and asked for dinner. They put us in the bar. The water glasses were made of heavy ruby-red glass, and when the first appetizer came, my sister Deyne used the lemon slices to make lemonade in her water glass. An amused hovering waiter brought her a whole plate of lemon slices and soon all four little girls were happily making lemonade in those gorgeous red glasses. Of course we then had more food and showers and all that, but my dominant memories of that trip, beyond my precious blanket, are lemonade in ruby-red glasses, and untranslated Québécois French.

Sandy with her Daddy (Howard Tompkins)

---



# I Carry Her in my Heart

---

Wendy Tompkins

All through our childhoods, Sandy was unquestionably the one we looked up to, but I don't ever remember it as anything but normal and natural.

There were many different ways we all interacted with each other.

Some of my favorites with Sandy were around our family car trips when she and I were the team, with Daddy, that loaded and unloaded the car (including camping equipment carefully tied down on the roof) and then set up camp (large canvas umbrella tent, with wooden poles) when we arrived at the campground. While we were busy tending to that, Deyne and Vicki were helping Mummy set up the cooking area and prepare for the first meal. It was a pretty good system, it seemed to me.

Another trip-related sharing she and I ended up with was that we both took it upon ourselves to keep an eye on Daddy when he was night-driving on any of our trips (so that he'd stay awake enough). This I didn't realize until years later, when she and I would share stories of our memories together at her kitchen table, often just the two of us having a visit over a cup of tea.

She was often in the front seat, between Mum and Dad, while the other three of us were in the back of the station wagon, with the seats folded down so we could sit up cross-legged to play games and look outside, or lie down to sleep or rest, or read. I favored the spot right behind the driver.

During our teenage and college years (the 1960s and early '70s), I don't remember feeling very close with Sandy. She was away at boarding school and college, and I, in due course, at college.

But that began to change when our Nana sent me over to India on behalf of the family to help give Sandy support after she lost the twins and was struggling both health-wise and emotionally. That was the first time I think we were together where I was the caregiver and she was the one in need. It was a bonding experience and a turning point.

Over the following many decades, as we welcomed and raised the next generation, she and I saw each other more and more as equals in a way: sisters, but not as older and younger sisters. We helped each other out back and forth. So many memories of this and of shared interest in what each other was dealing with.

And during many of my years as a primary classroom teacher, Sandy and I spent quite a lot of time both discussing educational practices, the issues I was dealing with in my students (and class parents), and especially with any costuming needs for my classroom.

Besides the ever-popular "dramatic play" area in a kindergarten room, there were two bigger drama projects in the school year. One was our Medieval Market Square reenactment, which took place after several weeks of studying about medieval times through both nonfiction books and folk and fairy tales, and many hands-on projects. The other was the play that my class put on every spring for the whole school, a dramatic rendering

of a good story we'd read together as a class. Sandy was invaluable at helping me suitably clothe all the kids, and plan and collect materials for the sets, and she seemed to take great pleasure and pride in what we created.

These are just a few of the many memories I treasure about Sandy. She was a wonderful, interesting, enjoyable, and trustworthy sister. Our love and respect deepened and grew with the years.

And I carry her with me always in my heart.

# Bananas!

---

Vicki Smith

I grew up in awe of Sandy, my oldest sister. But in spite of being slightly intimidated by her (and she could be intimidating, believe me!), we had so many fun memories over the years, as our parents made it a priority to provide us with adventures and experiences to remember.

One very memorable trip involved traveling to Sedona, Arizona. (I honestly do not recall if we were going to Verde Valley School for Sandy and Deyne's interviews, or whether they were already students there and we were picking them up or dropping them off. But no matter.) We were driving up from Flagstaff on a two-lane road up a mountain when a snow squall hit. Snow, ice, white-out conditions, and no room to pull off to the side and wait it out, so what could Daddy do but keep driving? But the windshield wipers started to jam up with ice, making it almost impossible to see in front of us. What to do?

We were all scrambling to find something inside the car that could be used to push the ice off of the wipers and get them working again but were coming up empty. Then Sandy produced a banana from our food box, and said we might as well try it! So with the rest of us laughing hysterically, Sandy opened the passenger-side front-seat window and leaned out in the swirling snow. And as Daddy kept driving (albeit slowly), Sandy pushed and nudged and dug at the accumulating ice, keeping on doing it even as she got colder and colder and wetter and wetter, and as the banana got softer and mushier. But she got the wipers working again! And she kept at it until we were safely past the snow squall.

This one example of Sandy finding a solution to a dilemma exemplifies what she was like as a sister. She focused on the job at hand and just got it done, even if through some rather unusual methods! Which is perhaps why we memorialized this particular adventure in one of many parody songs we all wrote over the years. (Sandy was very good at writing parodies, like "The Hell Gap Talking Blues . . .") In this instance, the chorus went something like "But no matter where you are, you put bananas on the windshield in the car." Just thinking about it brings a smile to my face. Thank you, Sandy, for so many wonderful memories, and so many smiles!

Wendy, Vicki, and Sandy

---



# Drama in the Emergency Room

---

Sandy Nayak

2021

My mother used to say that going to the local hospital emergency room four times while raising four daughters was not unreasonable, except that they were all for the same daughter. My youngest sister was always trying to keep up with all the older kids and consequently injured herself more often. Fortunately it was a good small-town hospital, quite adequate for normal emergencies, and not far from our house.

The most memorable accident for the rest of us was one August when we had all gone to visit family friends in Swarthmore, about two miles from home. Vicki was about five, which meant that the rest of us were six, eight, and ten, and our host's kids were ten and twelve. It was a lovely summer picnic lunch, including a huge bowl of fresh-cut peaches that had been soaked in Rhine wine. After lunch, all the kids were playing on the front porch while the grown-ups cleared up. While helping to clear up, Daddy spilled the leftover peach juice all down his pants, so our host loaned him a pair of Bermuda shorts, which was however several sizes too big. Daddy had to gather it in on his belt to keep it from falling off.

Then Vicki fell off the porch and hit her forehead on one of the ornamental bricks that edged the front walk. Forehead wounds are spectacularly bloody. Mommy scooped her up, Daddy hustled them into the car and told me to call Nana to come and fetch us. So soon my grandmother showed up and took us to her house, which was near the hospital.

Meanwhile, my parents got to the emergency room, and Mommy was holding Vicki's head while the doctor stitched her wounded forehead: thirteen stitches before he was through. Suddenly a nurse slid her hands around Mommy's and said, "I'll take care of your daughter. Your husband needs you." She turned around and found him crumpling to the floor in a faint. The sight of blood always did bother him. The only place to put him was on a gurney, and the only place to put that was in the hall just outside the door, which was also the main entrance. And visiting hours were just beginning.

Back at Nana's, I could hear her beginning to get phone calls from her friends. "Edith, is that your son-in-law out cold on a gurney in the hospital, wearing very strange pants and smelling of wine?"

He never lived that one down. A couple of years later, he inherited some money and happily moved us all to Swarthmore, close enough to see a lot of Nana and Grandpop but comfortably away from all her chatting friends.

# A Few Memories of Sandy, from her little sister

Deyne Meadow

Sandy was so much a part of my life while growing up that we didn't even think about it. It just was that way. She was two years older than me, and the leader of our band of four.

We never had cats or dogs, but Sandy had a tiny turtle named Shemhe. At least that is what I remember it as. She explained that it was difficult to know whether it was a he or a she, so she combined those terms for the name. Always logical.

Sandy hated the color pink. One summer, for our town's Fourth of July parade, she put her beloved Lambie in her tricycle basket and made a placard that said,

Mary had a little lamb,  
Its fleece was black as ink.  
It may not be red, white & blue  
But at least it's not all pink!



But this was during the early '60s, and townspeople thought she was being patriotically anticommunist! Daddy was not pleased when he figured out why so many were complimenting Sandy on her ensemble.

Another memory is of the camping trips. We had a large, heavy canvas tent that took two or three people to put up. Sandy and Wendy worked with Daddy to put the tent up, while Vicki and I would help Mom get the cooking under control. Usually we used our little Colman stove, but when it was possible, we would also have a campfire. We seemed to have a lot of rainy camping trips, so fires were not always possible, but Sandy

became adept at building and starting campfires, well surrounded by rocks, for safety. She was a well-trained Girl Scout.

Girl Scouting played a big role in Sandy's life. Even after we moved away from Swarthmore, she kept in contact with the Swarthmore troop she had belonged to. They all earned money, and then, between their eleventh and twelfth grade school years, they took a trip to Europe. Sandy came back with many tales and a love for travel that lasted a lifetime.

Reading was also a big part of Sandy's life. I often picture her with a book, as she usually had one with her. She learned early, mostly on her own, and could read something and remember it the first time. Her early interest in history led her to read, and question, what she read.

Verde Valley was a perfect school for Sandy. Nestled into a red rock valley near Sedona, Arizona, it encouraged thinking outside the box. Kids from all over were there, and the academics were challenging. Sandy's love for anthropology came from the anthropology courses that we all took at VVS. Sandy played cello in the school orchestra, rode horses for her sport, and blossomed academically. She wore her graduation ring for years, until in later years, it became too tight.

Sandy could be calm, centered, and quiet, but never boring. If you needed to talk with someone, she was there. I miss her dearly and often find myself wishing I could ask Sandy a question, whether about religious history, family history, or just daily issues, not to mention sewing solutions! She always had a way to try and solve something involving sewing or crocheting.

She claimed to not be much of a cook, but she was a wonderful cook and baker. We shared a love of dark chocolate and enjoyed making things with chocolate. Our mother had been a great cake baker, and our Nana made wonderful pies, so we had had good examples all through childhood. Sandy's zucchini chocolate cake and her cowboy cookies were enjoyed by all the family. And then there was spinach soup and crispy Konkani stir-fried okra and bread pudding and apple pie . . .

The memories of Sandy, and there are many, will be with me forever.

## Deyne and Sandy

---



*Seeing Deyne off to the University of Hawaii, 1966  
Nana (Edith), Mommy (Betsy), Deyne, Sandy*



*Deyne and Sandy in Poona, 1974 or 1975*



*Celebrating midsummer at Cedarholm—Mommy (Betsy), Sandy, Deyne*



*Sandy and Deyne at Penny Lane, Cape Cod*



*Deyne and Sandy at Cedarholm, Canton*

# Memories of School

---

Sandy Nayak

2021

In 1955 when I went to kindergarten, my friend Suzie told me that nobody could read until the beginning of first grade, and I believed her. Mommy was upset because she thought I should be reading out loud to my three little sisters.

On the first day of first grade, I discovered that I could read, but in school we were still only doing the alphabet. When we all colored Pilgrim children for Thanksgiving, we were told to put our initials on the back. Steve Tani and I had the same initials, so we told our teacher that we should put our names, to avoid confusion. She said absolutely not—we were too young to be writing our names. Sure enough, our neatly colored Pilgrim children were mixed up when they were returned.

The Ridley Park Public Elementary School was in a very old building on Tome Street. My mother and both of her brothers and her parents and their siblings had all gone to school in that building. The desks had wrought-iron sides and were fastened to the floor in straight rows. The wooden desktops had holes to hold ink bottles and slots to keep pencils from rolling off. In the third grade, we had lessons in learning how to use pens dipped in ink, taught by the principal herself. Penmanship was a very important subject.

There were two elementary schools in Ridley Park then, on opposite sides of Tome Street, about three blocks apart. Our school was public. The other was parochial, run by the Catholic Church. Their teachers were nuns in black habits. The parochial kids all wore uniforms. Every once in a while, a Catholic family would transfer their kids to the public school, and those kids would tell lurid stories of how the nuns beat children with rulers. Uniformed children and un-uniformed children kept to their own sides of Tome Street.

Most non-Catholics were either Baptist or Presbyterian. Our Nana was staunchly Baptist, but my mother and both her brothers had left the Baptists in their early teens. Nana said they had to go to church, but that they could choose. The boys joined their Presbyterian friends, but Mommy chose Quaker Meeting in Swarthmore, more formally known as the Religious Society of Friends. She met Daddy at a party there, when he was a student at Swarthmore College.

My second-grade teacher was Miss Carter, young and fresh out of teacher's college with lots of enthusiasm and new ideas. On Halloween she came to school as a "farmer girl" wearing blue jeans, which we thought was wonderful and very daring. In January we spent a lot of time making Valentine's to stock an in-class store, and then in February we ran the store buying and selling valentines with paper money and making change. All the valentines we gave to each other had to come from the class store.

In other ways, she was very inexperienced. She told us that in subtraction you always had to take the smaller number away from the larger number. I said no, you could take the larger one away from the smaller one and get a negative number for an answer, like on a thermometer when it was three degrees outside, if it fell five degrees, the answer was minus two. She said I was wrong. I said my father taught me. She said my father was

wrong! So at recess, I walked home and told my mother that my teacher said my father lied so I was finished with school. She said I needed to discuss that with him when he got home.

He said my math was right, but I shouldn't have continued arguing like that with a teacher in front of the whole class. So the next morning, he went with me to see the principal before school. She called in the teacher, who said that negative numbers were not age-appropriate for second grade. The principal explained that it might be age-inappropriate for her to teach it, but it was fine for me to know it. So we apologized all around, and I was more careful with teachers after that.

The two third-grade classrooms were separated by a heavy wooden folding door, and upstairs, the two fourth-grade classrooms were the same. The folding doors could be opened for combined classes like music. Every morning in each classroom, we saluted the American flag and said the Lord's Prayer. Some of the songs we sang were religious, like "The Battle Hymn of the Republic," which was the favorite song of the third-grade teacher who played the piano:

Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord  
He is trampling out the vintage where the grapes of wrath are stored  
He hath loosed the fearful lightning of his terrible swift sword  
His truth is marching on!

The words "under God" were inserted into the pledge when I was in the fourth grade, and many of us quietly refused to say it. On many occasions, ten verses of Scripture were read, usually from the Old Testament.

In the fourth grade we learned square dancing, which I loved. My favorite partner was a boy named Jimmy Peoples. We both got quite good at it, and were in demonstration squares on a couple of occasions.

Steve Tani and I were friendly throughout elementary school. His little sister Chris was best friends with my sister Vicki, and our mothers were friends. Steve and I generally finished our work better and more quickly than everyone else. We were so bored in the fourth grade that the teacher gave us blackboards to paint on. Steve had the front blackboard, where he researched and painted a mural of the three ships of Columbus. I had the small boards on the folding doors at the back, where I painted a number of carefully correct butterflies from the encyclopedia. I learned to read books under the edge of my desk when I was bored.

In sixth grade, our teacher left to have a baby, so we had a long-term substitute. She was supposed to teach us about geology and dinosaurs, but she taught us that God created the world in six days, starting October 23 in 4004 BC, but He never wasted anything, so He used material from previous creations, which was why we could find rocks that were millions of years old and dinosaur fossils and fossilized seashells on mountaintops like our textbook said. Steve Tani and I went to the town library and read about Darwin, which made a lot more sense.

I loved our little town library. I could walk there after school and do my homework, and read without interruption. One day, at the end of the afternoon, I took out three books—*Ivanhoe* and two *Bobbsey Twins*. The librarian said, "That's nice, dear, a book for your mother and two for your sisters. What about you?" I said that no, all three were for me, and I had almost finished *Ivanhoe* there in the library, and the *Bobbsey*

Twins books were fun. She was appalled that anyone could read books at such wildly different levels at the same time.

After my sixth grade, my family moved to the college town of Swarthmore, made possible by an inheritance to Daddy from his Aunt Juliet. It was only two miles away, but it felt like a different planet. It was a college town with a much better school system. I had to work a bit to catch up, which was very good for me. Apparently the Tanis moved away too, probably for the same reason. According to Google, they moved to Illinois, and Steve grew up to be an IT specialist in California. His baby brother Danny became an astronaut. I also learned from Google that the family had been in an internment camp for Japanese Americans during World War II when Steve was born, which I never knew.

We had three wonderful years in Swarthmore. Our house was right next to the college campus, and close to the Friends' meetinghouse. We were all very active in the Meeting.

I was a very active Girl Scout. My troop decided in the seventh grade to go to Europe in the summer after eleventh grade. So we all earned money and saved it, and all fifteen of us went to Europe as planned, four years later, even though I had moved away and had to come back for it.

*Note: Sandy told wonderful stories of her final two years of high school at Verde Valley in Arizona; we did not find written memories.*

# Sandy and I were always a Unit

---

Dorothy Gatewood Gelb

My memories range from sharing the dinner table with the entire family, often including a musical ensemble with the family strings, to a trip to the attic where the standard-gauge trains were set up.

Other memories include campfires on scout camping trips where Marty Moscrip, Sandy, and I were always a unit. Sandy always handled the fire building. Sunset Hill was usually the site where we camped, although we went to Cape May, to the Delmont Boy Scout Camp, Tyler Arboretum, and other wonderful camping areas, with Mrs. Morrison and Mrs. Moscrip reading *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe* to us around the fire at night.

The Cabin at Sunset Hill was the site of our decision to go to Europe. We stayed up until we had sketched out an itinerary with Barbara Hall, our Swarthmore College student assistant leader who had made the trip with her own Baltimore troop. Mrs. Gatewood wanted us to know what we were working toward and what it would mean collectively and individually to achieve the objective. Sandy and Marty and I were a trio during the trip.

Mom and Dad Tompkins were like a second set of parents, and Nana was a part of so many of our outings. I was always glad when she went along.

By the way, when Sandy and Nani put the *Nani Stories* in print, I read it in one sitting and reread it often. It is such a wonderful compilation of Betsy Cross's life and all those wonderful people who were part of the fabric of her being. So you know they are also the fabric of Sandy's being and mine. I do love *all* of you so much and feel blessed to be continuing in the celebration of life as it unfolds ahead of us.

Being in your wedding is another wonderful memory. I still have my beautiful turquoise-with-gold-threads sari I wore, and I treasure the memories of the Quaker Meeting wedding.

Then there are the wonderful memories of your home there in Massachusetts. We went to visit Mom and Dad Tompkins every time we were close.

Marv and I enjoyed our connection last summer and will continue to hope for opportunities to celebrate life with each and all of you.



*Dorothy Gatewood, summer 1968, at Sandy's wedding*



*Dorothy and Marv Gelb, summer 2022*

## The Girl Scout Trip, Summer 1962

---



**Swarthmore, PA, Friday, June 22, 1962**

### **Ready to Sail**

Girl Scout Troop 331's initiative pays off! Pictured on board the SS *United States* on sailing day (June 14) are, *L. to R., Front Row:* Sandy Tompkins, Jane Moore, Dorothy Gatewood, Linda Hunt, Leslie Walmsley, Sandy Barford, Mrs. Lee C. Gatewood (Leader); *Back Row:* Cathy Hoffman, Betsy Netzel, Peggy Woerner, Betsy Ward, Helen Morrison, Gail Donovan, Barbara Hayes, Judy Tyson. Not pictured: Martha Moscrip, Barbara Hall (Leader), and Mrs. J. B. M. Tyson (Leader). The group left the Borough Parking lot at 6:30 a.m., seen off by a large group of relatives, friends, and the Rev. Dr. D. Evor Roberts, pastor of the troop's sponsoring church. Word was received Wednesday of their landing at Southampton, to begin their eight-week European Tour.



*Seeing Sandy off to Europe for her Girl Scout trip, summer 1962  
Vicki, Deyne, Betsy, Wendy, Sandy (in uniform)*

**SCOUTS CROSS ENGLISH CHANNEL.**

**Editor's Note:**  
The article below is the second report received from Senior Girl Scout Troop 331, traveling abroad this summer. . . . .

After London, Edinburgh was the next stop for our troop. We stayed at a hostel on the edge of a lovely park with a view of Edinburgh Castle, about a mile away. The girls thoroughly enjoyed meeting young people from Denmark, Scotland, Norway, Canada and France at the hostel. A day was given to shopping in the marvelous Tartan shops of Edinburgh. Again it was difficult for all to leave such a delightful and friendly city as Edinburgh.

The girls have been impressed with the cleanliness of the cities in England and Scotland and the care given to provide beautiful flowers on and around the buildings.

A day was spent on a tour of the Trossachs. A highlight of the day was a boat trip on Loch Katrine after a picnic lunch on the hillside overlooking the loch. Our next stop was at the very beautiful town of Windermere. We were left at Troutbeck Bridge bus stop to begin our three-quarter mile hike (all uphill) with knapsacks and mitreases to our hostel. We decided when we arrived, as we looked out of our windows at Lake Windermere, that the effort was worth it. Some of the troop members and leaders at the time

invention of a neighbour farm hiked to one of the highest points at Windermere after dinner to enjoy the view and the quiet of the countryside.

We left Windermere Friday morning for Stratford-on-Avon. Saturday we visited Shakespeare's birthplace and walked to the village of Shottery to see Anne Hathaway's cottage.

In the evening we saw a performance of "MacBeth" at the Shakespeare Memorial Theater, the morning when we were "queued up" for theater tickets. Dr. and Mrs. (Edward A.) Fehnel with daughter Lynn and son Gary recognized us and were delighted to see someone from "home." They will be returning to Swarthmore in late August.

Sunday we went on to Oxford to tour the university and then on to Canterbury for a day of sight seeing before heading for Dover where we are now waiting for the midnight boat to take us across the Channel and then on to Paris by train in the morning.

**July 13, 1962**

**Scouts Cross English Channel**

Editor's Note:

The article below is the second report received from Senior Girl Scout Troop 331, traveling abroad this summer.

\* \* \* \* \*

After London, Edinburgh was the next stop for our troop. We stayed at a hostel on the edge of a lovely park with a view of Edinburgh Castle, about a mile away. The girls thoroughly enjoyed meeting young people from Denmark, Scotland, Norway, Canada, and France at the hostel. A day was given to shopping in the marvelous tartan shops of Edinburgh.

The girls have been impressed with the cleanliness of the cities in England and Scotland and the care given to provide beautiful flowers on and around the buildings.

A day was spent on a tour of the Trossachs. A highlight of the day was a boat trip on Loch Katrine after a picnic lunch on the hillside overlooking the loch. Our next stop was the very beautiful town of Windermere. We were left at Troutneck Bridge bus stop to begin our three-quarter-mile hike (all uphill) with knapsacks and suitcases to our hostel. We decided when we arrived, as we looked out of our windows at Lake Windermere, that the effort was worth it. Some of the troop members, and leaders, at the recommendation of a neighbor farmer, hiked to one of the highest points at Windermere after dinner to enjoy the view and the quiet of the countryside.

We left Windermere Friday morning for Stratford-on-Avon. Saturday we visited Shakespeare's birthplace and walked to the village of Shottery to see Anne Hathaway's cottage.

In the evening we saw a performance of *MacBeth* at the Shakespeare Memorial Theater. In the morning when we were queuing up for theater tickets, Dr. and Mrs. (Edward A.) Fehnel with daughter Lynn and son Gary recognized us and were delighted to see someone from home. They will return to Swarthmore in late August.

Sunday we went on to Oxford to tour the university and then on to Canterbury for a day of sightseeing before heading for Dover, where we are now waiting for the midnight boat to take us across the Channel and then on to Paris by train in the morning.

# The Infamous Radcliffe Interview

---

Vicki Smith

Sandy had gone to Europe for eight weeks the summer after her junior year of high school, along with other members of her Girl Scout troop from Swarthmore, Pennsylvania. We had moved to New Mexico a couple of years before, but Sandy was very much one of them, so she continued to fundraise on her own and went along with the troop for their big trip. For eight weeks, they crisscrossed Europe using Europass train passes, living on chocolate, bread, and cheese, and having a fabulous time. By the end of the trip, her badge sash was a welter of friendship pins from Girl Guides all over Europe, and her uniforms were, shall we say, a bit more snug than they had been at the beginning of the trip.

Well, Sandy's Radcliffe interview was scheduled for the morning after she arrived back in the U.S. The entire family went to NY, to what was then Idlewild Airport (now JFK) to pick Sandy up, and then we headed off to Boston. Her plane was late, and we were traveling much later than we had expected to, so we stopped off somewhere in Rhode Island to get a quick dinner. I do not remember whether it was at dinner or in the car that Sandy casually asked Nani what dress she had packed for Sandy to wear to her interview first thing the next morning. Dead silence . . . Oops! She had forgotten to pack a dress! Uh-oh . . . Sandy was *not* amused.

So the next morning, Sandy had to go to her interview in her extra Girl Scout uniform, clean but wrinkled from being pulled out of her packed duffle bag and, as I said, looking a bit snug. She was red as a beet. The interviewer looked up when she came into her office and said, "Why . . . are you wearing . . . *that*?" And Sandy said, "Well, you see . . ." and launched into the story. Being the storyteller that she was, Sandy made it into a great tale. The interviewer was very amused, and they ended up having a wonderful talk. Sandy, being an excellent candidate overall, was accepted! She headed off to Cambridge the following fall where, as we all know, she majored in archaeology, had many adventures, and very importantly, met Ranganath. And the rest is history.

*Postscript:* Four years later, when I was applying, by chance I had the same interviewer, so I told her that she had interviewed my sister four years before. She somewhat skeptically said she was sure she would not remember, as she interviewed so many young women each year, so I said, "She was the one with the Girl Scout uniform." The interviewer smiled broadly and said, "Oh, I will *never* forget that interview! She was terrific!" So, Sandy, once again in your own inimitable way, you worked with what you had and turned it into a triumph. The many memories of Sandy's ability to make things work, even if unconventionally, will continue to bubble up and warm our hearts for years to come.

# My Older Cousin

Dr. Malcolm L. Cross

I seem to have known Sandy my entire life. Sandy and I were cousins—her mother, my Aunt Betsy, was my father’s younger sister. Among my earliest and most pleasant memories are those of annual family reunions in the summer on Long Beach Island, New Jersey, and in Ridley Park, Pennsylvania, where our grandparents lived and where I first got to know Sandy, her parents, and her sisters.

Sandy was five years older than me and always seemed to me more like an adult than a child. She was preternaturally mature, rational, compassionate, and insightful beyond her years. Those qualities seemed to me, if anything, to have been strengthened by the time I moved to Boston in 1980 to teach at Northeastern University.

I was most grateful to her for including me in family get-togethers—Thanksgiving dinners and other family affairs—and also for hosting my mother, Dr. Elizabeth Sheffield Cross, when she visited. Sandy was especially effective in helping my mother, who had terminal pancreatic cancer when she last visited, tour Boston and visit Wellesley College, where my mother had gone to college. My mother frequently expressed to me her gratitude for Sandy’s kindness, help, and hospitality.

If we are diminished by her loss, we were enriched by her life and can be inspired by her example.



*Jersey Shore summer 1962 (while Sandy is in Europe with her Girl Scout troop):  
Jack, Vicki, Betsy, Edith (Nana), Bruce, Beth, Heather, Wendy  
Malcolm, Deyne, Doug, Uncle Frank*

# Who will you be? What will your world be like?

---

Sandy Nayak

from her journal, senior year of high school

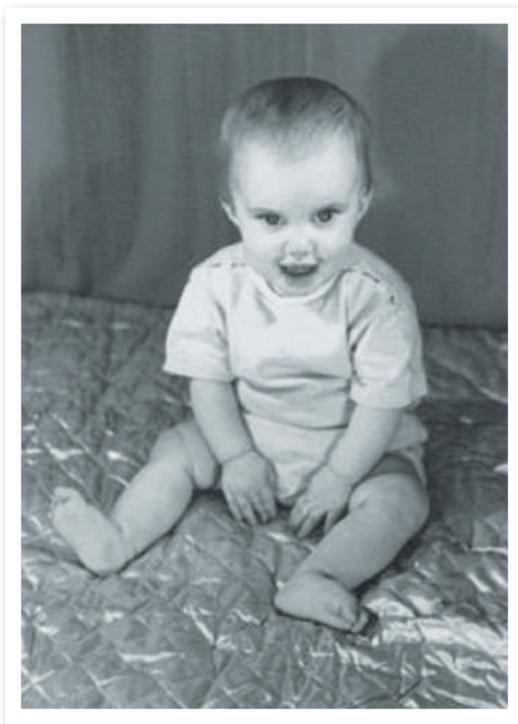
November 3, 1962

There is a truce on the international front, and the UN has sent an inspection team to Cuba. They are dismantling bases there. I hope all goes well . . . I wonder who you are, you who are reading this, my Journal. Are you me—days, weeks, perhaps many years older? Are you my child, my son, or my daughter, reading what your Mommy wrote, when she was seventeen, in the year 1962, before you were born? Or perhaps you are my children's children, if I may be so vain as to think this poor book will last that long. Are you also seventeen? . . . Perhaps you are my husband. As I write, I wonder who you will be, what you will be like, and where you come from. . .

Whoever you are, I hope you are happy—as happy as I am now—with as wonderful a family and as wonderful friends as I have been blessed with. I hope and pray that the world in which you live is at peace, a happy and honorable peace, not an uneasy truce. I hope that you still treasure the ideas of freedom and liberty which I now hold so dear—freedom of religion; freedom of speech; freedom to choose my own friends, my own career, my own place of residence; freedom to read whatever I like; freedom to travel wherever I like; freedom from censorship of mail—there are so many freedoms. If you have them, treasure them and don't take them for granted, for there are those who don't have them . . .

## Sandy, from new baby through college

---



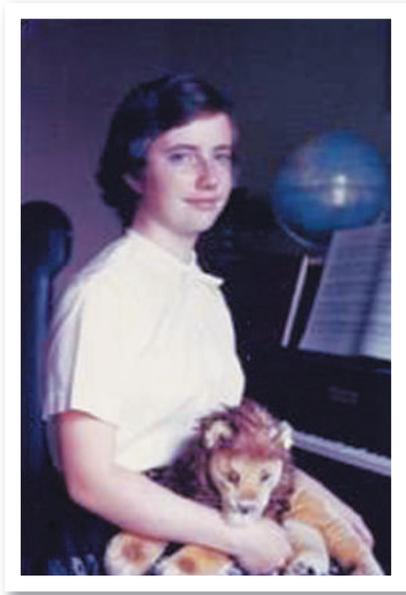
*Painting: Sandra, June 10, 1946, by Edythe Ferris*



*With maternal grandparents, Grandpop and Nana (Albert and Edith Cross)*







*with Leo the Lion, a gift from Nana*



# Radcliffe

---

Sandy Nayak

*from her journal, the first page of a new notebook*

September 15, 1963

Nana and Mommy have just left—I saw the car go down Walker Street and turn the corner. It is hard to see them go—not as hard as the year before when they left Verde Valley. I have met a lot of wonderful people here but there is still a bewildering number left to meet. Radcliffe is very big and a little strange. I have wanted to come here for so many years that I can hardly believe that I am actually here. Now that I have made Radcliffe, my goal for 12 years, I'd better set myself a new goal.

Sue Zerad, my roommate, seems wonderful. I think we will get along.

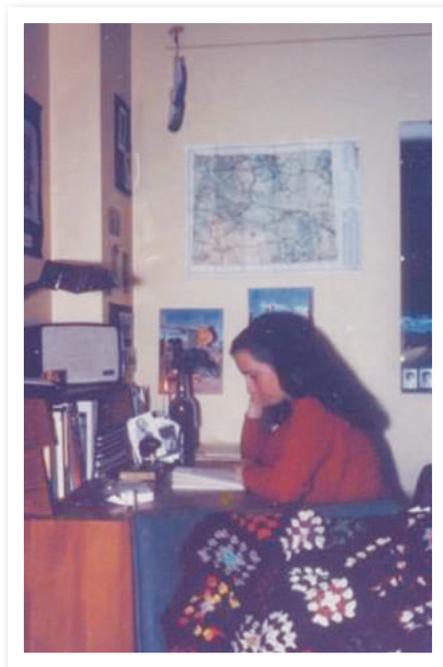
# College Roommates and Lifelong Friends

Susan Garau

Sandy and I became friends on the first day of college in 1963, when we first met face to face. Radcliffe had informed us we were to be roommates, and we had already exchanged a few letters and knew something of each other, our high schools, families, backgrounds, interests. The Tompkins family car was packed to the brim with Sandy's stuff, including on the roof rack, which was a bit of a high reach for her and her parents to lower bags and a bike down to the curb. So my tall dad stepped in to help and we all made introductions and chatted among the suitcases there and into the elevator and up to our room.

From day one, we were interested in each other's subjects, and sometimes we would attend each other's courses in anthropology and linguistics. I think we would each have been happy to switch majors. And Sandy took me to her Friends meeting and showed me their basement where she volunteered, mending used clothes for distribution to the needy. She used to use the Quaker second-person pronouns *thee* and *thou*, which I had never heard before.

I was there with Sandy for four years, and I especially remember her evening tea parties in the room for study breaks with our friends. She always added a mint sweet to the pot and played classical music in the background.



*Sandy reading Tolkien, under the afghan she had crocheted  
Photo by Sue Garau in their dorm room*

We knew all of each other's boyfriends. I remember Sandy at one time had THREE, and two of them used to come to lectures, one sitting on either side of her. And I think all three went to the Israeli folk dancing evenings. I had a favorite and expressed my preference, and I was so glad that she chose Ranganath.

After graduation, we both were awarded Fulbrights, and Sandy went to India and I to Italy, the countries of our future husbands. She stopped by in Rome on her way back to the States, and I remember how she bought some baking chocolate and heated up a batch of chocolate sauce for our ice cream. She hadn't had any chocolate for that year in India!

Through the years, we always kept in touch, visiting each other in Rome and Belmont, then later with our kids at the cape, and in Geneva when the Nayak kids went on a ski holiday. We went to events at Belmont high school.

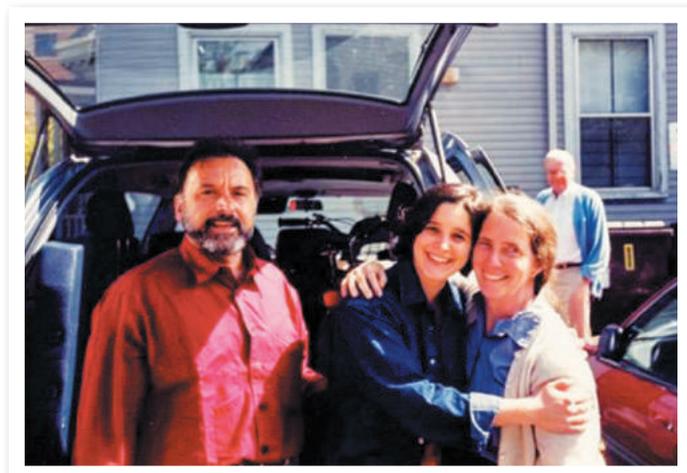
Both of us have daughters named Maia/Maya. They both went to the United World College in Trieste, coincidences that led to more meetings.

Later, Sandy drove down to Brown and moved all of Maia Garau's stuff from the dorm to her off-campus housing. We parents were far away in Kenya at the time, and she stepped in to help out. Sandy and Ranganath also joined in Maia's wedding celebration in Vermont.

So through the years, our two families have all had many opportunities to hang out, and we plan to keep up the tradition in future, and Sandy will be there in spirit.



*Maya, Sandy, and Maia eating a Happy Meal at the Boston Children's Museum, early 1980s*



*Piero, Maia, and Sandy*

# Summer Archaeology

---

Peter Mattison

Sandy was one of those studious anthropology/archaeology (archaeology?) majors I met through friends and roommates in early college years. Being a year younger and as yet uncommitted to a major or any serious studies, for that matter, I was mightily impressed by her focus and effort. She seemed to me to be too embedded in her studies.

Sandy's serious demeanor was only a screen to her fun side. The archaeology department was to hold a dinner (at Cedarholm) and Sandy's advisor, Dr. Cynthia Irwin, was conjuring a Mexican menu with the help of Sandy and her other students. Arriving too late to be useful in the kitchen and under the guise of acting as a server, I snuck in the back door and encountered a gathering of 'Cliffies (as they were known then) seated around the kitchen table, some grinding with mortar and pestles, but all with tears running down their faces, and loud sniffing for background music. Still, they seemed to be chatting and wore smiles, or maybe grimaces.

Confused, I imagined some catastrophe had befallen, and not wanting to intrude in their grief, I kept back. Sandy sized up my discomfort, hopped up from her chair, and smiling and chortling through her tears and sniffles, came over and informed me, somewhat smugly, that "It's the habanero peppers we're peeling and grinding for the salsa. Stay away or you'll be crying too." Then she returned to her co-conspirators. A fair warning to me to never look a habanero in the eye.

The summer ending her junior year, Sandy was eager to head out to a dig in Bernalillo, New Mexico, to collect data that would be crucial to her thesis. It was at a location called Armijo's tank, on part of a huge ranch. I seem to recall Bill Graustein, Peter Dane, Ricky Meadow, Rap Perkins, and a few other faces that passed through Cedarholm were there too, or planning to be there after they closed up another dig in Wyoming at a place called Hell Gap. It was also the summer Dev Kernan and I set off on a cross-country trek to visit friends and family before Dev was to report for army service in the fall. We headed off in the family's spare car, a red Mustang convertible, first to Hell Gap and then on south to Bernalillo.

Arriving at Bernalillo and knowing that we'd arrive late in the afternoon, Dev suggested that we stop off at the Bernalillo A&W root beer stand and stock up on a couple of gallons of pink lemonade as an offering for thirsty diggers. Dev and I had been given directions to the site: "At the gate, unlock the chain with the key hidden under the rock, then drive straight nineteen miles on the dirt road. Don't hit any cows, step on a rattlesnake, or cross a stream with running water." It all sounded straightforward. But the rock hiding the key was not to be found, nor, obviously, was the key. The chain was truly locked.

After a half hour or so of searching, head-scratching, and hoping for a Bernalillo-bound archaeologist, we thought that maybe, just maybe, the Ford could creep under the chain. The fates were on our side and top down, we slithered through the gate. Ten minutes later, down the desert road, we came nose to nose with the man with the key, the ranch foreman, who wondered who we were and what we were doing. Fortunately, after two cups of pink lemonade, our explaining we were searching for a band of rogue archaeologists, and a look at our unsuited car, he decided we were eccentric but benign and directed us to continue on.

Half an hour later, Dev and I pulled into camp as a string of tired-looking souls wound their weary way into camp from satellite digs. Dusty and tired, Sandy and one other woman were the last in line; Sandy, having been conscientious to catalog and map every artifact found at her dig that day, was headed to the “office” tent to safely store her findings. Abruptly, she noticed the Mustang and Dev and me off to the side. At the incongruity of two relatively clean preppies and a red sports car at a dirty, dusty dig, she lit up and broke into laughter.

A quirk of archaeologists in the field is how quickly the hard physical work is left behind. In short order, the crews were relatively clean and refreshed (beer was accounted as “paper clips and White-Out” for the budget) and almost all buckled down to the serious business of enjoying the company. The women, knowing the men were useless at the task, organized supper for the multitude with efficiency and esprit de corps, each joining in cheerfully. The men made themselves useful, or at least appeared useful, fixing tools or schlepping water, supplies, and campfire fuel, trying their hands at flint knapping, and cleaning up after meals.

Supper was the prelude to social hours as the day faded and a campfire on the flat bluff above the camp provided light and warmth. And if the next day was a day off work, someone would pull out a guitar and maybe Cynthia Irwin’s husband might appear and offer “rocket fuel,” nearly pure ethanol from his work at Sandia Laboratories. (To be diluted with fruit juice etc. but some unwary souls had the proportions wrong. Fortunately, the Quaker contingent saved them from serious harm or impending purgatory.)

Just as an aside, after Sandy married Ranganath and Deyne married Richard Meadow, the rest of the Tompkins sisters, Wendy and Vicky, and their friends were often part of the mob enlivening meals and other gatherings at one house or another. The four sisters were a formidable host of hostesses, pulling together meals, refreshments, and entertainment with flurries of activity and no hint of chaos.

The first time they produced their violins, guitars, and viola to form a quartet and choir, I was completely blown away. Their music and voices perfectly matched. As it happened, my back was turned, and what I heard was one voice repeated as on a recording, not four singers. Every time after, their performance still always amazed me that they melded so perfectly.

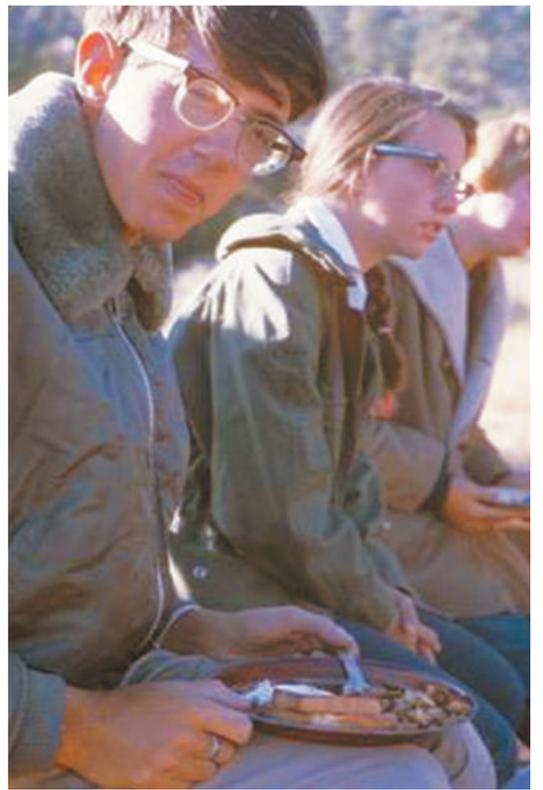
# The Digs at Hell Gap (Wyoming) and Armijo (New Mexico), over the summers of 1964, 1965, and 1966

Photos (mostly) by Bill Graustein

---



*Camp director Cynthia Irwin-Williams with Sandy*



*Sandy's own caption: "Latex smells!"*



### *Desert Archaeology*

*Sandy*

*Sand in your socks  
and camera,  
Wind in your eyes  
and the map you are making.  
Sun baking the dirt  
that hides what you search for  
Then silence, a chill breeze,  
and ten million stars.  
In the daylight you  
struggle with fragments and ruins  
But at night the Old Ones  
still lurk in the shadows.*



*Tigris and Euphrates, abandoned at the camp, more or less lived in Sandy's hood.  
Someone took them home at the end of the summer.*



# The Fulbright Year in Allahabad

---

Lucinda Dhavan

Allahabad University had been hosting Fulbright grantees for several years before Sandy and I arrived in July 1967. Traditions had already evolved: the two scholar-teachers would be housed in an independent cottage just inside the large, ornate gate of Holland Hall, a men's hostel. It was a pleasant place to stay overall, with the security of being inside the campus. Every time we went out the gate, though, there would be a chorus of whistling and commentary, which we studiously ignored.

We had an elderly cook, a tame white street dog that followed us everywhere, and a pair of well-worn bicycles for transportation. The university faculty was happy to have a new set of Fulbrighters enlivening the atmosphere.

In the austere fashion of those days, a telephone connection was something you'd spend years on a wait list before getting, so no phone. To make a call, we'd have to go across a vast open area, under the gaze of a few hundred curious inmates, to the office, where a phone was kept under lock and key, which the clerk could open if he was there and permission was given. In the normal course of our lives, this made little difference, as no one expected rapid communication back then.

But it did make travel planning a little iffy. We'd write insubstantial-looking blue inland letters off to hostels, dak bungalows, and guesthouses, and almost never get responses. We'd set out on trips in faith that we'd have a place to stay. On one occasion, we arrived at a dak bungalow in Madhya Pradesh to find a local MP had filled every room with his retinue. We ended up going back to the railway station in the dark of night, where a kindly official opened up a "retiring room" for us.

On our winter vacation trip to Bengal and Orissa, we had made plans well in advance. We traveled through the night in third class, where my future husband had made sure we had reserved berths, but we had forgotten the need for bedding and were slightly chilled as we hailed a rickshaw to take us to the YMCA hostel. The streets felt oddly empty. Our rickshaw was stopped short of our destination because the police had just broken up a demonstration.

We walked the rest of the way through a haze of tear gas and found the hostel an oasis of the ordinary. The dining hall was decorated with Styrofoam Santas and such, and life seemed fairly normal.

Possibly because of the volatile political atmosphere, the streets remained deserted the next few days; we spent a lot of time strolling around museums.



*Lucinda and Sandy in Allahabad, Thanksgiving 1967*

Everyone at the hostel kept telling us how wonderful Christmas in Calcutta usually was.

A young Bengali who said he was a PhD student, who'd come to the hostel to meet a girlfriend who failed to arrive, offered to take us to a restaurant he knew, where all the students went. Trusting souls that we were, we went along, and when it came time to split the bill, he found he'd "forgotten" his wallet.

Sandy and I were finally fed up of the Westernized wannabe atmosphere of the hostel and the sad disruptions of the city, though she was glad to learn a bit about student discontents and demonstrations.

From there we went to Puri, where we'd picked the name of a local guesthouse out of a government brochure and expected to stay in modest pilgrim-style lodgings in that famous temple town. We arrived to find an elderly English lady was our hostess, and she declared we were the answer to her prayers. She was a missionary who wanted someone to celebrate with. She fed us a special Christmas Eve dinner of pomfret, which precipitated one of the two bouts of food poisoning I had in my year in India.

The next morning, we had to sit in her improvised church with a handful of parishioners, one of whom confided in us that he'd come only because he felt sorry for the old lady, not because he believed any of this, and he wished she'd just go back to this "home" she kept talking about.

I guess Sandy was happy to have been able to brighten the life of our hostess a bit, but neither of us found much joy in the place where the Jagannath Temple turned us away as we had no certificates proving that we were Hindus, and Christians were not allowed. We did enjoy the beach, and somewhere, if I can ever find it, I have a photo of Sandy standing in the sea, her sari hiked up to her knees.

We were very careful with those saris, washed them in the bathroom bucket and folded them carefully beneath our mattresses wherever we stayed—who knew you could iron six yards of cotton so effectively that way?

We made do. We got on trains without reservations. We bought gold earrings in Cuttack for sixty rupees and wandered around the most magnificent medieval temples without a single tourist, once we got away from Puri. We were extraordinarily lucky.

Not all travels with Sandy during our time in India were so austere. Sandy's desire to get to know Ranganath's family took her to much more secure and comfortable surroundings. While I went off in search of various archaeological wonders that could be accessed only by village market buses and the occasional bullock cart, she enjoyed the hospitality of future aunts, uncles, and cousins-in-law, which I was lucky enough to share sometimes. Coming off a standing-room-only train in Mumbai, it felt like another world to be invited to stay on Marine Drive, where there was an unforgettable view of the "diamond necklace" of streetlights on the oceanfront, shining below the flat. Every convenience was provided, along with good food and company.

Passing through Delhi, I met her future in-laws in their Lutyens-designed Delhi home, an oasis of calm and refinement. I seem to remember a golden retriever sitting near the table who was being served idlis and ice cream, which he consumed with perfect politeness.

The concluding session for all Fulbrighters was held in the South. C. S. Krishnaswami, the secretary of the Coonoor Tea Planters' Association, had become friends with my family when he studied in the United States many years before. He invited us to stay with his family and showed us around the beautiful Nilgiris. Ranganath's aunt and uncle entertained us in Kodaikanal at their elegant hotel. We were served steak, and I did say I was Buddhist and a vegetarian, and was told that Buddha had ordered his disciples, "Whatever falls in the begging bowl, you should eat." It was a remarkably good steak, considering it was water buffalo, I think.

Some of our most memorable experiences that year may have come while we were traveling, but a lot of time was spent in the domestic routine of our cottage. My future husband's Chachaji was divisional railway manager in Allahabad, and Sandy and I went for a swim in their indoor swimming pool a few times. We cycled out to Bamrauli—miles and miles and across a bridge—where Sandy had found a distant connection with someone in the Civil Air Training Academy. We went to many, many dinners, picnics, and parties with Skand and Jaya Gupta, the professors who looked after Fulbrighters, and a motley crew of Peace Corps workers and international volunteers.

And we actually did some teaching and study at the university. We were assigned to teach the compulsory General English classes. The head of the English department at that time was Prof. K. K. Mehrotra, an erudite gentleman who was confined to a wheelchair by a progressive neurological disease. He met us and agreed that we had the academic background to teach one undergraduate literature course each to BA first-year students, as well. Like almost all female faculty and all female students of the arts, we were assigned to the Women's College, separated from the main campus's grand, historic buildings by a thick wall and guarded gate.

The building where classes were held was becoming far too small for the number of students; sometimes classes were held on the roof or veranda. The weathered doors didn't close properly, so we'd find ourselves trying to teach Wordsworth, Shaw, and Galsworthy over the voices of Sanskrit and Hindi teachers reciting loudly from adjoining rooms. I don't think either of us had even heard of *The Forsyte Saga* before we had to teach it, but we did our best to catch up. Tea in the teachers' lounge was an enjoyable part of the day, though some of the senior teachers found our record-keeping, particularly when it came to attendance registers, which the others treated with something close to veneration, far too casual.

An article appeared in the *New York Times* in May 1968, by Joseph Lelyveld, the Delhi correspondent. He boldly stated that there were no foreign professors at Allahabad University that year—true, I guess, as we weren't professors. (I wonder why he thought that an interesting point: how many foreign professors were teaching in American colleges that year?) Anyway, he further said foreign professors were unpopular with the students because they didn't teach by dictating the predictable exam questions and answers. It was true that our students often asked us, in despair, "But, Miss, will this be on the exam?" but they did have a legitimate desire to know what might be asked of them, and we weren't terribly sure. They humored us.

We never met Mr. Lelyveld; he possibly may have stayed on the privileged male side of the university, but he described well the agitation that took place in the closing months of our academic year. "In an orgiastic mood, the students roamed through the streets of this hometown of each of India's three prime ministers, seeking to obliterate the English language, a stumbling block to most of them because it is still a prerequisite for most of the best jobs. [They] attacked signs, billboards, even license plates, with stones, paint, and fire." This describes accurately the agitation that went on for long enough to close the university for the last weeks when we should have been teaching, which left us free to travel more.

While this rioting went on, Sandy and I didn't feel any particular hostility toward us as purveyors of the detested language. We taught as long as the university was in session. We attended "annual functions" arranged by hostels and clubs, in which no one seemed to have any objections to plays like *Journey's End* being served up for entertainment along with very English cakes and tea. We continued to meet with friends and make our plans.

In the end, Sandy and I ended our time in Allahabad with mostly good memories, and we both moved on to lifelong ties with India.



*Sandy, Lucinda, and their Hindi tutor, Allahabad 1968*

# Drama in the Ladies' Compartment

Sandy Nayak

2021

*This story was told at the First Church in Belmont online "Moth Hour."*

I was spending my year after college teaching English at Allahabad University in northern India and had been there long enough to be reasonably conversant in Hindi.

Back in 1967, the Indian railways had ladies' compartments so a woman traveling alone would not be unprotected among strange men. Traveling across central India by myself, aged twenty-two, I sought out a third-class ladies' compartment and got the very last seat. Just before departure, a tiny old lady came in, and amid cries of "No room! No room," she grinned at everybody and settled herself with her little bundles on the floor in the middle. After the train got under way, people started chatting with the strangers near them.

It's the custom there to address random older people as Aji (Granny), so pretty soon someone said,

"Aji, where do you live?"

"Oh, with a grandchild."

"Where is that?"

"All different places."

She named half a dozen towns in that state and said she was going now to stay with a grandson about fifty miles down the line we were on, but she visited all her grandchildren, one after another. She was a widow and had no place of her own.

"Aji, that's a lot of travel. How can you afford it?"

"Afford it? The tickets are free."

"Free? How do you manage that?"

"Oh, that's easy! I am sitting in a compartment like this, and in comes a very young conductor, younger than my grandson, and he says, 'Aji, where is your ticket?' And I say, 'Yes, Conductor Sahib, I will give it to you right away!' And I look in my waistband and it is not there, and I look in this bundle and it is not there, and I look in that bundle and I am crying, and the nice young conductor says, 'Aji, I must put you off the train or I will lose my job, but I will come back two stations from now and help you down.' So three stations later he comes back, and helps me down, and I wait for the next train!"

By this time, everyone in the compartment was listening and appreciating her story. Soon the conductor came by, and everything happened exactly as she had said. First he punched all of our tickets, and then he asked for hers, last, since she was sitting on the floor. She frantically looked in all her bundles, the tears flowing freely. Promising to return two stations later, he left. We all dug in our bundles for food to share with her, so her bundles became a little plumper. The conductor returned and saw her off the train as promised. The last we saw of her she was settled on the platform with her bundles, happily waving to us as the train pulled out.

Someone had asked her if her grandson wouldn't be worried when our train arrived without her. She had laughed and said,

“Oh, no problem. He doesn't know I'm coming!”

---

*Note from Ranganath:* Just by way of sharing memories, here are a few other stories from her Fulbright year that Sandy mentioned more than once:

- Being in a car with Ravi and Lucinda when they were stopped by anti-English students. They wanted to take off his license plate, which was in English. Ravi wagered a bet that they could debate the situation in Hindi and the loser would be the first one to use an English word. If the students lost, they would pay him Rs. 10, and if Ravi lost, he would paint over his English-license plate, with a can of paint and paintbrush he kept ready in the car. At the end of the year, on the strength of his winnings, he took Sandy and Lucinda out to dinner!
- Sharmazel Dutt, a faculty member who arrived every day on a motorbike, which the gate attendant would wait for and proudly park for her. Five years ago, we found Sharmazel on the Web, teaching in Texas. She has since passed away.
- Sandy returning from her work in the countryside on her bicycle to find that there was a curfew with shoot-on-sight orders in Allahabad. A policeman commandeered a passing bicycle and escorted her home.
- Going with a friend (Jaya Gupta) to the friend's mother-in-law's home and being offered coffee, which Sandy had never had. She was hesitating when the friend kicked her under the table and whispered, “Drink it. It won't kill you!” Eventually, Sandy became a dedicated coffee drinker.

# Part 3

---

## Marriage and Kids



# How Sandy and I Met and Became a Couple

Ranganath Nayak

It was the fall of 1963. I was newly arrived in the country and wanted to meet nice young women. In India, the only women I had met were my relatives. I tried pop dancing and did not like the overt sexuality. So I was told to go folk dancing, where “you don’t have to go to the dance with someone, you don’t have to dance with the same person all evening, and you don’t have to dance with anyone at all.” In the MIT student paper, I found an announcement for an Israeli folk dance at Agassiz Hall in the Radcliffe Quad, hosted by the young men of MIT Hillel, who had the same objective as me—meet nice young women.

I went to Agassiz Hall, went upstairs, found the dance hall door through which I could hear music and voices yelling, opened it, and saw a boisterous group of young women and men running around in circles and whooping and yelling. I felt stunned and bewildered, never having asked anyone to dance with me, and surprised that what I saw was unlike any folk dance I had seen in India. Suddenly, a petite, barefoot young woman in a white dress came running up to me and said, “Would you like to dance?” I said I didn’t know how to. She said, “I will show you,” grabbed my hand, and led me onto the dance floor. I learned that her name was Sandy Tompkins and that she was a freshman at Radcliffe from near Swarthmore, Pennsylvania. She was eighteen and I was twenty-one.



*Sandy and Vicki in front of Comstock Hall, Cambridge, Massachusetts, circa fall 1963, when I first met Sandy*



*Sandy wearing her dancing dress*

When asked over the years why she did what she did, her invariable answer was “You never leave a good-looking young man just standing there.”

Some years later, in 1966, we were walking across the Cambridge Common, and I both proposed marriage to her and told her not to answer me then, for I was sure she would say no. Some months later (I think it was in the fall), I asked her again, and she said yes, but on the condition that she got to see India and my family first because she expected that was where we might settle. That is what led to the Fulbright grant that took her to India in 1967 for almost a year while I stayed in Cambridge to finish my PhD.

Sue Zerad (later Garau) helped Sandy rewrite her Fulbright application, after tearing up the first draft. According to Sandy, Sue said, “Better me than them, honey. Better me than them.” In fact, both Sandy and Sue won Fulbrights that year, to India and to Italy.

I think an important factor in her decision to marry me was that she consulted Sue, who was her best friend at Radcliffe, and who gave her the thumbs-up on me. Sue and I have never forgotten that.

Sandy came back from India in late May 1968, I got my PhD. from MIT on the 7<sup>th</sup> of June, and we were married on the 9<sup>th</sup> of June, her twenty-third birthday, in a Hindu ceremony at the Quaker Meeting House in Purchase, New York, where her parents were members. They invited the whole meeting to attend, and almost everyone did.



*Howard and Elizabeth Tompkins  
invite you to witness  
the marriage of their daughter  
Sandra  
to  
P. Ranganath Nayak  
son of  
P. Ramanath and Saraswati Nayak  
on June 9, 1968  
at 2:30 p.m.  
according to the Hindu rite*

*Purchase Friends Meeting House  
Purchase Street (Route 120)  
Purchase, New York*

*Reception  
at the Meeting House  
at 4 p.m.  
following the ceremony*



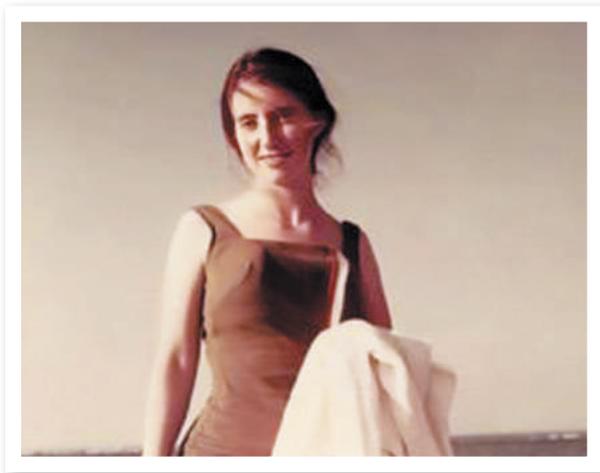


*Sandy and Ranganath, 9 June 1968*

As the ceremony came to a close, the priest invited the rain to fall as a blessing. Just as he spoke, there was a loud peal of thunder and a bolt of lightning—the skies opened up, and it poured! As Sandy used to love to tell it, one elderly lady in the audience turned to her neighbor and whispered, “What does *he* know?”



After the reception, Sandy and I got into a car loaned to us and drove in the rain to our honeymoon cottage, gifted to us for a week by her grandmother, Nana, in Wildwood, New Jersey.



*Honeymooners at Wildwood on the Jersey shore, June 1968*

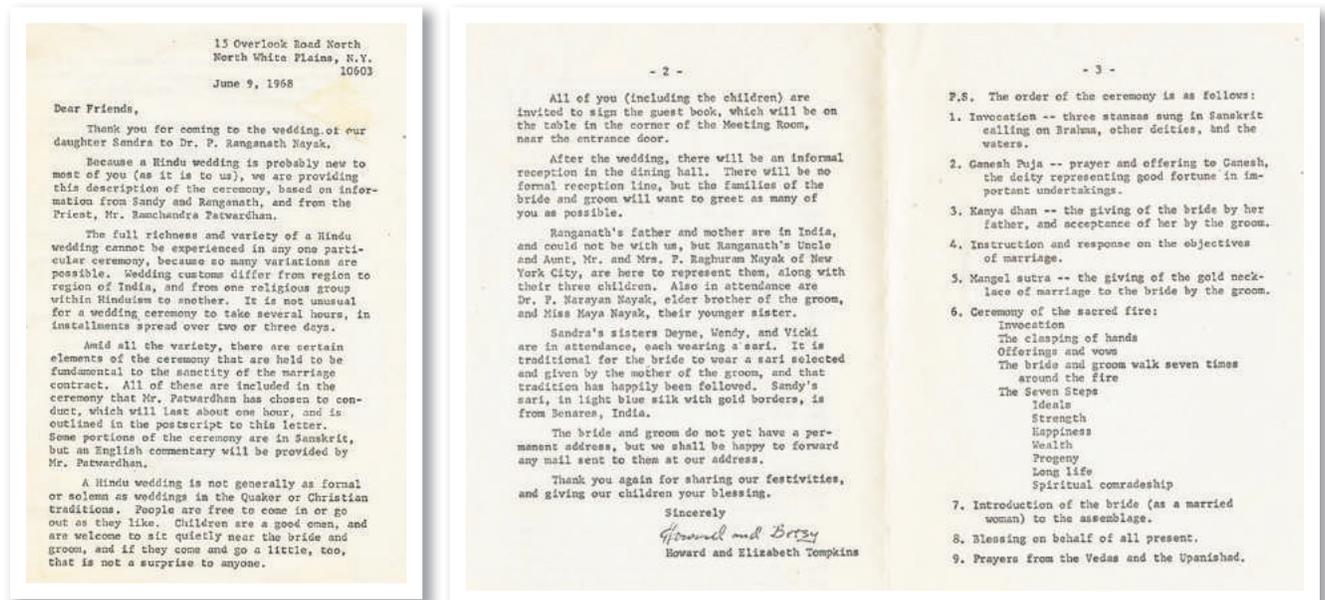
On our first evening there (the 9<sup>th</sup>), we found we had managed to lock ourselves out of our cottage and our car when we returned from a walk on the beach in our swimsuits. We asked a policeman for help. Remarkably, after a few questions, he broke into the car trunk where our keys were and accompanied us into our cottage. No suspicions, no racism, just a basic humanity.

The night was cold, and we had to put bricks warmed over the stove (which, fortunately, my Girl Scout wife knew how to fire up) in our bed.

# Dear Friends

Howard and Elizabeth Tompkins

June 1968



June 9, 1968

Dear Friends,

Thank you for coming to the wedding of our daughter Sandra to Dr. P. Ranganath Nayak.

Because a Hindu wedding is probably new to most of you (as it is to us) we are providing this description of the ceremony, based on information from Sandy and Ranganath, and from the priest, Mr. Ramachandra Patwardhan.

The full richness and variety of a Hindu wedding cannot be experienced in any one particular ceremony, because so many variations are possible. Wedding customs differ from region to region of India, and from one religious group within Hinduism to another. It is not unusual for a wedding ceremony to take several hours, in installments spread over two or three days.

Amid all the variety, there are certain elements of the ceremony that are held to be fundamental to the sanctity of the marriage contract. All of these are included in the ceremony that Mr. Patwardhan has chosen to conduct, which will last about one hour, and is outlined in the postscript to this letter.

Some portions of the ceremony are in Sanskrit, but an English commentary will be provided by Mr. Patwardhan.

A Hindu wedding is not generally as formal or solemn as weddings in the Quaker or Christian traditions. People are free to come in or go out as they like. Children are a good omen and are welcome to sit quietly near the bride and groom, and if they come and go a little too, that is not a surprise to anyone.

All of you (including the children) are invited to sign the guest book, which will be on the table in the corner of the Meeting Room, near the entrance door.

After the wedding, there will be an informal reception in the dining hall. There will be no formal reception line, but the families of the bride and groom will want to greet as many of you as possible.

Ranganath's father and mother are in India, and could not be with us, but Ranganath's uncle and aunt, Mr. and Mrs. P. Raghuram Nayak of New York City, are here to represent them, along with their three children. Also in attendance are Dr. P. Narayan Nayak, elder brother of the groom, and Miss Maya Nayak, their younger sister.

Sandra's sisters Deyne, Wendy, and Vicki are in attendance, each wearing a sari. It is traditional for the bride to wear a sari selected and given by the mother of the groom, and that tradition has happily been followed. Sandy's sari, in light-blue silk with gold borders, is from Benares, India.

The bride and groom do not yet have a permanent address, but we will be happy to forward any mail sent to them at our new address.

Thank you again for sharing our festivities, and giving our children your blessing.

Sincerely,

*Howard and Betsy*

Howard and Elizabeth Tompkins



*Meera and Raghuram Nayak, Sandy and Ranganath Chitra, Ramchandra, a young friend, and Kanaka*



*Vicki, Betsy, Ranganath, Sandy, Wendy, Nana, Deyne, Dorothy Gatewood, Howard*

# Many Fond Memories

---

Rachel Rosenbaum

In the fall of 1968, I entered the Brandeis department of anthropology (where I met Sandy). Sandy was knowledgeable without being overbearing.

We became friends, and I was a regular at the Friday evening Indian dinners that she and her husband Ranganath held for the MIT graduate students in engineering from India. I have many fond memories of these Indian graduate students imitating Elvis Presley or John Wayne in after-dinner skits.

Ranganath was himself a graduate engineer from MIT, and he cheerfully agreed to tutor us in statistics when our Brandeis teacher turned out to be incomprehensible. So a group of us met at their home in Cambridge. Ranganath would review the material that we had supposedly covered in class and make it clear to us.

When Sandy's younger sister Deyne married, I joined the regulars at the house in Canton, where we spent a fair amount of time planting roses on the periphery of the property. Musician friends of Deyne, Sandy, and Ranganath entertained us on occasion with a concert. Deyne's in-laws were most accommodating, tolerating the group of young friends who came to Canton on weekends.

# The Five Tributaries of the Hostee River

---

Ranganath Nayak

In the 1950s, my brother Narayan's classmate at St. Xavier's High School in Bombay (and his fierce competitor in examination scores) was B. Appadurai Vatsal, known simply as Vatsal. His family lived near Churchgate Station in Bombay.

After Sandy and I got engaged, we soon heard from Narayan that Vatsal's younger brother Arjun Appadurai was coming to Brandeis as an undergraduate. It was 1967. Vatsal had asked Narayan to keep an eye on Arjun. Narayan thought that since it was Vatsal's younger brother, it was my job, as Narayan's younger brother, to keep an eye on Arjun. Sandy was headed to India on a Fulbright, but she and I agreed to do so. So Arjun was, in some ways, our first hostee, although the phrase had not yet been invented.

Ram Subramanian also came to Brandeis in 1967 and we got to know him through his brother, Subramanian Swamy, whom I had known through cricket games between MIT and Harvard for some time. (Swamy was at Harvard but played on the MIT team because there was better home cooking there, provided by my roommates—my brother and Bharat Shiralkar—and me.) In 1969, Ram brought Sundar Burra, who had come to Brandeis in 1968, to our place at 74 Larch Road in Cambridge.

Arriving a couple of years later to keep an eye on Sundar was Neera, who had come from Delhi and had a job at an Indian store in Harvard Square named Sona. In 1971, when Lakshmi was a year old and we were living at Standish Street in Cambridge, Neera moved in with us and shared a bedroom with baby Lakshmi. So in most ways, Neera was our first in-residence hostee. Again, that term had not yet been invented.

Meanwhile, we added Pancho Chang from Brandeis and Dilip Gaonkar from Tufts and Jugnu (Tejbir Singh), who was also at Brandeis, and then Mala Thapar (who, I think, worked at the same Indian store in Harvard Square as Neera, and was keeping an eye on Jugnu).

Sandy and I moved to Pune, India, in January 1973 (it was bitterly cold in Cambridge), and that initiated another stream of hostees, the second tributary. First, Shreedhar was born almost next door to us in Sind Colony (at almost the same time as Anand), the neighbors having been discovered by four-year-old Lakshmi, who wandered into their yard and greeted Shreedhar's grandmother. Shreedhar became one of "our kids," moving to Belmont in the mid-1990s after finishing his master's degree in Texas. Meanwhile, Sandy interviewed Rekha Doraiswamy, a candidate for Radcliffe/Harvard, who was admitted and then became part of the family. Her wedding took place at Cedarholm, Deyne and Richard's home in Canton. Through that link, we acquired Rekha's brother Ashok and, through him, our friend Marian Wentworth.

Starting in the late 1970s, Sandy signed up for the host family programs at Harvard, MIT, Brandeis, and Tufts, and that's when the term *hostee* first came into official existence. The river thus added a third tributary that would include Arvind Atreya, Lin Shaw, Bijoy and Malabika Ghosh, Gordon Shaw, the Arumainayagams, Nirupama Rao, Gajanand and Dhamayanthy Pathmanathan, Sandeep Kochhar, Lakshmi Venkatachalam, Aditya Sawant, and Moutushi Islam.

In honesty, Arvind was our first true hostee, arriving sight unseen, as opposed to all the earlier ones, who were friends or friends of friends.

A fourth tributary was added by my work at Arthur D. Little: Sven, Tina, Mia, and Alice, from the family of Tom and Christine Sommerlatte, and Charlotte, the daughter of Jean-Philippe and Danièle Deschamps. And later, Maya Chaudhari.

Then, the fifth tributary arrived in the form of Arudra Burra, son of Sundar and Neera Burra. He brought Issa Mikel and Suchitra Shenoy and Neeti Nair and his own younger brother, Ananda. Suchi then started another river, which continues to this day and includes Anne Que and John Doan, Nirmala Ravishankar, Eric Yablonowitz and Leslie MacIntosh, Stephanie Aldrin, Robyn Trem, Vera Sistenich, Audrey Lin, Heena Mutha and Mike Hughes, and many, many others. The confluence of two tributaries happened when Suchi and Shreedhar met at 12 Orchard Street and, some years later, got married, in Hyderabad. Sandy attended their wedding.

Meanwhile, there was a gentle rain falling from the generous skies in the form of contributions from my family and the friends and younger relations of former hostees: Tuli Patel, Aniruddh Patel, Zeenat Potia, and Dan Cross, Manju Mehta, our nephews Steven Anderson and Nils Klinkenberg, our friends Marieme Soda-Lo (from Senegal) and Seble Tesfaye (from Ethiopia), our niece Sujatha Mizar with her husband Pete Martin (from Poland), Bun Lim (from Australia), and now my nephew Santosh Shenoy from Bangalore, our latest hostee.

We have been fortunate indeed to have had our land nourished by this river and its tributaries. May it continue to be a fertile land.

Written with apologies to all who should be mentioned here and are not.

# The Hostee River

---

Arjun Appadurai

This story is really fantastic and brings back so many memories of the warmth of your home, and of your kindness to me even when you were living with Narayan, Bharat, and some transient others on Larch Road before you and Sandy got married.

I also recall that you met Sandy at a folk dancing event either at MIT or Harvard and even more vividly that several of us made it up to White Plains for your wedding (1968). Many of us in this crew in the late 1960s also went with you and Sandy to Cedarholm in Canton (Sandy's sister-in-law's place) and made asses of ourselves.

You were my model of how to use the kitchen as a centerpiece for a social world, and I learned many culinary tricks from you, including using Pillsbury's buttermilk biscuits to make puris.

Yes, Narayan was a stern avuncular presence, mostly devoted to pulling my leg for doing social science and for not eating things like kale! But you and our late Ravi Nadkarni (who in 1967 was in his own apartment on 63 Dana Street) did the heavy lifting on the uncle role.

I was very lucky to have you all in those days, and this blossomed after you and Sandy got married and had a perennial open house for many orphans from the academic world. Sundar, Ram, Pancho, Jugnu, Mala, then Neera and I were the early Brandeis crew, then Dilip from Tufts and others I can't fully recall now.

Love and very good wishes to you and the whole family.

# I Cannot Imagine an America Without Sandy

Dilip Gaonkar

Sandy and you loomed so large on the day (and thereafter) I arrived at Logan airport in August 1968. Arjun had come to pick me up at the airport (I think with Narayan) and brought me straight to your apartment for a dinner party.

There were lots of interesting people and fabulous Indian food. Sandy was busy orchestrating the bustling gathering but took time to make me, jet-lagged and culturally bewildered, welcome and comfortable at your place. I will never forget that evening.

And then there followed so many evenings like that, smaller and intimate, during which we (Sally had arrived on the scene) got to know Sandy and you better and better and learned so much from the two of you, especially how to be kind and generous with fellow human beings.

Those were the wonderful days we cherish, thanks to Sandy and you.



*Dilip and Sally, when Sandy and Ranganath visited them in 2003*

# Sandy

Sundar Burra

---

I first met Ranganath and Sandy in 1969 in my second year at Brandeis. When Neera came to Cambridge in 1971, I introduced her—as a person of interest to me—to the Nayaks and she later became their first in-residence hostess, sharing a bedroom with baby Lakshmi. I left the U.S. soon after.

Ranganath was a stern host who kept all suitors of Neera's at bay and subjected them to a rigorous cross-examination before he gave the green signal for them to go out! So I am thankful in multiple ways to Sandy and Ranganath not only for providing me with many days and nights of warmth, friendship, and food but also for protecting my interests re Neera and showering the same love and care upon Arudra and Ananda.

Ranganath has used a powerful metaphor of different streams joining together into a strong river—while I brought friends over the years to join that magic circle of the Nayak household, Arudra brought in another generation of younger students, many of whom would be on this Zoom. What was remarkable was that many of the streams crisscrossed each other—Neera tells of Sandy introducing her to Marieme from Senegal and how this led to an invitation to a seminar at Chicago on child rights.

Sandy took care of many details. Neera reports of her thoughtfulness in placing the bus timetable for Harvard Square on the fridge and a box with change for newcomers as you had to give exact change on those journeys. The same sense of caring took her to Harvard Square to drop in at Neera's place of work, baby Lakshmi in tow because she knew that Neera had only recently come to the U.S. and didn't know many people. Sandy's basement was used by countless students both as a source of essentials like boots and blankets and as a storage place for students' belongings during breaks. Ananda was such a beneficiary, remembering to this day the many kindnesses Sandy offered without effort or plan.

The hostess river flowed with great strength with Ranganath and Sandy at the helm, so to speak. We are now bereft of Sandy but so many of us travelers on that river will remember her with affection and love and memories of her will remain forever treasured in our hearts.



*Sundar, Arudra, Neera, Lakshmi, Anand, Sandy, 1978*

# The Short, Perpetual Motion Machine

---

Pancho Chang

A callow youth, I believed that adulthood was a state achieved as soon as I left my parents' home. And achieved immaculately to boot, simply by being, not even thinking. Ah, college.

Because God (and St. Jude) looks after dumb animals, one day, Arjun and Sundar confided that they rested and recuperated at Larch Road, where Ranganath and Sandy hosted and fed a stream of young, hungry students. They let me follow them and, lying on the Nayaks' living room floor, eating their wonderful cooking, and admiring their amazing firstborn (hi, Lakshmi), I learned that Ranganath was (and is) wise and that Sandy was an adult (albeit a short one), hence the amazing Lakshmi.

And I learned life lessons about families and adulthood: that it was possible to choose whom you sought advice from (thank you forever, Ranganath!) and that adulthood, in the form of the short, perpetual-motion machine that was Sandy, meant thinking about others' needs and taking care of those needs before they were felt. Because no one ever has exact change or enough sweaters, Sandy made sure that both were around when needed.

And so, I learned (slowly) that behind the immaculate transformation of youth into adults lay lots of planning and preparation, fueled by actual thought (and Sandy's considerable intelligence). Later, as a Scout leader, I harangued the poor boys in our troop with nostrums like "Be prepared." But Sandy, herself a Girl Scout leader, did so quietly and far more completely than anyone might imagine. She'd explain (to those who asked) what went into getting people and things ready, whether it was for a musical, a pageant, or most successfully, for a family. But it was knowledge gained by doing, not by talking, or (in my case) by wishing.

I've been lucky that the first adults who befriended me were Ranganath and Sandy. If imitation is the sincerest form of flattery, I was fortunate to meet and marry Leslie, who shared a similar vision of extended family as we've welcomed new friends from Cambodia, Ethiopia, India, and China. But we haven't gotten anyone to lie on our living-room floor, as I remember our late friend Ram, all six feet plus of him, doing at Larch Road, even while arguing, eating, drinking, and cadging cigarettes simultaneously.

The last time I slept over at Orchard Street, we ate sumptuously, told stories, and deplored the state of the world (well, the messes that Trump was making). Sandy told me the next morning, "Just throw the sheets down the basement stairs where the laundry is." And I knew then that despite all the *meshugas* (an old Chinese term, not), all was right with the world. Sandy was on it.

# Haircut in Rome

Ranganath Nayak

A story that Sandy loved to tell was of when we stopped in Rome on our way to India for my brother's wedding, in March 1970. Susan and Piero Garau had a small apartment with a view of St. Peter's. Sandy and I spent a night there. It had a little balcony, on which Sandy gave me a haircut. I posed for a photo with a geranium in my hands. (Where *is* that photo?) Then we flew to Delhi, where we were received at the airport by my parents. On the way home, my dad said, "Well, the first thing we have to do is to get you a haircut."



*Delhi, 1970: Being greeted as a new bride  
Ranganath, Anu, Sandy, Pandu, Meenakshi*



*Delhi, 1970: part of the ceremonies for Narayan's wedding*

# Lakshmi is Born

---

Sandy Nayak  
*from her journal*

Feb. 3, 1970

This afternoon I got official confirmation that there is a baby on the way, due mid-September around Wendy's birthday. It's hard to think of anything else—schoolwork is piled up and here I am writing in the journal! . . . I keep thinking, "But what if something happens to it!" But I guess that's a feeling I'll have now for the rest of my life.

May 11, 1970

This journal is the greatest form of procrastination—5 papers waiting to be finished up, and here I sit not working on any of them!

The baby "quickenened" some time ago, but only this past week has it gotten really vigorous—it is hard to concentrate on anything else, especially when it is kicking me in the ribs. It's such a pleasure to know it's really there, alive and active.

So much has happened this spring — we went to Narayan & Polly's wedding in Delhi — Deyne had another piece of her lung out and is off antibiotics for the first time in 10 years — School is on Strike against the War, and the Peace Movement is bigger than ever. On our way to Delhi, we stayed with Sue & Piero in Rome. What a pair of lovebirds! We had a joyous time, relaxing and romping around—the perfect beginning for such a fairy-tale trip.

July 22, 1970

The child arrived early, on Bastille Day . . . at 7:45 PM (exactly) on July 14, 1970! She was whisked off to the premature nursery right away . . . I found out the next morning that she weighed 3 lbs. 3 oz. at birth. The doctor had a long talk with Ranganath. I don't know what was said, but the doctor told me that if she lasted 24 hours then probably everything would be OK. So all we could do was hope and pray . . .

She survived the night and so did we . . .

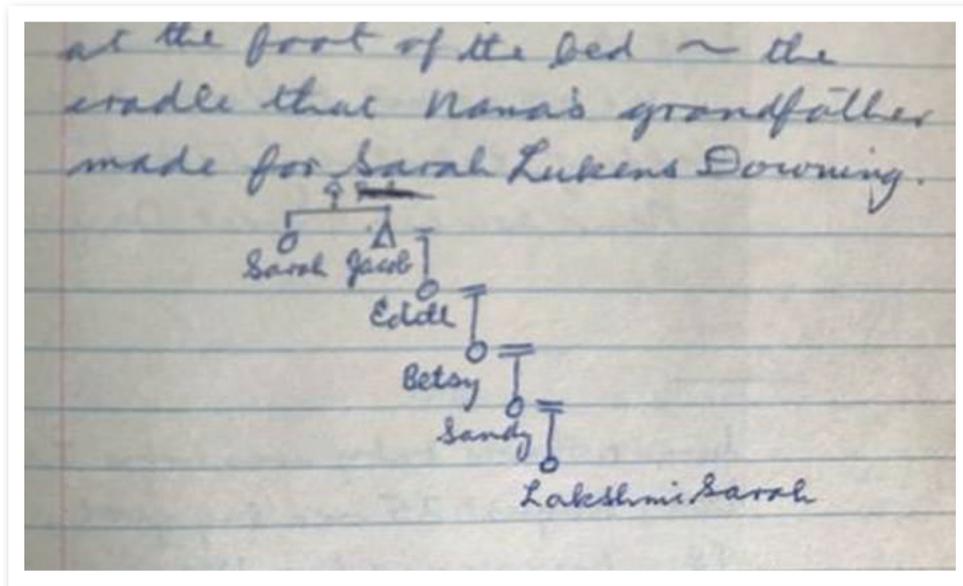
We named the baby Lakshmi. We like it, and it's Mamama's name . . .

When we name her on Sunday, we will give her 5 names—Mahamaya, a star name, Ranganath's secret name, a Western name (probably Sarah), and Lakshmi. We won't be able to do anything for a naming ceremony except distribute sweets to the nurses and whisper her names to her . . .

She's a cute little girl. I call her Button, because she has such a little bit of a button nose, and I miss her. My middle feels empty.

Aug. 20, 1970 . . .

The baby sleeps in a cradle at the foot of the bed—the cradle that Nana's grandfather made for Sarah Lukens Downing.



*Family tree drawn in the journal*

Daddy & Mommy are calling the baby Lek. That is Thai for “little one,” and one of Mommy's favorite names because of a Thai friend.

*Four generations, about a decade apart*



*1970: Nani (Betsy), Sandy, baby Lakshmi, Nana (Edith)*



*Circa 1980: Sandy, Lakshmi, Nana, Nani*



*Sandy and six-month old Lakshmi playing with Howard's train set*



*Sandy helps ten-month-old Lakshmi greet Great-grandmother Lakshmi*



*Sandy carrying Lakshmi, with Deyne and Bill Graustein (Ranganath taking photo) at Deyne and Richard's place in Colorado, circa 1971*

## The Cedarholm Gang, 1972

---



*Standing: Peter and Becky Mattison, Wendy, Vicki and David Smith,  
Ranganath, Peter Dane, Bob Phipps, Bob Tanner*  
*Seated: Mary Meadow, Richard Meadow, Gorky, Sandy, Lakshmi, Jane Tanner,  
Paula Phipps, Gabriel Phipps, Deyne, Henry Meadow, Kay*

# Ranganath tries to get Lakshmi to say Wendy's name

---

Sandy Nayak

*from her journal, 1972 (Lakshmi is almost two years old)*

June 3, 1972

R	Say Wendy	R	Say Deyne
L	Window	L	Deyne
R	(points to window) What is this?	R	Say Mouse
L	Pachhi	L	Mouse
	[mother's younger sister in Konkani]	R	Say Ricky
R	Christ! What is this?	L	Vicky
	(points to window)	R	Henry
L	Christ	L	Henri
R	(suppressed laugh, points to window)	R	Mary
	This is a window. Say window.	L	Maya
L	Window	R	Say Bob
R	Say when	L	Bob
L	When	R	Paula
R	Say when	L	Paula
L	When	R	Amma
R	Say di	L	Sandy!
L	Di di di	R	Say Dev
R	(quickly) Say Wendy	L	Dev
L	Window	R	Say David
		L	David
	(pause for new strategy)	R	Say Wendy
		L	Window!

# Living in Poona

---

Sandy Nayak

*Excerpts of letters from Sandy to Deyne, copied into Betsy's journal*

May 1973

Lakshmi finds the whole idea of birds in the house and cows on the road quite enchanting.

The very thought of adventuring out into traffic is terrifying . . . The Fiat is a mobile tin can, and the roads are full of a most amazing collection of animals and inanimate objects—a full assortment of pedestrians, cycles, scooters, cows, horse carts, ox carts, stray cattle, chickens, goats, trucks, buses, cars, potholes, stray bricks and rocks—rather more like Old Delhi than New Delhi in most places.

Mani has gone for the ration. Rice, sugar, wheat, and wheat products (flour, farina, etc.) are all rationed. This household uses too much refined flour (*maida*) and sugar. The whole-wheat flour (*ata*) is so much nicer—fresh ground every two weeks. It makes superb pancakes.

The neighborhood is full of noise, as three houses are being built around us. But construction noise here is very different from that in the U.S.—people talking, shouting, singing, infants crying, the soft plop of earth being dumped from a basket.

In spite of the heat and the drought, there are some gorgeous spots here—many of the biggest trees are in bloom just now, huge canopies of flame, gold, or white. A poinsettia out back grew 4 feet tall with branches all over the place. I saw a bougainvillea this morning which must have been 20 feet tall and 30 feet in diameter, standing free, all abloom in cerise and white.

## *From Sandy's Journal*

Aug. 9, 1973—Poona

As I recently wrote to my parents, . . . the agony and ecstasy of (life here) are occasionally overwhelming. One lives in comfort surrounded by great human poverty and natural beauty . . .

One of the nicest things about living here is the view of Poona over Chaturshringi, and also the view of the hills along the road returning to Sind Colony. It's the sort of view one might take a vacation to see, changing with the seasons but always beautiful . . .

Lakshmi obviously adores life in a big house with resident grandparents, an aunt, a dog, and servants . . .

The house is spacious, and I have a lovely big vegetable garden out back for my very own. I have conscientiously made compost out of all the house and garden garbage since early March, and the garden is showing the good results of a generous supply of first-class compost. I have never had a green thumb but the garden is thriving endlessly, and it is a wonderful thrill to see it start to produce after so much work . . .

Maya is a real joy to live with. She is one of the sweetest, most considerate people I have ever met . . .

Poona is an interesting city. It has some good shopping areas and even a reasonably good steak house for when I get hungry for such things.

We have also found some very good friends in the Patwardhans—Anand's uncle, his wife, their 2 sons, their wives, and the 2 little granddaughters . . . as a couple we do lots of things with Jayoo, Chinnu, and their infant daughter Tabu (short for Awanti) . . . Vidya Patwardhan and I have been having an exciting time talking about founding a school . . .

I am disturbed by the surrounding poverty, the beggars, and the system which produces them. Trying to provision a household in a situation of rationing, shortages, and rampant inflation is a major headache . . .

It is easy to be an anthropologist if one can go home afterwards and relegate it all to a book. It's a lot tougher if one lives in the field indefinitely, forever, and has to react as a human being as well.



*Poona Railway Station, 1973: Lakshmi, Anamma (Saraswati), Maya, Sandy*

# Dear Sandy

Neera Burra

The other day, I was lying on the sofa and thinking about all the people who played a significant role in my life and realized that you were amongst the two people outside my immediate family to whom I owe majorly!

Do you remember how after 1973 when you guys moved to Poona, you and I would sit late into the night on the first floor of your house in Aundh, and I would be crying on your shoulder, wondering how I was going to manage seven years of district life without going crazy? You would share your trauma of moving bag and baggage from the U.S. to Maharashtra, where there was not only fuel shortage but also food shortage. Compounding this were the difficulties faced silently of living in a joint family. Both of us knew that whatever we talked about in the middle of the night would remain between us.

I almost picked up the phone that afternoon to dial 617-489-0056 instinctively but realized that you would not pick up the phone on the other end to chirpily say, “Nayak household”!

Sandy, my dear, one of the best things that happened to me was being introduced to you, Ranganath, and Lakshmi by Sundar in the fall of 1971 when I was working for Sona in Harvard Square. It was my first time ever travelling abroad alone, and seeing you walk several times a week into the shop, with little Lakshmi in tow, was always such a delight. Our friendship only strengthened when I moved into your apartment months later and shared a bedroom with Lakshmi.



*Sandy, Meenakshi Mallya, Lakshmi, Shambhavi Mhave, Neera, Cambridge 1972*

Years later in 1976, when I was going crazy in Ahmednagar, you persuaded me to do a correspondence course in social anthropology. Thank goodness you were so persuasive because studying changed my life. Every time I faltered, you would get me back on track, reminding me that it was no good just sitting around feeling sorry for myself. I had to take control of my life and get on with it. Your no-nonsense approach was exactly what I needed. Thank you for that. But for your continued support in that first year, I would not have been

able to do all that I subsequently did. You were so proud of my achievements and didn't hesitate to link me up with others doing similar work.

I will never forget how enthusiastic you always were about taking me here and there. I just had to ask you and it was done. I was remembering the trip to Williams with boxes full of food I had cooked for Ananda's friends and stopping in several places en route as you told me the history of the area. You were a walking encyclopedia. We had plans to drive to Vermont, do you remember?

Every time I came to Boston, for Arudra's and Ananda's birthdays, you and I would sit at your dining table at lunch, quietly planning and plotting what we would do together when I could spend more time in the U.S. It was a fun time just daydreaming and talking about things we couldn't share with anyone else—about our spouses and our children! Our dreams, hopes, and anxieties.

I just wish we had more time together . . .

Take care, my friend, and lots of love.

# First Encounter

---

Ashok Kanetkar

In the early 1970s, Ranganath and Sandy moved to Pune, India. One day after I returned from work, I found my wife Jyoti and my mother discussing the day's happenings, especially an event that had given them a very pleasant surprise. For my benefit, they told me that a young girl (Lakshmi) and her mother (Sandy) had decided to just walk into our house and get introduced. They were new in the neighbourhood, and it was the young Lakshmi who in fact had dragged the mother in.

I found it all mildly interesting till my mother said that the American woman was carrying herself very well in a sari. That got my attention. What was an American woman doing in Pune, and why was she wearing a sari? It finally all came out. The American woman was married to an Indian man, and she was wearing a sari as though it was the most natural attire to wear. Later when my father and I both saw her, we were also surprised to see how well Sandy carried herself in a sari. Her movements were so natural that she never stood out as a foreigner wearing a sari but merged into the crowd of many other sari-clad Indian women.

As I came to know her more, I found that she had learned so much about India and Indians—a few things that even I did not know—and it was clear that she had done it out of genuine love and admiration, which was clear from the effortless manner in which she had assimilated the ways. The sari was just the tip of an iceberg.

Underneath this all, there was a Radcliffe summa cum laude absolutely intact. A big part of my understanding about the U.S. comes from my various talks with Sandy. She had an interesting way of talking too. She would push down her chin almost into the base of her throat and then look up and with shy humour in her voice and tell you—with some intelligent joke included—the similarity between old Bostonians and the Maharashtrian and Konkani brahmins. She had so much of information tucked away inside her brain that she could have easily patented some version of trivia game.

Another impression is that though she enjoyed cooking and baking, I never saw her eat with the same delight. She rather enjoyed cooking various things and watching others eat and enjoy. There are so many things I ate for the first time at Sandy's table. One was cheese fondue, other was apple pie, then of course some interesting baked stuff. When you moved from Pune to Boston, she gave her oven to us, and my wife and mother used it for many, many years.

Sandra Tompkins Nayak walked into India and Indian ways with genuine love and a desire to be a part of it without ever forgetting or letting go of the American ways she had grown up with. I have not seen any other American who became one of us with such effortless grace and a generous mind to boot.



*Poona, 1970s: Ashok, Sandy, Vidya Patwardhan*



*Hyderabad, 2015: Sandy, Ashok, Jyoti, Kimaya*

# Anand is Born

---

Sandy Nayak  
*from her journal*

Sept. 16, 1974

The new one is still within me, so all is well . . . Lakshmi is thriving. Her vocabulary is increasing in interesting directions—today she told me that one of her dolls was “in a prone position on the top of the wardrobe,” which indeed she was. She has 2 good friends (Sunaina Maira + Pumori Telang) who go to St. Mary’s school, so she has decided she should go there next year. I must look into it.

Oct. 20, 6:30 PM (1974)

It’s a boy! Born at 1:55 PM, after about 4 hours of rather intensive labor (+ all night feeling it coming). He weighs 7 lbs. 11 oz. (3 kg 550 g), and can already turn his head from side to side. He has a small amount of very dark hair, but is otherwise quite pink . . .

Lakshmi has decided that a brother is all right after all.\* She spent a couple of hours here this afternoon exclaiming over the baby and generally being wildly excited.

Deyne is here. She’s been here since the 6th. Thank goodness for Deyne! With her, Lakshmi is perfectly happy. She has been such a help and support since her arrival.

Ranganath saw the baby right after it was born, and watched it being bathed and dressed. He is very quietly very pleased. He was an enormous help thru the hours of labor he was with me—without him, it would have been enormously more difficult to keep my cool. With him, the Lamaze techniques worked like a charm.

I am exhausted but beautifully happy. I feel like I’ve accomplished a lot today.

Lakshmi was full of questions. “Are you exhausted now, Mommy? You lie still and I’ll take care of everything. Why are you bleeding? Why are you exhausted? Oh, he’s such a sweet baby! Why does he shut his eyes like that? Why does he look at me like that? Look, she’s looking at me! Oops, I missed. It’s a he. That was silly of me! Why does he want to sleep? May I kiss him? I’ll be very careful! Oh, he’s such a sweet little baby!” etc. etc. etc. etc. She’s marvelous, but her energy is sometimes frightening.



\*Note from Lakshmi: I had a bet on with Mani, our cook. I wanted the baby to be a girl, to provide me with a little sister, and he wanted it to be a boy. We bet that the winner would treat the loser: if it was a girl, I would buy him a 5 Star chocolate bar out of my allowance (it cost five rupees, which was a quite a lot of money for me.) If it was a boy, he would bake a chocolate cake for the family. So when I “lost” the bet, I really won all around.

Nov. 7, 1974

The night the baby was born Ranganath sent a telegram to Daddy, saying,

ISAIAH NINE SIX SUNDAY  
SEVEN POUNDS ELEVEN OUNCES  
ALL IS WELL.

He was *delighted*. The relevant verse is

*For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counselor, the mighty God, the everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace.*

Ranganath could not possibly have figured a better way of informing parents—that was a real inspiration. Apparently the people they have told it to got the quote right off, but Nana’s reaction was “Oh wonderful, it’s a boy, but isn’t that a strange name for an Indian?”

We took him home from the hospital when he was four days old, on Thursday morning. We distributed sweets to so many people, and many came to visit. . . . We had his cradling on Thursday, Nov. 31 . . . He was named

Narayan (Kuladevata - Lakshminarayan)

Yeshwant (Nakshatranam)

Ramanath (paternal grandfather)

Edward (maternal grandfather)

Anand (what we will call him)

Lakshmi decided the name, actually. We were trying to choose between Arjun, Anand, and Prakash, and she said it should be Anand because she liked Anand Patwardhan so much. So Anand he is.



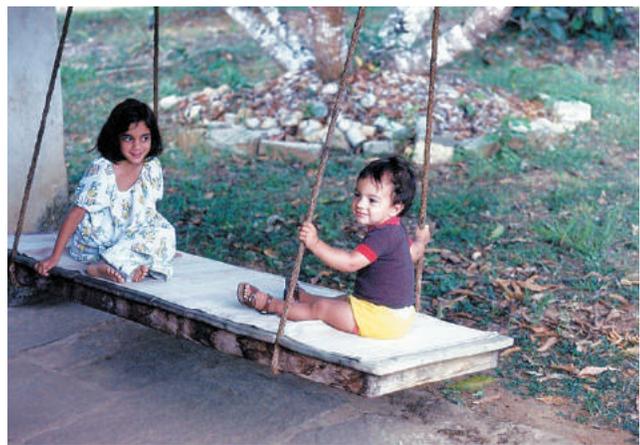
*"This is **my** little brother!  
I'm an Akka now!"*

July 18, 1975

Anand is nearly 9 months old now, and a more cheerful little rascal would be hard to imagine. He wakes up with a grin, smiles at everyone, adores his big sister, and is in all respects a delightful baby.

Oct. 26, 1975

Anand is one already. What a clown he is—good-natured and affectionate . . . He “talks” quite a lot, conversing with anybody in fully inflected gibberish. Since the day before his birthday, he has walked a few steps every day but seems to consider it a foolhardy form of locomotion not worthy of more frequent repetition. He crawls on hands and knees at high speed. He loves playing with Lakshmi, Ashish, Katya, and Shreedhar—and plays with them, not just near them.



*Anand with Anamma and Ajja in Poona, circa 1975*



*Anamma holds Anand and Deepa*



*Anand and Ajja*



*Family gathered in Bangalore, circa 1975*



*Visiting the National Museum,  
New Delhi, circa 1978*



*Anand's birthday party,  
circa 1980: Anand,  
Sandy, Karl Varnik*

# Adopting in Poona

---

Deyne Meadow

I was in Sweden, on my way to India, to be with Sandy when she gave birth to her second child. In Sweden, my friend Eva asked if I would check in at an orphanage in the town where Sandy and Ranganath lived, Poona, and take them the final papers that were needed for their adoption process. She gave me the papers, and off I went.

As it happened, Sandy knew the lady who had started this orphanage and who was still very involved with it. This meant that we were known, and made it easier for the orphanage to trust us.

Sandy had Anand, a healthy baby boy, and we waited ten days before taking him out of the house. Sandy then drove me to the orphanage, which was located on the grounds of a large hospital called Sassoon Hospital, and went on to do some shopping while I went into the orphanage. We were to meet at a particular tree in about an hour.

One hour later, Sandy was there. I was not. I was still in the orphanage, signing papers, and taking charge of a tiny baby girl for my friend. They had looked at the papers I carried, said all was in order, and then said that there was a baby who had just come in, abandoned at the police station, and we could be the foster parents while waiting for my Swedish friend to come and finish the court papers.

When I appeared at the tree, Sandy was sitting there with Anand in her lap. She looked at me and the blanket-wrapped bundle in my arms and said “Why am I not surprised?” And we took the baby home.

Looking back on it, I realize what a brave thing that was for her to do. She had given birth less than two weeks before this and yet was open to bringing an unknown baby into the house, with no idea of what the baby’s medical condition might be. The baby had abrasions on her knees, so Sandy took us to the pediatrician’s on the way home, and we got ointments to treat the knees, and the doctor’s assurance that she was a healthy baby girl.

Once my friend arrived from Sweden, Sandy and Ranganath organized a proper naming ceremony for the baby. Nothing was known about her ancestry, caste, or anything, but the naming ceremony is what they had done for their son Anand, so this is what they did for the baby girl. It was lovely.



*Mani (the cook) with baby Malin, 1974*

A year later, I was back in India, to adopt a child for ourselves, as well as get a second child for my friend in Sweden. The paperwork was complete, and Sandy took me over to the orphanage. The babies we brought home were tiny, and not in good shape. One of them needed penicillin injections on a regular basis, and Sandy was frequently the one to take her to the clinic to get them. We hired an ayah (baby nurse) to help look after the babies, as I had to go to Bombay (now Mumbai) for the court cases and passports. Sandy took it all in stride, folding them into her already busy household.



*The ayah, Mrs. Sustart, with the new babies (Deyne's Lela and Eva's Anna) and one-year-old Anand, 1975*

I can't imagine what the process would have been like without Sandy and her household. I was a new mom dealing with the legal paperwork of international adoptions, getting to know my little daughter, and Sandy always seemed to know what to do. She remained calm throughout, and let me know that she trusted me to be able to handle it. I needed that.



*Deyne with Lela*

# India, Sweden, and the U.S.

Eva Bergman-Larsson

I got to know Sandy in the beginning of the '70s, which means that I have known her for more than fifty years.

When I was in Poona to adopt a baby girl, Sandy and Ranganath opened up their home to me and my baby girl. Sandy was wonderful, taking care of not only her own newborn son Anand and my baby girl Malin, but also a four-year-old, Lakshmi, and her household. In retrospect, I wonder how she could cope with it all.

Sandy only visited us once in Sweden, when they were on their way from India to the U.S.. Anand and Malin were still babies at the time, and I have pictures of them sitting in the baby bathtub on the balcony.



*The Nayaks in Sweden, 1975*

Since the 1970s, we have met almost every year, as Deyne and I have been traveling back and forth between the U.S. and Sweden. I have been visiting the Nayaks on countless occasions, both in Belmont and on Cape Cod, always having a fantastic time.

Sandy was one of the wisest persons I have met, and it's astonishing how many people she took under her wing and guided through life. She took care of her parents and always found time for her sisters as well. She was the center, holding us all together.

Sandy was the kind of storyteller who could spellbind the whole room.

Having Sandy around, you didn't need Google, as she was like an encyclopedia.

We shared a mutual interest in textiles and sewing, and I helped her now and then with the costumes for her church performances.

And I remember how beautiful she was when she would look at Ranganath across the table and smile.



*Maya, Sandy, and Eva listening to bands perform in the 2000s—Maya's band is in the lineup*



*Eva and Sven's girls, all grown up: Malin with her daughter Selma; Anna with August, Alfred, and Johan*

# A Strong and Lasting Presence

Jyoti Kanetkar

Since Shreedhar and Suchitra came over yesterday morning, my thoughts have been full of memories of our times together. Whatever I do, Sandy is a strong and lasting presence in my thoughts. She always is and will be.

Small Lakshmi had pulled a pregnant Sandy into our compound in 408 Sind Society when I was standing in the veranda. I was expecting Shreedhar. Thereafter it is all our times together. The hilarious time on Sinhagad when I made sandwiches out of jelly, which melted. The last days when all of you stayed with us before leaving for Boston. The elegant dance you and Sandy did in the 408 Sind Colony drawing room. All the visits thereafter.



*Pune, 1989, picnic on Sinhagad: Tabu, Abir, and Maya in the background; Sandy, Lakshmi, Amy, Jyoti, and Jayoo, seated*

Even when in the U.S., the way she nurtured Shreedhar when it was most necessary, the way she got me out of a tight corner in Switzerland when my seat in the plane back to India had been given to another delegate. The special thing about her was that there was no noise about all the good deeds she performed as a matter of course. She just moved on to the next thing. In India, Dnyaan Daan (giving of knowledge) is considered

one of the best daans. The legions of students of many nations that have passed through your gracious home with Sandy being there for all of them is there for all to see.

No matter how much I try, I prefer to have her present in my life as I feel her now. Her physical loss is irreparable, but I feel her beside me as I have always felt her to be. You and I are the richer for having had her. She will continue to make us strong and be as life-oriented as she was.

I join you in remembering her with love and great respect. Look after yourself.



*Pune, early 2000s: Jyoti, Sandy, Nimatai, Ranganath*

# Sandy at Katapadi, the Nayak Family's Ancestral Home

Gopalkrishna Nayak

News of Sandy's demise, conveyed to me by my brother Sitaram, shocked and saddened me. For a few days, I reminisced about my meetings with Sandy—twice in Katapadi and once in Boston. I am honored to write a few words on this.

I first met Sandy in the 1970s when she visited the Pangal Nayak family's ancestral home in Katapadi, near Udupi, India. She accompanied Mrs. Laxmidevi and her son Venkatesh (Ranganath's cousin) who introduced Sandy as Ranganath's wife. Sandy was given a tour of this 200-plus-year-old two-floored house with seven small square courtyards. While entering the Sanctum Sanctorum, she suddenly hesitated and realized that the purse she was carrying was made of leather and so kept it outside the door and only then entered the area. There were about twenty Pangal Nayak family members, and all were witness to this incident.

I showed Sandy the adjacent rooms where Ranganath's father grew up, with his brother and two sisters, and then moved to the nearby town of Udupi. Sandy was fascinated by the brass oil lamps hanging from the carved wooden ceiling that used cotton wicks and vegetable oil. And the next room had (and still has) a one-slab wooden cot measuring 116"×37.5"×3", one of the seven such slabs cut with a custom-made steel saw from a dying wild jackfruit *Artocarpus hirsutus*.

A few years after her marriage, Sandy recommended to her younger sister Deyne's parents-in-law, Mary and Henry Meadow, dean at the Harvard Medical School, that they visit Katapadi on their India trip. Ranganath's cousin Mizar Sadanand Pai brought them here. They got a demonstration of coconut and also betel nut plucking by men climbing fifty- to seventy-foot-tall palm trees. They visited the fishing villages nearby. They invited me to visit their huge farm near Albuquerque, New Mexico, and also their Boston house.

I visited Sandy and Ranganath sometime in the early fall of 1980. Sandy had invited a couple of dozen or so South Asian students doing PhDs or master's and the food was pure vegetarian. Sandy and Ranganath took me to the Meadow house, where they also invited many young people. From there, I went to New Jersey.

Sandy's daughter Lakshmi visited and stayed with us a couple of times. She always reminded me of her mother Sandy and her great-grandmother Lakshmi (Ranganath's grandmother) for whom she was named. Sandy and Ranganath visited us with Maya and her family, and then with Anand and his family, about six years ago. Each time, they came in the morning and spent almost the whole day and left in the evening. I had a long chat with Sandy on various subjects. Anand and Polly sang some American pop and folk songs for us. My brother Sitaram and his wife Prema were here on their annual visit. Sitaram told me that Anand is an accomplished guitar maestro and Polly is a good pop and folk singer.

My brother Sitaram and sister Aruna, who frequently call me from the U.S., kept me informed about Sandy's health. Sandy was a great gift to our Pangal Nayak family, maintaining the tradition of the benevolence of her in-laws and their parents. May her soul rest in peace.

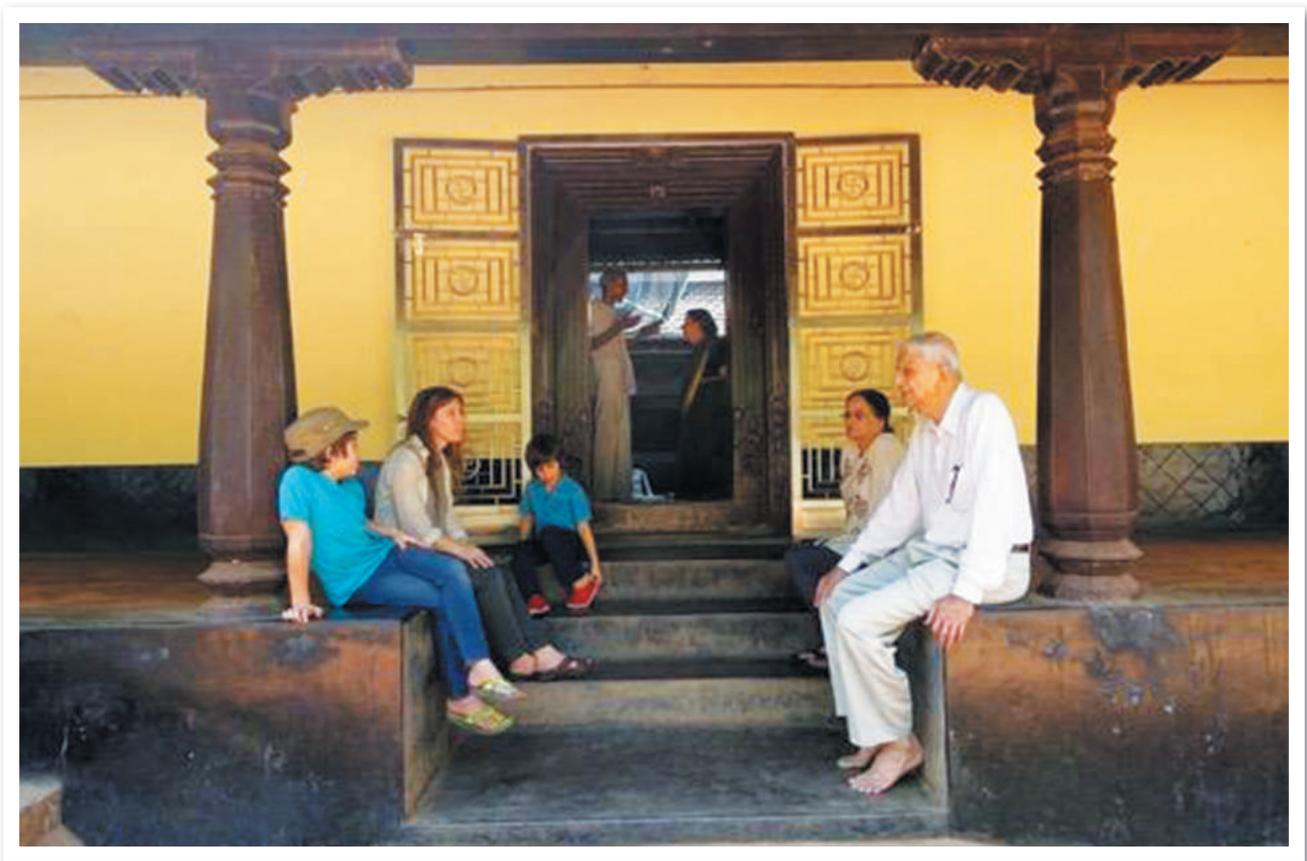


*Ranganath Kamath (of Gangoli) with Gopalkrishna and Sandy*

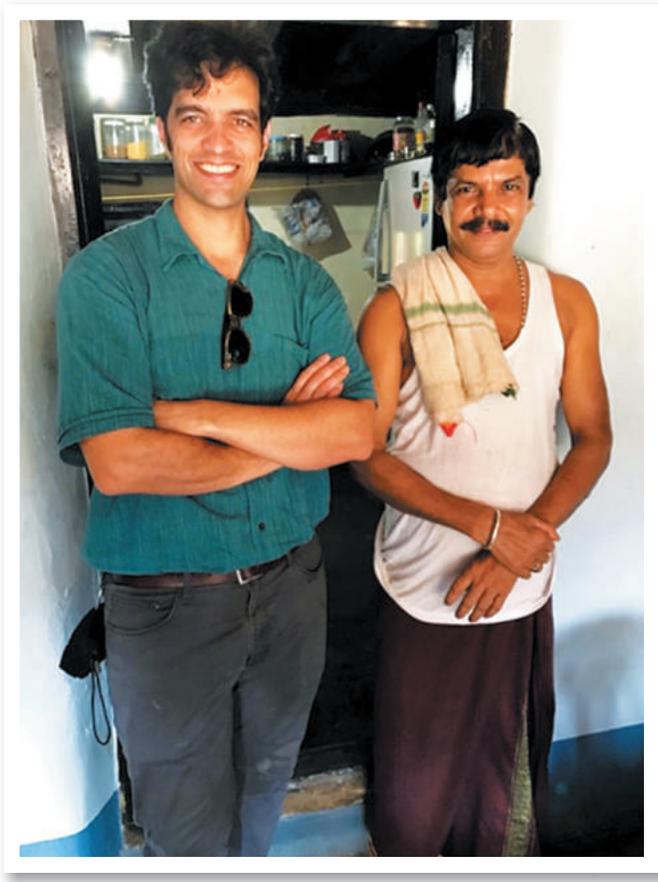
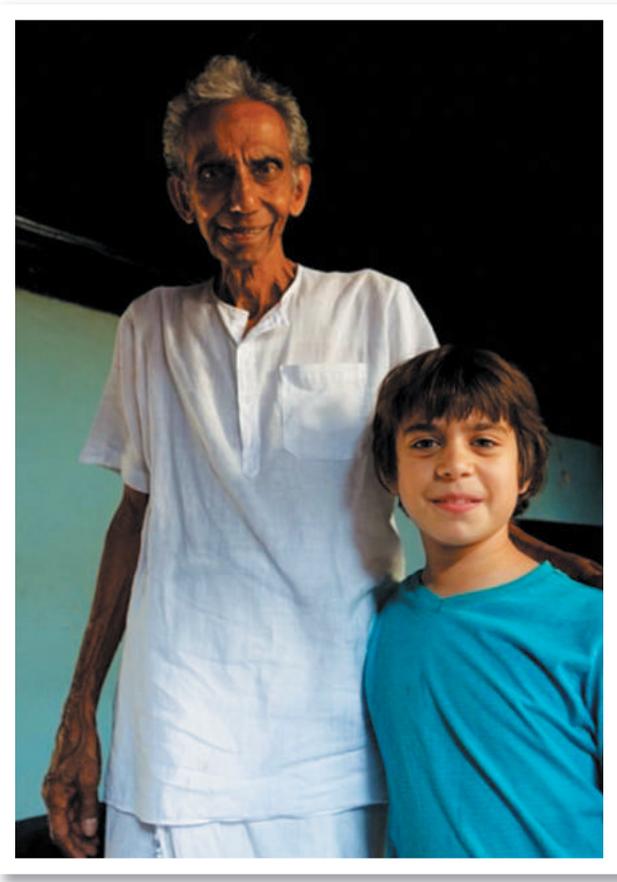


*2015 visit to Katapadi with Maya, George, Asha, and Lakshmi*





*2017 visit to Katapadi with Anand, Polly, Jack, and Leo*



# Back from India

---

Ranganath Nayak

We—Sandy, Lakshmi, Anand, and I—were living with my parents at 346E Sind Colony in Pune starting in January of 1973. Sandy had both enjoyed life there and had severe difficulties, the first being the loss of her twins, for which she blamed Beth Israel hospital for not having diagnosed and recorded the reason for the premature birth of Lakshmi, an incompetent os, a cervical opening that did not hold under pressure. The second, a severe case of pneumonia after her miscarriage, almost killed her. She was saved by our friend Jayoo Patwardhan, who moved into the hospital room with Sandy for several days and nights, and made sure the care being given was both timely and appropriate. God bless Jayoo!

Meanwhile, I was not greatly enjoying my work at TELCO (now Tata Motors) because the work culture was as different as could be from Bolt, Beranek, and Newman, where I had previously worked in Cambridge, my first job ever outside academia.

And then, Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, Nehru's daughter, and an unredeemed autocrat declared a state of national emergency because she felt threatened by the uprising of rural people, and the Untouchables (now Dalits) against her, led by Jayaprakash Narayan. People were being arrested and put in jail with no due process, demonstrations, and gatherings were banned, and the newspapers were censored. In Pune, our newspapers arrived with large blacked-out boxes on each page, covering censored material. It took courage to do this, telling the readers that censorship was underway. Most newspapers decided to just not publish banned material.

My father, who had served in high positions in the government for decades and had had a run-in with Indira Gandhi a few years earlier, advised Sandy and me to move back to the U.S. He thought it possible that we would soon be prevented from traveling abroad.

So Sandy, Lakshmi, Anand, and I moved back to the U.S. in the summer of 1976, staying at first with Deyne, Richard, Lela, Henry, and Mary at Cedarholm, their home in Canton, Massachusetts.

By amazing luck, the apartment at 21 Standish Street, Cambridge, which we had occupied before the move to India, was coming vacant that September! We loved it and loved our landlady, Ruth Johnson, but discovered that living there with two small children (as opposed to one toddler) was somewhat cramped. With the help of my brother Narayan, we started looking at homes to buy, in Arlington, Belmont, Lexington, and Watertown. We were not aiming to buy yet, just to get smart about house-buying, for we had never made such a big financial commitment before. It was February 1977.

But we ended up looking at 12 Orchard Street, Belmont. Its location was perfect—on the bus line to Harvard Square, a seven-minute commute to work for me, all schools within walking distance. Because of the time of year, there was only one other buyer interested, a lawyer from Boston. He was trying to bargain the price down from \$73,500 to \$72,000. My brother said, "If you want it, offer the full amount." We did, and we got the house.

We moved into it in April 1977 and have been here ever since.



*The home at 12 Orchard Street*



*Sandy and Ranganath in the original kitchen, and in the remodeled kitchen that O'Jay built*

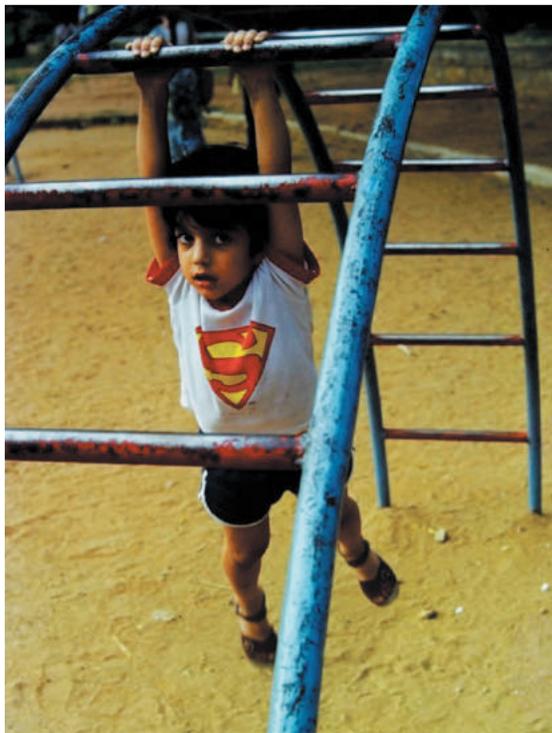


# The Key Bowl at 12 Orchard Street

Carolyn Bishop

The across-the-road neighbor moved in with young Lakshmi and even younger Anand and of course Ranganath. Fond memories of having another young family so conveniently located, so handy to borrow this half cup of flour or that egg or two as we often did when we found we'd misjudged how well our larder was equipped. So handy to have someone who made excellent coffee and had the time to sit and chat a bit on these borrowing trips. So handy to have a playmate—Anand—for our young daughter Becky.

Hard not to notice Anand in his boots and hero cape jumping, running, and narrating his adventure in their front yard, hoping Becky would notice and want to play superheroes. Not long and he was soon old enough to come over and ask Becky to play. Just tall enough for those big brown beseeching eyes to appear on the side window panel—who could resist? Sometimes, Sandy and I would sit and chat while they played in the sprinkler on a hot day.



Anand—Superman



Becky—Angel

Her gardening introduced us to some unfamiliar products including Ranganath's terminally hot peppers. He ate them like popcorn; we seeded, sliced, and minced them to add a tiny bit to brighten up a meal.

So many memories as the children grew: Maya arriving seemingly overnight! A perfect addition to the family but there were never empty rooms. Parents visiting when they could, poignant impacts of aging eventual loss but always some student, relative, or friend of a friend to keep the house humming with activity. There was always room for one more in Sandy's house.

Sandy: often busy with theatrical projects at church; for some reason all I could offer was a lot of petticoats when needed. There seems to have been nothing that Sandy couldn't find, fix, adapt, or create for these events.

As the years went by and the kids grew and went their ways; sadly I saw less of Sandy except when I was locked out and had to dive into the key bowl at 12 Orchard to find my house key. Those growing kid years were precious and the results were so rewarding.

I treasure my memories of those years—thanks to Sandy and the whole family. Blessings to you all.



*The key bowl at 12 Orchard Street*

# The Home that Sandy and Ranganath Built

## A Journey Back in Time

---

Rekha Doraiswamy

There is a house at 12 Orchard Street, Belmont, Massachusetts. It is an extraordinary place that defies simple descriptions.

You find yourself going there over the years for everything your life could possibly need—laughter, wisdom, love, reassurance, advice, warmth, adventure, unique experiences, abundant and delicious food, music, family, new friends, a cure for homesickness—really everything.

This is not just a house, but it is the home that Sandy and Ranganath built, with years of love and care for everyone in their orbit. You become part of their family.

When you are a college student from India and enter 12 Orchard Street, you feel you have come back home. There are traditional copper and brass vessels holding rice and dals in the kitchen. There is a cat named Menaka. There is a big map of India on the kitchen wall. Indian spices, textiles, artwork, and fragrances are everywhere. Amar Chitra Katha comic books are stacked up, inviting you to sit down and be transported back to old childhood stories. There are three bright and affectionate children named Lakshmi, Anand, and Maya, who all grew up to be loving, generous, and thoughtful adults, just like their parents. On the outside of Lakshmi's bedroom door is a translation of a timeless Sanskrit poem by Kalidasa, in Sandy's handwriting, "Salutation to the Dawn."\* You are in a home that embodies this poem.

In no time at all, you grow to love this family. It is a big joint family, though not entirely under one roof. Sandy's parents, Howard and Betsy, visit from Pennsylvania several times a year and ultimately settle an hour away, in Needham. Ranganath's family members visit from Bangalore and Pennsylvania, and from all over the world. Sandy's sisters Deyne and Wendy settle nearby, with sister Vicki in neighboring New York state, relatively close after several years in Chicago. Sandy cared for her grandmother in this house during her Nana's last months and also tended to Ranganath's dear father toward the end of his life.



*Anamma and Nani in the old Belmont kitchen, circa 1988*

In this family, there is a deep reverence for the elderly and an equally deep love for children. Sandy and Ranganath will cheerfully volunteer to host your fiancé Krish’s parents and sister’s family, whom they have never met, in the days leading to your wedding. They will make their stay memorable and comfortable. Your own parents, Namdeo and Hira, and your brothers, Bhim and Ashok, have stayed with Sandy and Ranganath over the years. And when Sandy visits you after you have children of your own, she arrives with a big bag of cute and soft Beanie Babies. Your children get to pick out a favorite to keep for themselves. She will have engaging and challenging games and books to give to older children. Your daughter Karuna is so comfortable with this “family by affection” that years later, while completing a college internship in Cambridge, she will call and say, “Sandy Maushi, could I spend a few days of my internship at your place?” The answer is “Of course,” and they have a wonderful time with each other.



*Rekha graduating from Harvard*



*Juliet and Karuna at Anand and Polly’s wedding, 2001*

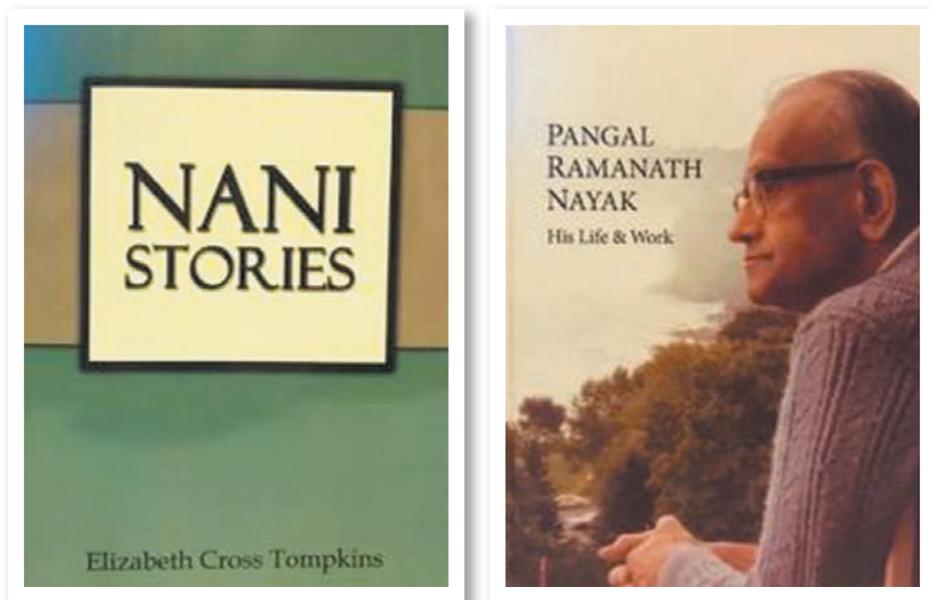
The food in Belmont is consistently delicious, unique, and nourishing. There will always be Indian food, but the menu will be very international. One will never forget Sandy’s Mexican Christmas Eve salad, which mixed

beets, sour cream, mayonnaise, and peanuts. The Nayaks serve hot dogs wrapped in tortillas, surprising but pleasing. Homemade banana bread, cookies, cakes add a sweetness to life. Ranganath will likely draft you to chop vegetables or to keep an eye on several pots simmering on the stove, and just like that, you learn a lot about fast and versatile cooking and the power of a team.

Sandy's magic office and workshop is a small desk off in a corner of the dining room. Magnificent things happen there. All her letter writing, all the volunteer work for the musical drama program for children organized by the First Unitarian Church, all the school volunteer work, various Friends' Committee projects—all of these things are brewing and simmering in that office. Big projects like costumes are done in her sewing room in the basement but will spill over into the large dining room and the light and airy kitchen. Sandy will create beautiful objects for sale at the First Unitarian's fundraising bazaars. One year she has a large tray of beautiful headbands she has created with lovely ribbons and colorful flowers. You see them and wish you could be six again so you could wear one of those headbands.

New experiences happen constantly in this home. Ranganath returns from Japan with the first version of a compact disc player and some music compact discs. One year they install a device in the music room that allows you to be suspended upside down. Everyone experiments with that, including someone who takes to reading a book for long stretches in that position. You could get drafted to help wash windows on long ladders outside as you discover one weekend when visiting from Chicago! What an adventure!

Loving stories are written in this home. The first story writer is Lakshmi. Still a schoolgirl, she spends a year in India with her grandparents, learning more about her grandfather's childhood, education, training, and long career. She writes a beautiful memoir of his life, called *A Gathering of Leaves*. Decades later, Sandy will gather a lovely collection of memories of her mother, Betsy Tompkins, in a volume called *Nani Stories*. Still later, Ranganath will create a detailed book about his father: *Pangal Ramanath Nayak: His Life and Work*, adding people's stories to *A Gathering of Leaves*. Each piece of writing captures the life, thoughts, and aspirations of family members in the twentieth century, in India and in America. Though specific circumstances are different, the universal human story rings strong in each narrative. Reading them, you hope the younger family members will continue the storytelling!



So this is my recounting of the life that Sandy and Ranganath built together in Belmont, starting back in the 1970s. It was a magical time to get to know them, to become part of their family, and to appreciate them for their love and their kindnesses and the gift of many great memories.

\*I think this is the translation Sandy used for Kalidasa's poem:

### **Salutation to the Dawn**

Look to this day!  
For it is life, the very life of life  
In its brief course  
Lie all the verities and realities of your existence  
The bliss of growth  
The glory of action  
The splendor of beauty  
For yesterday is but a dream  
And tomorrow is only a vision  
But today well lived makes every yesterday  
A dream of happiness  
And every tomorrow a vision of hope  
Look well, therefore, to this day!  
Such is the salutation to the dawn.



***Rekha's Wedding, Cedarholm***

*Standing: Ranganath, Sandy, Lakshmi, David, Vicki, Rekha, Krish, Wendy, Jim, Deyne, Richard*

*Seated: Nani, Grandpop, with Sarah and Nils standing next to them*

*On the floor: Lela, Maya, Anand*

## The Nayak Cousins in Belmont, 1970s

---



*On the sofa: Tara, Anammal/Amma (Saraswati), Ranganath,  
Anand, Ajjal/Dada (Ramanath), Sushila, Narayan  
On the floor: Sandy, Lakshmi, Polly*



*Anand, Sushila, Tara, and Lakshmi, approximately 1977 and 1980*



# We Will Not Forget You

---

Hans Sachdeva

As far as my recollection goes, I talked to Sandy for the first time on the telephone with a message from Ranganath that he would be coming a little bit late to the office. Ranganath had a meeting with somebody, and I took care of the visitor until Ranganath arrived.

In a few months' time, I had an occasion to go to the Nayaks' home. At the door, I introduced myself as Hans, assistant to Dr. Nayak. Sandy was extremely gracious. I was really amazed by the simplicity of her clothes and the way she was looking after her parents. She introduced me to them, and we talked for some time. I do not remember the conversation, but I was struck by their simplicity too.

I met Sandy many times thereafter at the office entrance, where she had brought some paper from home to give to Ranganath.

I remember I quit smoking in 1979. It was very difficult. Then Ranganath quit smoking in January 1980. Sandy was full of glee and called me to thank me. I said it was his own will that did it. She said, "You quit and that is what gave him the impetus." All of us were happy that he had quit.

I saw and observed that Sandy rolled many duties and activities into one great experience. She looked after her parents cared about Ranganath's parents. She was a mother and looked after her children in and out of school, was a wife to Ranganath, and also an assistant for his office engagements. She was a friend and sister to Deyne and Wendy and her other sister. She hosted foreign students every year from different parts of the world. She looked after church activities. In fact, she rolled in some other activities as well. God blessed her with tremendous stamina and patience to carry out all of this without showing any grimace on her face.

Just days before her passing away, Ranganath and Sandy came to our house. We all had tea together. Happily my children happened to be home. I saw that Sandy and Ranganath were very happy and they were glad to see my children also.

This was the last time I saw Sandy and Ranganath together.

Suddenly, the sad news was disclosed to us by his son. We were all standing in the kitchen. We could not reconcile ourselves to what the news was.

Sandy, our family misses you very much. God be with you. Hans Sachdeva and family will not forget you.

# Drama in the Basement

---

Sandy Nayak

2021

Once upon a time, a long time ago, an employee from the gas company came every month to read the gas meter, which was on the wall at the bottom of the basement stairs. That assumed of course that someone would be home to let him in.

Also once upon a time, a long time ago, the Parent Teacher Association at our local elementary school held an elaborate Haunted House at Halloween to raise money.

One year, a local company was getting rid of some mannequins that had been used in car crash studies, so we got one of a young woman that had an easily detachable head and dressed it up for the haunted house, with nylon fishing line attached to the head so that someone could pull the line and make the head float up toward the ceiling. With suitable lights, it was wonderfully scary, and it was a big hit. After that year's Haunted House, we stored the mannequin in our basement, leaning her against the wall, with her head on the adjacent shelf, at the foot of our basement stairs. As it turned out, this was near the gas meter.

The next month, the gas man came and headed quickly for the basement with his big flashlight, descending the stairs without turning on the overhead light. When he got to the bottom, his flashlight shone on the head on the shelf, then the headless dressed body, and he yelled in surprise. When he came up, he said, "Lady, you took ten years off my life with that thing down there!" Then I explained about the haunted house, and we laughed about it.

The following year, we took her back to the Haunted House. This time a neighbor took her home afterwards and stored her in his basement. And the same gas man saw her there! When he came to our house, he said, "What is it with this neighborhood?!"

Not long after that, the gas company changed to remote meter reading. And the haunted house was forbidden, maybe by insurance people, or maybe by anti-Halloween objections. I don't know what happened to the mannequin.

# Around the World in a Superman Cape

---

Lakshmi Nayak

One of Mom's stories . . . When Anand started kindergarten, in 1979, Mom got a call from his new teacher. She said, "Your son is delightful, but I'm a little concerned about his being able to tell reality from fantasy."

"Oh?" Mom replied, "What did he say?"

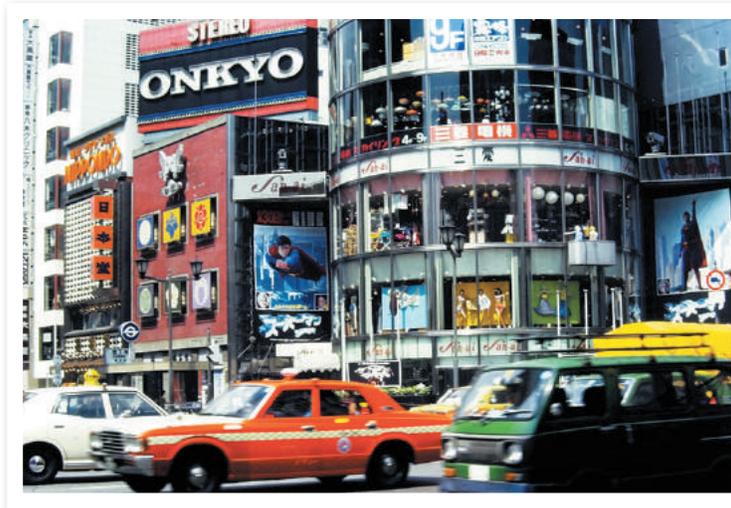
"We asked the children, 'What did you do this summer?'" said the teacher, "and he said that he said that he flew around the world in his Superman cape."

"Well," said Mom, "with a little help from Pan Am, that's exactly what he did!"

Ana had won a pair of first-class tickets through his work to go around the world on Pan Am. He traded them in for four economy tickets, and off we went, spending time in Japan and India, and stopping down in various airports in transit such as Hong Kong. We always went west, so we did indeed end up going around the world. And since Anand wore the cape that Mom had made for him on every single flight, he literally flew around the world in his Superman cape.

In Japan, Mom made a rule that each of us got to choose something for all three of us to do each day, while Ana worked. Since Anand, age four, usually chose riding on the subway, and we needed that to get places, it really worked out well.

A few weeks into the new school year, Mom received another call from Anand's teacher. "We were talking about transportation today, and Anand said that in subway stations people line up along white lines painted onto the platform, and the train doors open exactly at those lines, and there are other people with white gloves packing everyone into the train cars. I've never heard of a subway like that, but this time I thought I'd check with you first." And of course, that is exactly what the subway was like in Tokyo. We had not yet been on any subway in Boston.



*"Look, Mom, Superman!"*

Mom made us try Japanese food (our first taste of sushi) but relented for one lunch at a Japanese McDonald's.



We took the bullet train—the Shinkansen—to Kyoto, passing Mt. Fuji on the horizon. In Kyoto we saw ancient temples that had survived centuries of earthquakes and ponds with giant koi that I was convinced could jump out and eat me. We stayed in the traditional-style rooms, with tatami mats and futons, a wonderful Japanese bath, and kimonos.



Mom often talked about how she was at first reluctant to leave our hotel in Tokyo and go to Kyoto just for one night when the opportunity arose, and how Ana said, “This is the opportunity of a lifetime. The kids will always remember it.” And we did, and she did. It was an amazing trip.

From Tokyo we touched down in Hong Kong and then stopped in Bangalore for some cousin time. Radha and I (age eight and nine) decided to put on a play of Little Red Riding Hood. Deepa (age four), who had a red dress and a red cape with a hood, was Little Red Riding Hood. Radha was the wolf, I was the mother and the grandmother, and of course we were the co-directors. We deemed Nandan (age two) to be too young for a part, so he was The Curtain, along with Chittu. (Sadly, I can’t find those photos.)

We wanted Anand to be the woodcutter who saves Little Red Riding Hood, but he refused to be anyone but Superman, and so it was Superman who flew out from behind the curtain and saved the day.



*Superman (aka Anand), Ajja, Nandan, Deepa, Anamma, Lakshmi*

# Maya is Born

---

Sandy Nayak

*from her journal*

July 31, 1977

It would be good for Lakshmi and Anand to have another sibling. Siblings are such a comfort when one is grown up.

Feb. 5, 1981

It's a girl, born Jan. 20 at 11:56 PM (7 lbs. 4 oz.), at the Beth Israel in Boston. After 2 weeks of intermittent contractions, I went into labor at 10:30 PM, got to the hospital about 11:15, and delivered at 11:56. Just made it! So she was born on Reagan's Inauguration and the day the hostages were released, by just four minutes. She has black hair, and her eyes are still that newborn grey. She has a round face and is very pretty.

We had her Cradling on the 31st. Narayan came with Tara and Sushila, and all 3 sisters and assorted other friends and relations. Deyne conducted a lovely ceremony, and there was a feast by Ranganath, Deyne, Wendy, and Vicki with contributions from many others who came. Narayan gave her a silver cup, and Joanna gave her a music box. Tara and Sushila brought a security bunny and there were many other lovely gifts.

We named her Maya Elizabeth. Gloria named her Leah ("because she will need all the patience she can get"), Joanne named her Maria (because she needs some Italian in her heritage), and Deyne named her Sulochana (after a lovely person—Sulu Telang). There were other names too, but I forgot. Lakshmi & the other kids named her Miss Piggy, & Mugwump 2 . . .

Maya sleeps in the old Lukens cradle. Nana is thrilled.

April 22, 1981, Wednesday—Spring Vacation

Little Maya is now 3 months old and thriving . . . She coos & gurgles conversationally, with anyone willing to chat. When she sees someone she likes, she smiles all over, wriggles & exclaims with delight. When put on her front, she "swims" across the bed . . . She adores riding in the car.

June 3, 1981

Maya at 4+ months is a delight. She can roll from back to front but hasn't yet bothered to go front to back . . . She likes to pick up and play with fabric, especially the tablecloth.



*Lakshmi, Fauzia, Maya, Sandy  
In the background: Lela, Richard*



*Too Much Candy! No Sympathy.*



*Sandy and Maya at TipTop, circa 2019*

# On Adversity

---

Sandy Nayak

2014

One of my Nana's favorite sayings was "Regardless of what happens to you, what matters more is how you deal with what happens to you." She knew what she was talking about. Raised in luxury, she had her own car in 1910 at the age of sixteen and was the first woman in that county to drive. Well-educated, she married a handsome young officer at the end of World War I and settled down to raise three children. Her husband worked in her father's company, and they all lived together in the big farmhouse that had been in her family for two hundred years. They inherited the company and the house in 1930.

But 1930, the beginning of the Great Depression, was not a good year to take over running a company. First the company failed, and then the house had to be sold. Nana moved the family into a little house by the railroad tracks and worked for a florist to put food on the table. My grandfather, depressed and unemployed for two years after the company folded, finally found work in an office at a big oil company. The children all did very well in school and earned their pocket money by delivering flowers and doing other odd jobs. They all earned scholarships to good universities and did very well.

When adversity threatened their lives, Nana's admonition helped them. My mother was diagnosed with a serious neurological degenerative disease when she was only thirty-five. She faced it cheerfully and tried to adjust carefully and remain independent for as long as possible. She managed to see her children and grandchildren grow up and finally succumbed, gracefully, over fifty years later. Her younger brother lost his beloved wife very young, to a badly treated kidney infection, but he never became bitter and concentrated on his daughter and then his grandchildren. At eighty-nine, he is still active, independent, and an inspiration for the whole extended family.

My grandparents continued to live in the little house by the railroad tracks for many years. My grandmother continued to help out at the florist shop at major holidays when they were extra busy. I grew up in the same neighborhood, and my grandparents were an important part of my childhood. Once when I was about ten, Nana took me to visit a friend of hers who spent the whole time telling us about her lifetime of problems. On the way home, Nana turned to me and said, "All the things she talked about happened to me also, but why choose to make yourself unhappy about it? I wouldn't want to live like that."

Her husband died when she was sixty-eight, and two years later, she married a neighbor whose wife had died at about the same time. They had a happy ten years together though he already had Parkinson's disease and nursing him was a big job for her. She herself remained cheerfully independent until struck by colon cancer at eighty-eight. When she realized what she had and what it was doing to her, she closed her house, came to live with me, and died two months later, willing herself out, and valiant until the end.



*Nana, Sandy, and baby Maya, 1981*

# Maya and Mrs. Perry

---

Sandy Nayak

2021

In the fall of 1980 when I was pregnant, I was thirty-five years old, married to Ranganath, an Indian engineer and management consultant at Arthur D. Little, and settled in a house in Belmont. We had two older children, Anand and Lakshmi, in the first and fifth grades in the local elementary school. I was the leader of two Girl Scout troops and taught UU Sunday School. Our house was the center of a large circle of family and friends from America and India, with frequent visitors who sometimes stayed for weeks at a time. We also hosted international students. It was a busy life.

My Scout co-leader Gloria said I needed a cleaning lady, but I objected. One day there was a knock on the door, and I was confronted by a short Boston Irish woman with white curly hair who said that she was Mrs. Perry and that Gloria said I needed her and she had come to look at my house. She marched all over and then said, "Gloria is right. You need me. I'll come on Friday at nine, and you will pay me in cash and give me lunch." After that she came every week and helped me organize my life.

By this time I had accumulated a formidable obstetric history. Lakshmi had been born suddenly, ten weeks early, at three pounds three ounces. She survived and then thrived. We moved to India when she was two and I again got pregnant and delivered at thirty weeks, but this time it was twins who were less than two pounds each, and who didn't live. The obstetrician told me that I had an "incompetent os," and it should have been obvious to the doctor who delivered Lakshmi, but nothing was in the record. He knew what to do about it, so I should go home, get well, get pregnant, and with his help have a full-term baby.

So I did. About three months along during an office visit he tied my cervix shut with a length of fishing line, something called the Shirodkar stitch. It worked, and Anand was born full-term, very comfortably a day after the stitch was cut, at 1:00 p.m. on a sunny Sunday afternoon. Having a baby at the Telang maternity home was lovely—we sat around having tea and cookies and chatting through the early stages of labor, and after the baby was born Ranganath brought Lakshmi in and she got to hold her brother when he was only a couple of hours old. We returned to America when he was almost two.

Back in Boston, I had two ten-week miscarriages and then got pregnant again. Safely past the danger point, I told the doctor that I had an incompetent os and would need the stitch. He wanted to wait and see. I objected. I finally told him that if I couldn't get what I knew I needed in America, I would return to India and get care there, telling them that American care was no good. The doctor said that if that was the way I felt about it, he would order the stitch for me. Getting the stitch was a production, with anesthesia and a whole-day stay, unlike it had been in Poona.

I did go to India when I was about five months along, to visit relatives and friends. When I went to visit my obstetrician and his wife (Lala and Sulu Telang), who was also an obstetrician, she said, "You are carrying a girl." I said, "How do you know?" She said, "I don't know how I know, but when I do know, I am always right." And she was.

By mid-December I started having regular contractions, the kind called Braxton-Hicks, every ten minutes, 24/7, not strong enough to wake me up but obvious if I woke for other reasons. In mid-January the contractions speeded up and I had the stitch out. It went back to ten minutes and nothing happened. I started making sure there was another adult in the house in case we had to go suddenly to the hospital.

On Tuesday, January 20, 1981, Reagan's Inaugural and Hostage Release Day, I could not find anyone to stay. Of course that was the night I suddenly went into labor at about ten at night. We called the doctor, wakened Lakshmi, and told her she was in charge of the house and drove to the Beth Israel in Boston.

When we went into the maternity floor, a young male resident said he would take me to a labor room. I said the baby was coming fast and if he didn't hurry it would come right there in the hall. A rapidly passing older nurse made a U-turn and said, "You're not a first-time mom!" I said, "This is my third," and she replied, "Come on, sweetheart, let's go have that baby." And as we went, she said to the resident, "How many times do I have to tell you to listen to third-time moms?" She got me settled in a delivery room and told Ranganath to gown up because he'd be needed. Then she delivered the baby, cleaned and wrapped her up, handed her to him, and said, "Here, be useful. Your wife and I have work to do." So he was waltzing around, staring into the baby's eyes and falling in love, while the nurse and I dealt with the afterbirth and all that. It was still before midnight on the 20<sup>th</sup>. Finally, the doctor walked in and said, "Well, it looks like I don't have anything to do here."

"Yes, you do!" the nurse said. "You get to do all the paperwork!" I hope that nurse knows how wonderful she was.

Ranganath called Lakshmi but no one answered, so he went home right away. When he got home, he found her sound asleep, sitting on the toilet with a book on her lap. Anand slept through everything.

We hadn't thought of naming the baby Maya, because in Konkani culture, you don't name a baby after a living relative, and Ranganath's sister was Maya. But the baby looked just like her! The resemblance was so striking that we called Maya in Bangalore to ask her permission. She was pleased but the grandparents were upset. Amma later said she really didn't like it that two of her favorite close relatives had the same name. The two Mayas had a strong attachment, and when sister Maya died in 2001 after 9/11, daughter Maya took it very hard. We were all devastated.

As a baby, Maya went everywhere with me. At Girl Scout meetings, she either slept in her basket or was handed around among the girls as the best doll ever. She loved all the attention. She went camping with the Scouts when she was three months old. At home she didn't want to miss out on anything. She resisted naps and bedtime. At Thanksgiving when she was ten months old, we took her to meet my grandmother near Philadelphia, and Maya walked across the living room. That Christmas, we put the Christmas tree in the playpen to keep her out of it.

By her first birthday, she was also talking. Her first word was "uh-oh!" Just before her birthday, she fell all the way down the front stairs, said, "Fun!" and headed back up the stairs.

Mrs. Perry and Maya were great friends. Every week, Mrs. Perry would say, "Maya, it's time to make the beds!" So they would go to the first bedroom and pull off the old sheets, and Mrs. Perry would put on the

clean fitted sheet. Then she would plop Maya in the middle of the bed, throw the top sheet over her, and say, “Oops! I lost the little girl!” Then there would be a lot of giggling. Finally that bed would be finished, and they would go on to the next one.



*Mrs. Perry with Maya, February 1983*

One day when Maya was almost three, Mrs. Perry said that she was retiring and wouldn't be back. She said, “Do you have any idea how old I am?” When I said no, she said, “I'm eighty-three, and the vacuum cleaner is getting heavy.” She then took off her hair! It was a wig!

Years later, my mother-in-law was asked if anything on her visits to America had surprised her. She said she was very surprised that I had a cleaning lady who called me Sandy and ordered me around, while I called her Mrs. Perry and served her lunch.

## Two Mayas, Decades Apart

---



*Maya (sister) and Wendy with Ranganath and Sandy at their wedding, 1968*



*Maya (daughter) and Wendy with Shreedhar and Suchi in the Belmont kitchen, early 2000s*

# First Official Hostee

---

Arvind Atreya

It was 1978, and I was just off the plane at Logan Airport, arriving from India. It was my first time in America, and Sandy and Ranganath came to meet me, their first hostee in a long line of future hostees. I was so grateful because I didn't know where to go. They took me to their house and made me feel so welcome. It really eased my transition to America. I think I stayed with them for a few days at their house until they took me to the graduate student dorm at Harvard, where I would pursue a PhD in engineering sciences, finally finishing in 1983.

During those five years, I took the bus from Harvard Square to their house whenever I needed a break from my research in combustion and fire spread on wood. I would call Sandy and she'd say, "Come home and cook." So I would, and it did feel like my second home. I recall that when I was there one summer, I would go out to Concord Avenue and collect cherries from the cherry trees planted in the median strip. It felt magical! Sandy and Ranganath always made me feel so welcome and a part of their family.

One Christmas, Sandy made me my first Christmas stocking. On it, she adhered felt cloth symbols from my life: an Indian flag, sugarcane (representing my village), an "H" for Harvard, and a fire with wood logs. I still have this stocking, and my wife Liza hangs it up every Christmas.

When I met Liza in October 1979, I eventually took her "home" so Sandy and Ranganath could meet her. Liza says, "Arvind had talked about his host family so often and I knew they meant a lot to him, so I was happy when Arvind took me there to meet Sandy, Ranganath, Lakshmi, and Anand." (Maya wasn't born yet, but when she was, I enjoyed taking many photos of cute Maya with my new Nikon camera.)

One year, probably 1980 or so, right before the Nayaks traveled to India, Sandy asked Liza if she would like a saree from India. "Oh yes!" she said. Sandy asked, "What color?" and Liza told her, "Maroon," since that was her favorite color at the time. Sandy brought her back a wonderful maroon saree and showed her how to wear it. It was Liza's first saree and she still has it. How thoughtful of Sandy to think of this! That was another of the many thoughtful things Sandy did.



*Maya, Liza, Anand, Arvind, Lakshmi*

In November 1983, Liza and I got married, first near her family's home in the Chicago suburbs and then in my village in north India. For our American wedding, Sandy, Ranganath, and their three children traveled to Illinois. In fact, Ranganath was my best man, having become like a brother to me. Thereafter, Sandy would talk about the great fun that Maya and the other kids her age had playing under the tableclothed dinner tables. Maya, almost three, called the wedding "Liza's party."



*Arvind and Liza's wedding, 1983*

Before our Indian wedding in my village that December, Sandy advised Liza that all the village ladies would want to touch her long red hair because it would be unusual to them. Sandy was right, of course! After the long, spectacular ceremony, when Liza thought she had escaped the hubbub for a while by going in the house, a long line of village women started to appear at the second-floor bedroom doorway. They were lining up from the bedroom door, down the stairs, and into the courtyard, all waiting to take their turns inspecting the foreign bride with red hair and freckles. Liza had to literally grin and bear it, so as not to offend anyone. Thank goodness for Sandy's forewarning!

We stayed in touch with the Nayaks, of course, and in 2005, Sandy became a host mother (again!) to our daughter Meera when she went to Harvard. As with many others before and after her, Meera was in the long line of people fortunate enough to be a Nayak hostess, and a couple of Meera's friends were, as well. Meera spent a couple summers living in the Nayak household and visiting the Cape. When our son (also named Anand) was in Cambridge, he visited Sandy and Ranganath as well.

All of us were fortunate to be part of the welcoming, wonderful Nayak extended family. Such great memories!

## The Nayak Family Annual Cards

---

*Thank you to the Seifs for saving so many of these!*



1975



Season's Greetings 

Ranganath, Sandy  
Lakshmi and Anand Nayak

1976



Season's Greetings

12/77

1977



Peace  
on Earth

1978



1979



1980



1981



1983?



*Feliz Navidad*



*Happy 1985 from  
Anand, Lakshmi, Maya,  
Ranganath + Sandy*

1985



*With Love to the Seifs  
from the Nayaks  
Happy 1986!*

1986



1989

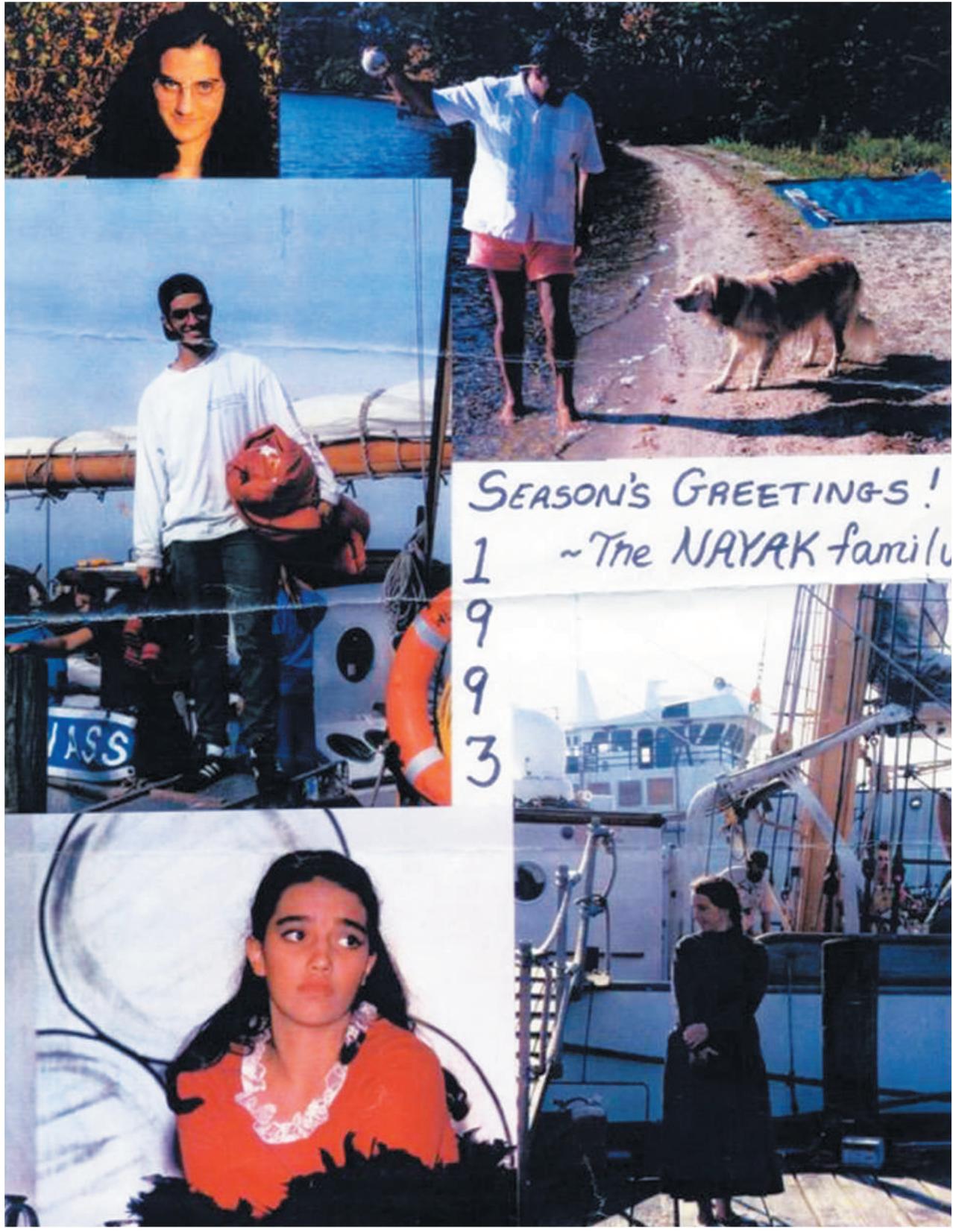
*Tuli joins the family, in our newly extended dining room*



1990



1992



1993



Mid-'90s



Nayak Family  
12 Orchard St.  
Belmont, MA 02178  
1-617-489-0056

Anand sings and plays with  
a band called  
three against four

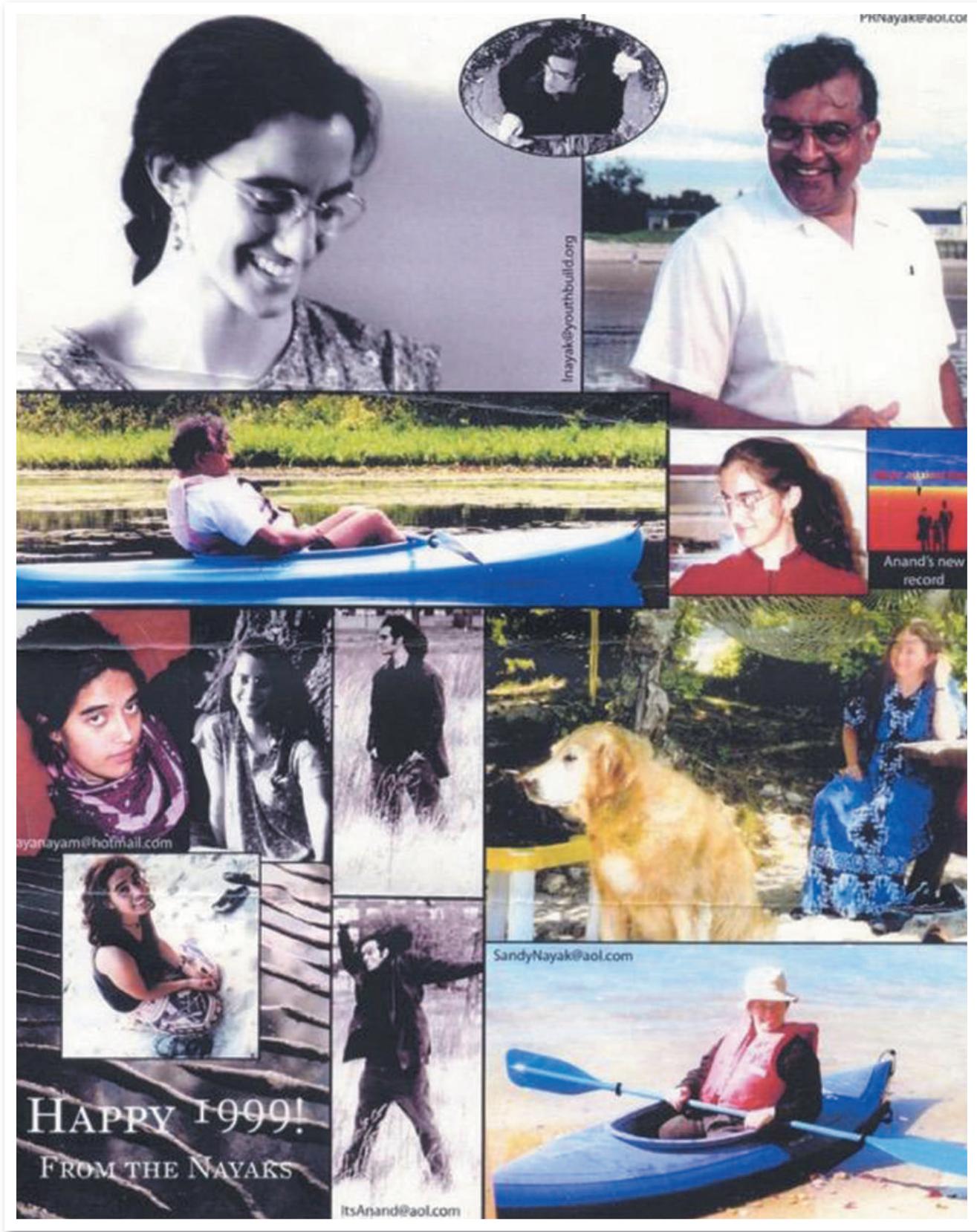
HAPPY  
1998

Ranganath now  
works with the  
Boston Consulting Group

Maya Nayak  
Collegio del Mondo Unito  
dell'Adriatico  
Via Trieste, 29  
34013 Duino (Trieste) - ITALY

Lakshmi

1998



1999



Anand and Polly are engaged, Maya is on her way to Barnard, Lakshmi is exploring a new job, and the baby belongs to Tuli.

Happy 2000 from the Nayaks!

HAPPY NEW YEAR



2000



2001



2003



Sandy with Jack



Maya, George, Polly, Jack, & Anand



Ranganath cooks idlis. Mmm



Wow! A blueberry tree!

# Happy 2008 from the Family Nayak

In these difficult times, we delight in our family and friends.

Sandy & Ranganath Nayak

sandy.nayak@verizon.net  
pr.nayak@verizon.net  
12 Orchard Street  
Belmont, MA 02478  
1-617-489-0056



Walking, walking, walking, walking, hop, hop, hop ...



Sameer learns to play piano with Kabir & Anand



The Tompkins sisters: Sandy, Deyne, Wendy, Vicki



Betsy, Sandy, Lakshmi, Jack, & Howard

# Reflections on a Friendship

---

Cindy Soule

In 1985 I was a thirty-five-year-old mother of two girls when I met Sandy Nayak. Our daughter Samantha was enrolled at Atrium, a small private school in Watertown, Massachusetts. She joined a group of several other girls who formed a bond immediately, becoming affectionately referred to as the “gang of five.” Central to that circle was Sandy’s youngest child, Maya, who became Sam’s lifelong friend.

As they grew, living in different towns and attending different public schools after Atrium, there was a normal ebb and flow to their relationship. But throughout the years, they continued to reconnect, always strengthening their bond.

My friendship with Maya’s mom Sandy never ebbed, continuing to deepen for over thirty-five years. Her family became a heart home for me. As the Nayak family tends to do—and does so well—they “adopted” us all into the clan. The Tompkins sisterhood too was a model to me of what sisters can be for one another, and I love them for generously welcoming me into their circle.

Our backgrounds and life experiences were extremely different, but there was always a sense of harmony between Sandy and me. Being with her anywhere was easy, comfortable, and nurturing. Some of my favorite times with her were spent at their Cape house on Penny Lane.

Her commitment to keeping local birds fed sometimes took us to a famous local source of all things birdy, the Bird Watcher’s General Store in Orleans. One afternoon there, Sandy helped me pick out an owl box for Samantha to hang by her house, inviting some upstate New York owl to make it a home.

Seldom idle, Sandy spent quiet times reading, working on a sudoku puzzle, enriching some conversation with her extensive knowledge, crocheting another shawl or baby blanket, working in the garden, or—my favorite activity with her—opening up and grooming trails through the thickets of woods on the property. Sandy was a naturalist, and a patient and hard worker! Thoughtful and careful about what she cut, she preserved the natural growth wherever possible, removing only tangled or overgrown woody barriers to allow safe passage through. We chatted about how she anticipated how one of her grandchildren (or one of their many young visitors) might explore the trail, maybe looking for signs of animal tracks—or perhaps discovering a particular tucked-away spot and claim it as a setting for imaginative play.

We spent one lovely afternoon at the end of one of these trails, opening up a small channel that allowed water to flow from Greenland Pond to Long Pond when the water was high.

She spoke once about her involvement with the Brewster Conservation Trust, whose mission to protect fragile natural resources sometimes put severe restrictions on what property owners are allowed to do with private land abutting ponds. Sandy, a patient listener and wise negotiator, felt she’d come to a reasonable balance between those concerns and some work that improved views to the ponds, always respecting and preserving the natural habitat.

I thought I'd share much more time with Sandy on Penny Lane. I treasure the time we had.



*Socially distanced birthday party during the summer of 2020  
Visible are Ranganath, Sandy, Cindy, Michael, and Lydia*



*Birthday, summer 2021—Cindy and Sandy*

# Spaghettios

Lakshmi Nayak

I grew up in Girl Scout troops mostly led or co-led by Mom. Selling cookies was the least of what we did. We worked on all sorts of projects and badges and skills, learned how to be organized about chores and tasks, participated in Wide Games, learned about Girls Scouts and Guides around the world, and went camping at Cedar Hill.

This photo shows Mom with one of her Scout troops, dressed up in uniforms from around the world.



While camping, of course we had to cook our meals outdoors over campfires, in cast-iron pots and pans. We all had our rotating chores, for tending the fire, cooking, washing up, and least favorite, cleaning the latrine. This particular day we were hungry after hours of running around through the woods and were looking forward to dinner, which featured Spaghettios, little pasta circles in tomato sauce, heated up from a can. We dug in with gusto, and, yuck! What was this awful taste? We examined the empty cans—they looked and smelled fine. Well, it turned out that Mom had told the crew to soap the pot as a protection against the fire, making it easier to wash the pot afterwards. One girl had interpreted that to mean soaping the inside of the pot, so our Spaghettios were cooked full of soap. I think we ended up enjoying s'mores for dinner as well as dessert.

To this day, I equate Spaghettios with soapy tomato sauce. And Mom laughed about that story forever after.

# Girl Scout Leader

Dhamayanthy Pathmanathan

My late husband Gajanand and I were the lucky couple to be welcomed by Sandy and Ranganath when we arrived in Cambridge in 1981. They were supposed to help us settle into life in the USA, but they went far beyond that and welcomed us wholeheartedly into their wonderful family, extended family, and worldwide circle of friends.



*Gajan and Dhamy*

I was delighted when I realized that Sandy, like me, was a lifelong Girl Scout, and was a leader of an older girl troop. She promptly invited me to join in her Girl Scout activities, and I even went camping with them to Lake Winnepesaukee that fall, which was a very different experience for me, coming from sunny Sri Lanka.

Sandy had started a museum of Girl Scout uniforms from around the world, which if I remember correctly, was somewhere close to the Unitarian Church. I found this fascinating, so I started collecting uniforms as well, and I use them in my training sessions on the World Association of Girl Guides and Girl Scouts. I am still very involved with Girl Scouts the world over, and I put into practice many things Sandy has taught me.

While Sandy and I connected around our mutual love of Girl Scouts, she was so much more: I remember attending the performance of *HMS Pinafore* at the Unitarian Church. It was excellent, though it was Sandy's first involvement with a production at the church.

There was nothing Sandy couldn't or wouldn't do to help everyone. In her matter-of-fact way, she came up with practical solutions to everything, including telling people how they could learn my name. She said people will want to shorten my name, and I shouldn't let them do that.

She suggested I put both hands up, and count the syllables in El-i-za-beth with one hand, and the syllables in Dha-ma-yan-thy with the other hand, and show them that both names were just as long!

Needless to say, my name is hardly ever forgotten by people who have taken Sandy's linguistics course!

No matter what the issue was, it would always be solved. The world has lost a most wonderful and caring human being, whom we all loved and cherished. I hope we can follow her guiding principles and honor the life she led.



*Visiting in the Belmont driveway, 1980s: Dhamayanthy, Lakshmi, Anand, Sandy, baby Ishani, Gajanand, and Maya on a bike*

# I Miss Her Storytelling

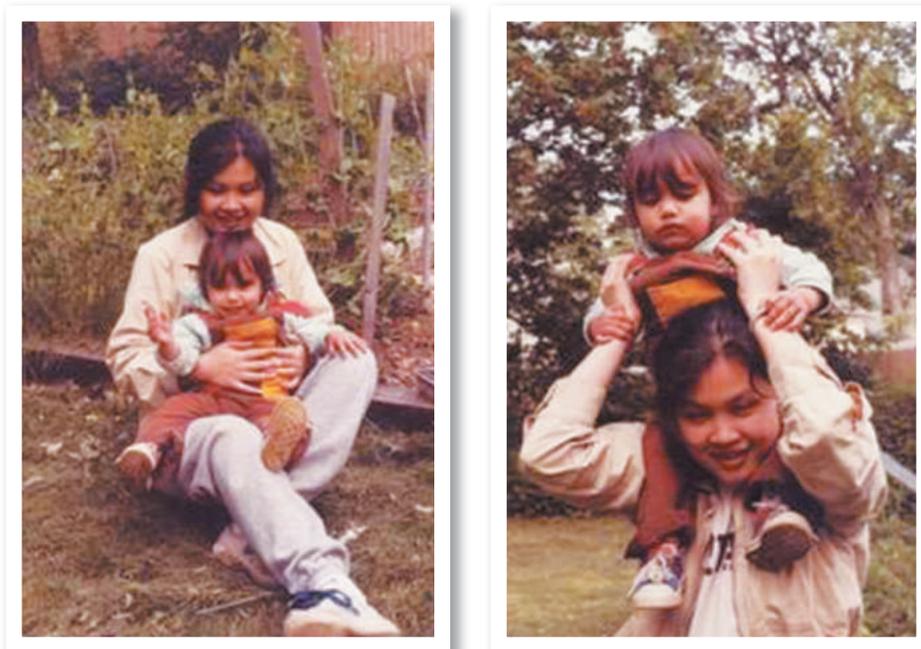
Lin Shaw

In the late 1970s, a young couple, Sandy and Ranganath, newly settled in Belmont, signed up to host international students from Harvard. They were matched in 1980 with a lucky eighteen-year-old Chinese girl from Hong Kong. Those were pre-Internet days, so they only received her flight information via snail mail.

Sandy came to the airport with ten-year-old Lakshmi carrying the hostess's name sign. From their first meeting at Logan Airport, this "fresh off the boat" young girl knew she had found her American family. That young girl was me. My name is Lin Shaw.

Having never done a backpacking trip, I had signed up to attend the Freshman Outdoor Program. What is a bandana? Sandy, like a mother, taught me and gave me everything I needed for the trip. Sandy was like a walking encyclopedia of the history of Harvard. She told stories of how Mrs. Widener funded the construction of the Widener Library and allegedly stipulated that every Harvard undergrad must pass a swim test. Sandy recounted how Radcliffe students were once required to listen to lectures by Harvard professors from the hallway, outside the classrooms where only male students were allowed. I was fascinated.

I would spend the next four Thanksgiving breaks and numerous weekends with Sandy and her family. For an international student thousands of miles away from home, doing the most ordinary household things—jumping onto a pile of raked leaves with Lakshmi in the backyard, pushing Maya on the swing, or doing grocery runs with Ranganath—were exciting introductions to my new life in America. A ride on bus #74 from Harvard Square meant going home for homemade meals and meeting many interesting people from all over the world.



*Lin with young Maya in the Belmont backyard, early 1980s*

In 1984, my parents made their first trip to Cambridge to attend my graduation. Sandy and Ranganath hosted a lovely backyard barbeque party for them. Ranganath has a video of that party. Our family relationship blossomed. My brother Gordon and sister Iris would be the luckiest people to have Sandy look after them when they attended MIT. Lakshmi visited my parents in Hong Kong.



*At Lin's graduation from Harvard: Maya, Lin, Sandy, Lakshmi*

After graduation, I moved to Seattle, Washington, to work for Microsoft. During their big cross-country tour in 2003, Sandy and Ranganath graced me with a stop in Washington. I was so excited for the rare role reversal—I was Sandy and Ranganath's host. [She even gave up her bedroom to Sandy and me.—Ranganath]

Time flies, and in 2002, my eldest daughter, Pauline, was attending Middlesex School in Concord, Massachusetts. It was super comforting to have Sandy near the boarding school my daughter was attending. By then, I had Christopher, who was two, and Megan, who was five months old. We had just moved back to the U.S. from Singapore. We all stayed at Orchard Street. One morning, Christopher was sitting at the breakfast table in the beautiful kitchen, when Kathie Fiveash (Anand's mother-in-law) came in and sat next to him. He turned, looked up at her, and asked in perfect Chinese English, "You are sitting next to Auntie what?" Kathie, having been a kindergarten teacher for many years, understood immediately what he meant, and answered, "My name is Kathie." Little Christopher had inferred that his name was "You," because that was what everyone called him. So his question was "Whom am I sitting next to?"



*Sandy with a young Megan and Christopher on the Belmont back deck, 2000s*

Fifteen years later, in 2017, it was Christopher's turn to spend the entire summer with Sandy and Ranganath while he worked at an MIT internship. Megan came to Wellesley College for a resident summer program. Sandy drove us to Wellesley, loaned us the bedding, and made the bed for Megan. It was the most beautiful and comfortable bed among all the attendees. Later, both Christopher and Megan became undergraduates at Harvard and had the comfort of knowing that Sandy and Ranganath were there if needed.

On another occasion, while driving through the town of Lowell, Sandy recounted the fascinating textile mill history of Lowell from the top of her head. Again, I listened with awe as I had thirty-seven years ago when I first met Sandy.

In addition to becoming my loving and supportive second mother, Sandy was my no-nonsense advisor. Over the years, she became my moral compass and wise counselor. But most of all, I miss her storytelling.

# She Taught Me . . .

---

Chris Arumainayagam

I remember Sandy with overwhelming gratitude. Sandy was more than a friend to me—she was like a second mother. Her kindness, love, and support meant the world to me, and I will always cherish the memories we shared together.

I still vividly remember Sandy, holding baby Maya in her arms, picking me up at Logan airport more than forty years ago when I first arrived in the U.S. from Sri Lanka. She often reminded me that I was the greenest foreign student the Nayaks had ever hosted. And she was right! She taught me how to eat cereal because I knew nothing about cereals when I arrived in the U.S. She gave me hands-on training with fitted sheets and taught me how to use a washing machine and dryer. The Nayaks' home at 12 Orchard Street, Belmont, became my home away from home.

She was the light of so many of our lives, always there for her brood of international students. I called Sandy so many times for advice that the Nayaks' landline number is still ingrained in my memory. Sandy and Ranganath gave me an entire living room set, which I later gave to another family. I am grateful that she taught me the importance of paying it forward.

She had a way of making everyone feel welcome and loved, and her warmth and kindness touched the lives of all who knew her. My mother had a deep affection for Sandy and constantly asked me for updates after Sandy's heart surgery.

Although Sandy is no longer with us, her memory will live on in the hearts of those who loved her. The over 500 individuals from around the world who participated in Sandy's Zoom memorial will remember her for her unwavering love and support, her infectious laughter, and her gentle spirit. Rest in peace, dear Sandy. You will be deeply missed but never forgotten.

# The Belmont Household

---

Sandy Nayak

*from her journal—the only entry in an otherwise empty notebook*

June 10, 1984, Early Morning

It's time to start a journal again. I kept one all through college and the early years of marriage. Somehow in the last few years I've lost the habit. When life is so full and busy it's hard to take time out to keep albums and journals. But just now it's very early morning. The household sleeps. The birds are all singing. It's still delightfully cool, though even at 6:15 the heat is returning, and it looks like it will be another record day in a scorching week. Last week it rained solidly, breaking records and washing out half the state. This week it has been solidly hot and muggy, breaking records again for heat in June, burning in the high 90's by early afternoon.

Maya is in our bed. She wisely climbed into Ranganath's side, so I wouldn't put her back. Gradually he rolled over, so I woke up with no space. But I'm also expecting a friend to drop off a vacuum cleaner around seven, on the way to West Virginia, so I wanted to be up. And I'm happy to have some cool quiet time awake.

I'm sure everyone else will sleep late. We were all up partying last night in a perfectly splendid party. It was our 16th anniversary, and my 39th birthday, and Lin's graduation from Harvard, and bon voyage for Dr. Jiang, and Lakshmi & Amy graduating from middle school, and lots of other passages, all kinds of rolled up into a big celebration. Lydia brought balloons, and Deyne brought lots of cakes, and we had a huge barbeque in the backyard. In the course of the day Parents and Vicki and Narayan & Arvind + Liza all called in with best wishes. Beyond that, lots of people came, or were here already. So here we are—

Ranganath—newly in Friday midnight from Omaha, and off next Tuesday to Tokyo. Working on trains for ADL. Newly head of his section at work. He did the barbeque last night, despite the heat, an American cuisine he has become master of.

Me—newly 39, and enjoying it. We have been married 16 years.

Lakshmi—soon to be 14, and vastly relieved to be leaving the middle school. She has learned a lot in the 8th but has not liked Chenery on the whole. She is looking forward to going to the high school next year. She has recently rediscovered gymnastics, and is working hard to regain the skills she had at 8 or 9 and then allowed to lapse. She is very beautiful, though she tends to not want to admit it—she looks in the mirror and sees the pimples, which are not really noticeable to others, because of her vitality. She is doing well in school academically.

Anand—9½ and a passionate soccer player. He played a game yesterday (in spite of the heat) and scored a goal, which Ranganath caught on video. Anand must have watched his goal 20 times after he got home.

It was a classic goal in the last minute of play, and though his team still lost 5–2, it redeemed the game psychologically. He is just finishing the 4th grade, and has had a very good year with Miss Stathos, who also taught Lakshmi.

Maya—3½ and delightfully alert and articulate. Her logic is marvelous. She was up last night 'til nearly eleven, determined not to miss a minute of the party. She tries valiantly to keep up with all the older kids in everything and is managing pretty well—she can sing and turn somersaults and dress herself and she knows all her letters and can count reliably through 12 and unreliably through 30 or 40. She can also write all her letters and type them on the computer, and she draws wonderful, complicated pictures with lots of faces and elaborate stories. She's a lot of fun and a great companion.

Dong Tao Jiang has been living with us since December. He is from Beijing, and hopes to go to college here when his English gets good enough. He is very shy and polite and helpful.

Nitin and Tehmi Patel are here for a week, on their way back to Ahmedabad. We knew them well in the early '70s when Lakshmi was a baby, and before that, Nitin and Ranganath were in high school together in Bombay, at St. Xavier's.

Christopher Arumainayagam from Sri Lanka, between jr. & sr. years at Harvard, is staying here 'til he finds summer lodgings. He is one of our host students. His brother Allen, due to enter Brandeis in September, will be staying here July and August.

That's the household (9). Here's who came to the party—

(1) Dr. Jiang. Dong Tao's father, a visiting scientist at MIT, due to return to Beijing next month.

(1) Lin Fon Shaw, our host student who just graduated from Harvard, Phi Beta Kappa, with an AB, summa, in applied math and an MSc as well. Wonderful kid. She is taking up a job with Microsoft in Seattle and we will miss her sorely.

(5) Lin's brother Gordon, her parents, and 2 young friends from Singapore. Gordon will be a junior at MIT and we like him a lot. Her parents don't speak much English. They flew in from Hong Kong to see Lin graduate. The 2 teenage boys from Singapore are spoiled rich kids and not interesting like Gordon or Lin.

(4) Deyne, Richard, Lela, and Ashok—Deyne made all the desserts for the party. Ashok and Maya played in the sprinkler all the time before dinner. Richard is just back from Europe, where he was gone a month at a conference in Amsterdam. Lela is now 8½ and Ashok is 5½. She is artistic and reserved. He is an extrovert, but not nearly as much of a hooligan as he was last year. Maya adores him. Anand and Lela are pals.

(3) Wendy, Klink, and Nils. In the process of buying a house, and stunned. The house is in Marlboro and they are due to take possession on July 16, assuming the mortgage gets signed and sealed. Nils is 8 months

old and delightful. Maya is very motherly about him. Due to Nils's passion for hair pulling, Wendy just had her hair cut very short.

(3) Mike, Lydia, and Amy Seif. Best friends, all of us. They brought balloons and wine to the party. Amy and Lakshmi are like twins. Mike & Lydia & Ranganath & I pal around together.

(2) Henry and Mary. Very close to Ranganath & me both. No real celebration would be complete without them if they were in the area (which they are often not as they spend a lot of time in New Mexico on their ranch). Henry is retired now. They have moved out of Cedarholm, leaving it to Richard & Deyne, and are living in the cottage while they build a little house by the pond.

(1) Faith Fuller—I'm so glad she could come. It was nice for her to see everybody. She has known all of us for so long. She's just as full of bounce as ever, and is arranging our Mexico trip for us. She likes seeing Henry & Mary too. I've known Faith for 22 years, since she was my dorm mother at boarding school.

(5) Ramesh, Santosh, + Anand—cousins from Bombay. And 2 of their friends.

34 at the party.

Nice birthday anniversary party!

In the '80s

---





*Anamma/Amma (Saraswati) playing solitaire at the Belmont dining table, 1980s*



*Visiting Faith Fuller in Sedona, Arizona, circa 2008*

# A True Friend

---

Nitin Patel

She was a true friend to Tehmi and me through life's many joys and sorrows over more than fifty years. She was a cheerful, warm, and loving person who welcomed us so often to your home—meeting her always raised our spirits.

Tonight, we lit candles in remembrance and reflected on Sandy's kindness to our family. To us, as to many others, she was a source of practical wisdom and support in difficult times.

We remembered arriving at Logan airport with Arjun and Aneesh in a wheelchair at night in 1987. Sandy was waiting for us with a broad smile and many hugs to drive us to Cambridge in her Toyota minivan.

She was the first person whose advice I sought about bringing over Aneesh to attend a public school in the U.S.

When we visited your summer cottage in Brewster, while all of us were in kayaks on the lake or strolling around it, Sandy sat for hours beside Aneesh, holding the umbrella against the wind to chat with him and shield him from the blazing midday sun.

When we brought Aneesh home from the ICU at Mt. Auburn Hospital, she drove over with food and supplies and comforting words.

Sandy was a wonderful person.

# In Patzcuaro, Mexico

Ranganath Nayak

Back in 1969, one year after we were married, Sandy was pursuing a master's in anthropology at Brandeis (her BA was in archaeology from Radcliffe), and she decided to do her fieldwork in a small town named Patzcuaro in the Michoacan province of Mexico. That was because she had gone there when she was a student at the Verde Valley School near Sedona, Arizona in 1961–1963. She was there for two months in the summer of 1969, and I joined her for three weeks and became accepted as an honorary Mexican.

There, we met and became friends with a textiles storekeeper named Salvador Vasquez. He told us to go to his favorite restaurant and say to the owner, “Mi amigo Salvador me dice que su comida es la mejor.” We got the royal treatment.

Then Sandy and I moved (with young Lakshmi) to India. From there, Sandy sent a photograph of Lakshmi (three years old) to Salvador.

In 1976, we moved back to the USA, with Lakshmi and Anand—born in India—in tow. And years later, in 1984, we decided to go back to Mexico, now with all Lakshmi, Anand, and Maya.

One day, we were back in Patzcuaro, found the way to Salvador's store, and wandered in, fifteen years after the last time. He did not recognize us. Sandy said, “Yo soy Alejandra.” His eyes opened wide. He looked at Lakshmi. Then, he pulled open a drawer under his counter, pulled out a photo, showed it to us, pointed at Lakshmi, and said, “This is Lakshmi???”



*Sandy in Patzcuaro, 2008*

# Life with Maya

Sandy Nayak

2021

Life with Maya was never dull. She wanted to be involved in everything. We traveled a lot in those years—India, Belgium, the American southwest. We all flew to Mexico when she was two. On our first morning in Guadalajara, we ordered breakfast in a restaurant and then had a very long wait. Finally a waiter came through the swinging kitchen door with an enormous tray piled with dishes, collided with another waiter, and the whole tray crashed to the tile floor. Maya’s anguished voice rang out across the restaurant, “That’s my breakfast!” It broke the tension, and everyone in the restaurant laughed. She was quickly provided with something to eat.

I was worried about drinking water in Mexico, so I told all the kids they could have bottled carbonated beverages whenever they wanted as long as we were actually in Mexico. Maya promptly settled into a routine. She announced that she would have scrambled eggs and Coca-Cola for breakfast, chicken noodle soup and Coca-Cola for lunch, and macaroni and cheese with Coca-Cola for dinner. Everyone else happily ate Mexican food. In about a week, Maya was also trying new things, and eating whatever her brother ate. And everyone got tired of carbonated beverages.



*Sandy with two-year-old Maya*

In those days, a Chinese student named Dong Tao Jiang lived with us for a couple of years to learn English. Three- and four-year-old Maya appointed herself as a teacher, and would stomp up the stairs, carrying her favorite storybooks and shouting “Dong Tao! It’s time to read English!” He was shy with the rest of us, but he couldn’t resist her. She knew those books by heart, so she could make him say everything right.

When Maya was three she had an imaginary friend named Jim, who had a mother named Hatch. Jim messed up the playroom and had ingeniously naughty ideas. I was informed that Hatch was a wonderful mother, who brought Jim breakfast in bed. She drew me a picture of Hatch carrying a tray. One day when I picked her up from nursery school she said she had a playdate with Jim, and I needed to drop her off there. I said I didn't know where Jim lived. She said that was all right, because he lived in a pink house with a pink dog house and a pink cat house in the yard, and we would just drive around until we found it. I wouldn't do that, and she was supremely annoyed.

My sister Wendy had a late May wedding when Maya was three. It was a wonderful wedding. One of the guests brought a large canister of helium and zipped around the reception in his electric wheelchair, filling blue and lavender balloons for anyone who wanted them. Maya collected so many balloons that she almost levitated.

Maya always helped me do the shopping. I would tell her the list, and she would keep track and make sure I didn't forget anything. She learned to write "cookies" on the list so I would buy them. When she was three and a half, she started at the Belmont Cooperative Nursery School two days a week. On the first day, she settled herself at the sand table and said, across the room, "Bye, Mom! You'll just have to do your shopping by yourself this morning!" The teachers were very amused. All the other children were clinging to their mothers.

Maya was soon moved up to the older class, which met three days a week, and I started the search for a kindergarten that would accept her for the following year since she would be too young for public kindergarten. We found the Atrium, a private school in Watertown. Maya happily settled into a K-1 class with a wonderful teacher named Marion and made fast friends with a girl named Samantha Soule, who is still a close friend.

Another memory from those early years is that Ranganath did a lot of consulting work for the Burlington Northern Railroad, and was often gone for several days at a time. He came home from one of those trips late at night, after Maya had gone to sleep. He had brought mugs for the kids with locomotive pictures on them and set those out on the kitchen table for the kids to see at breakfast. When Maya came down in the morning, she asked where the mugs came from. I said that her father had brought them back from work. She said indignantly, "He works for mugs?! I thought he worked for money!"

# From Both Sides

---

Ashok Kanetkar

In 1984 I visited Boston. It was my first trip to the U.S., and I was too eager to take in as much as I could of the Boston-Cambridge scene. I did not want to depend upon others and the desire was to explore the place as much as I could on my own. Sandy was equally enthusiastic.

The first thing she did was to explain how to reach Harvard Square from Belmont in the bus. The bus etiquette in the U.S. is slightly different than in India. There is no conductor. You have to drop the coin in the coin drop and take your seat. Then when the bus nears the place where you wish to disembark, you have to go and stand behind the driver. This was new to me, but Sandy patiently explained everything.

She then explained how to travel on the underground, how to trace your route on the map at the station, how to remain alert to listen to the announcement as your train nears the destination, etc.

She very generously gave me her Coop number and suggested that I furnish the number every time I made a purchase and take the discount. With an impish grin she also told me that if I had a smug enough expression on my face, nobody would notice that I am not a Harvard alumnus.

I explored the Harvard Square area with her help. She guided me to the Brattle theatre, and I was so fortunate that I got to see *Casablanca* there.

Somewhere in the same area, there used to be a graveyard. Sandy gave me the history of it and suggested I should see it.

There are so many ways in which she helped me that it is difficult to enumerate them all. She even told me that if I returned the empty Coke can, I could get five cents for it. This was all new to me, and I thoroughly enjoyed it. Her instructions used to be very crisp and easy to follow.

During this visit, I went with Ranganath and Sandy to Cape Cod for a Girl Scout camping expedition. However, it was so cold that I just could not bear it. My nose went dry while breathing, and then when I started breathing through the mouth, the lips went dry. I wanted to return home. I was dropped at some station that resembled the stations we used to see in Western movies. Sandy told me exactly what to do. She said you have to wave your hands for the train to stop. Then after you enter the train, there will be a bar. Go and have a small whisky. It will do you good. The train will take you to Porter Square station, and from there, you can reach Harvard Square by another train and then by bus to Orchard Street. Drink some warm coffee and go to sleep. I followed her instructions to the letter and slept for some ten hours after reaching home.

In 2001 she came all the way to India to attend my son's wedding. She came to Pune and travelled with us to Hyderabad by train and returned with us. Actually, Sandy was instrumental in bringing my son and daughter-in-law together. They met each other at 12 Orchard Street. Sandy probably had guessed that they liked each other and assured my wife that the pair would make a great married couple. She was, in a manner of speaking, from both sides at the wedding, the boy's as well as the girl's. I very fondly remember our return

journey from Hyderabad to Pune by train. Sandy was with us and we were all singing and laughing and Sandy even tried singing a Hindi song. She knew some of them and could easily hum the tune.



*At the wedding in Hyderabad, 2001—Jyoti, Shreedhar, Suchi, Ashok, Sandy*

The last time I saw her was when she visited Hyderabad in 2015. It was the same old Sandy. At that time, I remember asking her for the lyrics of a song that I had heard Sandy and Deyne sing and play on the guitar—“Jamaican Farewell.” With that same old spark in her eyes, she pushed her chin down, looked up with a smile, and recited the whole song. It was great fun.

# She Bridged the Worlds

Nirupama Rao

We, Sudhakar and I, first met Sandy and Ranganath Nayak in 1984 when Sudhakar was studying for an MPA at Harvard. Sandy took us under her charge and was so incredibly helpful, kind, and caring as she introduced us to life in what was for us a new and often overwhelming country.

Over the years, we spent many days at the Nayak home in Belmont—the last being in 2016—with the Nayaks and their incredible children, Lakshmi, Anand, and Maya.

Sandy bridged the Indian and American worlds so effortlessly and with such deep insight and understanding.

We will miss her very much because she was such a quietly magnetic presence in the lives of all who met her.

Om shanti.



*Ranganath and Sandy, Nirupama and Sudhakar Rao, 2016*

# Role Models

Sandeep Kochhar and Sylvia Zetterstrand

**[Sandeep]** I met Sandy in 1984 soon after arriving from India for my Ph.D. studies. I had been matched with the Nayaks through Harvard's Host Family Program, and little did I realize that the first trip on the bus from Cambridge to Belmont (#74, if memory serves) would result in more than just a social visit. I would be joining an extended family of hostesses, relatives, friends, and friends of friends who would flock to the Nayak home over the years to enjoy tasty home-cooked meals and great conversation in a relaxed and inclusive environment. Soon, my future wife Sylvia, my father, and my mother-in-law Norma would also become part of that extended family.

**[Sylvia]** I met Sandy in 1990 when my now husband, Sandeep, took me to the Nayaks' home in Belmont to introduce me to his host family. After that initial visit, as with countless others, I was hooked. And there began our joint story.

We have so many fond memories of Sandy. For one thing, she was so well-read and yet totally unpretentious about her knowledge. From Sandy, we learnt about the Native cultures of the Southwest, about William Penn and the Quakers, about the early colonial history of Boston, about Joseph Campbell and the metaphors we live by—just to name a few. Through her frequent childhood stories recounted around the kitchen table, she drew us into the rich and nurturing Tompkins' world. To us, Howard, Betsy, and their four daughters (Sandy, Deyne, Wendy, and Vicky) were the perfect family. The girls just seemed so much more interesting than the March sisters.

When I was preparing to travel to India for the first time around 1992, Sandy was my guide. She told me about the sacred geography of the country. "Wherever you go," she said, "the landscape is imbued with ancient stories of gods and heroes." She spoke of the temples and shrines, of the mystic poet Kabir, of the breathtaking beauty of Kashmir, and of the five great epics of Tamil literature that have been overshadowed by the better-known Ramayana and Mahabharata. She added, "The South is more civilized. You'll see."

Sandy gave me my very first Indian garment: a pink, gold, and beige cotton sari. She took me upstairs to the bedroom and showed me how to put it on. My closet and drawers are full of Indian clothing for all occasions, but I will always cherish that first sari because it was a gift of love. It was her way of helping me to start to bridge the culture gap that lay ahead, as she herself had done years before.

Before that first trip, there was plenty of practical advice too: what to say (and not to say), what to eat and drink (and what to avoid), how to navigate Chandni Chowk, where to shop and what to buy, how to use an Indian toilet, and how to endear oneself to the aunties. Sandy's wisdom came not only from books but from having lived a full life and reflected upon it.

That's why Sandeep and I turned to Sandy for advice at difficult times in our lives, such as when I was trying to make a career change, or when Sandeep's father had a stroke and we needed to bring him to the

United States, or when our parents passed away. Sandy was always there for us, offering useful suggestions and support.

When Sandeep and I finally decided to get married, the natural choice was to ask Sandy and Ranganath to be the maid of honor and best man respectively, in our wedding. After all, they were our role models. How could it have been otherwise?



*Sandeep and Sylvia's wedding at Upstairs at the Puddin in Harvard Square, 2001*

Sandy was especially dear to my mother Norma. My mother, a lay Buddhist monk, found in Sandy a kindred spirit. She often commented on Sandy's kindness, her air of serenity, and her ability to make anyone feel welcome. In fact, my mother read *Nani Stories* well before I did, and was enchanted by it. A picture of Sangha, the monastery in upstate New York where my mother used to go for retreats, was posted on the Nayaks' kitchen wall for a long time.



*Ranganath, Sylvia, Randy, Norma (Sylvia's mother), Sandeep's father, and Sandy at the Belmont kitchen table*

There are, indeed, many more memories. They may seem random, but nonetheless, they are vivid and precious to us: picking berries in the garden with Sandy, kayaking in Long Pond on Cape Cod, playing Colorku, savoring Sandy's cookies and pies, and seeing the amazing costumes she had crafted for the school plays.

Sandy's life encompassed it all: academic achievement, intellectual curiosity, artistry, family, community, friendship, generosity, and compassion. Her legacy is rich—it was a life well lived. We loved and admired Sandy. We miss her.

# When Ranganath Left Sandy Speechless

---

Rekha Doraiswamy

Back in the quaint 1980s, we used to share long jokes and anecdotes in person—these were the days before email, texting, WhatsApp, and other communication methods had been invented.

One weekend I was visiting Belmont. Sandy, Ranganath, and I were sitting at the kitchen table, chatting away after lunch. I thought it would be a good time to administer a personality test to Ranganath. This was a popular test that had been making the rounds, and I had tried it out on many friends. It was just a simple set of questions—what is your favorite mountain, your favorite animal, your favorite color, and finally, what is your favorite body of water. There must have been a grid I carried around, to interpret all the answers people gave me.

My friends and family circle were well-traveled, so there were a lot of wide-ranging and exotic answers to all the questions.

There is only one specific answer I remember after all these years. While it is safe to guess that Ranganath answered, “Penny,” when asked about his favorite animal, I don’t even remember that specifically. All I remember is that when asked about his favorite body of water, Ranganath paused a bit, broke into a mischievous smile, and said, “Sandy. My favorite body of water is Sandy!”

It was such a surprising answer that Sandy and I were both caught off guard. Sandy remained blushing and speechless a bit longer, then I started in with “No fair, name a body of water, please”! Ranganath stood his ground. “I am sticking with Sandy! After all, the human body is over two-thirds water!”

I don’t remember how I interpreted this answer for the personality test, but I do remember this as a moment of deep affection, humor, and tenderness between Sandy and Ranganath. I am infinitely grateful that they shared so much of their beautiful and sweet life together with the rest of us.

# Endlessly Curious

Reid Whitlock (Kigali, Rwanda)

I worked for Ranganath at Arthur D. Little in Cambridge from 1980 to 1981. He would invite his direct hires to his house several times a year—for a Christmas dinner, for a summer barbeque or to provide some local flavor to welcome one of the many exchange students or foreign visitors who always seemed to be ensconced in the Nayak home.

Sandy seemed to be endlessly curious about her visitors—those who were staying only for an afternoon as much as those who were staying for a semester. What I still remember was how deeply she probed beyond niceties and pleasantries. Though an impeccable hostess and entertainer, what Sandy seemed to enjoy most was learning new things from her many visitors. She remembered names and details about those of us she had taken under her wing. She was interested in our lives, adventures, and personal development. But far from being a mere information sponge, Sandy invariably knew something about whatever topic was being discussed and was happy to test her ideas, offer an insight or share an anecdote.

My visit to see Sandy and Ranganath at home in the beginning of November 2020 was as warm and stimulating as ever.



# Sandy's Smile

Carla Mond

The first time I met Sandy was at the house in Belmont. I had recently (circa 1980) joined the team at ADL and Ranganath invited us all for a potluck. As Sandy nursed Maya, she was hostessing, scooching the other two little ones, and directing Ranganath for how to best get the potluck organized. Chaos in control, with a smile and grace. Despite the chaos, there was no sense of tension. Rather, I remember being so surprised and even a little uncomfortable as in my own home, when we would entertain, my mom would be anxious as we readied the house and even during cleanup.

Over the years, Sandy's smile is what I remember most. It was a warm and loving smile. When sharing a story about Ranganath, her eyes had a special teasing laugh and so much love shining through.

In attending the memorial service I loved hearing about all of Sandy's work with the theater efforts and the costumes for the children and the productions. I think I missed an opportunity to better know an extraordinary person. But for me, my memories are of a wife and mother and hostess with the kindest smile and brightest eyes.



*Carla and her daughter at the ADL Transportation Unit's reunion at Penny Lane, 2010*

# A Loving and Compassionate Person

Douglas Palmer

I can tell you that, as a young person (probably twenty-three or twenty-four years old), I did not know what to make of your family. I was in awe of the depth and complexity of you and Sandy. At first you seemed so different from one another. Then I saw you as amazing partners with strong, intertwined goals. I barely understood the international or global experience that you represented.

I certainly loved the food! I have since considered Indian cooking to be the best. We, Marie and I, always have Indian for a best meal.

Sandy was a loving and compassionate person. I often think of her and smile at the comfort I felt with her at your home.



*Marie and Sandy; Doug and Marie, at the ADL Transportation Unit's reunion at Penny Lane, 2010*

# Cuckoo, Cuckoo

---

Ajit Sarma

*Letter to Maya, Anand, and Lakshmi*

December 10, 2021

Amma/Sandy/Mom was a rock! A solid rock with a sense of goodness and values that she has passed on to the three of you and your families.

You always knew where you stood with her and even agreed with her when she, in her matter-of-fact and straightforward manner, pointed out a needed course correction that one needed to make to be a better person.

Not only was she your mother, she was an adopted mother to hundreds of kids that made her and your dad's home their home. She touched and guided so many young students who lived at 12 Orchard Street, Belmont. Her passing will be grieved all over our world (planet Earth) and let's ask ourselves: can we aspire to make a difference to people's lives in the manner she did?

In the forgotten strands of memory she lives, crocheting and proudly sewing in the basement and sharing her creations for the plays in which she participated. Lending a sympathetic ear to listen to you and after digesting the issue, delivering sensible and pragmatic advice to help you put the issue behind you and move on with positives. Always there to lend a helping hand to whoever needed it, putting herself out for them, even strangers. That is how I will remember your mother, Sandy.

As an aside illustrating the utter randomness of life, Sandy's first contact with an Indian family happened long before she met your dad. Back in 1958, your grandparents invited an Indian family to their home for dinner (editor's note: Howard and Betsy Tompkins were part of a United Nations program to host visitors). This family had a servant, Krishnan, courtesy of the Indian embassy. Your grandparents had a cuckoo clock that fascinated Krishnan, who, like Swiss clockwork, would gather the family's two young children to watch the cuckoo come out throughout the evening! A few months later, Sandy stayed with the family in Queens, New York, when she visited the United Nations.

All of this would never have been known except that years later when your grandparents were downsizing, your grandmother gave Sandy a box of her Girl Scout memorabilia. And a few months later (I was now married to Chummi Akka), we received a letter from Sandy with a picture and a note to Chummi: "I found this picture of 2 kids named Ajit and Nandini. Would this by any chance be your Ajit?"



Without providing the above background, Chummi casually showed me the picture. I took one look at it, stunned, and asked, “Where did you get this? This is me and my sister when we were kids!”

So that’s how the circle closed and the icing on the cake was that your house was the first house that Chummi and I visited as a married couple in September 1988. We had wonderful visits when your parents came to our house in California twice, and their house was a must visit for me every time I came to Boston. Sandy never tired of telling this story and laughing about Krishnan’s fascination with their cuckoo clock.

I will always remember her and love her.

# That Extra Bit of Caring

---

Chitra Nayak

Sandy was always the person you could sit down with and share whatever was on your mind, and she would always be there, with her practical advice, her stories, her thoughts. She was so caring of all around her, which led to her and Ranganath's home being open house to so many, even multiple generations.

I still remember we came over one day, and Sandy had just got home herself. She deduced which different folks had been there in her absence by the washing machine and dryer still being warm, and the musical instrument (a guitar) being pulled out onto the sofa. She and Ranganath just created a welcoming environment for all.

While Ranganath was The Host and The Chef for the many who came through the doors and stayed for dinner or for much longer, it was Sandy who made sure there was milk in the house, that the laundry got done and the myriad other tasks that pop up when you have a revolving door were completed. Still, she would always make time to stop and chat.

She also did so much for the community. One example that comes to mind: often in their house there was a pile of costumes being mended or created for the annual play in the Belmont schools or at the Unitarian church, which she was so deeply involved in for so many years.

She made time for that extra bit of caring, back when she made Christmas stockings for our first Christmas in Boston thirty-five years ago, all the way through to last year when she wanted to make a sewing kit for my niece Uma, who is at school in Boston.

She will be remembered by so many, and I believe that anyone who is still alive in memories of others is never truly gone.



Dipi and Sandy, California 2003



Chittu, Sandy, and Ranganath, Belmont 2018

# The Anchoring Effect

---

Aniruddh Patel

My memories of Sandy date back to the late 1980s when I arrived for grad school in Boston and she and Ranganath welcomed me into their home. Lakshmi, Anand, and Maya were still schoolchildren (I still remember Anand first learning to play guitar, practicing on the front doorstep).

I can't remember who first connected me to the Nayaks (my cousin Tuli?), but I soon learned our families had a special bond. Ranganath's father and my paternal grandfather, neither of whom I had ever met, had been fellow officers and friends in the Indian Civil Service (ICS) during the years spanning the British Raj and Indian independence. From Ranganath, I learned that when my grandmother gave birth to my father during ICS-related travels in northern India and no doctor was nearby, it was Ranganath's mother who delivered him.

Sandy was the calm center of the vibrant social ecosystem that made the Nayak home such a wonderful place to be whenever I could visit. I soon learned that I could count on that home for stability and warm companionship: food for the soul during the turbulent years of graduate school (not to mention Ranganath's Indian cooking, which was always a treat.)

I still recall sitting around the kitchen table, talking with Sandy about her years at Harvard, where I was studying. She had spent much time in the Peabody Museum, next to the Museum of Comparative Zoology, where I worked. The stories she told were vivid, including one of an anthropology professor we both knew, Irv Devore, giving a lecture while a tiny primate he took out of his pocket (a slow loris) slowly made its way across a large table over the course of the class.

I also enjoyed hearing stories of her archaeology fieldwork out west and resonated with her curiosity about other times and cultures. Speaking of other cultures, Sandy's stories of her family history, including how she and Ranganath met at a dance during Ranganath's grad school years at MIT and later traveled to India to meet his family, always meant a lot to me. They no doubt helped convince me that cross-cultural marriages could succeed.

And they do: I met my American future wife in grad school, Jennifer Burton, and we have been married for over twenty-five years. We left Boston after grad school, in 1997, and returned from San Diego to Boston in 2012 with two children: Roger and Lilia Burtonpatel. Having Roger and Lilia get to know Sandy, Ranganath, and the Nayak home was a wonderful full-circle experience. (Both have written memories of Sandy for this collection and have written in the guest book at the Cape: they were delighted to find my entries from grad school there.)

Years later, I appreciate even more the anchoring effect that Sandy and the Nayak home had on my life during grad school. Their phone number was one of the few that I learned by heart during my grad school years—not from a conscious effort but simply because I called enough that it got ingrained in my memory. (I still remember it.)

Sandy never ceased to make me feel welcome, except for one rather funny incident, which was not her fault. In my third year of grad school I had just come back from fieldwork somewhere warm (Australia, I think) and came straight from the airport to the Nayak home in the middle of the night in February, as planned. The kitchen door was supposed to be unlocked for my arrival, but it wasn't. I knocked and knocked, but no answer. It was so cold. Eventually I gave up, pulled out a thin sleeping bag, stuffed it with laundry and towels, and made the best of it outside on the back porch.

At some point in the morning, I heard the door open, a gasp, and then Sandy was ushering me inside, apologizing for locking the door and looking flustered for the only time I remember in all the years of knowing her.

I wasn't at all upset because I knew how deeply welcome I was. No physical cold could overcome the psychological warmth Sandy and the Nayak home had bestowed on me. I was fortunate to know this remarkable woman, and I miss her.

## The New Back Deck

---



*Sandy and O'Jay on the Belmont back deck (that he built in the early 1990s)*



*Maya and Sandy, October 2021  
In the foreground: a bouquet of flowers that Maya grew*

# Kind and Caring Heart

Anand Pai

I was very saddened to find out belatedly about Sandy's passing. There is precious little I can say, write, or do to address the anguish of your bereavement.

Amma used to speak endlessly of Sandy's huge, kind, and caring heart every time I spoke to her. That is also how I remember Sandy too every time I visited you.

I also remember the warm open house that was always available for me to visit unannounced, the barbeques, lunches, dinners . . . I remember on one occasion when there was no one at the house, the door was open, so I invited myself in, played Anand's guitar, slept for a while, made myself some coffee, drank it, relaxed, and left.

It was Sandy's warm welcomes on every past visit that made me not think twice about it. In fact, Sandy was full of kindness and love to all she came across. It was truly a given.

And so it is that in Sandy's passing, I realized just how fortunate we all were to have known the kindness that Sandy was so naturally and endlessly blessed with, and abundant in.

I pray for Sandy and for you and all of us to bear in mind the true meaning of Sandy's life, that her passing is but a pause in ours too, to reflect on and rejoice in a life well lived. And so that we also remember and strengthen the kindness and love she shared and left with us.

Sandy would also be happy to know that she left us capable of at least a small part of that kindness she endlessly showed us. In truth, passings of loved ones are truly but punctuations.



*At Anand Pai's wedding, 1990*

# Sandymai

---

Tuli Patel

Everyone should have the good fortune of having a mother figure like Sandymai in their life. “Mai” is an honorific in my mother tongue—Marathi, closely related to Konkani, the mother tongue of the family Sandymai is married into. Her father-in-law and my paternal grandfather were colleagues and friends, in the Indian Civil Service right after British rule. I came to America in 1988 for graduate studies and had the phone number for the Nayaks as an “emergency” contact.

Sandymai gave me a home away from home, a safe and stable harbor in which to anchor my tumultuous twenties, celebrated, championed, and nurtured my establishing a family. Sandymai introduced me to and bore witness to my career in Unitarian Universalism. I ended up living in the Nayak home for two years—so much for emergency contact. Sandymai nursed me through my depressive days, a torn ACL, incessant migraines. The year I arrived, Uncle Nayak passed away and I companioned Sandymai through those tense and anxious times. Sandymai accepted me for who I was and made no attempt to change me: I aspire to embrace others as she did me.

Sandymai taught me all the quotidian things an adult settling into America needs to know—how to balance a checkbook, where to buy sheets winter shoes, how to bake apple pies from scratch. She bought me my first cast-iron Lodge pan, gifted us our first Nambe bowl as a wedding present, my first L. L. Bean backpack and, with Ranganath, hosted our wedding reception.

Similar to what Sandymai had with so many others, we had an easy companionship discussing not just the mundane but also heady topics like the colonization of harvesting indigo. Adoptive grandmother to my kids, parent to me, when I was so far from my own, she was a guiding presence in my life. We spoke regularly, two to three times a week. When we moved to Japan, she shipped baby clothes and books to us.

An indelible image: *At the kitchen table, removing jeweled pomegranate seeds for an annual Christmas salad.*

We talked often and regularly about the intricacies of Unitarian Universalism, particularly education programs. When there was a problem at work or an issue at hand, a call to her was the first I would make. Her perspective, input, and advice have been foundational to my success.

We shared a love of books, history, textiles, and stage performances. I watched and sometimes helped with the iconic church fall musicals; Sandymai was endlessly resourceful and creative: a bridesmaid dress that I considered particularly ugly was repurposed into a carefully researched, glorious historically accurate costume.

She taught me how to be patient: coat and backpack zippers were like butter in her hands: “Getting frustrated won’t help,” she would say when I flung the jammed things down. One fall I asked Sandymai for sewing lessons. Despite her patient tutoring, I despaired after two days and moaned that I would only ever be good for buttons, to which Sandymai said, “Well, button sewers are necessary too.”

Another indelible image: *At the kitchen table, smoothing my son’s sock to darn a slightly ripped edge.*

Sandymai had an enviable ability to accommodate everyone—“How many did you have on stage?” I would ask with incredulity. “Oh, seventy-five,” she would say casually. “You really can’t deny a child a spot.” Ever inclusive, there was always a place for my kids, whom she counted among her grandchildren.

And this one: *In the garden now, tending a flower bed.*

Every year calling my sons on their birthdays, mailing a card, and sending money, these rituals are now no more.

Weaver of story tapestries, tugging on strands of memory to find *the* one that would bridge and bind our experiences, always listening for the connections.

Today, unmoored and unanchored, I am honored to carry forward the flame of Unitarian Universalism and try to cultivate the qualities Sandymai modeled for me: kindness, generosity, inclusion, hard work, patience, steadfast constancy, love for and always building community, celebrating the gift that is life, grateful for its mysteries and wonders.

Above my desk hangs the Edwin Markham poem Sandymai loved to quote—she wrote it on a Post-it in her neat handwriting.

He drew a circle that shut me out—  
Heretic, rebel, a thing to flout.  
But love and I had the wit to win:  
We drew a circle and took him in!

Thank you, Sandymai.



*Tuli and Sandy at the Cape, plucking herbs*

## Dialogue by email between Tuli and Sandy, 2010

---

On Dec. 12, 2010, at 6:23 AM, Tuli Patel wrote:

Hi Sandymai:

Good to hear from you as always. I tried you a few times over the week—my pageant is a HUGE mess and there are WAY too many kids, and I couldn't get things figured out, but it seems to be in control now. Next year, if you can't make a rehearsal, you're out!

I don't think Sammy knows what a board game is! We play Go Fish and Zingo, but he, like Kabir was at that age (and still is), is totally into changing rules to suit himself. I think he would love a simple board game—something like Candyland. He has watched Kabir and me play Blokus and we give him his pieces, and hand him a piece and tell him to figure it out and then tell him where it goes. Blokus's earliest age is 5. I can bring it with me, if you like.

Basically, if he is paid attention to, for 15 minutes, he is fine. He also loves to cook and bake. Jobs in the kitchen are also great. Laundry too. My spirited child #2.

Tuli

Dear Tuli—

Good luck with your pageant!! I'm sure it will all work out one way or another, and everyone will love it anyhow. As long as you don't have a real live sheep you'll be fine. No one at Swarthmore Meeting will ever forget the First-Day School nativity where someone thought it would be great to bring his pet sheep. So in the middle of everything it pooped all over the rug, and everyone reacted tumultuously. And Jeff Bradley tells of the time from his childhood when his preacher grandfather arranged an outdoor spectacular and the donkey took fright and bolted and ran away with Mary screaming on its back. You'll be fine. -----

I was in Florence two days this week, helping out. Jack is into the whole concept of rules—how to make them, break them, twist them, bend them, etc., with occasional dramatic meltdowns. Interesting and exhausting. His preschool is big on games, and Candyland is very popular. I'll get a game for Sammy, and play it with him. (We have Blokus, so don't bring yours). And we can make cookies. See you soon!!

Love,  
Sandy



*The three Magi in the Belmont UU Church pageant, late '80s, costumed by Sandy: Bridger McGaw, Anand, and Trey Sasser*

# Unflappable

Jody Lisberger

To me, the one word that captures Sandy, besides endlessly *generous* and *giving* and incredibly *smart*, is *unflappable*. Sandy always seemed to know what to do.

For years, she and I ran a Brownie or Girl Scout troop together. Dealing with the energies of girls was something she clearly could deal with a lot better than I could. She always had an encouraging word for the girls and also had a way of reminding a girl of the needed proper behavior or response that kept the whole machine running. Working with Sandy was always fun, and a marvel. She knew so much about activities and scouting. I remember the fly-up ceremony we had on our back patio, where Sandy had *all* the necessary items in her storage boxes, and somehow also managed to have a “bridge” for the girls to walk over to pass, I guess, from Brownie to Girl Scout? Where did the bridge come from? I have *no* idea. How did we cart it across the street? I have no idea. I just have this picture of the parents who wanted to be there for the ceremony sitting on our back steps, and the girls, under Sandy’s instruction, lined up in a different place, and all the proper words and salutations guided by Sandy. She was a marvel.



*Jody and Sandy march with their Scouts; Maya is visible second from left. Sandy made the banner.*

I remember another time we went to a daylong Scouting jamboree or some such, and Sandy taught us all a game that forever changed my life and became a lesson in my own college teaching. Once again, either she *had* all the cards written up for this game already (a magician pulling things out of her hat?), or she got kids to write on index cards all the living things they could think of—birds, insects, sun, rain, fungi, slugs, you name it. Then she put everyone in a big circle and gave us each a card. We each had to tell everyone in the circle what we were, what we ate, and what ate us (including sun, rain, etc.) Then she pulled out a huge ball of yarn, and handed it to one person, instructing them in that marvelously confident and unflappable voice she had, to make sure to hold on to the end. She instructed us then to throw the ball of yarn to someone

in the big circle who ate us or whom we ate. Soon enough, we had a huge web, with everyone holding tight to their spot in the yarn web. Then, she encouraged us to decide which of all the things around the circle was going to be extinct, and told that person to drop the yarn. If the yarn you held in your hands suddenly went slack as a result, you had to drop your string. In a matter of seconds, the whole web fell to the earth. It was a striking and forever memorable exercise to show us both the importance of interdependence and how quickly the loss of one species would kill off everything else. I never forgot this exercise. I also did it with my university students, always with the same gasp from everyone when the web collapsed.

How many times did I sit at the kitchen or dining room table in your house with cookies and tea and food prepared by you or Sandy? Hundreds. It's odd, in a way, that Sandy didn't come and hover at my house, because your house was Grand Central and drew people into it. I remember the night I came in late to stay at your house, with no idea who else was there. When I came down for breakfast, there was Tuli! Sandy knew all along, I suspect, who would be in her rooms, or maybe she didn't. She seemed to have an endless supply of homemade cookies and love and also knew everyone's train and bus schedules, the ins and outs of Boston life—everything. She was someone who found the most direct line to a solution. She was a problem-solver. What could she not do?

I know these incidents aren't very particular, but Sandy was a force in our lives, always present, it seems, and always giving. I also remember moments when she joked about Alfa's requests and insistence with a wry love for and awareness of the demands Alfa was putting on everyone to help achieve the drama excellence at First Church, but also with an edge of tempered humor about Alfa. Sandy managed to be Alfa's top helper, though I often think it was Alfa who was under the command of Sandy. I remember Sandy's solutions for costumes, her pride at reusing something from years before, her ingenuity at sewing something simple that served a complex purpose. She was a marvel with seemingly endless patience, or a marvel as she told a troublesome child that her patience was running out. Sandy did not beat around the bush.

I have so many gifts from Sandy and you, besides the ones mentioned here and my joy of knowing Lakshmi, Anand, and Maya. Sandy never came back from India without a caftan for me, or the glorious bedspread Mike and I have on our bed to this day. She is a flame in my life, whose sturdiness and insistence on recognizing the gifts of people from all over the world will forever stay with me.

# Many Firsts

---

Nayana Lin

Sandy was instrumental in making my move across continents (many years ago) an exciting experience, filled with adventure and a lot of first-time events.

I landed in Boston in May 1989 from Bangalore, India, along with my brother Suresh, and for the first time in our lives, we had host parents. Sandy, Uncle Ranganath, and their children Lakshmi, Anand, and Maya were happy to share their home with us. To have had a family and a place to call home was a sense of security and comfort that we have always treasured.

Sandy knew exactly what we needed to understand and learn in order to navigate our new life here in the United States. She was caring, warm, and always to the point. She was always there to help with anything you needed. She was a good listener and a great storyteller. I have to admit that if one had any questions, one didn't need an encyclopedia—all one needed was Sandy.

My first winter coat and wool sweater were given to me by Sandy. She had boxes of kitchen stuff organized for my first apartment. I remember her words, "When you're done with it, pass it on to the next person who needs it," and that's exactly how it all worked with Sandy. "Pay it forward when you can," is all she said. I have been fortunate to be able to pay it forward by being the host parent of a few students from India who have studied at the University of Michigan—Ann Arbor.

Sandy invited me to services at the Unitarian Church. That was a new and lovely experience for me. She also asked if I would give her a hand organizing the costume closet at the church.

We did that a few times and I really enjoyed the time we spent together. Sandy would explain what each costume was used for and how she continuously reworked costumes to fit different plays. We'd bring home costumes that needed repair, and it was then that I saw Sandy's love of creating and sewing. One would see her elaborate tailoring workspace filled with all sorts of colorful costume pieces if one went down to the basement.

Sandy took me grocery shopping and showed me how the sales work and how one can stock up when there were deals. I remember her words of wisdom. "Most Americans spend a lot of money eating out. It all adds up pretty quickly. If you save that money, you could take a vacation instead."

One was always welcome at the Nayak home. One could stop by any time. If no one was home, one knew where the house keys were—just go in, open the refrigerator, help oneself, and feel comfortable. Always so inviting! Holidays were always special. It was family, friends, and lots of food. There was always a casual niceness in the atmosphere that felt complete and unpretentious. We would all gather in the living room and listen to specially picked out Christmas readings read by Sandy's dad. You really felt the spirit and joy of the holidays.

Everything was so real about the Nayaks. Sandy and Uncle Ranganath always cared to know how you were doing and what was happening in your life. When I told them I was dating a guy, John, from Ann Arbor,

Michigan, they said, “Bring him over to dinner. We would love to check him out and give you our OK.” Well yes, that did happen! They hosted a sit-down dinner in their formal dining room. Great conversations were always a part of the Nayak home, and this was no exception. When we were on our way out, Sandy and Uncle Ranganath casually slipped in, “He’s a good guy. You’ve got our OK!” They were right. John and I have been married for thirty years and counting.

The firsts continued. Sandy sent my kids their first picture book with a little rubber ducky. Soon after that, she sent them CDs of *Steve’s Songs*. They were a huge hit at my home. My children Hannah and Jonathan parted with their treasures as they grew up, but the little rubber ducky and *Steve’s Songs* are here to stay.

I’m so lucky to have had amazing host parents in Sandy and Uncle Ranganath. I’ve learned so much from both of you. Sandy’s approach to life was simple, uncomplicated, and casual. Her focus always remained on family, relationships, friends, and community. There was a quiet confidence in the way she moved through life, helping anyone she could. Sandy was always so generous with her time, her talent, her mind, and her heart. She shared her family and her home with me. She showed me the joy of what sharing means.

To the person who dropped me off at my first apartment and helped me navigate my life as an adult in a new country: Thank you, Sandy!

# In loving memory of Sandy, a surrogate mother, a mentor, and a lifelong inspiration!

---

Marieme S. Lo, PhD

12 Orchard Street, Belmont, has affectionately been called the “United Nations,” a beacon of multiculturalism (before it had become vogue), tolerance, inclusion, love, warmth, and memorable encounters for many generations of students and visitors like me.

Words cannot fully describe or characterise Sandy Nayak! She was an anchor, a surrogate mother, and a mentor who continues to be a lifelong inspiration for so many of us—international students, visitors, and scholars—from all walks of life, ethnicity, creeds, national origins, and races.

Our first encounter is imprinted in my memory forever: June 1990. I was warmly welcomed when I arrived in the U.S. (Boston) for the first time on an international exchange program. As a francophone from Senegal, I spoke good textbook English. Sandy and Ranganath welcomed me with open arms, and the whole family quickly helped me adjust and learn everyday English to communicate with ease.

I enjoyed my first Christmas sock on the chimney of 12 Orchard Street, filled with goodies. I attended many musicals and witnessed Sandy’s masterful design of elaborate costumes from scratch and then on full display during the performances. I saw Lakshmi in action taking over the musical preparations with the same virtuosity, our impromptu drumming circles, Anand’s amazing musical performances, and Maya’s performances as a gymnast.

Lingering memories include time spent cooking together versions of West African peanut soups. The delicious welcome-home meals cooked by Ranganath (the menu du chef!) with servings left on the kitchen counter for late arrivals and drop-ins. The door that never locked, to greet visitors anytime! The bag of packed goodies for the road. The exact change for the bus and subway fare is always available for self-service. The live music, singing, games, and impromptu performances! The smell and taste of pancake early morning, late afternoon tea, and snacks and laughter! Sandy’s art of storytelling and unique touch of hospitality. Memorable visits and encounters. Sharing the joys of a loving family in its broadest sense, including Sandy’s mother and father (the late Betsy and Howard), her sisters (Vicki, Deyne, and Wendy) and their families, and Ranganath’s own family. I have been an integral part of a loving global and multicultural extended family, a chain of solidarity, love, and care that transcended boundaries, differences, generations, and time periods!



*Sarah Klinkenberg and Marieme on the Belmont back deck, circa 1990*

In fact, the genuine ethics of care for others extended beyond those closely connected to her or Ranganath as Sandy wore the hat of an advocate for the vulnerable. I fondly recall Sandy's decisive action and stand in support to an international Jamaican visitor who had a hard time with her host placement in the 1990s. Sandy did not hesitate to take action in her defense and for a better host placement and experience, and in the process, transformed the institutional structure of the program for the better for the next generations of international visitors.

Sandy and Ranganath stood by my side at decisive and formative times in my personal and professional life journey, providing me with academic and career advice and life guidance. Their wisdom and guidance supported me in embarking on a new life trajectory with confidence, venturing away from the francophone world into American academics. Sandy read my draft dissertation. She and Ranganath were there when I negotiated my first academic position and when I dealt with a heart-breaking incident in my academic career. Sandy also gave me advice on marriage and not-so-promising suitors with her typical humor and incisive insights!

As I embarked on my doctoral journey, I was also fully prepared for the harsh winter in the Northeast, thanks to advice from Sandy on the art of layering and must-have items from L. L. Bean. She and Ranganath welcomed me home for Thanksgiving holidays and Christmas celebrations and offered memorable stays by the ocean at the Cape house (Penny Lane), riding in style in the back of Ranganath's convertible blue Cadillac!

I found in Sandy a surrogate mother and mentor. A scholar with prodigious knowledge of world history and cultures, and gifted with legendary wisdom, Sandy instilled in me boundless intellectual curiosity and

humility. I am inspired every day to be a better mentor and caring professor, owing to the role models Sandy and Ranganath have been to me and countless others.

I am forever thankful and grateful to Sandy, Ranganath, Lakshmi, Anand, and Maya and the larger family for having been such a kind-hearted, generous, and inspirational family for us! You have so much to teach the world, especially in these uncertain and dark times.

Sandy has left an incommensurable void in our hearts and the lives of so many of us for whom she was a surrogate mother, but she has also left an inspirational legacy and ethos of care. I will cherish Sandy's memory forever and the love you all share with me and countless others from around the world!



12 Orchard Street, April 20, 2018!

# Sandy, Who Understood

---

Paula Phipps

My first memory of Sandy is in the kitchen at Cedarholm, watching her and Deyne cook in a manner I had not seen before, seeds sizzling in hot oil in a wok, followed years later with fond memories of Sandy in her own kitchen, cooking, enjoying company and conversation, and guiding the cleanup!

I recall Sandy working with Deyne, Wendy, and me in Richard's lab when we were helping schoolchildren get familiar with the bones of many creatures. What a diligent and intelligent teacher she was.

And her generosity, welcoming (with Ranganath) speakers coming from all over the planet to present at Biodiversity for a Livable Climate's conferences. Rajendra Singh, the Water Man of India, was the first. Later, Michal Kravcik, a Slovakian hydrologist who remarked how intelligent Sandy was, quickly understanding the difficult science he was presenting.

Sandy with her sisters making music, Sandy firmly assigning parts in the Christmas play, and her calm (or seeming so) way of letting things happen in a very full house with kids running around.

And Sandy the mother, because Lakshmi, Anand, and Maya are testaments to very good parenting.

And Sandy who understood the historical moment and the importance of doing what one can to help the planet heal and who wanted to show her neighbors how they could do it too.

I will miss this graceful, warmhearted friend.

# Over Decades and Across Generations

---

Lalitha Prabhu

Sandy was a huge part of our lives over decades and across three generations. It all began with Ranganath and I being double first cousins (as Sandy would explain it, two men from India who met and became friends in England married each other's sisters, and Ranganath and I are the offspring of those two marriages), but evolved into a warm and wonderful family kinship and blending of extended family on all sides!

So many Christmases, visits, weddings, special occasions spent together, so many memories of Sandy's parents and sisters, and then their families, so much joy shared! In fact, hanging up our stockings this year will be bittersweet since every one of them, bearing some unique and personal symbol, was stitched for us by Sandy!

The legendary open house that Ranganath and Sandy ran was indeed remarkable: how so many people, related and unrelated, from such diverse backgrounds, floated through or lived there for years, enjoyed the privileges but also pitched in with their share of the work required to make this cozy commune function so beautifully!

Once you had met her, Sandy was not someone you could forget: the mesmerizing deep-blue eyes, the rocklike strength of her presence and being, the fascinating stories, her way with children, the feeling that you belonged—as Anand said, I could go on!

Your legacy lives on, Sandy, as you do forever in our hearts.



*Lammu with Mano, Merry Coffin, and Wendy, at Sandy and Ranganath's wedding, 1968*



*Sandy with Anita, Maya, Ranganath, Kavita, and Lakshmi, Belmont Center, circa 1986*



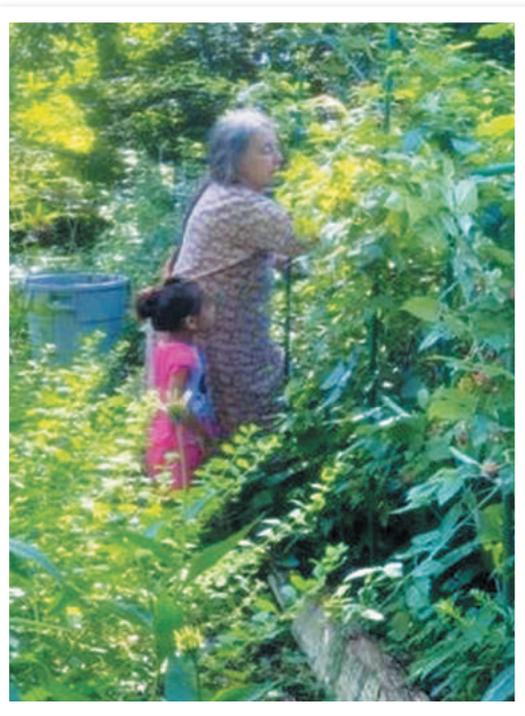
*Mercedes, Lakshmi, Jack, Ritvik, Tanavi, and Anita at Lakshmi's fortieth birthday party, Belmont, 2010*



*Anita Prabhu's wedding, August 9, 2015  
L to R: Ashok and Kiran, Sunanda and Jayendra, Tarakka, Aaron and Anita, Ranganath and Sandy, Lammu, Chummi, Pandu*



*Ranganath holds baby Ariana, surrounded by (L to R) Tanavi, Moky, Yuthica, Ritvik, Prachetas*



*Sandy with Ariana—reading, and picking black raspberries in the Belmont garden*

# An Aunt for All Seasons

Nandan Kamath

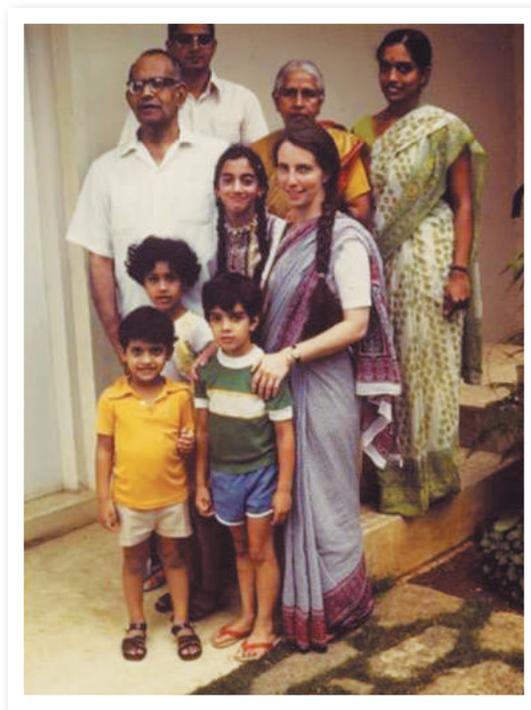
A Richard Scarry book that taught three-year-old me about our busy, busy world. At thirteen, a Harvard T-shirt that I wore till it frayed. Fitted sheets for my college dorm room while I made sense of a new country at twenty-three. These gifts stitch together a tapestry of memories of my aunt Sandy—not as much for the artefacts themselves but for the care and thoughtfulness behind them.

Bundled in a warm coat, behind the steering wheel of her minivan, relating a fascinating story or anecdote that I had never heard before—this is the picture of my aunt that remains in my mind’s eye. Warm, in control of her own destiny, and sharing the products of her wonder and curiosity with the world.

With my uncle Ranganath, she created the most open and generous home I have seen, exceeding all standards of Indian hospitality while trying to recreate it. How she created space and time for all of us who passed through will remain a mystery.

There is no memory of my childhood, our travels, my college graduations, our wedding, our kids, and more that does not have her imprint on it.

Her trademark oatmeal cookies sat in that seemingly bottomless brass bowl on the Belmont kitchen table, just like their maker—wholesome, available nowhere else, never enough.



*Bangalore, circa 1980: Amarnath and Maya, Ajja and Anamma/Mamamma, Lakshmi and Sandy, Deepa, Nandan, Anand*



*Cedarholm, circa 1986*

*Far back: Amarnath, Ranganath, Narayan*

*Middle: Jim, Sushila, Anand, Tara, Deyne, Deepa*

*Sandy, young Nils held by Lakshmi, Ashok, Nandan, Lela holding baby Sarah*

*Front: young Maya, Mayakka, Wendy*



*Bangalore, 2011: Sandy, Jack, Anand, and Ranganath congratulating Nandan and Sandhya at their wedding reception*



*Madhav and Yamini Kamath, March 2023*

## Visiting the Coffins in South Portland, Maine

*The Coffins were Mayakka's host family during her high school year in the U.S., 1967-'68. We all stayed in touch over the ensuing years.*



*1970s: Ranganath, Anand, Sandy*



*1980s: Frank Coffin, Betsy, Sandy, Ruth Coffin*



*Visiting in Belmont, 2007: Ranganath, Sandy, Frank Coffin, Nandan  
Seated: Ruth and Merry Coffin*



*2013: Nandan, Sandhya, Ruth, Doug, Merry*

# Her Generosity and Her Stories

---

Sarah Klinkenberg

When I reflect on my relationship with Sandy, and the parts of herself that she shared with me, two traits come to the front of my mind—her generosity and her stories.

From an early age, I knew that there was always a place for me at Sandy's table. There was space for us to come to dinner, space for me to sit beside her and feel the calm comfort of listening to stories—from books, relatives, and lore. There was a week for a friend and me to join her on the Cape one summer. I remember wondering why there were always people I didn't know or remember at Thanksgiving, but that's because they were welcome too. When, while in college, I needed a place to stay for a month one winter, the tiny room at the top of the third floor was ready for me.

Sandy and I shared a love of musical theater, crafting, and historical fiction books. She was generous with that too—making my costume for my first community-theater play, giving me beads for jewelry making, and recommending endless stories to read.

It was generosity, but also more than that. Love and resources were given matter-of-factly, because it was, in her mind, simply the right thing to do. I always admired and was a little intimidated, by the solidity of her presence.

I often felt that Sandy's storytelling was a way of connecting with the people around her. It was an avenue for humor, advice, education, and putting people at ease. She had anecdotes about everyone, but especially from when we each were young. Here are a few that I remember (as told to me):

Someone was meeting your family for the first time. When they heard Nils' name, they said, "Nils! Well, that's a strange name!" and you looked at them and said, "It's not strange, it's Norwegian. My brother has a Norwegian name, and I have Norwegian blond hair" (her impression of me was complete with a twinkle-eyed hair flip).

While your mother was on bed rest with you, she stayed with me and Nils was with Deyne. Nils was very quiet as a child and rarely spoke. But one day Deyne heard him sitting at the table in her kitchen, talking to himself. He had a straw in a glass of milk, and was blowing bubbles and giggling to himself, while saying in a perfect impression of your mother, "No no, Nils! We don't *do* that!"

Your family was at the beach and you and Nils were swimming in the water. Someone said to your mother, "Wendy, Sarah needs to get out of the water. She's turning blue!" and so your mother told you, "Come on, Muffin! Time to get out!" And she helped you out. While she was carrying you, you said, "Well, I guess that would make me a blueberry muffin, then!"

There were so many more. Many of her stories made clear the delight she found in kids and the way they view the world. They communicated her love of family and history. I'm so grateful to have heard so many and received so much.



*Sarah with Sandy, late '80s*

# Tomorrow, Today, and Yesterday

---

Polly Fiveash

I came across this poem that Sandy sent in 2012, and it made me think of a number of things I love about her. Particularly her love and attentiveness toward the way small children's minds work and the wisdom they possess, which she understood and cherished and was able to be with in a really cool way.

the 3-year-old, wanting to know what day  
it is asks everyday what day it is  
we tell her Tuesday or Saturday etcetera  
then she asks what day it will be  
tomorrow and we go through the naming  
of tomorrows in order  
chanting the future like a litany  
tomorrow is when she wakes up  
in the morning and when we tell her  
we'll go shopping tomorrow she  
remembers yesterday and informs us  
that it is tomorrow that today is  
yesterday that therefore the time is  
always now to do what we plan to do  
tomorrow

—Jane Piirto

# The Very Best Kind of Grown-up

---

Cynthia Freeman

Sandy Nayak was the very best kind of grown-up when I was a kid. She was at the heart of the village that raised a whole extended generation of Belmont kids, designing costumes for scores of musicals, coming to our classrooms to talk about life in India and to let us play dress-up with dhotis and saris and salwar kameez, organizing Girl Scout campouts and teaching us how to cook over open fires, and driving carpools in her minivan (which she was excellent at maneuvering). I was a precocious, curious child with no filter and no tact, and this was not popular with many grown-ups (a feeling I have more empathy for now as an adult). But Sandy saw through my rough edges and always took me seriously and cheered me on. She did her best to protect me from the occasional hostility of other adults, and you always, always got fed and felt welcome at Orchard Street.

Sandy Nayak was also the very best kind of grown-up when I was a teenager. In our small, insular, redlined town, she introduced us to ideas and books and people from outside. She told lots of stories about adventures in the wider world—living in India with Ranganath’s family, traveling in Europe and running so late she had to attend her Radcliffe interview in her Girl Scout uniform, having Lakshmi and Anand and then losing the twins before Maya, growing up with Nani and Grandpop and her sisters, and many stories of the extended family around the world and their various adventures and foibles.

Sandy was part of a community infrastructure of caring for people—she hosted people in her home, she kept the church and the schools running and on their toes, she knew when people were hurting or needed help and she responded. Quietly, without fuss or fanfare, *she showed up*. She had a whole set of smiles and significant looks. She sent me off to India with Lakshmi to visit the people I’d met in her living room—and many more. This was in the olden days before the Internet, so you couldn’t just instantly know the answers to all the things. *But* you could ask Sandy, and she would know, or would know who would know, or how to find out. And you always, always got fed and were welcome at Orchard Street, and on the Cape.

Sandy Nayak was again the very best kind of grown-up when I was a grown-up. She met all my serious boyfriends and came to my wedding and played with my babies and welcomed me when I was in town and needed a place to stay. She caught me up on all the news from the extended family and friends. We called or emailed each other on our shared birthday. When my sister died of breast cancer at the age of thirty-seven, Sandy helped feed all of us at the memorial and gave me the hugs and the solidarity you get from people who know what it is to lose someone you love way too soon. Her brain was always sharp, and she always knew what was what. But I can’t remember a time that she was cruel or snarky or childish. (Now that I’m a grown-up, I know better how rare this is). And you always, always got fed and were welcome—you, and your family too—at Orchard Street, and on the Cape.

All that love she poured into her family and extended family and community, me and you and us—that attention, that knowing, that understanding, that care, that way she made us feel—it’s still in all of us whom she helped to raise and nurture, who are now, ourselves, grown-ups. May we remember her, see her in us and in each other, when we are feeding people and making them feel welcome and all the other ways when we ourselves are being the very best kind of grown-up.



Look, here’s the Pirate King!

The Pirate King (Anand Nayak, left) gets a chin squeeze from the singing Ruth (Cynthia Freeman) as a policeman (Sasha O’Neill, right) looks on in the upcoming First Church in Belmont production of *The Pirates of Penzance*.

*From the Belmont Citizen Herald newspaper, 1987  
(Costumes, of course, by Sandy)*



*Cynthia and Anand as Golde and Tevye in the church production of Fiddler on the Roof, 1988 (costumed by Sandy)*



*Sandy, Ranganath, Lakshmi, Anand, and Toby Moore at Cynthia's wedding in 2005*

# A Colorful Mosaic

Sven Sommerlatte

It would be difficult to pick just one story related to Sandy because a colorful mosaic of impressions comes immediately to my mind. I associate with Sandy many things that I discovered and that were very different to what I knew before I visited the U.S.

It started one day 1990 when Sandy so kindly picked Tina and me up from the airport with her light-blue Toyota van when we first arrived to the U.S. to stay for the summer. We had never seen such a car before. Its very shape was special for us. The large streets, the massive cars, and the slow traffic made a strong first impression, which always comes back to my mind when I think of these first moments with Sandy. We were so happy and thankful that Sandy took care of us and in such an incredibly calm and friendly way as if it was nothing special at all. I remember many amazing weekends in Belmont and on the Cape during that beautiful summer.



*Sven and Sandy at Nauset Beach, 1990s*

We also had the privilege to get to know Sandy's parents and sisters in their country home. This traditional and rather rural way of life was a great surprise (and of joy) for me, because before I had always thought of the U.S. as being a brand-new and only modern country. Here I became aware of the depth of historic traditions, which seemed to be a blend between European legacy and the mindset of those who had settled in the new continent with their own values and beliefs. This helped me understand a lot about the U.S. and where this new civilization has its deeper roots.

In 1996 you very generously invited me to stay in your home for many months, while I started the research work for my doctoral thesis. Every morning we drove with Ranganath in his stretched silver-blue convertible Cadillac to Acorn Park. On the way back from the office we stopped at the grocery to shop for the dinner,

where usually a happy crowd of Harvard or MIT students as well as friends from Lakshmi, Anand, Maya were expected. These were such marvelous evenings!



*Front seat: Ranganath, Deepa, Sarah, Nandan  
Back seat: Lakshmi, Sven, Nils, Shreedhar, Maya*

This amazing melting pot of cultures you were so generously hosting in your house gave me an understanding of the diversity that is existing in the U.S. And it was quite a surprise to understand that this was just the normal way in the Nayak family. Sandy was always relaxed. For her this seemed to be evident that people would live in your house and that you would share your time, house, food, happiness, family life, weekends, etc. Sandy and Ranganath, you were naturally at the epicenter of this joyful, cultivated, curious, debating, laughing community. This was and still is an absolutely unique and fantastic role model for me.

This leads me to my next surprise concerning Sandy. Sometimes I felt that she was more Indian than American. I think she often started her sentences with a “well . . .” and very often she then gave a simple thought, just as if it were evidence. But in reality, it was some deeper wisdom that you could meditate for quite a while later on. I have gotten to know Sandy as someone always smiling and lighthearted. She was for me the incarnation of the saying that calm waters are deep. I was impressed by her ability of letting go. Of not trying to influence. Of accepting things as they were. Of not being prescriptive. This gave me an amazing feeling of freedom.

When I had the opportunity to visit you three years ago, even though it was many years after I had stayed as a long-term guest in your lovely house, I felt immediately completely at home. It was this fabulous experience of diving back into the past with all the memories. From this patchwork of impressions, I keep a vivid picture of Sandy sitting at the kitchen table with her adorable and generous smile.

# The Family Circus

---

Sandy Nayak

*Written in 1992 for the 25<sup>th</sup> Reunion of the Harvard-Radcliffe Class of 1967*

The Fulbright to India was terrific, but dreams of anthropological research and publishing haven't happened.

At any given time, the complexities of daily living in a large extended bicultural family on two continents are just too absorbing. The last two days have been quite typical.

Friday morning, we decided that our golden retriever's cut paw wasn't healing properly, so after Anand and Maya got off to school and Ranganath left for work, I took Penny to the vet's, where she got thoroughly bandaged. [Penny was a few months old.—Ranganath]

Anand had left me his achievement test application to post but he forgot to sign it, so I dropped it off at school, went to a costume meeting for a production of *The Music Man* that our Unitarian children's choirs are doing, did the grocery shopping, picked up the application from the school and posted it, and was home in good order to meet eleven sixth grade Girl Scouts at 3:00. They made hair things, went roller skating, cooked and ate dinner, cleaned up, and were more or less out of here by 7:00 when Anand arrived home from a Varsity Soccer game with two friends, a cousin showed up to do his laundry, Ranganath got home from work, one of our Harvard students got out of Stillman [Harvard infirmary] and came home to sleep it off, and five of these people were hungry. So dinner was produced from the freezer and a good time was had by all.

Saturday morning Anand and Maya got off to soccer and gymnastics, and our Harvard student decided to go to her dorm so I dropped her off in Cambridge and did the basic grocery shopping on the way home.

Throughout Friday over several phone calls, my extended family had arranged to have a five-way joint birthday party at our house Saturday night, so Ranganath and I figured out what people were likely to bring and what he felt like cooking. He headed off to do his grocery shopping and I went to Watertown to get the gymnastics carpool. When we returned, there was a message that our Harvard student needed picking up, so I left Maya to fix lunch and headed into Cambridge again. Anand came in from soccer victorious. In the course of the afternoon, both kids helped clean house, my husband cooked an Indian feast, I baked a birthday cake, Maya had soccer practice, our eldest daughter came in from Wellesley, and the family gathered—my parents, two sisters and their spouses and children, several of Ranganath's cousins (two of whom are students at Harvard and MIT), a couple of friends, and a new student from Taiwan at college in Newton who is the young cousin of one of our Harvard host students from ten years ago. Several of Anand's friends drifted in, and we ended up with a lot of music. It was a jolly party. Several people slept over.

This morning I teach Sunday school, but the lesson is Karma and I wrote this part of the curriculum myself several years ago so that's all right. I think eight more people are asleep upstairs, but they all know where everything is and can manage breakfast on their own. This afternoon there is a rehearsal for *Music Man*, Maya has a soccer game, and of course, there is homework. It's a good life. Actually, an anthropology major was pretty good training for it.

# Simplicity, Sincerity, and Service

Martha Moore

Sandy struck me as a person with an unusually strong sense of who she was and what she was about. She had strict ideas about appropriate behavior, which she occasionally made known quite directly, to her own children and to the cast of young people she enjoyed teaching and directing in First Church drama productions. Part of Sandy's legacy is surely her influence on the growth and maturation of the children of First Church, who benefitted from her sage and capable guidance over the years. Whether as an indispensable right hand to Alfa for the choir/drama program, as a cultural educator for our children, or as a skilled problem solver and creative costume and production designer, Sandy's contributions have been remarkable and superlative.

Knowing Sandy has also added a unique dimension and richness to the lives of the Moore family. We are grateful for this. Friendship with a family of mixed Indian and American traditions has been a valuable cultural education for us as it sure has been for many others in our church community. Sandy's presence and that of the Nayaks seemed for many years to be woven tightly into the fabric of our daily lives, full of shared experiences on stage, at church, at Burbank and other Belmont schools, and during Cape summers. While we enjoyed our time together, the years slipped by. In the end, our fondness and sense of connection to Sandy and the Nayak family remains.



*Gaylen and Martha Moore with Sandy at one of Maya's birthday parties in the '80s*

For many years I spent summer vacation times in Pennsylvania in a rather unique lakeside community. It was established in 1904 by a group of Quakers for use as a center for vacations and religious retreats. Inside its rustic stone library, running along the front edge of a wooden mantelpiece, are carved the words “Simplicity,” “Sincerity,” and “Service.”

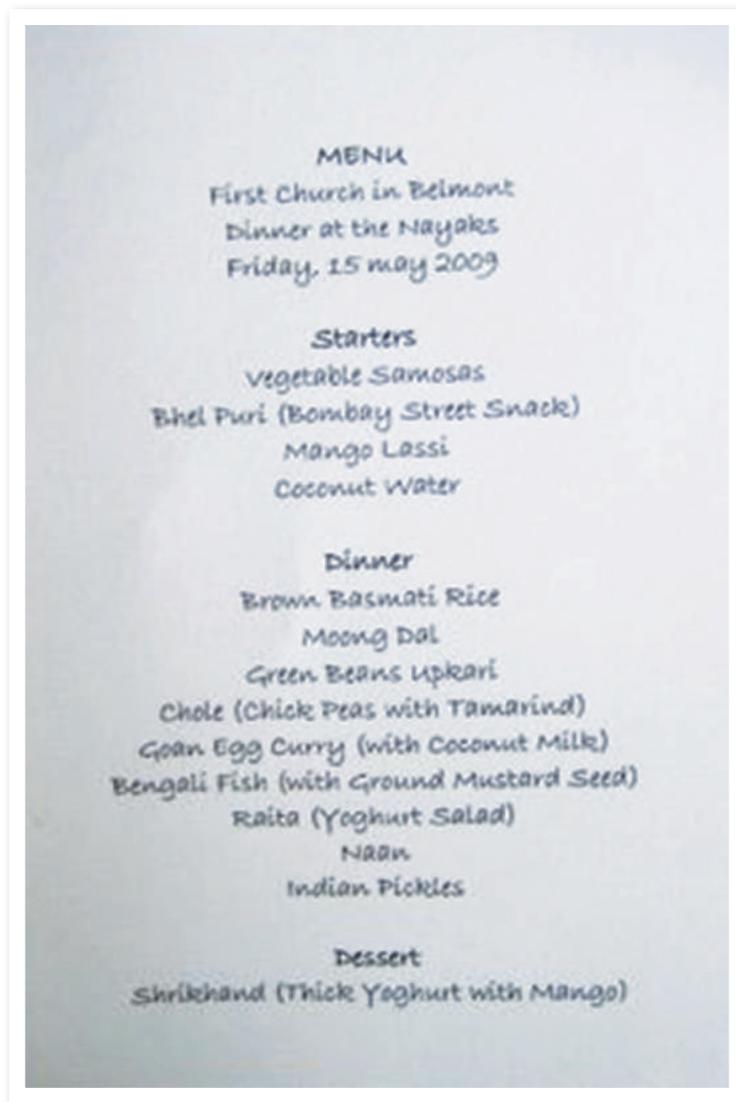
These words come back to me as I recall Sandy. I believe her life personified these values, as well as other essential Quaker values—equality, integrity, and truth.

Losing Sandy shook my own world more than I could have guessed in advance of the loss. It continues to be difficult to get used to a First Church world without Sandy.

# Indian Dinners for the Belmont UU Church



1985—Indian Dinner and Music played by Serge Paul-Emile, Jack Freeman, and Fran Babcock



*2009 Menu (above) and company: Charles and Ethel Haman, Ranganath and Sandy Nayak  
Brad and Mary Power, Mark Thurber and Susan Galli*



# Part 4

---

## The Golden Years



# Penny Lane

Kathie Fiveash

Sandy's home away from home was Penny Lane. She loved being there with crowds of friends and family, and she loved the quiet times when she was there with just Ranganath and one or two others. Over the years, as the place evolved under her watchful eyes to include the bunkhouse and the lovely gardens and landscaping that beautify that quiet space, it seemed that her roots there grew deeper and wider, along with her heartfelt pleasure in her life there.

Many people, friends and family who shared in the pleasures of Penny Lane, went out on excursions and adventures—beach walks, hikes, miniature golf, the Brewster Scoop, Guapo's, shopping trips to Orleans or Harwich, and kayaking, sailing, and rowing on Long Pond. Though Sandy did enjoy the Brewster Library, and the Cape Cod Museum of Natural History, and the Bird Watcher's Store, she usually preferred to stay home.

Sandy loved just being at Penny Lane. She loved her garden there, not so much for what it produced as for the process of tending it. She never put up fences to keep out the rabbits, preferring to let them be. She watched with interest as snapping turtles dug their sandy nests, and she tried to protect those nests from the depredations of raccoons and foxes. Sandy took care of the compost. She kept the bird feeders full and delighted in having birds flitting around the garden. She stood patiently in her long, loose Indian dresses, watering vegetables and flowers. She created and maintained paths through the woods for children to explore. She collected sticks to use as kindling for the tiny woodstove in the house. She loved tending that little wood stove! She also maintained the firepit around which so many hot dogs and marshmallows were lovingly toasted. She enjoyed late afternoons down by the lake, sitting at the picnic table with snacks or a glass of wine, an old hat with a big brim shading her face from the summer sun.



*Sandy and Lily at Penny Lane*

I can see Sandy in my mind's eye, bent over a board game with Betsy or helping Polly and me assemble a jigsaw puzzle or conversing quietly with Wendy at the table, sharing a cup of tea. Often, as she talked with others, she was working on creating one of her intricate crocheted shawls. She was always available to help a child find an entertaining project or read a story or find a vase for a fistful of wildflowers. But when the rest of the gang was out gallivanting, Sandy took time to relax on a couch in the living room, reading or snoozing. I think it was peaceful and pleasant for her to be alone there.

Though she oversaw all the comings and goings, Sandy loved the way everyone chipped in with the sweeping and the tidying, the laundry, the endless dishwashing, the shopping, and the cooking. Oh, the cooking! The amazing meals for a crowd that come out of that tiny kitchen with zero counter space, a mini-stovetop, an erratic oven, and a hodgepodge of equipment! Sandy loved sitting around the table at breakfast, lunch, and dinner enjoying those meals. I think she was pleased to just make do at the Cape. She understood, at Penny Lane as in the rest of her life, that satisfaction doesn't depend on fancy spaces or gadgets or exciting new experiences or on anything that money can buy. It depends on appreciating what you have. It depends on thoughtful, loving people gratefully sharing time and activities, and taking care of one another.

## Penny Lane, Cape Cod—a few glimpses over the years



*Penny, Sandy, and Lydia picnicking in the front yard, mid-'90s*



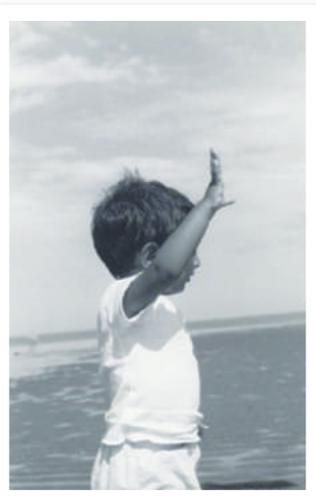
*Investigating Anand's band's steel drums, summer 1995:  
Sandy, Beth Reddish, Abby Hosmer, Jen Reddish, Ranganath*



*Celebrating a birthday at Penny Lane, late 1990s: Sandy, Henry Meadow, Maya*



*Playing a railroad game with Nani and Grandpop (Betsy and Howard)*



*Shreedhar, Kabir at the Brewster Flats, 1999*



*Watermelon at the dock, circa 2012: Jack, Sandy, Leo*



*Picking peas with toddler Shireen*



*Watering with older Shireen*



*Indoor marshmallows! Sandy, Asha, Leo, Isabel (Claire's daughter)*



*Outdoor marshmallows! Leo, Edie, Asha, Sandy*



*Family portrait, 2013—Standing: Sandy, George, Ranganath, Polly, Lakshmi  
Front row: Anand, Jack, Asha, Maya, Leo*



*Backyard party—Ranganath, Sandy, Elise and Matt Pawa*

# Blueberries

Tuli Patel

I am convinced that my older son, Kabir, loves blueberries as much as he does because of how he was introduced to them.

Sandymai would take fifteen-month-old Kabir out in the bright-blue kayak at 199 Penny Lane on Cape Cod, sitting him between her outstretched legs on the kid-sized seat in front.



After paddling for a bit along on Long Pond, she would turn along the edges of the water, as close as she could get to shore where blueberry bush branches hung heavy with ripened berries. She would balance the kayak carefully and let Kabir climb to the front of the kayak, where he would proceed to pick blueberries and eat them rapidly. I only knew because he would return painted indigo, like a toddling Krishna. Sometimes, once he'd had his full, a stainless-steel bowl brimming with them would be brought up the shady path to the house to be made into blueberry pancakes the next morning. All along, the two of them would be reciting *Jamberry* by Bruce Degen by heart. It was a board book, among our favorites, that she sent to us along with an olive-green sweatshirt from L. L. Bean called “bean sprout.”

Sprouts and berries aside, Sandymai loved growing things, especially on Cape Cod—from cherry tomatoes to mint and basil to fountains of lavender, later harvested and made into closet sachets to keep moths away, to marigolds and hydrangea, she loved being at Penny Lane.



*Collecting dried lavender at Penny Lane*

Hours spent in sun dappled pathways, working the soil, planning out the planting, watering the seedlings and finally, resting after a long day outdoors.

# The Friend from Across the Lake

---

Kristen Kimball

Jess alerted me to the news that Sandy passed away, and I am writing to express my sincere condolences to you, Lakshmi, Anand, Maya, and all the rest of your lovely family and friends who might as well be family. I'm so very sorry, and for what it's worth, know that I have an understanding of what it is to lose your beloved partner.

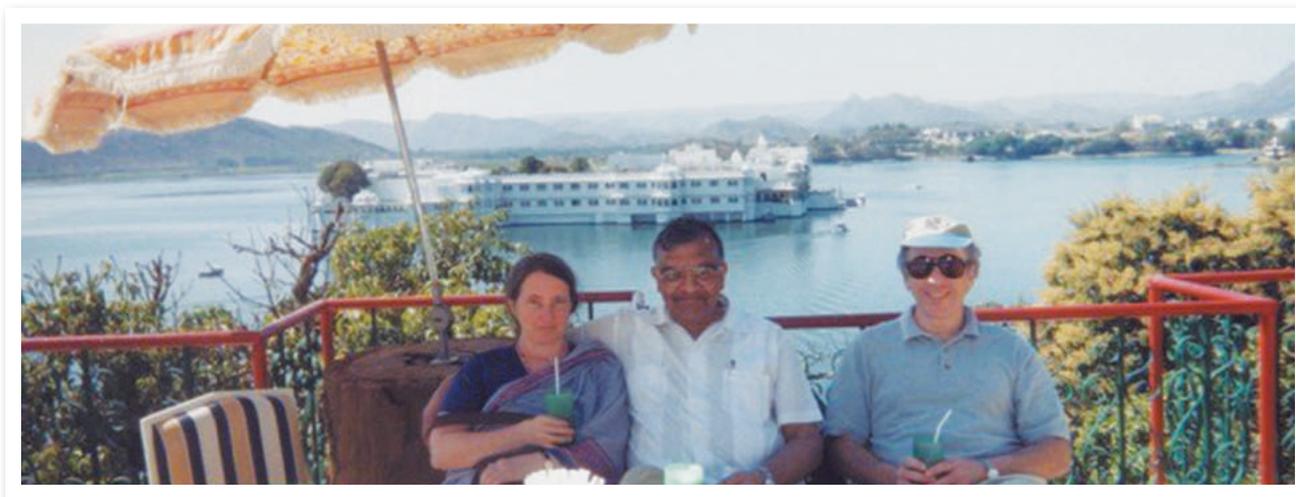
I have many memories associated with our earlier years at Long Pond: Sandy paddling around the lake in her little kayak with her flyers telling everybody about the how the Long Pond Watershed Association was trying to be born. Sandy presiding beatifically over the usual conglomeration of family and friends who might as well be family at your amazing home across the pond. And more recently, Sandy recounting the tale of the owl eating the chipmunk, I think it was on top of the roof and how she got to listen, alone, in the winter at that house—that house that in the moment was truly in the wilderness. We were there with her during her rendition of that story.

And I am so glad that you invited me over last June. I made my way alone for the first time, nervously, via auto, to the home that Dave and I so frequently had arrived at together, via boat. And as you always had for us, you and Sandy made me comfortable and glad that I overcame that sadness to be able see you by myself, as part of your extensive extended family. That was another step forward in my grief pathway. Thank you.

I am grateful that I had the chance to know Sandy, and I wish peace to you and your family.

## Visiting India with the Seifs, 2000

---



*Sandy, Ranganath, and Michael at Jaipur*



*Lydia, Maya, and Sandy in a coracle at Kabini*

## “I Know You!”

---

Kathie Fiveash

It is an extraordinary coincidence that Sandy and I were in the same dorm, on the fourth floor of Comstock Hall at Radcliffe, in the tumultuous sixties. Sandy was two years older than I, but I remember her well from that time, and in later years we often shared memories of our Comstock cohort.

In 1993, when Lakshmi and Polly and I were all in the Revels together, Polly and I were invited to a Revels party in Belmont, and Sandy and I met again for the first time in more than twenty-five years. We looked at each other, and said, “I know you!” A year later, Polly went to Wesleyan, and Anand was the RA on her hall. That was the beginning of the interweaving of our families.

There is not a word in English for the relationship between the parents of a married couple—but there is in Konkani. When Polly and Anand got married, Albert and I were folded into the family by Sandy and Ranganath in ways that enriched all of our lives in more ways than I can express. For more than twenty-five years, we shared holidays, homes, summer adventures on the Cape and in Maine, and Winter Family Camp in Vermont. We combined our friendship groups, enjoyed endless conversations around tables with people from all over the world, and loved our grandchildren together. Ranganath and I share a birthday, and for years, we merged our parties into one big Orchard Street October 1<sup>st</sup> potluck and musicale. I consider myself an honorary auntie to Anand’s sisters, and an almost sister to Sandy and her sisters.

The magnitude of Sandy’s absence is a reflection of the magnitude of her paradoxically quiet presence. She always avoided the limelight, but without her, a light has gone from our world. Orchard Street and Penny Lane will never be the same without her. I miss her so much.



***The Belmont staircase, 2006***

*Going up the stairs: Polly, Sandy, Tuli, Kabir, Lakshmi*

*Seated: Albert, Kathie, Ranganath*

*Standing next to the stairs: Anne, John, Vikram*



***The Belmont staircase, circa 2012***

*Co-grandmothers with Leo*

# Anand and Polly's Wedding, September 2001

---



*At Lanakila, on the shores of Lake Morey, Vermont*

# Sandy

---

Kathie Fiveash

How is it possible that I will never see you again  
early in the morning, your long hair still unbraided  
down your back, your Indian dresses,  
your mangalsutra of coral and gold beads,  
that you wore every day of your long marriage  
a wedding gift from your mother-in-law in Karnataka.

Your love of children, your curiosity, your authority,  
your intricate crocheted shawls, your laugh, your quiet greetings,  
your endless shelves of books, toys, puzzles, albums,  
your basement crammed with castoffs, sewing tables,  
racks of costumes, boxes and piles of fabrics,  
your ironing boards and overflowing laundry baskets,  
your closets full of sheets and towels, enough  
to welcome every guest. Anand's room, Lakshmi's room,  
Deyne's room, the purple room—there was always room.

Who will scrub the pots with steel wool, who  
will sew the costumes, make the cowboy cookies,  
drive to the airport and to Alewife for the travelers,  
pick the black raspberries, water the garden,  
tend the compost, organize the household?  
Who will teach us about religion,  
history, archaeology, anthropology?  
Where has it all gone now, everything  
that inhabited your prodigious memory?  
Who will be the keeper of the stories?  
Who will take care of all of us?  
Who will welcome me home?

# American Scrambled Eggs

---

Christina Jenkner

The first time I met Sandy was at United World College in Duino in 1998. She was there visiting her daughter Maya, and we (Nuccio and I) were there visiting our daughter Maja. Sandy had rented a little flat, and Maya invited us to come over and meet her mum for an “American breakfast.” We started a wonderful conversation about Duino, Belmont, Locorotondo, our families, Cape Cod, Camerata (the place in the mountains near Rome, which my father had bought, planted, and built), India, food, raising children, coping with them as they are becoming adults and while they are miles and miles away, and last but not least, making and sharing American scrambled eggs. This happened with onions, tomatoes and colourful bell peppers, and obviously, eggs. The result was delicious, nutritious, and nourishing for body and spirit. And we had got to know each other.

I and Nuccio had a similarly great experience again when we went to see the Nayak family in Belmont in 2001. We were invited to spend some time with them (and obviously, the extended family and tons of friends) around Anand’s wedding. On the first evening at a mountain summer camp in Vermont where the wedding was to be celebrated, we had a wonderful potluck dinner; as everybody was busy in the big community kitchen, we had an opportunity to meet all the different people coming from all over the world and engage in conversations like “Sorry, do you know where the salt is?” or “What are you going to do with that or the other ingredient?” and from there, slip into more personal ones. And then came the actual dinner on the lawn, something so diverse in its every possible meaning that it can hardly be described, and at the same time so deeply uniting and involving.



*Nuccio and Christina at Anand and Polly's wedding in Vermont, 2001*

Spending time with Sandy (and Ranganath) has enhanced my belief that one among the most enjoyable gifts in life is the pleasure of sharing—time, food, and a lot more.



*Puglia, Italy, circa 2005: Sandy, Nuccio's mother, Christina*

# My Compass Rose

---

Ananda Burra

In reading Sandy's obituary, the word that rang like a bell through my head was Sandy's voice saying "Well!" It is such a distinctive sound, with such resonances and tremors that spoke of love and caring and sharing and curiosity and bringing in and inviting. It is a voice that says, to each person sitting around the table, whether it is just you or there are ten people and the kitchen table has been extended, that you are in the group. You are special. You are loved and you are cared for.

Sandy leaving us isn't real to me because she was too real in my life. She was so real that she distorted the world around her with her presence—she was a solid figure where so much else was ephemeral or transitory. She was the central character in a show where almost everyone else played a cameo.

I have very few memories of my first year in the U.S., in 2003. There are a few vivid memories, though: the first being at Delhi airport with my mother, undoing the ropes tying my overloaded suitcase together to get out the alarm clock that had started to ring while I was in check-in. The suitcase was overloaded because I was carrying my own pillows to the U.S. The second was landing in Boston and seeing Sandy, in the minivan, waiting for me. I had met her several times, of course, but I had never been on my own in the way I was for the first time that moment. And she hugged me. And she took me home. And she sent me off to have a bath and to have some coffee, and to go to bed in Maya's bedroom on the top floor, to wake me up that evening. The next day, we sat across the table (we all know which one—obviously not the dining room table!) and she told me stories over breakfast as I ate Trader Joe's toast with lingonberry jam, drank coffee, and tried to figure out what was happening in my life. In those pre-cell-phone days, she told me to use the landline to call my parents. Then, later that day, she bundled me into the car and took me to REI (or maybe EMS). She bought me my very first boots. I had a wad of cash that my parents had converted for me before I left India, but she paid for these boots. And she paid for my sheets (twin, extra long). The boots and sheets are long gone—boots collapsed and sheets, I believe, put to use by another generation of hostesses. But I still have the blanket.

Sandy had a large bolt of green fleece in the basement. I was never clear what costuming purpose it was to fill, but it was the size of a nice blanket, and Sandy gave it to me. It has the jagged edges from her scissors. It is a tangible mark of her embrace (her hugs—so wonderful!). Six years later, I remember going to Ann Arbor to start at UM. I went to the University of Michigan Credit Union to start a bank account, and they asked me what I wanted as my free gift. I said I had come with a single blanket—Sandy's blanket—and they gave me a little blue branded blanket to go along with it. I layered the blue blanket over the green for years. The green blanket still comforts me as I take a nap on the couch—a couch that, like every couch I have ever slept on, is an echo of the big brown couch in the living room in Orchard Street. That blanket went into my suitcases on that first trip to Williams—how I don't know—but something had to be left behind, and so began the first suitcase in Sandy's basement. It may even have included one of the two pillows I brought from India. It was in that basement that I left much of the stuff of my life after Williams when I left not knowing when I would return. My sculptures, old clothes, memorabilia from heart-wrenching breakups. I emptied that very last box in December 2019, just before the pandemic, when Ashley and I sat around the table with Sandy and Ranganath, and I spoke of pain and my need to re-center myself.

Orchard Street and Sandy were the anchor or the fixed point in my life for two decades when I felt like I was careening wildly, inside and around the world. At Williams, a place that both broke me down and where I forged my adult self, I would leave on the bus to South Station at the end of every semester. If it was winter or Thanksgiving, I would get on the red line to Harvard Square, switch to the bus, and show up at the door to Orchard Street: cold, wet, bedraggled, sleep-deprived, with bloodshot eyes and a desperation for normality. Sandy would bundle me in, tell me to drop my bags in the hallway (if they were dry!), and send me up to have a shower and go to Maya's room to sleep. If it was the summer, and I came with boxes and suitcases and all the detritus of my life, Sandy would come and pick me up at South Station. I would then spend a week, repacking, unpacking, storing things in that magical basement, and breaking my caffeine and nicotine addictions, and eating and sleeping the sunken eyes away in the safety of Orchard Street before flying to India. "Making myself human," I would tell Sandy before I could see my family in India and not worry them.

Sandy, I think, saw me whole and raw in a way few people, if any, did in those years. She had an incredible ability to take you as you were without being condescending or free of judgment. In other words, it was meaningful for Sandy to take you as you were because you knew that there were things Sandy would *not* accept, things that would be beyond the pale. Even if your self-worth and ability to see yourself were at their lowest point, you knew that Sandy would accept you and that if Sandy accepted you, it meant that you truly were acceptable. When she saw the rawness behind your eyes, that your cheeks were a bit sunken, that you showed sadness, that didn't turn her away. It got you a hug, a brisk look up and down, an admonition to "go up to Maya's room" or, later (with seniority among hostees), to Anand's room," to have a shower (and find your name on the little card to go with your towel), and a hot cup of coffee and some toast and maybe a glass of wine and various forms of comfort in the warm bright yellow light of the kitchen. The next day, if it was cold, there would be the therapy of shoveling snow or vacuuming the main floor. If it was summer, it would be mowing the lawn; in the fall, raking leaves. Going into town on a Trader Joe's run.

I don't mean to point solely to these moments of travel in and through the house as if they fill the entirety of my life with Sandy. There was so much more. But I think what I saw in her, *especially* in those moments, was a way of relating to the world and to others that was different from what I had begun to train myself for. It was a way of looking at the world, not through money or through academic achievement or through prominence in one field or the other, even though that was the reality of what the people coming through Orchard Street saw in the hostees (all hugely accomplished), but it was a way of seeing one's place in the world in relation to everyone else.

When Ashley and I started dating, meeting Sandy was a very important part of her integration into my life. One thing I think Ashley and I saw in each other and value is the need to extend the kitchen table and invite people in, as the ultimate expression of how to be a good human. That is what we aspire to be in our lives—it isn't wrong to say it is our highest calling. I am glad that, at least in December 2019, I was finally able to fess up to how, sixteen years after I had first come to that house, I was finally re-centering in a way that was meaningful.



*Ananda and Ashley at Arudra's wedding*

When Sandy died, I couldn't process the loss. I still can't. I will, for the rest of my life, associate certain images with her—random, strange, but evocative: the sliding doors at Logan, her hands steepled as she spoke, the cookie jar, the labels on the boxes in the basement, the small glass of wine, the overhead wires of the silver line, brushing her hair back with the back of her hand, holding my face as I cried, telling me things would be OK, waking me up when I was fast asleep on the couch under a crocheted blanket. I am mourning the loss of my compass rose. Of course, I know I haven't lost her ability to orient me—it is just that I can no longer see her stepping in and correcting my course.

The Sandy who has to keep me on track is in my heart, and I miss her so, so very much.

# Sandy

---

Claire Hruby

It's the little things  
that I remember.

When I was barely 20,  
you gave this Midwestern girl  
straightforward matter-of-fact instructions for getting from the airport to the T,  
to the Red Line,  
to Alewife.

I saw signs for Jamaica Plain and wondered if I had accidentally flown to the Caribbean.  
I transferred downtown,  
feeling like the narrow platforms were barely enough to keep me from getting swept away by trains moving  
in both directions.

And when the tunnels spit me out, there you were waiting at the top of a long, long escalator . . .

As ever,  
I didn't see your quiet plan that empowered me,  
gave me confidence,  
sent me on an adventure,  
and then caught me at the end of the day,  
and fed me stories and ice cream until I was strong again.

Ready for the next challenge.

Ten years later, after the naive confidence of youth had faded, and I was feeling like I hadn't achieved as much  
as I should, I sat on the steps of your home at Thanksgiving, overhearing you tell my story to another  
guest.

I saw myself through your eyes.

I was a dancer and a scientist and somehow you made me sound brilliant and brave.  
I went back to the Midwest, well-fed and filled with quiet courage to move forward again.

Twenty years later,  
you were there in the kitchen,  
handing me a small stainless-steel cup,  
a trick for a fussy kid who didn't want to give up her bottle.

Cold on her gums, a good fit in her hands.

You never expressed judgment, just gave me a tool to keep us both moving forward. That cup sits on my shelf  
today, a quiet reminder.

For three decades, you watched and gave me just what I needed. All your life you were quietly mothering so  
many more than your own children.

And now you're gone, and we all need a little mothering. But even your passing is a reminder that we all must  
keep moving, watching the next generations grow, and telling each other's stories.



*Penny Lane, 2012*

*Back Row: Ranganath, George*

*Middle Row: Deyne, Maya with Asha, Sandy, Albert, Kathie, Javier, Wendy, Lakshmi, Claire*

*Front row: Anand, Jack, Lily, Polly, Leo*

# To Love and to Be Loved

---

Zeenat Potia

Sandy was the true embodiment of someone who practiced unconditional love.

I first met Sandy at dusk when she opened the door to Penny Lane in Brewster in the summer of 1999. I was working at Beacon Press in Boston and had taken the bus to Cape Cod from South Station on Friday night. Sandy warmly welcomed me into their Cape house and into the heart of the Nayak family. She showed me the map of where we were on the Cape (it was my first time there) and in her kind, unique-to-Sandy way made sure I was settled, cared for, and comfortable in the new setting.

This was the first of many such visits on the Cape, and three of my favorite memories are watching and helping Sandy garden and weed outside, sitting at the table during teatime chatting and enjoying a snack, and appreciating Sandy's steadfast company while doing the dinner cleanup. I'm sure she was tired at the end of a long day, but she never sat down and, instead, talked and dried dishes.

Over the years, Sandy and Ranganath became my family. They modeled what it was to love and to be loved. They raised their children by supporting and embracing their unique, individual expression. They gave so generously and freely of their time and resources. They opened their hearts and home to family, friends, and strangers.

Sandy was with me through some difficult times in my life. When I failed my driving test twice and was too nervous to continue, it was Sandy who went with me to my third test, and I passed. Sandy brought me home from the hospital after an amniocentesis procedure, and when my first child was born, it was Sandy who brought her famous cookies to the hospital and Sandy who baked her chocolate zucchini cake when my second child came into the world.

Foolishly, I thought I could always pick up the phone to ask Sandy a question or send her an email or stop by 12 Orchard Street for a chat and a hug. I can, however, still feel Sandy's presence in all those whose lives were touched by hers. I am grateful for the time that our paths crossed.

Thank you, Sandy, for all that you were and that you continue to be for me.

Dan, Shireen, and Samira are also deeply honored to have known you and to have been in your orbit of unconditional love, receptive warmth, insightful wisdom, deep knowledge, and open-hearted generosity.



*Shireen, Samira, Zeenat, and Dan in the Belmont kitchen, 2018*

*This body is not me; I am not caught in this body.  
I am life without boundaries.  
I have never been born and I shall never die.  
Look at the wide ocean and the sky filled with stars,  
manifestations from the basis of consciousness.  
Since before time I have always been free:  
Birth and death are only a door through which we go in and out,  
sacred thresholds on our journey,  
a game of hide-and-see.  
So smile with me, take my hand, and let us say goodbye.  
Tomorrow we shall meet again.  
We shall always be meeting again at the true source,  
always meeting again on the myriad paths of life.  
—Thich Nhất Hạnh, based on a Buddhist Sutra*

# Big Trip USA 2003

Ranganath Nayak

Our wonderful golden, Penny, died in early 2002. It was one of the saddest moments of my life. But later that year, Sandy and I decided to take our newfound freedom and start planning a car trip across the USA with the goal of seeing as many of our hostees and relatives as we could. Sandy got out a map of the USA and put pins in for every hostee and relative living in the USA. We then created a route that took us to every person on our list but for two—one in Fort Myers, Florida, and one in Houston: those were too far away from everyone else.

The list included people in Connecticut, New York, Pennsylvania, Virginia, North Carolina, Georgia, Tennessee, Missouri, Kansas, Colorado, Arizona, California, Washington, Iowa, Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, and Ohio. We wrote to everyone saying we were coming, and then we set out, on March 26, 2003, in our almost-new VW Passat wagon.

Here are the basic statistics of our trip:

- Sixty-three nights on the road, of which forty-nine were in people's homes. Motels were used mainly heading east between Seattle and Chicago, where we knew only Madhav Prabhu and Claire Hruby, both in Iowa, but also in a few places in the South and heading west from St. Louis.
- Wonderful sights and vistas: the Truman Museum, the Eisenhower Center, the Miracle Mile in Colorado, Gunnison, the Grand Canyon, San Juan Capistrano, the Pacific Coast Highway, Yosemite, the redwoods, elephant seals, Seattle Sound, the breathtaking drive east across Washington and Idaho, the lava fields in Idaho, Yellowstone, the Devil's Tower Monument in Wyoming, Mt. Rushmore, the Badlands of South Dakota
- Total distance driven: 13,500 miles
- Total number of hostees and family members seen: approximately 125, plus, of course, lots of friends.



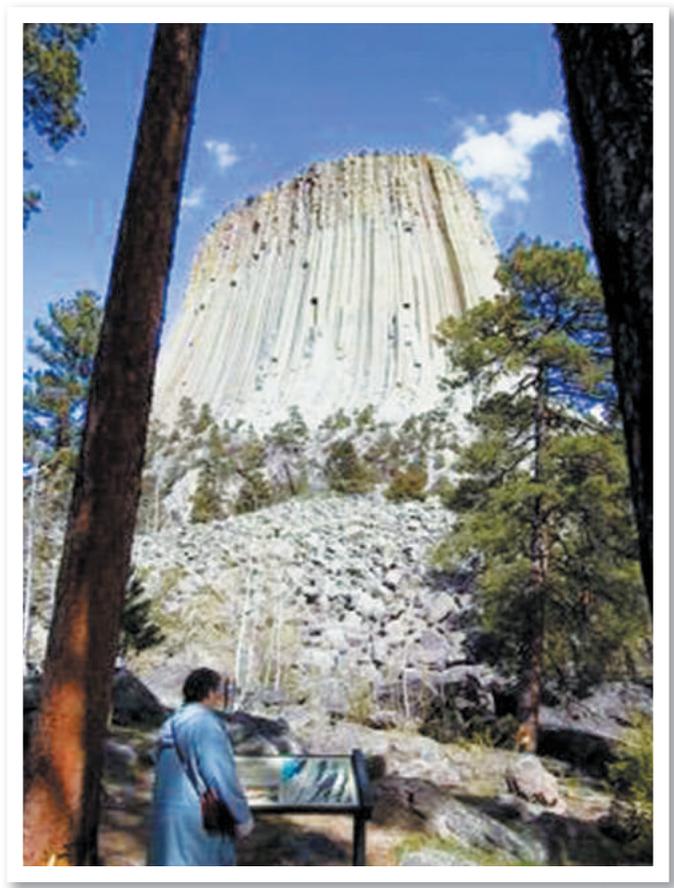
*Sandy with Uma Dowd*



*Redwoods, California*



*Yellowstone National Park, Wyoming*



*Devil's Tower, Wyoming*



*The Badlands of South Dakota*



*Craters of the Moon, Idaho*



*This image from our trip, looking south toward San Diego, was Sandy's background on the computer for several years*

# Comrades in Theater

Margot Law

When I met Sandy in 2003, I had just finished a master's degree in theatre education. Over the next nineteen years, she showed me how to be a teacher.

Sandy had been the costumer for Belmont High School for many years at that point, and she had established deep relationships with parents, who not only sewed for her but proved to be critical allies for any stage director who was willing to hear the wisdom of building those bridges. We produced fifteen shows together in those first three years, with designs that spanned four centuries, and all of those productions incorporated her vast depth of knowledge concerning the importance of historical accuracy, techniques to make a costume practical for the stage, wonderfully innovative ways to create animal costumes, the use of stage lighting to effect a costume change, the art of the happy compromise, and above all, how to value the needs of the young people who would be wearing those costumes.



Throughout the process, Sandy's quiet nudges to pay attention to particular students' gifts taught me to look beyond the obvious talents of lead actors and notice the contributions of the ensemble and the crew. We created a rule that all actors had to be part of the crew for at least one production during their four years in high school, and all crew members had to set foot on stage once, in some capacity as an actor. The resultant trust within cast and crew was clearly evident to the audience. As a result of Sandy's example, we were able to create a safe space for students to shoulder responsibility for a production, and a number of those young people went on to professional careers in acting, costuming, stage management, and technical theatre.

When an administrator decided that winning competitions took precedence over creating learning opportunities for students, we left the school system together. There was never a question about this decision for Sandy, even after having invested decades of her time, energy, and love. When she agreed to costume for me at my new school, I felt as if I had won the lottery.

Over the course of the next fifteen years, we created a theatre department at a small school (sixty students, grades 6 through 12) for students with learning disabilities. With rehearsals limited to five hours a week and technical theatre time of three hours on Friday mornings, producing one or two full-length shows each year became the focus. Sandy's operating system—putting a student's emotional well-being above all else, without sacrificing their need to learn responsibility—became a thing of paramount importance.

She began anew by inspiring parents: one mother made twenty newsboys' caps for us! Then she brought her mantra of historical accuracy, first to *Inherit the Wind*, then *Newsies* and on to our most beautiful production, *The Crane Wife*, set in medieval Japan. Our students were hungry to participate, so Sandy made the trip out on many afternoons to co-teach a costume elective for our juniors and seniors. Within two years, students with no theatre experience were designing and creating costumes.



Sandy would come and watch rehearsals so that she could see what a young actor was bringing to the stage, then she would create special touches for the costume to focus the audience's attention on that attribute. Our amazing (and very young) Oberon in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* was a young man who never stopped moving. The great joy of his performance was how sprite-like that perpetual motion made him seem. Sandy attached hundreds of tiny bells to his velvet Elizabethan jacket, so of course he doubled his efforts to stay in motion, and he and his wonderful queen simply owned the stage.



I think my favorite moment in our entire collaboration came with our production of *The Crane Wife*. It is a one-act play about one of Japan's oldest folk tales. Our students dutifully learned their lines and the blocking, but their portrayals seemed wooden. Sandy was at the rehearsal when it occurred to me to ask the actors if they understood the play, an allegory about good, evil, and unconditional love. Secondary meaning was something we had to work at with our students, and to a person, the actors said they had no idea what it was about. Sandy realized that the costumes needed to be a tangible representation of the core concept of the play. She chose varying shades of white, gray, and charcoal gray to represent each character's place on the spectrum of good and evil, which prompted me to make changes to the blocking so that each group of villagers understood how to portray their characters.

The aforementioned favorite moment, however, came when one of the young women in the cast came to me, saying that she did not want to stay in the show. Sandy was sitting next to me when Celia said she would look ridiculous in a kimono because she was bigger than all the other girls on stage. Sandy asked if she could have a chance to create something different and came back the next week with a tunic and palazzo pants in two gorgeous patterns. Celia lit up when she tried it on, which shifted her self-image, and she stayed with the show. It was a major part of her growth that year toward becoming a confident leader in the school.



Sandy and I finished our stage collaboration in March of 2020 with an original production of *Robin Hood*. With a cast of twenty-seven, we pulled ten existing medieval costumes from Sandy's collection, and our students made the rest!



Other than reimbursing her for material, Sandy would never allow me to pay her for her time, so I donated my time each summer and we would spend a few weeks cleaning up and organizing the vast costume collection at the First Church in Belmont. Generations of young people are the beneficiaries of Sandy's deeply human attention to their success and self-esteem, through her more than forty years as costumer and backstage manager for the annual musicals and Christmas pageants. The pandemic gave us the opportunity to begin to organize the collection at Orchard Street and to attend to the collection at the church.

Then suddenly, Sandy was gone.

During this past difficult year, in a collaboration with her family and First Church, we have begun to create the Sandy Nayak Costume Collective, which we hope will serve to unite the costume collections of high schools and community theatre groups throughout Massachusetts by sharing costumes, people, and resources, and to promote Sandy's legacy of a welcoming theatre experience that serves to build knowledge, creativity, and self-confidence for young people everywhere.

## Sandy at Work on Costumes

---



*Shopping in India for gold trim*



*Sewing*



*Dressing rooms at showtime! South Pacific, 1999*



*Taking a bow after a performance of Fiddler on the Roof, 1988*



*Staying organized in the costume attic at the church*

# My Dear Friend and Colleague, Sandy

---

Alfa Radford

March 2022

It's such a real honor, indeed a great privilege, to speak about my dear and special longtime friend and colleague, Sandy.

Our collaboration was delightful, though daunting at times, as we prepared our young thespians of the children's and youth choirs for their fully staged, and costumed, a la Sandy, performances at the First Church in Belmont, Unitarian Universalist.

Sandy's costuming ideas were nothing short of fabulous. Of course, in true Sandy style, they were not only authentic, but they were practical as well. You all knew Sandy, the most practical woman in the world. In some cases, her costumes were even multipurpose! She was a master at that.

I was continually amazed at the ideas that Sandy came up with. She was the classic example of a woman with an idea a minute. So as you all might imagine, it was quite an exciting experience—an exciting scramble!—as we approached every performance time. My heart still soars when I recall those very special occasions, and my life has been greatly enriched by all of it.

In closing, I shall offer an affectionate salute by blowing a virtual kiss to dear Sandy and the Nayak family.

# Her Presence Was What Made Everything Just Right

Mariko Findell

Sandy is one of those people whom I don't remember not knowing, and her presence throughout my life at the church has always been wonderful. In the way I saw it, she was always there to make everything right. I remember how on opening nights when we were all warming up, she would always be bustling around from person to person, fixing their buttons, tying their aprons, adjusting their hats, and anything else that needed to be done.

As I got older, I saw just how much work she put into staging, props, and managing the backstage chaos in addition to everything she did with costumes. Still, even when I was older and was stage manager instead of a young cast member, I always felt like her presence was what made everything just right.

Even with all the work she put in, she still gave us a lot of responsibility and ownership over the shows. When it came to production time, she had so much confidence in me and the other kids, and my fondest memories of her are the empowering and safe atmosphere she helped create for all of us there.



*Mariko as the Angel Gabriel (wings made and pageant costumed by Sandy)*

# The Gift of Transformation

Kate Searle

Sandy transformed Marcus like a magician, year to year, persona to persona: Sailor to Goat to Pool Player to Policeman to Mountain Boy to Priest to Hugo to Uncle Henry and, ultimately and most dramatically, to Sarastro, commander of the stage. And dare we forget a shepherd herding a flat furry sheep, Joseph with the heftiest Jesus ever, and King Melchior.

Ranganath, we were so lucky to bask in her light, touch her meticulously cared-for costumes, and soak in her knowledge. She cared for the whole cast and crew, parents and children, nurturing mother to Alfa's driven dad. What a team! And her partnership with Ian was also extraordinary, as he led the program with her wise guidance.

Each year the kids would learn their lines, learn their songs, learn their dances—but it was always the moment of the costume when it all coalesced into a character, the moment when the whole became far more than the sum of the parts.

Each December when you decorate with a significant feature of Marcus's Sarastro costume, I hope you remember the gift of transformation Sandy gave my boy. We are all better for having known her.



*Marcus in The Magic Flute (costumed by Sandy)*

# A Mother to All of Us

Gabriel Stalberg

Sandy was a mother to all of us in a way. She really cared about all of us and the activities we were involved in, from the plays to the pageants and everything in between. She loved the community's children. She loved helping out; she loved contributing in whatever ways her gifts allowed. Sandy had the most amazing eye for costumes and costume design, and with this, she gave our events so much life and color.

I always felt cherished by Sandy, and I know many of the kids felt the same. To have that much love to give out to everyone truly made her special. We will all miss her greatly, and I'm grateful to have had the love from such an amazing person as I grew up through the church. I'll always remember her laugh and the smiling, radiant joy she exhibited when a play was over and successful!



*Gabriel as Joseph in Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat, surrounded by his brothers and mothers, all costumed by Sandy*

# Friendship

---

Meron Power

I first met Sandy when my parents enrolled my little sister and me in the church plays when I was seven. My first memory was seeing Sandy with her long brown purse, walking in and out of the stage, carrying costumes. I was scared because at that time I didn't speak English very well. Sandy approached me and explained what she did and told me she knew my mom and my older siblings. I remember, in that moment, feeling like I could relax because Sandy welcomed me with such kindness.

When I was in middle school, Sandy realized I had a special talent in backstage work, and I then had the pleasure of working with Sandy backstage for many years, throughout middle and high school. Being backstage with Sandy was a lot of fun for me and one of the best parts of my adolescence. Sandy let me be creative and bossy backstage which was a dream come true for me. Sandy taught me a lot about working with people and how patience, kindness, and leadership can be utilized. Working with her on the many plays we did made me feel heard and trusted as a young girl, which is something I really needed at that age. My favorite part of working with her was the friendship I was able to create with her.

Coming back from college and seeing her at the Christmas services was always a special part of my holidays that I looked forward to. Sandy always would give me a warm firm hug and check in with me and then we would chat about the play that happened previously that fall and how stressful it was but also how rewarding it was putting together the costumes and set pieces.

Sandy is one of those people I looked up to. I always admired how she worked very hard and put a lot of her time into making sure the kids and the music directors were happy. She is humble and I admire that, and through her, I have learned to work hard and care for people. I was very lucky to have Sandy in my life. She was a role model for me and a friend, and I will miss her. I thank Sandy for her kindness and appreciate everything that she did for me. All of the special memories we had at church, I will keep with me and share them with my future family and friends. Every play and Christmas service I attend at church, I will be thinking of her.



*Meron and Hanna as Mary and a shepherd, costumed by Sandy*



*Cast party after one of the musicals: Meron, Sandy, Ayla, Hanna*

# Knowledge, Curiosity, and Friendship

---

Jayoo Patwardhan

The three times I visited Sandy and Ranganath in Belmont are so vivid in my mind, where she was like a fairy and granted all of my wish to see America from *our* (Sandy's and my) point of view.

She made sure we exchanged so much knowledge old and new, so many stories of us and others. We never seem to have had to cry on each other's shoulders, 'cause life was full, and like sponges, we grabbed each other for inspiration, acknowledgement, appreciation, and a Wow moment time and again! I know we could not meet often, distance being so much from India to the U.S.

I remember once I asked her what the hell was she doing designing for her small town of Boston—she should be designing for Hollywood. To that, her reply was a smile and a very curious look saying nothing but making me eat up my babble.

Her work, I realized as I visited the church, was not just tremendous but very satisfying to her soul. In those days there was some disaster in Mexico, and she was repairing, buttoning, and cleaning the collected clothes that had to be sent as aid.

Her tremendous knowledge of anthropology and her curiosity to find out about the various cultures of the world would have been appreciated in films where people see only actors—this was our common point of agreement.

Her relentless work in her art was not just for her; it began and ended in making a difference in the lives of people she came in touch with. She just gave and gave and gave till finally she only just discarded her body and gained so much, when I see the short film\* you guys made at the time of her heart surgery . . . who knew, would prove to be her lifetime achievement award. At this time, I can only say so much, but there is so much that I could write a para or two every week about her and my journey with her.

Lakshmi, I want to thank you for writing and listening to her last words of looking after all. Very big shoes to get into, but I have no doubt. All four of you may experience and express your grief differently at this loss, but such is reality, and I too am slowly coming to understand what such a loss means.

The journeys to the U.S. are long for us physically, Chinu being seventy-three and me seventy-two years. But I will come.

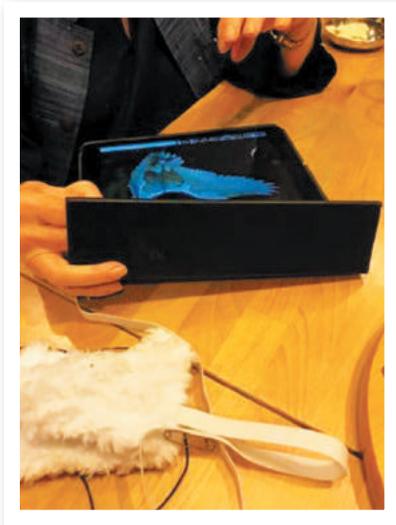
I will then look for her in every nook and corner of 12 Orchard Street.

*\*See the tribute video, posted on [www.prnayak.org](http://www.prnayak.org)*

# Snowy Owl

Lakshmi Nayak

During these recent pandemic years, it was really hard for Mom and Ana to see less of the grandkids before vaccines were fully available for all ages. Mom was delighted to be involved, long distance, when Asha asked her to make an owl costume for Halloween 2020.



*Research*



*Making the Wings*



*The mask*



*The final result! Maya, Asha, and George, Halloween 2020*

# My Friend, Sandy

---

Sherry Jones

I was a friend of Sandy for more than 40 years.

Before I met Sandy, I had been involved with First Church for several years, primarily teaching Sunday School and helping with the Rummage Sales. The church had fallen to a low point in the 1970's. At one time Robin Santos and I taught all of the Sunday School programs for a whole year so that young new-comers could attend church. Slowly things improved with new leadership by Rev. Diane Miller and Religious Education Director Ann Fields. Alfa Radford had already started a strong choir program for adults and children and added Children's Musicals. The first of these was *The Prince and the Pauper* in 1980. My daughter Sarah was cast as a townspeople. The Nayak family came to First Church that same year.

Sandy was a whirlwind from the beginning. We didn't know it at the time, but she was a Radcliffe graduate in archaeology and adept at the theater arts—wonderful skills for Sunday School teachers, and for musicals! From the beginning Sandy helped with Sunday School and Rummage Sales.

She rewrote the script for the children's Christmas pageant. She added new props (those sheep are still living proof!) and made new period costumes for the young participants. The service was better than ever with Lakshmi, Sarah, and Cara Abdulrazak singing "Silent Night" (with descant!) and Anand as one of the kings. Sandy then began helping with costumes in the second children's musical *HMS Pinafore*. Over time, she became props mistress, costumer, and backstage director all in one. She continued until the COVID pandemic.

As we reared our children (Sarah, Bradley, and Natalie), Ralph and I became close friends with Ranganath and Sandy and their three (Lakshmi, Anand, and Maya). We played games together, sang carols together, made cookies and candy together, and so many other things. Bradley enjoyed playing Scrabble with Sandy's parents. These activities brought our families together.

As we got older, our ties to Ranganath and Sandy strengthened in other ways. Ranganath became a board member in Ralph's former company, the Cadmus Group. Lanier Smythe and I introduced Sandy to the Thursday Club.

The Thursday Club was founded in Belmont in 1890 as a women's read-aloud and sewing group. As the women did hand-work, they would take turns reading aloud classics or a book of lasting value (not the latest best seller). At that time, women were primarily homemakers without access to college educations, so reading aloud to each other was a serious form of education. Sandy was a good group member because she did hand-work (then, mostly crocheting shawls), she read aloud well, and was knowledgeable about a variety of study material such as archaeology, cultures, history, and world religions that focused on the readings, something club members admired.

Sandy made so many valuable contributions to the lives of her family, her friends, and especially to me. I miss her and will always love her.

# On Books and Reading

---

Sandy Nayak

*Written for the Thursday Club*

(December 2008, revised in 2011)

Books have always been a normal part of life, like eating or breathing. When I was a child, reading is what all the grown-ups did for pleasure whenever they got the chance. It was obviously the thing to do.

By the time I was five years old, I had three little sisters, so I was reading to them. *Tubby the Tugboat* and *The Little Engine That Could* were favorites, and of course *Wind in the Willows* and all four Pooh books by A. A. Milne, in precious copies that had been our father's when he was little.

Soon escaping with a book became a way to avoid chores and other intrusions, and learning to read very fast became an obvious advantage. And it was assumed that we would all go to college, like our parents and grandparents.

Both parents had saved books from their childhoods, and the tiny local library was within walking distance. The librarian was fussy and not at all pleased with me when I insisted on reading two Bobbsey Twins books and *Ivanhoe* in the same week when I was about ten. I never did see any sense to grade-level reading.

School was mostly boring, so I learned to read under the cover of my desk, and with one book hidden inside another. I loved the *Arabian Nights*, in all the versions I could find. Most books were old and familiar to the grown-ups, like *Heidi* and the *Alice* books, but a highlight of each Christmas was the latest Laura Ingalls Wilder book, given to the four of us, all about another set of four little girls.

*Little Women* was another obvious choice. We were very aware that our father's aunt Juliet Wilbor Tompkins was a writer, and as we grew, we read all her books, rather delightful Edwardian romances. I hear that there is still a portrait of her in the Vassar library.

We were Quakers in a small Pennsylvania town south of Philadelphia where everyone else was either Protestant, meaning Baptist or Presbyterian, or Catholic. My maternal grandparents lived around the corner. Nana was Baptist and so was Grandpop, sort of, because of Nana. He was really agnostic but could quote chapter and verse endlessly and accurately. My mother had become Quaker in her teens and met my father at Meeting. I became aware of religious differences and complications very early.

Walter and Emmy Fischl, friends of my father's who became an honorary uncle and aunt, were Austrian refugees from Hitler's Holocaust, and I sought out more Holocaust stories and had more nightmares about it than my parents ever knew about.

Every week we went to Friends Meeting in Swarthmore, a town only three miles away but on a different planet. My parents had graduated from the college there and had been married in the beautiful old meetinghouse right on campus. There in First Day School we learned about Quaker history and world religions and also got a thorough grounding in Bible stories.

When I was nine, I was presented at First Day School with my very own copy of the King James Bible, with my name on it and a zipper around it! I loved the Elizabethan language but was shocked at the truly violent stories that had been left out at First Day School. I started to read other accounts of Middle Eastern history and archaeology. Ceram's *Gods, Graves, and Scholars* was tough going but wonderful. I knew then that I wanted to be an archaeologist when I grew up.

When I was twelve we moved to Swarthmore. It had a much bigger library and a much more rigorous school system. I discovered C. S. Lewis and other authors my parents hadn't told me about. A wonderful English teacher introduced a love of Shakespeare and made us learn outlining in grammar class by outlining Genesis (not easy!).

When I was fifteen, we moved to Albuquerque, New Mexico, where school was a disaster but the whole area was fascinating, and I plunged into learning everything I could about the local Indian and Spanish populations. Two years in a boarding school in Arizona straightened me out academically and sent me off to Radcliffe, to major in American archaeology. Other courses included a marvelous romp through Epic and Drama (the *Iliad*, the *Odyssey*, the *Aeneid*, the *Inferno*, and *Paradise Lost* in one semester, by Professor Finlay, who knew them all by heart in the languages they were written in, followed by a semester of twenty plays, ancient to modern, by Professor Alfred, who had a play running off-Broadway at the time.)

During quiet evenings on a dig in Wyoming the summer after freshman year, I discovered and devoured Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings*. I also read all nine hundred pages of *Kristin Lavransdatter* for a course in Scandinavian literature and was delighted to find Gandalf and all of Tolkien's dwarves in the *Vinland Saga*.

After college, I went to India on a Fulbright scholarship to teach English for a year and started to read voluminously in the history and literature of the subcontinent. I also discovered Agatha Christie and other British mystery writers I had somehow missed, but whose paperbacks were available in Indian train station book stalls.

On return I married my Indian MIT boyfriend, in a Hindu wedding ceremony in a Quaker meetinghouse, in 1968. Deciding that archaeology as a career was not compatible with marriage to an engineering consultant, I switched fields and got an MA in South Asian anthropology from Brandeis, while my husband worked for Bolt, Beranek, and Newman.

Then, with daughter Lakshmi, we moved to India. We lived in Pune for almost four years, where our son Anand was born. I taught introductory sociology in a college there for a while. Then we returned to Cambridge, moving to Belmont a year later, where I became very active in the Girl Scouts and the Unitarian Church. Daughter Maya was born in Belmont in 1981.

Every year we hosted international students and acquired a lot of nieces and nephews by affection, from all over the world. And now there are grandkids!

Since then, my reading has largely followed my interests in history, anthropology, and comparative religion. I taught Sunday School for a dozen years at the First Church and developed a course in comparative world religions for Newton adult ed. that I sometimes now teach at the First Church.

On the fiction side, I think I've read everything written by Agatha Christie, including her autobiography. Other favorite authors include Dorothy Sayers, Ngaio Marsh, Josephine Tey, Margery Allingham, Dorothy Gilman, Ellis Peters, Dick Francis, Tony Hillerman, Arthur Clark, Ursula Le Guin, Eva Ibbotson, Rumer Godden, Barbara Kingsolver, and Laurie King. I love both Jane Austen and the Regency novels by Georgette Heyer.

I think a good book to read out loud would be *Daughter of Time*, by Josephine Tey. It is a rather philosophical consideration of the nature of historical truth, disguised as a retrospective mystery as a hospitalized detective tries to figure out why Richard III was always vilified as the killer of the little princes in the tower. It would also be interesting to do a year on Louisa May Alcott and the Concord literary scene.



*Sandy reading at the Kanetkar's home in Sind Colony, Aundh, Poona*

# I'd like to get to know her!

---

Julie Goetze

Sometime in the late 1970s, I saw a young, vigorous woman dressed in a full-length Indian caftan stride across Concord Avenue and into the Belmont Post Office. Wow! I thought. I'd really like to get to know her! As context, my husband and I had lived two years in Nepal as Peace Corps volunteers. To this day, I can picture Sandy, as she turned out to be, with her braid flapping across her back!

That is my first memory of her.

Later, she asked me to come, with guitar, to a Girl Scout meeting she was running, and there she was in a Scout uniform—what a change! I remember one song she quickly taught me so we could all sing it together (I sing it to this day):

Make new friends, but keep the old,  
One is silver, and the other gold.

Then years later when we were in Thursday Club (the women's book read-out-loud group), I was pleased when we read *Kim* because I knew Sandy would make sure the group understood the underlying history, places, and customs of that vast country. I was familiar with India, but not to her depth, and enjoyed every time she enlightened me in her humorous, amusing, and straightforward manner—right to the point, no beating around the bush.

For the Nayak family, please know that I hold Sandy and all of you close in my memories and am grateful for all you did for Sandy and for each other.

With love,  
Julie Goetze

# I Will Never Forget That Day

Sharon Vanderslice

While I knew her only a short while (13 years rather than 40+), I was—like her old friends—the beneficiary of her very kind and wise presence.

Given her absolutely extraordinary knowledge of cultures, geography, history, and literature, she naturally became the resident encyclopedia for Thursday Club—just invaluable.

I recall that two years ago when we were reading Japanese literature, she showed up with a brilliant silk kimono and explained to us the significance of the construction and the places where it would have been worn.

Then, in mid-March 2020, when the whole world shut down in an instant, it seems, I was scheduled to host the ladies of Thursday Club at my home on Pleasant Street on March 12. Forty-five minutes in advance, while I was busily vacuuming my carpet, several club members decided we should cancel and not meet again until—who knew? I was devastated.

Lo and behold, Sandy stepped up and invited Julie Goetze and me to come to *her* house instead. The three of us sat around your kitchen table, ate cookies, and reminisced for a couple of hours about the things we'd been reading that year, the children/grandchildren we were raising, and what the world might be like for all of us going forward. It was just so comforting; I will never forget that day.

Several weeks later, Sandy sent an email to all of us to report that she had already stitched a large supply of cloth masks, and would we like one? And what color would we prefer? I chose black-and-white dot, which she dropped off on my front porch along with a supply of elastic (in those weeks, as valuable as gold) so that I could make some more of my own.



*Masks made by Sandy*

She was just an extraordinary human being. How lucky you were to have her in your life for so many years.

# Sandy the Storyteller

---

Nicole Galland

What I cherish most dearly and think of often is Sandy the Storyteller.

I loved knowing that whenever I was visiting or staying there, chances were I'd get to hear at least one Sandy story; I rarely heard her tell stories about herself—rather, her knowledge of and interest in Things Humanity Has Done seemed limitless. Her way of sharing anecdotes was calmly mesmerizing, and most delightfully to me, the segues from one story to the next were seamless.

Sandy could tie any one thing to any other thing in the universe; she had a sense of the spiritual connective tissue, the common denominators of All Things Human.

One afternoon she told me about the remarkable history of her Thursday Book Club—a narrative which flowed into describing the book, which somehow (here's where it became Sandily Magical) organically led to the history of the Boy Scouts and then the Girl Scouts and then the recipe for some Swedish cookies (not Girl Scout cookies). And all of those things together made perfect sense; on that day, I could not have imagined any one of those stories existing independent of the others. The magic lay in the interconnectedness, the weaving and knitting together of things. As a writer, I have always been in awe of how she does that.

# Sandy's Perspective Was One I Could Trust

---

Paul Santos and Anne Stuart

We met Sandy at First Church in Belmont, and most of our memories of her are through her leadership of many Adult Programs at First Church, where she shared her knowledge and deep insights about world religions and history. Written below are our thoughts on both our individual and shared memories of Sandy.

**Paul:** I quickly learned that Sandy's perspective was one I could trust and learn from when looking at history and exploring different religions. She persuaded us to rely less on political boundaries and more on differing language groups. She would summarize different world religions without comparing them, helping us to know more about each religion and to make further explorations prejudice-free.

Sandy introduced me to the concept of Big History. Instead of thinking of history (as it is usually taught or described) in silo-like focus, we learned to look at simultaneous events or interactions throughout the world. This perspective prompted fresh realizations of what actually happened to us as a species across the globe. Thanks to her, I had the very satisfied feeling that the whole was more than just the sum of the parts.

She also profoundly affected my understanding of how different religions impact the cultures they create. One of the insights I most remember is that one type cares most about what a person does, while another type cares most about what a person believes. This explained a lot about what I had observed, and I was very pleased to find corroboration years later when I read about religious identity in Kwame Appiah's book *The Lies That Bind: Rethinking Identity*.

**Anne:** Because of some scheduling conflicts, I wasn't able to attend as many of Sandy's world religion classes as Paul, but I always learned something new when I did. Sandy put a great deal of time and energy into preparing for these classes. For each year's series, she would have a new theme or perspective. She prepared detailed handouts that included summaries of each class, as well as references for further study.

Frequently, she shared anecdotes from her own experiences and interactions with people from different parts of the world. She seemed always to be seeking to learn more about others and share that wisdom to improve understanding across groups, regions, and religions.

Outside of Adult Programs, it was a pleasure to talk with Sandy at church and town events. I particularly enjoyed catching up on what the Nayak children and grandchildren were doing because she would just light up when talking about them.

Paul and I were fortunate to have purchased seats at an Indian dinner at the Nayak home at one of the church auctions. The evening was a delight; the food was truly delectable with many, many vegetable dishes, including the tastiest okra I have ever eaten. That evening was also an education and not just a culinary one. Sandy and Ranganath again prepared handouts and shared personal insights about the history of India and the food that they had jointly prepared. The event was enriched by the stories they told, jointly weaving the threads of the stories as they had woven the tapestry of their lives.

***Both:*** We are so grateful to have known Sandy. She helped us to better understand the world in which we live. She radiated warmth, kindness, and a spirit of love. She is sorely missed, but we are certain that the light she shared with so many will live on.

# You Weren't Supposed to Leave So Soon!

Arudra Burra

Having left the U.S. some years ago, Sandy's passing still seems not quite real to me. Not just in terms of her physical absence, but also in the sense I have of her as being always *there*, sitting at the kitchen table with some tea and a book and smiling as one entered the back door—whether in 1996, when I first came to Belmont, or in 2006 or in 2018, for that matter, when I think I must have seen her last!

That's the image I have of her. I've been trying to capture the particular Sandy smile I have in mind in words but I'm not able to—*wicked* is not quite it, but it certainly is not *proper* (though now that I think about it, there was more than one Sandy smile, or am I imagining this? I can't recall her frowning, though I have seen her be *cross*).

And then the way she would put her hands together in a triangle when about to embark upon a story and start with *Well . . .* I can summon up that image and her voice so clearly.

What I want to tell Sandy just now—hey, you weren't supposed to leave so soon! You just met my wife once, and we have this three-year-old whom I wanted you to meet, and now a seven-month-old, and I want to feed them your chocolate chip cookies, and talk about children and toddlers and teachers and teaching and bedtime stories and hear your stories of your kids and grandkids and your childhood and all the kids whose families you've been part of because of an Orchard Street connection.



*Greetings from New Delhi—Arudra with Madhav and Vasant Niranjana*

And there are murder mysteries to discuss and exchange, these new Laurie King novels, which I know you would like, since you liked *The Beekeeper's Apprentice* and the fantastic Sujata Massey murder mysteries set in 1920s Bombay, and the Abir Mukherjee ones set in colonial Calcutta. Not to mention Inspector Singh in Singapore and Tarquin Hall in Delhi!

And there is tea to be made and drunk in the dark-brown teapot with what looks like a sock inside it, or coffee, or hot chocolate. And gardening to be done on the Cape, in your floppy gardening hat (I think you'd like the gardening book I just read, *The Well-Gardened Mind*), and quarters to be got for the 74 bus to Harvard Square. And lots of comings in through the back door in autumn, winter, and spring, and seeing you with *that* smile on your face, and waiting for a story that starts with *Well* . . .

# She Let Me Be Just Myself

---

Issa Mikel

Our memories form a part of the fabric of who we are as humans. We are such social creatures that we quite literally don't exist without the people in our lives. Our personalities are formed in large part by our associations. And with Sandy, who means a lot to me, my memories are quiet and calm. Sure, I have memories of loud gatherings. Thanksgivings. Christmas. Birthdays. Sitting around the dinner table laughing with the family, Aru, Suchi, Shreedhar, John, Anne, and others. I don't think anything made us happier than when we got Sandy to really crack up.

But so many of the memories I have of Sandy Nayak are quiet ones, memories not consciously remembered. That is one of the things I appreciated most about Sandy. She just let you be and took you as you were. The first time I went to the Cape was a perfect example. I sort of expected that I would have to socialize all the time. I still didn't know Sandy or Ranganath very well at the time, and I was frankly a little nervous about having to socialize.

But Sandy—and everyone in the family, really—just let me be. Sandy, more than anyone, excelled at making people feel comfortable in their own skin. Just do your own thing. We'll chat quietly sometimes. I'll show you around a bit, and you can help when needed. But mostly just hang about and be you. You are valued for who you are. I'm convinced that no one in the world did this better than Sandy. She didn't ignore you. She let you be yourself and appreciated you for it.

Those quiet moments, those innumerable moments of silence, and those quiet conversations are some of the things that I cherish most about Sandy. Not just what she taught me about life or about being human, which was a lot. What I appreciate most was that she was just herself and let me be just myself.

## “Well, of Course There Was the Time . . .”

---

Madhav and Gitanjali Prabhu

My first memory of Sandy Akka and Ranganath Anna was when they visited our house in Madras soon after they got married. I took them over to the house of Babayya Mam (Chief Justice Lakshman Rao’s son), which was about half a mile from our house. As much older cousins, Ranganath and Narayan Anna were role models for my siblings and me. Sandy Akka was wearing a sari, and we were all amazed at how well she had assimilated into Indian and Konkani culture.

Ranganath Anna and Sandy Akka visited us in 2002 in Ames, Iowa, during their road trip across the United States. We got to know her better during that trip as she impressed us with all the details of two plays that our children Krishna and Mythili were acting in—*The Pirates of Penzance* and *HMS Pinafore*. Little did we know that she had been directing plays by Gilbert and Sullivan in the schools in Belmont and at the Unitarian Church.

When Krishna was admitted to Harvard in 2007 and Mythili in 2009, both Ranganath Anna and Sandy Akka welcomed us to stay with them in their home in Belmont. These years are when we got to know Sandy Akka a lot more. Sandy Akka oriented us to Harvard Square and the MBTA bus system and the Boston T. We were made to feel completely at home in the house in Belmont, without any of the typical Konkani *sambaram* and we could wake up as we pleased and take care of our activities as long as we gave a heads-up on whether or not we would be home for dinner. This sense of comfort and familiarity was made possible by Sandy Akka’s no-nonsense authenticity without having us be on our best behavior. We also enjoyed helping Ranganath Anna with the meals and doing the dishes.

Sandy Akka possessed an innate intellectual capacity, and she was truly a citizen of the world. One of her favorite ways of sharing knowledge was through anecdotes and stories she recounted to us. Throughout her travels, she had collected a vast repository of personal experiences and stories to support her views on life’s challenges. If someone at the dinner table was grappling with an issue, Sandy would start, “Well, of course there was the time . . .” and then she would go on with a personal story about a similar struggle that she had faced. These stories were by no means superficial; rather, they spoke deeply about the full spectrum of the human condition. During every visit, we felt that we had become a little wiser just by listening to her.

When Krishna’s grandmother came with us to Boston for his graduation in 2011, Sandy Akka made it a point to pick us up from the airport herself. Also, during his medical school when Krishna departed for a yearlong trip to Liberia to help with the Ebola pandemic, Sandy Akka drove to his apartment in Brookline, picked us up, and took us to the airport to see him off. We will forever remember her for these acts of kindness, which became her hallmark in making her guests feel safe and comfortable.

Sandy Akka will be dearly missed, but not forgotten. We are sure that God has granted her a place in the heavens and ultimate secession from the cycle of births and deaths.

# The Right to Bear Arms

Krishna Prabhu

To the constant chagrin of my friends and family, I love puns. I came up with one pun in particular that took the form of a Halloween costume. I wanted to dress as a play on the Second Amendment—the right to *bear* arms. I thought I could fully realize my dream costume if I had a shirt with the arms/paws of a bear attached to it. The only problem is that I did not have the skills to enact the vision.

As it so happens, on a September evening during medical school I happened to stop by Sandy and Ranganath’s house for dinner on the way back from my work at McLean Hospital. I had the rare pleasure of having dinner with just them on my own. Somehow I brought up my costume idea, probably to see if I could generate a laugh from this pun. They mustered a polite chuckle at best, which in my experience is typical when I make a pun. But after dinner was over, Sandy calmly got up from the table and said, “Well, we should go to the basement because I can think make this costume for you. I don’t really understand it, but if you want I can make it.”



*The Right to Bear Arms*

I was in disbelief. I followed her down to the basement, past a collection of hanging costumes from various plays, plastic bins of scrap material, luggage, and other odds and ends until we finally found this roll of brown furry fabric. She measured my arms, took a pair of shears and methodically cut the faux fur into rectangles and folded the fabric and stitched it together. She took the T-shirt I was wearing and proceeded to stitch the “bear arms” right onto the shirt. She instructed me to find some stick-on “witch fingernails” at a costume shop that could serve as claws. After years of dreaming of the costume, Sandy had constructed it for me in thirty minutes.

She was generous, not only when people truly needed her, but also in the service of the whimsical and irrational. She probably could tell that this costume was oddly important to me.

When October 31 came around, I went to the medical school party, which also included law students. When I explained the costume, almost no one understood it. But it remains my favorite Halloween costume to this day, and I have Sandy to thank for it.

# A Rare Individual

Mythili Prabhu

As a bright-eyed and somewhat naive young girl from Iowa, moving away for the first time to the East Coast was scary. It was August 2009, and I didn't know what to expect from New England or the people here. The first person I associate with that time is Sandy Mai. I distinctly remember feeling a calmness and comfort wash over me as I entered the Belmont house, where I was staying for the days before the dorms opened up and was received by Sandy Mai.

She oriented me to Harvard Square, the MBTA bus system, helped me move my boxes, gave me a bag of her famous cookies, and told me they're only a fifteen-minute ride away if I need anything. There was a simple authenticity to how she was—matter of fact and to the point, but very welcoming and comforting at the same time.

At the time, I didn't realize that this would be the start of a journey into the beautiful community built by Sandy Mai and Ranganath Mam, one that I have always treasured and continue to do so. It is here that I met some of the most interesting individuals I have ever encountered, who spoke deeply about the full spectrum of the human experience. Whatever conversations were taking place, one knew that Sandy Mai would be listening fully and intently, able to share her wisdom gracefully.



*Mythili and Akhilesh,  
2018, with Krishna*

Sandy Mai was someone I knew I could always trust, someone who wouldn't beat around the bush, would always give me her honest opinions, and could push me to see things differently. Her mind was truly brilliant (one of the smartest people I have known), and I have always valued hearing her perspectives and opinions. She was reliable and always did the right thing but didn't seek accolades or credit—she had her own standard of what she thought was right and took solace in executing that. She was a rare individual I will aspire toward, and she will always be a role model for me.

I miss her dearly and give condolences to family and all. My heart feels heavy these days, but I know the community she and Ranganath Mam built will continue to cherish her memory. She will be dearly missed but never forgotten. May her soul rest in peace.

# We Remember

Michèle, Bob and Louise Tanner

We remember Sandy with affection for her generosity and respect for her intellect. We miss her.

We remember the last online Salon talk she gave, a year ago, when she shared her knowledge about the origin of the Magi in the Christian tradition and their roots in Persia.

We remember when she sat by the fire during one of the Winter Family Camps on Lake Morey and taught Michèle how to crochet.

We remember her hospitality and warmth when she hosted us during many gatherings at your house in Belmont and her generosity in sharing her wisdom.

We remember when she made a renaissance hat for Louise for a Baroque recorder performance.

We remember when she encouraged us to look for a house in Arlington when we were hesitating.

So many memories . . .



*Tanner playing at Anand and Polly's wedding, 2001*



***Deyne and Richard's fiftieth wedding anniversary, Cedarholm, December 2019***

*The four sisters in the middle—Sandy Nayak, Vicki Smith, Deyne Meadow, Wendy Tompkins  
 Surrounded by (L to R) Dev Kernan, Michael Seif, Patty Walsh, Becky Mattison, David Smith, Lisa  
 Graustein, Ranganath Nayak, Kathie Fiveash, Michèle Tanner, Anand Nayak, Richard Meadow,  
 Bill Graustein, Peter Mattison, Bob Tanner, Jim Klinkenberg, Jim Brad Connor, Lydia Seif  
 Down front: Xander Graustein, Jack Nayak, Louise Tanner, Lakshmi Nayak,  
 Leo Nayak, Margo and Edie Connor, Lela Meadow-Connor*

# Crocheting

Pandurang and Mala Nayak

While I had first met Sandy in Bombay when she and Ranganath would visit my parents, both Mala and I really got to know her in the U.S. during our visits to Boston and her visits to California. We have very fond memories of Sandy. She was kind and engaging, straightforward and down-to-earth, without any pretensions. She was a wonderful storyteller, with a wide range of interests. She could relate easily to all of us, not just with Mala and me, but even with our girls.



*Mala, Nandeeka, Alisha, and Sandy*

On one of her visits to California, she hit it off with our girls and engaged them with her crocheting. Subsequently, she gave the girls the crochet pieces she was working on as a memento of her visit. Our girls still have those crochet pieces in their beds as fond memories of Sandy!



# Learning to Crochet

---

Sandy Nayak

9/21/2021

Betsy had a daily commute on the train from her parents' home in Ridley Park to her work as a secretary at the Tax Institute in Philadelphia. She wanted some handwork to do on the train which would fit easily into her bag. She found a crochet pattern that was based on small hexagons, which could eventually be stitched together to make a tablecloth. She bought the pattern, enough thin cotton yarn to make a tablecloth for her mother, and a hook of the correct size. She then told the shocked saleswoman that now she needed to learn how to crochet.

Fortunately this design needed only two kinds of stitches, a chain, and a double crochet. After a year of commuting, she had enough hexagons to put them all together. She then learned another stitch, to make a lacy edge, and was able to present her surprised mother with a lovely tablecloth suitable for covering a side table, which is currently in Belmont.

After that, she crocheted lots of things—including leaf-shaped hot mats for the table out of thick green cotton, clever little Christmas wreath pins, and several wool afghans.

I learned from her to crochet afghan squares before going off to boarding school and was able to complete a wool afghan in less than two years of Community Meetings at Verde Valley.

Now Asha is learning.

# Sandy's Shawls

In the first photo, one can see a completed shawl in dark-green yarn and the beginning of a new shawl with multi-shaded yarn.

Then there are two views of that new shawl, completed.



# Amid the Joyful Chaos

Antonia Woods

Here are two of my favorite Sandy memories:

Sitting with Sandy on the couch in front of the fire at Winter Wildwood—games and reading and laughter and singing going on all around us—the two of us quietly crocheting and knitting. No need to talk, enjoying being together amid the joyful chaos.

The many absolutely wonderful October gatherings at your home: Sandy a bit exhausted from all the prep work but such a gracious hostess and so welcoming to all. David and I loved the many cultures and ages at your parties and the joy they embodied.

Love,  
Antonia



*Family Camp 2008*

The Big October 1<sup>st</sup> Birthday Parties for Ranganath, Kathie,  
and Zeenat — and others in September and October

---



*Albert and Ranganath*



*Wendy, Sandy, Zeenat, Ranganath, Cindy, and Lydia (2011)*

*At the 2017 October birthday party (all the birthday people are wearing leis)*



*Henry, John, Ranganath, Samira, Deyne*



*Roberta, Heena, Kathie, Wendy*



*Samira, Lydia, Zeenat*

# Car Talk

Stephanie Aldrin

I keep thinking of the quiet conversations I had with her while in her Prius, driving to the Cape or out to visit Maya's family in western Mass.

One of my favorite ones happened one day in the kitchen. I couldn't tell you if it was morning or evening or even the season. We were both doing something else, and she made a comment about one of her best friends annoying her. I said something about how my best friends annoy me. Then we started talking about how we had these close friendships with people that absolutely annoyed us and we loved dearly. We knew they were great friendships because the annoyance didn't actually change the relationship; rather, the tolerance of it only highlighted how important the other people were to us.

I appreciated how frank and honest she was. It made life so much richer.



*Stephanie, Sandy, and Ranganath at Mike and Heena's wedding, 2015*

# Just One More

---

Leslie MacIntosh

The kitchen table at 12 Orchard. Kids running the seemingly infinite family room–dining room–kitchen circuit. A baby on someone’s lap. A bustle of friends and strangers, whom we know don’t stay strangers for very long at Orchard Street. There is baking wafting through the house. Laughter and music abound. In the middle of this joyful chaos is Sandy.

I take utmost comfort in her stories. The stories—they come on waves one after the other, punctuated at intervals with a grin and twinkling eyes. We drink tea at the kitchen table, and I am wrapped in the retelling of sisters, of grandparents, of train rides, of books, of Mexico and India. I hear about so many people I sometimes get lost, but it’s OK.

I long for the kind of memory that she possesses, the kind of memory that can unspool perfectly without fading. There is peace in the listening, peace in the pauses. I don’t want to get up just yet—just one more cup of tea, one more story.

Thank you, Sandy, for letting me in and letting me listen.

# My Memory Often Comes Back to Quiet

Eric Yablonowitz

I will always remember Sandy as a storyteller.

The stories came from her own rich personal and family history and her masterful knowledge of different peoples, their religions, and languages across space and time.

Her stories expanded my world. Whenever she would begin telling one, I would find myself suddenly getting more comfortable in my seat and my mind, feeling that sense of ease you get on a warm spring day in the sun.

Her stories would draw lines of sanity and continuity from the seemingly random mad scribbles of life. They slowed me down, let me breathe, and see. Sandy might tell a grand tale of civilization or relate an autobiographical anecdote. But regardless of the scale and scope, her stories were unfailingly human. I could always hear and feel her care in them—her care for the world, her family, and her care for me.

But though I cherished her storytelling, my memory often comes back to quiet. Sandy lived in a full house. There were always friends and family about, making our own daily noise. I was lucky enough to occasionally join this cacophony. Telling our own stories. Making jokes. Talking politics. Playing. Planning for the future. Parenting. Worrying.

Though Sandy grew up in a house full of sisters, and though she could inconspicuously command our attention with her understated manner, I always sensed she was a kindred spirit who, like me, cherished quiet introspective moments. And when I think of her now, my mind's eye often comes back to one image: I am working alongside her in the garden at the Cape house, under a warm sun, in companionable silence save for birdsong and breeze.



*Sandy and Eric, gardening at the Cape*



*Eric and Leslie at their wedding, with Ranganath, who officiated*



*Emily, in a costume Sandy created for her to be Enola Holmes*

# For the Birds

---

Lakshmi Nayak

During these last few years as Mom got tireder, I began doing more and more of the gardening and yard work—not mowing the lawn, but tending, planting, weeding, etc. Since I had no idea what I was doing, I was forever running inside and asking her, “Is this a weed?” or “What do I do about this?” I also used to take photos first thing in the morning and share them to her iPad so she could see the new day and the gradual changes without having to go out. I miss that little daily ritual.

She really got a kick out of our “bird TV” area—the bird bath and bird feeder, with a cardinal pair in residence and a host of other birds, chipmunks, squirrels, random bees, and rabbits. She once got a solar-powered fountain for the bird bath, as a birthday present to herself—she was so excited for it! But unfortunately, it fit exactly, which meant there wasn’t room for it and the birds as well, and it also needed more direct sunlight than it got. So I would occasionally put it out in a large bowl of water, just to see it happening.

I think she got that solar fountain at the Bird Watcher’s General Store in Orleans, one of her favorite places on Cape Cod. And one of her favorite stories was of taking Nani (her mother) there. At that time, if you told them a bird joke they hadn’t heard yet, they would give you a pencil with the store logo on it. They didn’t sell these pencils; the only way to get one was through a joke. So Nani walked up and said,

One spring there was a pair of birds with a nest full of eggs. The papa bird noticed that one of the eggs was of a different size and color than the rest. He said to the mama bird, “How did this get in here?” And the mama bird said to the papa bird, “Don’t worry, dear. I only did it for a lark.”

Well, Mike and the others at the store were surprised to hear this slightly risqué joke told with a twinkle by this sweet little old lady! Once they got over their laughter, she got a pencil. And Mom got a new story to tell.



*Summer at Penny Lane, 2008: Ranganath & Sandy, George & Maya, Lakshmi, Anand & Polly, and Jack; Mona, Nani & Grandpop*



*Mike O'Connor's store in Orleans, MA*

# She Was Quite a Lady

---

Mike O'Connor

*A Letter to Maya, December 2021*

She was a quite a lady. Of the hundreds of times I've seen your mom, I can only think of one time when she was not with a group. People just enjoyed her company. Whenever she stopped by our shop, it was a major event. She traveled with a crowd of friends and family, often from far away, and she always introduced each and every one, just to watch me try and pronounce their names. I failed every time.

Now that I think about it, your mom was one of the few people I could never make laugh. I would say the stupidest things and she would just give me that confident Sandy smile.

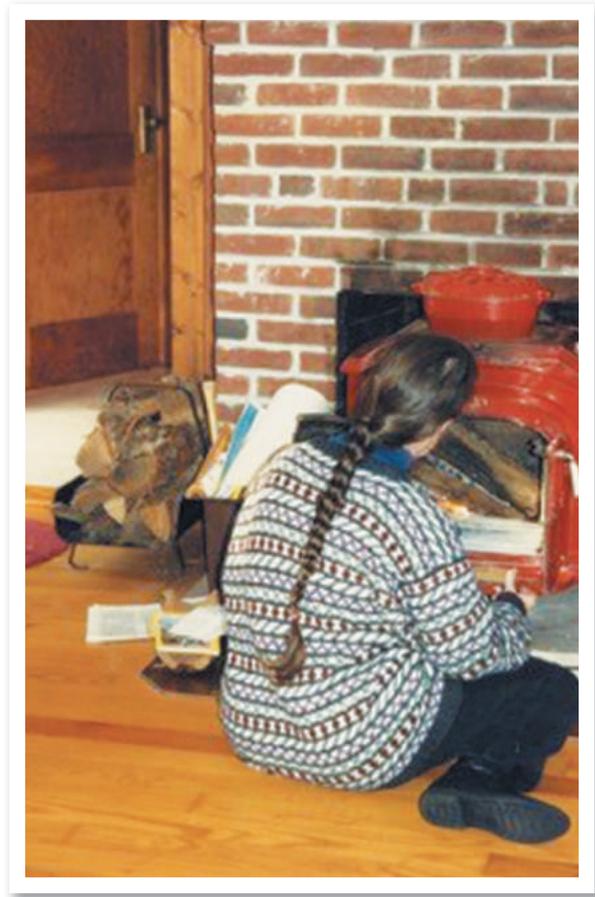
Years ago, when I was asked to sit with a panel of college professors in a venue in Harvard Square, I was shaking I was so nervous. I didn't know these people, and no one knew me, including the audience. Then Sandy walked in and sat right up front. Once I saw that same confident smile, the shaking stopped.

# An Anchoring Presence

Judith Lahav

I remember many sweet moments with her, but they are more of snippets than events. She was such an anchoring presence wherever we were together. One of my early memories of her is from the first time I went to the Cape, with Eva. We went exploring the surroundings and met Sandy returning from pruning some bushes, perhaps along one of the trails around the house. She had been at it for quite some time, and I have a picture of her in my mind, very busy and businesslike. I then realized that she was always busy, doing something to improve whatever was needed in and around the house.

Then on the last time I was at the Cape, it was a cold and wet winter weekend. As we arrived, Sandy sat down in front of the fireplace to light it. It took some time, as the wood was a bit wet. She sat there very quietly, absorbed in her work, very diligently working on it, until it caught. The kitchen then became warm and cheerful.



On that last visit to the Cape, we went to the visitor center and the shore of the national park. Sandy was very happy and explored the exhibits at the visitor center, pointing out to me the different devices that were used in seafaring in the old days, and then the grass-covered sandy beach, how beautiful in that fiercely grey sky and ocean. I did take a picture at that point:



At the house in Belmont, we used to sit in the kitchen, having fascinating conversations about archaeology, different customs of people around the world and diversity in America. She once told me about life in India, way back, when they were “very young.” It was fascinating to hear.

Once, Sandy took me to the basement and showed me the costumes she made for the different plays she directed at the church. She was particularly proud of the costumes she made for *Fiddler on the Roof*. They were indeed amazing, rich, and intricate. Over the years, I learnt of the enormous number of plays she directed there and their significance in the life of the community. People, now grown up, took part in those performances as children, and it must have left them with sweet and meaningful memories.

Sandy’s warmth and inclusive attitude, as well as Ranganath’s, always made me feel welcomed and comfortable in their house and give me a sense of beautiful humanity.

# What Would Sandy Do?

---

Suchitra Shenoy

There are a number of things that make a house a home. The deep sense of comfort and familiarity that comes from your family sharing it with you, objects lovingly chosen for the space, and having a sense of belonging. Knowing that come evening, the kids will be thumping their school bags down, or your spouse will be coming in from work. Or identifying, on a completely subconscious level, by the sound of footsteps and churning and clinking, that it is your mother rummaging through her purse for her keys.

Most people feel at home at one or two houses, possibly your own and that of your parents. If you are lucky, then that of your grandparents.

It is rare to be in a house that belongs to people not related to you and to feel completely at home. To feel at home to such an extent that even if you are visiting after a number of years, you know which drawer in the kitchen has the big pots, and where to find the tiny blue espresso cups that get pulled out only for parties. That wonderful sense of familiarity of sinking into a couch and knowing just how far down your body will go. Or what the evening meal is going to bring. Knowing too, that just like being in your own home, you can be your complete self, no veneer of cautious politeness, no need to be on best behaviour. If you are feeling grumpy, it's OK.

What is remarkable about this home, and the two extraordinary people who own it, is that they have made it a home, not just for me, but also for easily more than a hundred people over the past three decades or so. If you add *their* friends and relatives that have gone through these doors, the number would be in the thousands. There are people scattered over three continents who know where the key to the back door is "hidden." Numerous romances have taken place under this roof, while others have nursed broken hearts and healed.

There are multiple ways to be generous. Opening one's home in this everyday manner certainly ranks high up. After all, people often retreat to their homes to be private, to be quiet. Here, there is no such thing as separating their lives from ours. It is all of the same continuous flow. A deep connection and caring for all those that come through. In northern India, there was a famous saint called Neem Karoli Baba, who had a simple message: "Love all. Serve all. Feed all." We see it manifested miles away from northern India, in Belmont, Massachusetts, in a different way, but very much with the same spirit.

What you receive in this house from this couple is lots of love, wonderful food, laughter, and great conversation. You open the creaking garden-gate, walk up the stairs, and slide the back door open. Take your shoes off and know, deep down in the depth of your bones (and your heart), that you are home.

*Postscript:* This essay was written more than a decade ago. Why do Sandy and Ranganath's names not appear in it? Because it was for a public blog and when I mentioned writing it, Sandy asked not to be named. That spirit of anonymous generosity was typical of Sandy.

How many students did she schlep up and down from their messy dorm rooms, her van piled high with treasured college belongings? How many friends, relatives, and relatives of friends did she pick up at Logan

Airport through all the ghastliness of the Big Dig and regardless of the weather? How many last-minute stockings were hastily stitched together to shelter a lost soul at Christmas? There will never be a way for any of us to say thank you to both Sandy and Ranganath for the incredible love the open-hearted warmth that just took us all in.

There were five years of my life where I spent a disproportionate amount of time with Sandy—running errands together, helping her with a seemingly never-ending flow of heavy costumes that were either coming from church to home or going from home to church, getting the big dining table set up for an enormous dinner with Ranganath snoozing at one end, her storytelling at the other, and easily a dozen people squeezed in between, so many things that we did together. Somewhere in those five years, between umpteen mugs of tea and cheese-and-apple lunches, we became good friends. I was no longer the young college student, she, no longer the older, caring aunt. She'd confide in me, in unexpected ways. It was a beautiful friendship.

Now, many moons later, Shreedhar and I are well settled in India. Sandy and Albert, whom we adored, are no longer with us. (I like to think Albert and Sandy are somewhere nattering away over cups of coffee. Albert, armed with a tablespoon, is eating Rancatore's bittersweet-chocolate ice cream for breakfast, and Sandy's telling him about the latest musical as she sews a beaver's face onto a costume.)



*Albert eating ice cream; Sandy making Rat and Badger caps for *The Wind in the Willows**

Now, whenever we are mulling over some onerous task that will soak up a lot of time and effort, but will help someone, Shreedhar and I ask ourselves, “What would Sandy do?” The answer is always clear.

## Planting Lilacs for Betsy/Mommy/Nani (1922–2009)

---



*Penny Lane (Brewster, Cape Cod)  
August 2009*

*Kabir, Maya, Sarah, Lakshmi, Vicki, Juliet, David, Nils, Randy, George, Wendy, Sandy*



*Belmont, August 2009*

*Bill Graustein, Madhav Prabhu, Wendy, Jim Connor, Valerie, Ashok, Juliet with baby Edie, David, Nils, and George on the stairs, Vicki, Lela, Anand, Deyne, Sandy, Polly with Jack, Kathie, Tuli with Sameer, Randy, Sarah, Grandpop—plus several more of us just outside of the picture*



# Appreciating Aloe

Nirmala Ravishankar

Before I moved into 12 Orchard Street, aloe was just an ingredient listed on the side of lotion bottles. Sandy introduced me to Aloe, the mighty succulent.

I vividly recall the first time I got a burn while making something in the kitchen. And she jumped to my aid immediately. She reached for the aloe plant perched on the window sill right near the stove, broke off a fleshy leaf, squeezed the juice out of it, and applied it to my hand. Instant relief and no scar!

I saw her do the same many, many times over the two years that I lived in Belmont, so much so that I always think of Sandy when I see an aloe plant.



*Ranganath, Nirmala, and Sandy tending the fire at Penny Lane*



*Ishan, Nirmala, and Sandy*

# It Began When Sandy Met Me at Logan Airport

Alice Ammon

My year in Belmont/Cambridge in 2006/2007 has very much enriched my life especially because I lived with the Nayak family and was lucky enough to get to know Sandy and to learn from her.

It began when probably the most hospitable person I have ever met, dear Sandy, met me at Logan airport. After a long and heavily delayed stopover flight from Frankfurt via the terrible Philadelphia hub, I was very embarrassed for the delay and also quite a bit unsure about the new world I had landed in, but above all, very tired. Sandy managed to make me feel comfortable in a few seconds. When I sat in her big sky-blue Toyota van, I felt at home. It was also the first occasion for my first lesson I memorized from Sandy, who was always available for very wise advice, given with warmth and ease. “Never take stopover flights!”

I remember her as very committed to her family, friends, and the community but never too tired for more support to others, paired with an instinct for how to make others feel happy and at ease. For example, I can very well remember how she took me to different interesting places and events; how she got excited for Nirmala, Zeenat (both of whom I got to know at the Nayaks’ house), and me when we were planning to go to the American Southwest, and gave us many recommendations that proved so helpful; how she got for me some books when I left for my flight back to Germany and how she told me why she picked those books for me. She was very knowledgeable and experienced in so many areas of life.



*Greetings from Germany—Wanja and Alice, with Zélie, Liv, and Luc*

# Giving with Joy

---

Maya Chaudhari

Sandy is among the most generous people I have known. Not only have I been a beneficiary of and basked in her generosity, she has made me a better person for it.

I know Sandy liked Khalil Gibran, so I think it is apt to reflect on what he had to say on giving and how Sandy lived up to those words.

*You give but little when you give of your possessions.  
It is when you give of yourself that you truly give.*

Sandy gave of herself, both in terms of her time and her labor.

*There are those who give with joy, and that joy is their reward.*

Sandy gave with joy. There was never a sense of giving with any grudge.

*You often say, "I would give, but only to the deserving."  
The trees in your orchard say not so, nor the flocks in your pasture.  
They give that they may live, for to withhold is to perish.  
Surely he who is worthy to receive his days and his nights, is worthy of all else from you.*

Sandy did not judge who deserved to receive. She was generous to all, with no boundaries of race, religion, or any other identifier.

*For in truth it is life that gives unto life—while you, who deem yourself a giver, are but a witness.  
And you receivers—and you are all receivers—assume no weight of gratitude, lest you lay a yoke upon yourself and upon him who gives.*

We are conditioned to receive with a weight of gratitude. To receive in appreciation but without a sense of obligatory giving back or a weight of gratitude is only possible when the giver allows for that. Sandy did.



*On the Cape: Sandy, Maya Chaudhari, Peter and Becky Mattison*



*Belmont back porch, 2020*

# Her Mind Encompassed the World

---

Vivek Rau

While I didn't get to meet Sandy in person very often over the past few decades, any time we did meet I felt her wisdom and warmth. I know so much more about her now from her memorial service online, which was a real labor of love, and I'm grateful for having been a part of it. It was eye-opening for me, and I got a glimpse of a different world from the one I usually live in, coming to know her and her life in its incredible breadth from so many perspectives.

I also realized (again) that the Nayak household on Orchard Street is and always has been a magical place, and it's the entire family together who made it that way. All of us have our limitations, and mine is an excessive love of tidiness and solitude. This all the more makes me admire a family like theirs that can be so open, generous, and tolerant as to open their home to such a varied collection of visitors and residents at all hours, for so many years, creating such a vast global family.

All the individual memories and many direct quotes from Sandy that appeared in each of the tributes really brought her to life for me. So many of the tributes were quite poetic in the way they were composed and spoken. I really felt awe thinking about a person whose mind encompassed the whole world and its history and religions, while her heart encompassed every class of humanity, with interest in everything and warmth toward everyone. What a beautiful life to have lived, and what a void it must leave behind. The event will stay in my memory for a long time.

I'd never heard the song "Simple Gifts" before, and I'm so glad it was chosen as one of the pieces to play. I went and looked it up and listened to it more than once, because it's so powerful, and I love the weaving of Sufi-like themes into a Shaker hymn. I also was struck by Sandy's lifelong interest in religions of the world, and the quote repeated by Paul Santos, saying, "Most Eastern religions care about what a person does, while most Western religions care about what a person believes." It's an idea I'll want to return to overtime to get all its nuances.

After Sandy's passing, I got to know her even better from her recorded Sandy Salon lectures, which I find completely captivating. I felt compelled to watch each one from beginning to end without a break, because each part of her narrative leaves one wanting to learn more, wanting to hear what comes next. One I saw was a lecture on the history of the Hagia Sophia church in Istanbul, and the other was a Christmastime lecture about who the Magi really were. I marvel at the intense intellectual curiosity and scholarly yet affectionate interest in the human experience from era to era that led to her acquiring that kind of encyclopedic knowledge. I hope many others get to enjoy her lectures in the years to come.



*Vivek listening to Sandy, Bangalore, 2015*  
*L to R: Shobha, a guest, Shalini, Sandy, Babbi Akka, Vivek*

# Generosity Beyond Limits

---

Valli Subbiah

Sandy was a living legend; she will dearly be missed . . . it just seems all too sudden to process. There is never a preparedness for the loss of a loved one, yet it seems too soon.

Let's remember Sandy in her warm and always inviting conversation ways. She was truly one of a kind!

Being always happy to host people was one thing that I learnt from her. Home was always liberty hall for friends, family, family's friends, and friends' families . . . shall remember where to find the spare key for guests. (And I still have my key to your home!)

Her authority on a range of subjects especially history baffled me to the extent that I started reading up to be up to date.

I used to love going to the basement just to see her workshop and endless costumes flowing around—it was quite magical like they were almost characters that could come to life any minute. Have enjoyed her endless conversations on putting the fabric into forms and shapes for myriad kids!

I remember lovely Christmas pageants that she put together.

The times when Wendy and Deyne's families were over, as a constant rock to her sibs. The times we used to spend with Grandpop and Nani were truly special too.

She was always pottering around on multiple projects and so engaged in a range of stuff that I always looked up to her as this wonder woman! 😊

I shall really miss her in person, whenever I visit Boston next, but in my heart and mind, she will always be this very special person who came into my life, who taught me generosity beyond limits, and who taught me to be a warm, good person.

I'm so glad I had the good fortune of having long chats with her after my return to India, via phone calls. Will always be blessed by her love! May she keep showering you, the family, and the rest of the world with her kindness, generosity, and wisdom!



*Sandy and Valli visiting in Bangalore*

## Sandy, My Friend . . .

---

Rani Sarma

My friendship with the Nayaks started on an unusual note. They were introduced to me as friends of my daughter-in-law Gitanjali's parents, and what is more, they actually babysat her when she was an infant. What a coincidence that was! So when I visited them in their house in Belmont for the first time, they were more my sambandhi's friends, not mine.

Over time, I realized how wrong that premise was! Sandy and I were to develop a very warm friendship over the ensuing decade and a half. She would always be the first person I called on arriving in Boston. Her immediate response would be a bright "Come home, let's catch up over dinner!" That would be the beginning of a series of dinners through the summer. "You don't have transport? Never mind, I will pick you up and drop you back. You have friends staying with you? No problem, bring them along. What is important is that we meet."

The first time we dined with the Nayaks, I presumed that it would be a formal affair. I put on my silk sari, wore pearls around my throat, and pinned my hair up. Little did I realize at that time that it was totally the wrong way to visit them.

There are things you do and you don't when you visit the Nayaks, as I was soon to learn. You don't dress up, you dress down. And let your hair down. You go prepared to spend the entire evening to savour their company and the food, of course. You carry with you a healthy appetite, both gastronomical and cerebral. And you went prepared to be surprised. You can't stay formal or demure for long. Relaxed over drinks, you got voluble, aired your views openly, argued, parried, reconciled, or held out, depending on which way the wind blew, the conversation went, so to say. It's all great fun.

Dinners at the Nayaks' are events. Ranganath is a foodie. He delights in cooking and is most unconventional in his food preferences. His ensembles are quirky but delightful. He can match a typical South Kanara vegetable dish with an exotic Italian concoction or a spicy Kerala fish curry with Spanish paella/gazpacho. Dinners are always drawn out. Guests gather around the rustic dining table in the cheerful Nayak dining room, devouring starters. You made a mess with pistachio shells or sweet potato chips? It's OK. Conversation over drinks dominates the evening; other things are secondary.

Not just the food, the guest list too is equally eclectic. Guests for the evening could be from anywhere in the world, from South Asia to Europe to Africa. If the weather is good, you sit on the patio, next to Sandy's rosemary and thyme pots, and are treated to wholesome country music with everyone joining in.

Sandy and I had a common interest—history. We were fascinated by all things historical. New England is a treasure trove for the historically inclined. I do not think I could have asked for a better guide or a more enthusiastic companion. Sandy knew New England inside out and could reel off its history from the top of her head. We zipped around in her aged but reliable car, visiting famous period homes, historical sites, and museums. No site was too far, inclement weather not a barrier. Marblehead to Deerfield, Salem to Saugus.

My stay in the U.S. was a whirlwind of excursions and visits, thanks to Sandy. What made those excursions so very touching is the fact that while those sites were new to me and I was naturally wide-eyed, she must have done that circuit innumerable times. When she matched my excitement and enjoyment, she was just being kind. That's Sandy for you.

It is difficult to believe that anyone as fragile-looking as Sandy could pack so much punch into her small frame. I have seen her help fix the dock at the Nayaks' Penny Lane beach, in Cape Cod. I watched in wonder as she participated in reassembling the dock alongside others, mostly the young. When I appreciated her strength, she scoffed. "I can bring down a tree by myself," she assured me. Having seen her in action, I can quite believe her. I saw her fight fiercely against cranberry bogs that came up in Cape Cod. They created environmental problems, she fumed.

It is unbelievable that Sandy is not with us anymore. I cannot convince myself it is true. How can someone so full of life and zest vanish? Maybe she hasn't. She lives on in my memories—such beautiful memories, vibrant with action.



*Decorating the Christmas tree in Belmont with Rani*

# A Rare and Admirable Kind of Person

---

Kathie Fiveash

I think one of the remarkable things about Sandy is how consistently she was herself through all the periods of her life, and with all the different people she knew. Sandy never altered who she was for any audience. She maintained her values steadfastly throughout.

Antonia, whom I visited today and who attended the service, was struck by what a huge impact Sandy had on people all over the world. Belmont was the center of a wide web, woven by you and Sandy.

Despite the fact that she did not have what we call a career, she touched, taught, helped, and influenced so many people. Mabel Gray, the woman in Vermont who was my second mother, was like that. She stayed in Putney, growing her gardens, taking care of children, working at the Putney School, and yet her life reached across continents and into the hearts of so many, me included.

That is a rare and admirable kind of person, driven not by ambition or self-aggrandizement, but by caring for and about others.

# All Are Like Family

---

Audrey Lin

It's hard to encapsulate the care and humor, intelligence and warmth, wit and humility and authenticity that Sandy exuded. As part of a wave of twenty-something-year-olds who frequented the loving Nayak abode in the year of 2011/12, I was always comforted by the compassion in her discerning way of seeing, and the care in her gestures and the incredible generosity in her acceptance and way of treating all of us like family. I have a visceral memory of one time when Sandy and Ranganath graciously accepted an invitation to be guests on a small podcast conversation that a community of volunteers hosted. The morning of the call, a couple of friends and I arrived at their home to be a live audience as the podcast interview\* unfolded. -:) It was the first time these friends were meeting the Nayaks.

We entered through the doors, and the scent of beloved chocolate chip cookies filled the air. As we sat down and prepared to dial into the call, Sandy appeared with a plate piled with fresh-out-of-the-oven cookies and held them out with so much warmth and a bright smile to a friend who, up until that point, had not met her yet. "Cookie?" she invited. I remember watching my friend receive the unconditionality of Sandy's offering. Her composure softened as she smiled and picked up a cookie, laughing, "Okayyyy!" In less than a few minutes, Sandy had wrapped all of us in a blanket of kinship.

As young adults, a year or so out of college, being able to enter a home steeped in stories, where Sandy was a matriarch with a twinkle in her eye was a gift that soothed all of our souls as we struggled with finding our way and place in the world. Sandy's playfulness, wordless grace, and commanding warmth, natural humility, and effortless generosity made everyone feel welcome, at ease, and instantly family. She was a paradigm of strength, an exemplar of service, and a pillar of compassionate joy. I'm so grateful to have had the incredible fortune of crossing her path, and I know that all the love and subtle lessons she flowed forward into my soul will live on in all my interactions with others.

*\*A link to this interview is posted on [www.prnayak.org](http://www.prnayak.org)*



*At the Brewster Flats: Jack plus a line including Robyn, Lakshmi, Stephanie, Audrey, Steven (Randy), Ranganath, and Vera*

# Around the Table at 12 Orchard Street

---

Robyn Trem

I first met Sandy in 2011 or 2012. She was sitting with Ranganath on the couch in their living room at 12 Orchard Street, being interviewed as to how their home became a home away from home for hundreds of people from all over the world. At the time, I was working in an AmeriCorps service position at a high school in Chelsea—though my colleagues became friends, I was far away from family and all the people who knew me best. It was my first job out of college and my first time far away from home.

One of my new AmeriCorps friends was Audrey Lin, a bright spot in my stressful day-to-day with the high schoolers. One spring Saturday, Audrey asked me if I'd like to join her as she interviewed a couple for a podcast she was involved with. She told me they were amazing, with a vast global network and a beautiful outlook.

Though as I listened to the interview I was immediately in awe of Sandy and Ranganath, I soon learned that they were what a friend of mine would describe as “real people” too. They were people you could talk to, didn't have to work to impress, and could make mistakes in front of without fearing judgment.

I don't remember how it came about, but after that day, Sandy and Ranganath welcomed us into their lives with open arms. Maybe it's because they sensed we could all use some familial love. No matter the reason, soon Audrey and I and a growing group of friends were at 12 Orchard Street again for dinner, eating yellow dal, roasted brussels sprouts, and ice cream out of those small metal bowls (you know the ones).

Perhaps because we were all so obviously from different walks of life, we soon devised a plan to hold salons every few weeks, at which over dinner one member would share about something—anything—that they already knew or wanted to learn about. I remember learning about life on a Buddhist monastery, birds, and pilgrimages. I gave a talk on the history of foodie-ism in the U.S.

Sandy, always an anthropologist, gave her talk on Islam. In addition to her warm presence, her penetrating blue eyes, and her bright laugh, I will always remember my feeling of amazement around Sandy's ability to retain facts! In the few years I lived near to the Nayaks in Boston, I had many history lessons from Sandy around the kitchen table (both before and after O'Jay refurbished it). I also had many lessons in storytelling, in costume design, in the careful art of honoring children being children. Sandy offered such rich dialogue and would always leave me either laughing or newly educated. Both things happened during her salon talk on Islam—which, if I am recalling accurately, was one of the last I attended at the Nayaks' before shipping off to Chicago.

I hardly remember the houses I lived in, in Boston, but I remember 12 Orchard Street in Technicolor detail. What a joy to get to know the Nayaks (all of them!), their friends, their family, their visitors, and those people they just met this morning and who are now staying with them for the next three months.

My favorite thing about Sandy and Ranganath together was that they might invite you over for dinner, give you some of the best home-cooked, fresh-from-the-garden food you've ever eaten, and entertain you with stories through the night—but they would also allow you to do the dishes, ask you to remove the sheets from

the bed and remake it with fresh ones, and have you feed Agnes the cat if you're staying at their house for some solitude while they are down at the Cape. For me, this lesson in hospitality is one I take with me into every walk of life: people feel most at home when they are allowed to help.

I will always remember Sandy sitting at the table, kneeling in the garden, sneaking into the kitchen quiet as a mouse, and leaning against the cupboard to listen with her hands tucked behind her. I will always remember her long, long brown and gray hair, usually loose but sometimes braided. I can see her features and her spirit in all of the Nayak (adult) kids and their kids. I will also eat gazpacho made with Sandy's recipe, from her friend from Spain, until the day I die—one of my favorite foods on this earth.

As follows from being the most hospitable people you will ever meet, the Nayaks' network has roots from here to the other side of the world and back. Many, many people have passed through the Nayaks' house on their way from here to there, hither and yon. To bring this reverie to a close, I will share that when I met my wife Katie at a conference in Michigan in 2018, long after I stopped being a regular around the Nayaks', you'll never guess the one memory we shared despite having never crossed paths. Good food and good people around the table at 12 Orchard Street!

### **Orchard Street Salons, 2011–2012**

Nancy Chu on *China's Religions*

Stephanie Aldrin on *My Favorite Birds*

Robyn Trem on *The Development of Food Culture in the USA*

Audrey Lin on *Pilgrimage*

Vera Sistenich on *The Concept of Human Rights*

Pavi Mehta and Ranganath Nayak on *The Aravind Eyecare System and Breakthroughs*

Piero Garau on *Smart Cities*

Sandy Nayak on *Islam*

Arathi Ravichandran on *My Search for Meaning*

# A Loving and Warm Presence

---

Nancy Chu

I well remember the dinners your family hosted and how open your hearts and doors were to a young twenty-something-year-old figuring out her way through life and young adulthood. I was lucky to know Audrey, who brought me into your home, and through her, got to know you and Sandy.

Sandy had such a loving and warm presence, and I remember how she made costumes for the local plays. I recall the kitchen where we used to help with preparing dinners. I remember seeing pictures of you as a young couple (beautiful!) and her laughing and telling the story of meeting you and dancing with a tall, dark (and handsome!) stranger. I think you both picked well. I admired your family, and how unique each person was that I got to know at your dinner table. I remember you talking about a big family trip abroad. You and Sandy welcomed many young people like me into your home with your big hearts and hospitality—it's an inspiration and a model for me.

What a loving and generous life and home you've built together. Though I have not seen Sandy in a long time, I remember her gentle and disarming spirit and hope you got to spend a lot of time together in recent years.

Though I did not go to very many dinners, they each made a great impression because it was always a welcoming, cheerful, and mind- and heart-opening evening. Sandy was a wonderful grandmother and a welcoming and interested host who was always ready to chat and open her home widely.

# The Gold Standard

Vera Sistenich

I can honestly say that my understanding of how one can live regarding others is marked in my life, quite clearly, as Before Sandy and After Sandy.

Never before or since have I met someone who seemingly effortlessly avoided the reflex to categorize, prejudice, or use heuristics as a starting point when meeting someone new.

She ran her home like she kept her heart: open, free, and welcoming with open arms. There was never concern for mess, the work involved in hosting a gang of visitors, nor for formalities; Sandy, and by extension the Nayak family, live like I have never seen any other family do.

I have since aspired to the same spirit of openness to all, across the societal and generational spectrum. I am constantly falling short but will forever treasure having met Sandy and having this gold standard to refer to in my heart.



*Penny Lane (Cape Cod): Included around the table are Steven (Randy), Nancy Chu, Vera, Robyn Trem, and Jack*

# Sandy Mayi—Incredible, Special, Unforgettable

Vasant and Harshita Kamath

When I heard from my father that Sandy Mayi had passed away, it was like there was a hole in my heart. When I think of your family, I immediately think of the word *home*. Your family has always been so welcoming, so comforting, more than family, more like home. The feeling you get when you come back and can relax, where you can be yourself, without pretense, no expectations, come as you are.

During college, if I ever needed to step away from the craziness or bubble I was in, I could always come to Belmont for a nice meal and great company. When Harshita moved to Cambridge and was there by herself for a year, she could do the same (and when her entire family visited, you hosted them for a meal, which they still talk about to this day). When we were both in Boston together, it was like a second home to us.



Sandy Mayi was the boss of the operation—the organizer, mother, planner. To me she had this great wry smile with a wit and twinkle in her eye that was incredible—displaying a superb intelligence and worldliness, but without any ego or showiness. She was also a great blend of intellectual and pragmatic—one minute you could have a conversation about what was in the New York Times, and the next minute be discussing the holiday program at the UU church in Belmont.

Some of the things I remember fondly about her: I love how she deferred to Ranganath Mam in the kitchen so he could show off his skills (and we all could benefit!); I loved her love of mystery books, especially Hercule Poirot; I loved how when we brought Gopal to Belmont for the first time, she treated him like a prince and showed him all the toys so he could enjoy himself. I loved her grasp of family history—I love people who know and love their extended family. And I love that there are people in the world like your family who open their homes and hearts to travelers from all over.

Sandy Mayi was an incredible, special, unforgettable person, and we will miss her dearly.



*Ranganath dancing with Vasant's grandmother at Vasant and Harshita's wedding in Georgia, 2008*



*Bringing Gopal for a visit, 2014*

# About Dear Sandy

---

Azar Rezaee

Writing about Sandy is not easy. She had a unique personality with so many positive characteristics that usually hardly exist at the same time in a person. She was kind, generous, reliable, sincere, friendly, and really intelligent. She was extroverted and introverted at the same time, which helped her to be a great sociable person and also a very deep thinker.

Sandy was a great speaker and storyteller. She was so good at explaining things in a pleasant way with a complete history and details, and you could sit and listen to her for hours eagerly. Her widespread awareness and knowledge about social, political, and cultural matters was unique and amazing. In a wide variety of our talks and conversations, we found that she knows a lot about these matters and the reality of social currents and the real faces and intentions of politicians which are not perceived by many people.

A great combination of her knowledge of external world with her internal illumination gave her the possibility to see the reality of things while most people are usually attracted to see the appearances of phenomena. Sandy's inner world was so rich and strong that she didn't need to show off anything. She was a silent mystic, whose righteousness, kindness, empathy, honesty, freedom from greed, and generosity made her a real role model for others.

To create a better tomorrow, we need more people like Sandy. May God bless her in eternal gardens of paradise.

# Our Kitchen Table Talks

Seble Alemu

Sandy and I had some common interests. We loved general knowledge, and she was a living encyclopedia. During the course of kitchen table discourses, we touched on some heavy subjects. Politics, marriage with different subtopics, family, LGBTQ, religion, and race were some of them.

We used to have long chats while she was resting from outside chores, eating her afternoon snack, or early in the morning having morning coffee. Without forcing me to accept anything, our kitchen table talks helped me to widen my worldview.

Who can forget her invaluable iPad from where she used to tap into the news of the world?

Sandy had a gift of making everybody feel at home. She knew the world enough that she could find a way to relate to anyone.

She told me the story of an Ethiopian woman, the wife of an Ethiopian ambassador in DC. We got connected through that ambassador's wife's story. She knew more about my country than I do.

In my heart there are more strong memories that I cherished her for. Primarily, she was very authentic. She had wisdom and created a comfortable space for all, without compromising her own authenticity! That is such a huge gift.

I truly miss her!



*Lakshmi, Sandy, and Seble at the Belmont dining room table*



*Decorating Christmas cookies in the Belmont kitchen, circa 2015  
Around the table are Jack, Polly, Sandy, Ayan, Leo, and Asha,  
with Seble and George in the background*



*Around the Belmont kitchen table, L to R:  
Seble, Shreedhar, Anne, John, Sandy, Suchi, Kimaya*

# Sunday Record

---

Sandy Nayak

**From:** Sandy

**Subject:** Sunday record

**Date:** December 30, 2014 at 8:14:37 AM EST

**To:** Ranganath Nayak

Accurate?

Love, Sandy

Sunday morning waking up here, breakfast

Ranganath, Sandy, Seble

Jack, Lakshmi, Andres

Tuli, Vikram, Kabir, Sammy

Suchi, Shreedhar, Kimu

= 13 breakfast

Lakshmi, Andres left for Revels

Anne, John, Esther, Sergio, Henry arrived

Anand, Polly, Leo arrived

= 19 lunch

Anand, Polly, Jack left for Revels

Vic, Juliet arrived

Tuli, Vikram, Kabir, Sammy, Suchi, Shreedhar, Kimu left for Florence

Vic, Juliet left for airport

Wendy arrived

Anand, Polly, Jack returned

Deyne, Richard, Lela, Jim, Edie arrived

Richard left

= 12 for dinner

# Hospitality

---

David Story

I met Sandy in December of 2010.

Most of the time, people are introduced at a social gathering and are introduced by someone else common to both. But in this case, I had just spent the night in her house. I arrived late at night. I had taken a shower upstairs and came downstairs to the kitchen dressed and ready for my day. Sandy was seated at the kitchen table in her nightgown, robe, and slippers. I believe she offered me a cup of coffee or at least told me where the mugs were. I helped myself and sat down.

We began a conversation that morning that continued for many years. We were immediately friends, and there was never a word spoken about who I was and why I was there. I think she had been told that a visitor was in the house or maybe not. I have learned since that morning that it was not unusual for a new person to come downstairs and enter the kitchen. I started to say “stranger” there, but I don’t think she ever met a stranger.

My love for and respect for hospitality is informed both by my Southern heritage and my Christian faith. It is one of the primary tenets of the Bible: “To welcome the stranger” is always the right decision. “No room at the inn” would never have been in her vocabulary. Rabbi Jesus would have loved her welcoming nature.

I also grew up in a home where people were always welcome at the table. My mother always had a way of making the soup stretch or the vegetables extend. If you were at the house near mealtime, you were expected to sit down at the table. If I take what I learned from both these great women, there will be many great conversations around the table for years to come.

Sandy was a gift in my life.

# Thanksgiving 2015, Cedarholm

---



# Thanksgiving 2019, Belmont



# Always a Place at the Family Table

Roberta Logan

Sandy always made a place for me at the Nayak family table. I remember being invited to 12 Orchard Street one Friday evening between Thanksgiving and Christmas; the culinary treat of the evening was dosas, something I'd not tasted before.

I may have been the only guest that evening; the plan was to decorate the Christmas tree. The ornaments were intertwined with memories of family members and years long past. Some of the decorations were earrings that had lost their mates. I thought what a wonderful use for the orphans! Just like those earrings, Sandy found a place for each person who entered her home. Since then, whenever I find an earring that has lost its partner, I add it to my collection of Christmas decorations.

Although I know she extended her welcome to all who crossed the threshold, in my heart her generosity of spirit always felt like a personal gift to me.

During the fall of 2021, while still in the eye of the pandemic, I celebrated my birthday by inviting a circle of friends to an open-air concert at the First Church in Roxbury. Lakshmi joined us. Sandy sent me a gift, and of course, it came with its own story.

On her first trip to India, she selected this small dish as a gift for her mother. It may have had a particular purpose or it might have been cherished for its beauty and craftsmanship. That small dish returned to Sandy after her mother passed away.



It now sits between two other treasures, a cherished gift from my son and a treasure from my mother's home. When I received it, I knew it was a gift of appreciation. Once again, Sandy was creating a welcoming space for me in her household.

# Wisdom and Humor

Melissa Braaten

When I first moved to Boston, one of the first people I met was Lakshmi Nayak. We taught together for five years and have remained close friends. Lakshmi is now a beloved akka/auntie to my son Munro. Like everyone else, I was welcomed into the Nayak home and family.

My memories of Sandy are of listening to her stories. There was usually tea. There were usually cookies. And as Lakshmi and I were chatting about work or the state of the world, Sandy would fold in stories from her life: as a child, or about her time living in India; stories about being a mother to three young children, heroic in my mind; stories about the people she had met from all over the world, the people she and Ranganath worked to bring into their circle and their lives. She always told stories with a gentle humor and a deep understanding and respect for all types of people. In the back of my mind, I always felt that if the world folded up, Sandy would know what to do.

Sandy with her wisdom, humor, and amazing storytelling became for me a living example of the type of woman I always wanted to be. The house on Orchard Street and the house on the Cape are places that feel to me like a place apart—a place where everything feels a little more safe and beautiful and enchanted than regular life. Sandy and Ranganath created a community and place in a way that one doesn't encounter very often.

But perhaps most of all, I am grateful to Sandy for being the mother of Lakshmi, who carries on her parent's magic in her own unique way. To Lakshmi and Ranganath and the whole family, so much love and gratitude.



*Chocolate, wine, and Colorku at Penny Lane with Melissa and Sandy (and Lakshmi)*

# A Rather Special Woman

---

Jean-Philippe Deschamps

Sandy has always appeared to me as a rather special woman, unlike most of the other women I have known over the years. She was special in the way she looked, in the way she spoke, in the way she related to visitors, like me, and mostly in the way she engaged us in serious and rich conversations.

First, she was special in the way she looked. I have known Sandy for over forty years and must recognize that she has always been ageless. She hardly changed over the years. Unlike most other women who use lots of makeup and buy fancy dresses, Sandy's look has remained natural throughout. Wearing long Indian-type dresses whatever the circumstances, she looked different and real.

Sandy was also special in the way she spoke. Her voice was soft—I cannot remember a single time when she would speak loudly or seemed aggravated! Her words were always thought through well chosen although simple. This ensured that everyone would listen to her.

Sandy's presence was always unobtrusive. With her, there were never many signs of excessive effusiveness when she greeted you! Just a warm smile and a short hug. In my early visits, her reserve, which contrasted with Ranganath's immediate and welcoming warmth, made me uneasy, until I realized that it was her style to show her deep friendship!

But it was her conversations that made her really special for me. And it was usually at breakfast when I was alone with her before other members of the family appeared around the breakfast table. I remember those intimate and early breakfast conversations, at the Cape as well as in Belmont because she was an early bird and so was I, typically awake from my transatlantic flights. Her conversations covered a wide range of topics: geographic and cultural differences, art, books, politics, religions, education challenges, all of these topics reflecting her deep humanistic values. These moments were precious for me as I couldn't stop wondering where her immense culture and wisdom came from.

Of all the memories I kept of Sandy, over the years, my favourites are those quiet breakfast conversations in the early mornings of my visits.



*An after-dinner conversation in Belmont*

# Circles of Love

---

John Schlorholtz

Dear Sandy,

I am sending this note to you in the hope that it might evoke some of your genuine, meaningful smiles accompanied by the deep, quiet glow in your eyes that I so much appreciated. I don't feel that I knew you very well, but I was enchanted by the circles of love that you were instrumental in creating and nurturing, both in your family and in your vast, many-sided community.

I loved hearing about your theater work with the special-needs children. I could palpably feel the communal, playful, and creative delight that you brought into their lives. In the same vein, one day I sat down to quickly scan through the long video of the theater work you did with the children at your church, but I ended up unable to stop watching throughout the whole video. I was entranced by the flowing waves of young lives beautifully evolving under the deeply capable, ingenious, wise, and appreciative care on the part of you and the group of people—including an evolving and growing Lakshmi—pitching in year after year to enrich young minds and hearts with wonder-filled experiences in learning on all levels.

Thank you.

I was touched that, during the pandemic, when your knee became a serious problem and you were unable to participate in your beloved Tai Chi class, you joined my chair Yoga Zoom class and appeared to find it useful. It was great to have you in the class. When I would do something like share with the group the backstory of *Mary had a Little Lamb* that I had just learned online, I could count on you to remember all the words to the song. (BTW for other readers, there was an actual Mary and an actual lamb.) You also kindly smiled at some of my jokes and stories about my father. Ranganath claimed that this was rare praise from you, and he also warmed my heart by telling me that you actually cancelled or rescheduled other events in order to participate in the class regularly. I believe the words he used in telling me about this were “This never happens!” I still feel honored by and appreciative of your presence in the class.

My favorite memory of being with you was not too long before you departed. I don't remember why I stopped by to visit you and Ranganath one afternoon. I think that some of your health issues and treatments weren't going as planned and that I thought perhaps I could offer some insights that might be helpful. I expected to stay for about an hour, but if I recall correctly, I departed after about three enjoyable hours of sparkling, meaningful, and satisfying conversation about health and all of life. I am extremely grateful that I was able to share that time with you and Ranganath and that I have that memory of a deep and delightful connection and sharing with you.

Again, thank you.

Sending all warm and good wishes on your journey,  
John

Sandy and Kabir, circa 2005



# A Bit of Insight

---

Rob Whittlesey

There are myriad things about Sandy worthy of holding in memory. But for me, one particular image comes most easily to mind.

Picture people around a table, could be in the kitchen on Orchard Street or maybe at Penny Lane. A conversation is underway; given either of those locales, it could be about most anything.

Sandy is quietly knitting or stitching away at a bit of costume. And then, at a moment always well chosen, she interjects with an especially relevant fact or bit of insight gathered over the years either through study or personal experience, something encountered and stored away seemingly for this very moment, something that clarifies, contextualizes, or illuminates but invariably elevates the conversation. After which, she frequently would return to her sewing, having made her point without needing to command the stage.

It was a remarkable talent, rooted in curiosity, an embrace of learning, and a striking ability to hold on to what she'd learned. Coupled with her admirable storytelling skills was her great gift for inviting one to listen and think. Anyone who can do that is a gift to the rest of us. It's perhaps not the first thing that occurs to others who knew her better, but it's what endures most clearly in my memory. It's something I'll forever feel worthy of celebrating.

# She Was So Cool

---

Neeti Nair

I have turned to so many conversations with Sandy after learning of her passing. I have lingered over every piece of advice, turned it over and over in my heart, and wished I could have told her in person how much she mattered to me.

Ours was a long friendship that began with my first stay in Belmont in August 1998. My first real interaction with Sandy was under somewhat embarrassing circumstances. I had arrived from New York the previous night. The next morning, I was around the bench in the backyard rubbing Penny on her head and cooing “Sandy, Sandy” to her. Sandy, who was sitting right there, said nothing. Suddenly someone called out for Sandy from inside the house, and she left. I realized I had made a mistake and thought Sandy would naturally be offended. I sought her out later that day and apologized. She said, “That’s OK. Golden retrievers are often called Sandy.” She brushed it off with such grace that I realized in an instant that *this* lady of the house was different. She was *cool*. She was *so cool*.

That was the first of many, many memorable interactions with her. Across the Nayak kitchen table, Sandy talked about musicals, archaeology, sects in Christianity, Sandy’s childhood, siblings, parents, graduate career, Ana, a vast array of friends in India and around the world and shared so many lovely anecdotes about her children. She seemed to know I would need a cup of tea or coffee the moment I walked in, and would say, by way of greeting and with a toss of her head, “There’s a cup for you.” I always needed to unwind from graduate school/dissertation-writing woes, and Sandy would always listen carefully to my latest angst-ridden story and offer the perfect advice.

I missed Sandy when I left Boston in 2005. But there was the telephone! So I called a few months later. I wanted her advice on a man I had recently met. She listened carefully and then spoke in the voice of an anthropologist: “There are five identity markers that matter—race, religion, class, language, and nationality. If one is different, that’s doable. But if all five or four out of five are different, it can get very hard. It can still work, but it will be very hard.” Of course, she was right.

Some years later, I got married. In 2013, we lost our first child Amartya in his fifth day in the NICU. I was grief-stricken and could not think. I thought I would just die. The doctor gave me oxycodone to last a lifetime. Ana asked me to speak with Sandy. I expected the usual words of sympathy; instead, Sandy described the beautiful twins she lost. *I did not know!* Then she spoke of another two pregnancies that didn’t work. And so, Sandy revealed, minute by revealing minute, that it was possible to live, in fact, to live a full life, even after such tragedy. She was proof; her full, incredible life was proof.

I went over that phone conversation many, many times over the next months and years. I thought of Sandy’s body and her heart, and how much it had had to bear, and how she never shared these experiences of bereavement, until I needed to hear about them.

In my last phone conversation, I told her about my child Amrit and how he was faring in school. I like to think she was fully caught up with my life, and I was with hers. But I didn't at all know the details of her ailment and so I was shocked at the news of her passing. It made no sense.

Sandy was always full of life, and in my mind's eye and in my heart's eye, that is how I will always remember her.



*Making garlands for Anand and Polly at their wedding, 2001*



*Amrit in the Belmont playroom, circa 2017*

## Dear Neeti

---

Sandy Nayak

*Email, written in 2013*

Dear Neeti—Oh my! It's definitely surreal and lasts for a while. My twins were born at 30 weeks and didn't have a chance. A boy and a girl. She was beautiful but tiny and lived about half an hour. I didn't see the boy—he died while being born and I passed out.

I made the huge mistake of trying to put it behind me too soon and came down with a pneumonia that landed me in hospital for a couple of weeks. And mostly what people said to me trying to make me feel better didn't work. Some of it was really annoying. But a year later I had Anand! Then two more misses and then Maya! (That's why our kids are so far apart.) Six pregnancies to produce three children is not the way to go, but we can't help that. We pick up the pieces and move on. It's good that you and Rahul are grieving together.

When I lost the twins, I discovered that every older married woman I met had lost at least one, including Ranganath's mother, which he hadn't known about. Take care of yourself. You will be very vulnerable for a while, and your hormones will be playing merry hell with you for a couple of months (at least). Not fun, but no way around it. Tears help, sometimes.

We will light a candle for Amartya at our Christmas gathering. Also for Polly's father Michael Fiveash, who died this fall of cancer and was my age. Also for my dorm mother Faith, who lived a full life and died in August at 95. What a range.

Lots of love to you both, and best wishes for a good recovery, eventually.

Love, Sandy

# To Be with Her in Warm Silence

Billye Toussaint

There is a metaphorical thirteenth month of pregnancy in which you have been a good sport and done the best you can do but you are utterly exhausted and your body used up and the universe doesn't care. You trained admirably for the marathon, only to find out that at the twenty-six-mile mark, there are five more miles to go.

The last week of my pregnancy, I went to visit with Aunty Sandy because I knew that only she would get this state of being, this misery that just was. That you just need to sit with. Nothing can be done. It needs a witness, but just that. To over-pity or feed into it is tacky and risks making it worse.

It was January: a mean, cold one that refused snow. I came to the house in Belmont in the morning and sat. We drank tea. I nested in a corner of the couch. She straightened up around me, did some hand-crafts, did not make a fuss.

She warmed up leftovers and put out cheese and fruit. We read our respective books and checked in about all of the relatives. She retold all the stories. Our conversations arced and died out. I shifted and rolled and grunted. She silently handed me more pillows. I joked about having the child in her humongous tub. She did not laugh. When it was time, I packed up and went to pick up Solèy from daycare and prepared dinner.

The baby came a couple of days later. I will never forget this time that I had with her. It was fortifying in a nameless way, this not having to explain. Just being able to be with her in warm silence and have her bear witness to such a difficult time without moving to change it.



*Billye with Ayan at Belmont*



*Solèy, Ayan, Leo, Jack, Ranganath, Asha at Spectacle Island, 2018 (Sandy is relaxing at the bottom of the hill)*



*Grandparents' Day at Solèy's school, 2018*



*Reginald, Sandy, and Ranganath at Cedarholm*

# How to Have a Baby

---

Anne Que

It must have been around the time that our dog Max passed away, at the end of 2009 or maybe early 2010, when I had a conversation with Sandy in the Belmont kitchen, where a lot of wisdom resides. As with all memorable conversations, this started out seeming very insignificant. I think I was making tea and she was reading at the table.

I brought up the subject of missing Max and also commented that I had held on to what Albert shared with us—that even with the pain of the loss of your companion, remembering will get easier with time. I sighed and then I jokingly said that well, maybe now we should start thinking about having a baby.

Now, mind you, I had not talked to John (my husband) about this. This may seem important to the reader to have done, but this was a Belmont kitchen conversation, after all. Sandy responded by saying, “It’s never a bad time to think about starting a family.”

She says this while riffling through the newspaper and as I stir milk into my tea. As a thirty-something living in Manhattan at that time, many challenges start to surface.

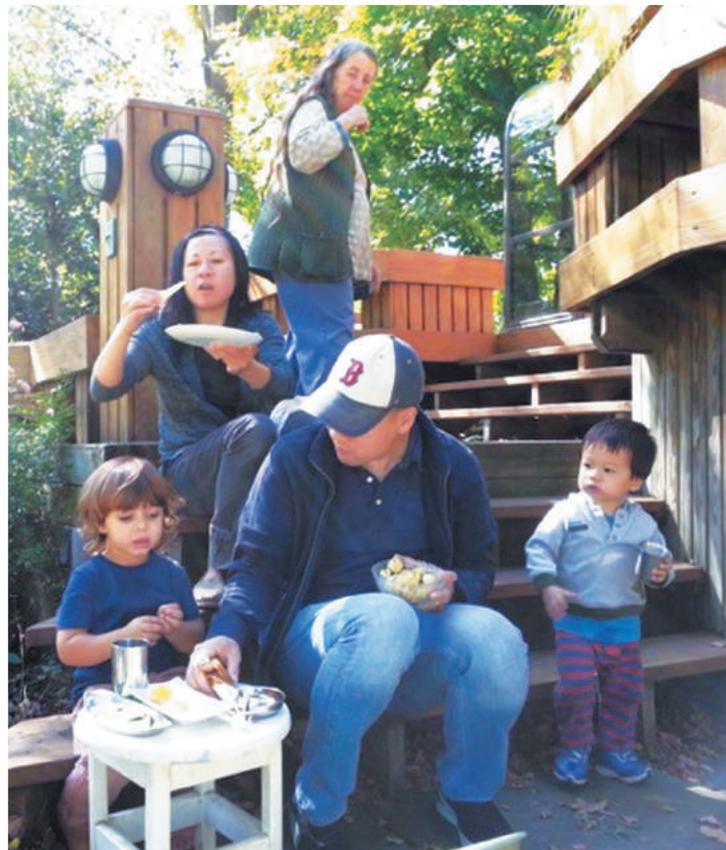
I said out loud, “Oh, Sandy, New York City is expensive. There’s childcare costs, and I’d have to continue working. The schools aren’t great, and my parents are in Texas, far away.” I ramble on and on, and of course, at the time, it all felt overwhelmingly complex—the idea of bringing a child into the world.

And in Sandy style, she puts down the newspaper or book that she may have been reading, looks me in the eye, and says, “Anne, have a baby, move to Boston, and you bring the child here to Belmont as many times as you can.” Pause. “The playroom is ready for you.” I giggle and say, “Sandy, you make it sound so easy.” To which she replies, “Well, because it is.”

And so, that was that. Our Henry was born at the end of 2011, and soon after, we moved back to Cambridge and have continued to occupy the Belmont kitchen and playroom ever since.



*Belmont playroom, 2013: Henry, Anne, Leo, Sandy, Jack, John*



*Belmont back deck, 2013: Sandy watching over Leo, Anne, John, and Henry*

# The Feeling of Joy

---

Henry Doan

One of my fondest memories of Adi was when I came over for a few hours because my parents had to work. I was outside unpacking Adi's mom's old stuff with her, and she was sorting through it with me. We were talking about life and our day. I then, out of the corner of my eye saw a beautiful soup spoon and a beautiful glass bowl.

I then pointed it out to her, saying that it was really pretty. She took it out and said, "You really like it, huh? Well, you can have both."

I might not remember every single detail, but I remember the feeling of joy I had. I smiled, hugged, and thanked her.

# Just Us

John Doan

---

“Sandy, can I be honest about something?”

“Of course you can.”

“I love the beach, the dinners served around the massive makeshift table, and the people who fill this house, but honestly, dinners like we just had tonight where it’s just you, Ranganath, Anne, and me . . . there’s something really nice about these.”

“They *are* special.”

“I’m going to hug you now.”



*Cooper, Anne, Sandy, and Ranganath on the beach at Penny Lane, watching John and Henry in the water, summer 2021*

# Too Much *Doctor Who*

---

Roger Burtonpatel

I've known the feeling of Sandy's reassuring presence since before I can remember, though it was only in the last decade that I was able to understand her life through personal time with her. I have one particularly strong memory related to this.

It was one night some years ago, and my parents had gone away and left their child with the Nayaks, as is local custom. After spending the afternoon poring through volumes of *The Cartoon History of the Universe*, I was invited by Sandy to a play she'd been working on. It was a cool night as we drove to the theater. On getting there, she put a cookie in my hand, led me to my seat, and said, "I'll see you when it's over, all right?" I remembered she had costumed the show, and I spent the entire performance looking at the clothes, hardly listening to the actors. I guess that wasn't what she had intended. But I still remember those costumes today.

After the play, I was driven back, and then Sandy had to attend to some business. Ranganath was asleep or reading, so I was left unsupervised with a computer, never a good idea with a twelve-year-old.

I promptly watched the most frightening episode of *Doctor Who* ever produced and became so scared I could not be by myself in my room, let alone fall asleep. After hours of trembling in my bed with the lights on, I timidly knocked on Sandy's door. I don't really know what I wanted—comfort, I guess—but Sandy knew, as she always did, what I needed. She sat by my bed, playing solitaire on her iPad, warding the aliens away. She stayed until I was fast asleep.

# Come and Stay Awhile

---

Lilia Burtonpatel

Sandy had a wonderful laugh. Some of my favorite memories from her and Ranganath's house were sitting around the kitchen table with a cup of tea and some kind of deliciously cooked snack, and sneaking away to the bathroom to read the delightfully curated joke wall. I've never found a collection of jokes quite so funny as those.

In truth, it's difficult to pick a favorite memory. When I think of Sandy, I think of warm hugs, rows of welcoming games and music and books that filled her houses and beckoned to guests and children to come and stay awhile, and especially her bright smile that lit up her entire face as her low, textured voice told a joke.

Sandy had the gift of being able to make a home for new people she met; however, they were or were not related to her. I won't forget her laugh or her strength and fortitude, or the way she filled her life with love. She is missed.

# Thank You

Christopher Ong  
*2017, end of summer*

---

Dear Sandy,

Thank you for all the kindness and generosity you have shown me in the past month. When I came in June, you did more than provide me with a bed and a roof. You gave me company, delicious food, warm advice on my work, and fascinating stories. I could listen to you for hours. I have learned so much from you and still have so much to learn. You have strength of character, and wit, and knowledge that you share with everyone yet force on no one. You embody the things I wish to be.

Thank you for welcoming me into your home and making sure I had everything I needed to feel welcome and comfortable. Thank you for teaching me how to wash and iron my clothes, something I should have learned years ago. Thank you for teaching me how to cook eggs. But most of all, thank you for always being there, after a hard day at work or a terrible run, to just listen to me and smile.

I feel at home here.

Love,  
Christopher



# Twenty Years Old

---

Steven Anderson

The memory of Sandy that stands out as the brightest and most consequential to me was not from the first time I met her as a child. Rather, it's from me at twenty years old trying to figure out how to get my life back together after it had seemingly been derailed. A series of spontaneous lung collapses as a teenager, followed by chronic chest pain due to increasingly invasive surgeries, kept me out of high school and seemed to cast doubt on the future I had imagined for myself. I knew that I wanted to go to college knew that I needed to be intellectually challenged, but was at a loss as to how I could overcome what in my mind was an insufficiently extraordinary academic and extracurricular high school performance. Feeling weakened by chronic pain, I wasn't even sure that I could handle moving away from my hometown in Tennessee to go to college.

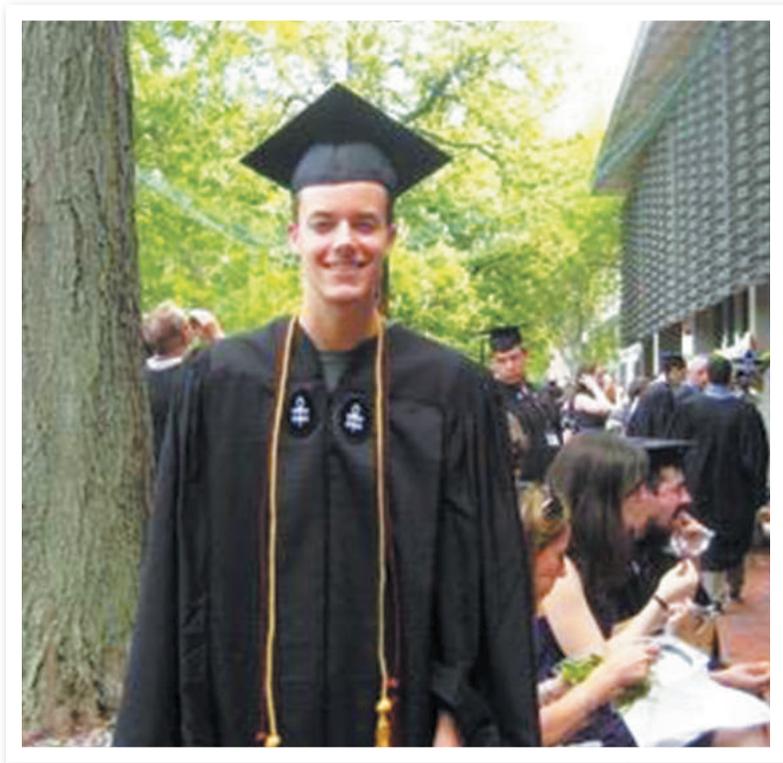
But I had an idea. A few years earlier, I had gone with my grandfather on a road trip up the East Coast to visit relatives. Although we had done this several times when I was a child, this was the first trip I took with him as a teenager. I remember driving a few sections of the trip with my driver's permit. A section in which I drove a winding section of Appalachian Mountain roads caused my grandfather to momentarily question whether this was a good idea. Still, we made it to Boston, and the impressions of the Nayak family that flew past me as a child now lingered as a teenager. The openness of the Belmont household that Sandy and Ranganath led the closeness of the family, friends, and visitors that continuously streamed through that house suddenly struck me as something extraordinary. In the years that followed that trip, I kept thinking about it at stray times. When it came time to figure out how to get my life back on track, feeling already derailed at twenty years old, I took a chance and emailed Sandy.

What to me felt like a huge request was met with matter-of-fact delight and planning. With that email and Sandy's excited and helpful response, I had a plan to move forward. I didn't know what I would do once I got to Boston, but I was hopeful that I could figure it out. Those first few weeks in the summer of 2007, after I drove up to Boston with my mother, were a constant stream of new experiences.

When I told Sandy that I needed to enroll in a college program so that I could maintain my health insurance coverage (vital given my recent health problems and required in a pre-Affordable Care Act landscape), she mentioned that Harvard had a continuing education program, Harvard Extension School. Attending classes in the evening and working at a Harvard Square ice cream shop during the day, I gradually began to feel that the train that had been fully derailed in my teenage years had been tentatively righted. The entire time, Sandy, Ranganath, Lakshmi, Deyne, Wendy, and the entire Belmont family and friends supported me, listened to me, fed me, and provided a structure and support system.

The support, actionable advice, and especially the calm but warm demeanor that Sandy provided in those crucial first few months, and then years, cut through the fog of uncertainty (and opioids) that challenged this period of my life. In time, I started to see a path forward. I became more confident that I would finish college, that my lungs would not collapse again, that the opioids would no longer be necessary, that the family ties that I had made at Belmont would persist.

In time and with gratitude to Sandy, each of these came to pass. College became graduate school, and then postdoc, and then a career that has meaning for me. Lungs remained in place. Chronic pain subsided. And the family ties that were restarted in earnest at twenty years old grew deeper, ushered in from the start by Sandy's always calming, always practical, always helpful guidance.



# Puzzles and Pets

Lakshmi Nayak

Mom liked working on the occasional jigsaw puzzle, bit by bit over days, even better if with other people. And though she didn't think of herself as a pet person, she had good relationships with all of our pets—Tinker, Menaka, Ariel, Penny, Tigger (foster cat), and Agnes.

When travelling to the Cape, Mom would sometimes stop at a McDonald's and get two hamburgers—one for Penny and one for herself. And Penny wouldn't let Mom use the vacuum cleaner without first getting a little vacuum grooming!



Agnes adored Mom. In these later years, Agnes spent lots of time with Mom on the couch as she recovered from heart or knee surgery. Agnes developed a ritual of “escorting” Mom up the stairs at bedtime, running ahead when she saw Mom getting up, and waiting on a step halfway up.

Here she is tucked up against Mom, grooming Mom's hair and herself, while Mom pieces together a beautiful wooden puzzle.



# Depth of Knowledge

---

Santosh Shenoy

I first came into contact with Sandy Mai and Ranganath Mam during one of their visits to Bangalore, when I was eleven or twelve. They were introduced to me as the brother- and sister-in-law of Mayakka!

I had the opportunity to spend a few weekends with them at my grandparents' house. In the evenings, we would gather in the living room with a beverage and some snacks, typically roasted peanuts and cashews, and the five of us would play a crossword.

What stood out to me most upon first meeting Sandy Mai was her wealth of knowledge, a sentiment shared by anyone who has had the pleasure of conversing with her. My grandfather too was an accomplished repository of knowledge, and as a young boy, I was fortunate enough to be privy to some of the engaging discussions that took place during those few weeks. I was struck by the depth of Sandy Mai's understanding and impressed by the fact that there was someone who could rival my grandfather in terms of general knowledge. I have a vivid memory of an animated conversation about Indic religions, during which my grandfather brought out a book on the subject. After reading several chapters, Sandy Mai was so impressed that she was told to keep the book!

That visit also unveiled to us a fascinating world of Sandy Mai's travels throughout India. In the subsequent years, whenever I would voice complaints about the difficulties of road and train travel in India, my mother would evoke the example of Sandy Mai from America, who not only tolerated but relished her experiences travelling by third-class train in India.

Their visit was a truly delightful experience, and Sandy Mai was kind enough to gift me a charming little beetle pocket watch, which I still treasure to this day.

Nearly two decades after our initial meeting, I moved to Boston to pursue my master's degree. Over the years, I had heard many captivating tales from relatives in India about the Belmont Nayak household and their famed open house and student-hosting program. I discovered that 12 Orchard Street was every bit as enchanting as I had imagined it to be. Sandy Mai, Ranganath Mam, and Lakshmi welcomed me with open arms into their home, lives, and hearts, introducing me to their immediate family and the vast network of friends that make up the Belmont Nayak family. When the COVID-19 pandemic hit, they said I could come and live with them at 12 Orchard Street instead of staying cooped up with three housemates in a tiny Fenway apartment. The warmth, love, and kindness that I received from them made me feel instantly at home.

I quickly re-experienced Sandy Mai's encyclopedic knowledge, and sitting at her usual spot at the kitchen table, she would often regale us with stories and information on topics such as family, history, science, archaeology, religion, and more. It would be much easier to list the few subjects that she didn't speak about than to enumerate all the ones she did. I began referring to her as Sandypedia! Given my particularly strong interest in history, I was completely absorbed as she meticulously recounted the intricacies of European and

Christian histories. I also thoroughly enjoyed her recounting of family tales, particularly those from before my birth, revolving around my beloved grandparents.

She had a way of making even the most mundane stories seem like thrilling tales, adapting facial expressions and tones to suit the nuances of each narrative. I came to appreciate her exceptional listening skills and wise counsel. I was (and still am) very fortunate to bear witness to the Nayak household's well-known and admirable willingness to extend assistance to anyone in need, upholding a decades-long tradition of offering a young student from the other side of the world a warm, welcoming and loving home-away-from-home, even amid the enormous challenges posed during a global pandemic.

Although I only had the privilege of knowing Sandy Mai for eleven months (as an adult), I am grateful for the time that I was able to spend in her company. As she was being taken into surgery on that fateful day in December of 2021, she reminded Lakshmi to inform me that she wished for me to have a wonderful visit to India, which was scheduled to start in two days. She had gifted me a Bananagrams set for my birthday the previous month, with the hope that I would play it with my parents during my visit. She was truly one of the kindest, friendliest, and most caring individuals I have ever had the pleasure of meeting.

I miss playing Bananagrams and Scrabble with her, where I drove her up the wall with my insistence on making only long words or using uncommon words ending with *er* (like *prover*—the one who proves!), as well as her presence at the kitchen table of 12 Orchard Street. I miss Agnes the cat's nightly ritual of sitting at the bottom of the stairs after dinner, deliberately blocking her path. I miss her scrumptious chocolate sauce, delectable family-recipe chocolate zucchini cake, and renowned cowboy cookies, which I now proudly continue her legacy as the cowboy cookie maker at 12 Orchard Street. While they may not be as good as hers, I believe that I would have made her proud with my efforts.

I miss our shared enthusiasm for piecing together 1000+-piece puzzles. One particularly poignant memory I have is of us starting a puzzle (sent by Deepa) during what turned out to be the final two weeks of her life. Although we were able to complete most of it together, I was left to finish it on my own after her passing. The experience was both beautiful and heart-wrenching.

There are countless other things that I will miss, but I take comfort in the fact that her values and ideals continue to live on in all of us, guiding us through life's journey.



*Cedarholm, summer 2021*  
*Visible around the table are Edie, Santosh, Sandy, Leo, Jack*

## “I need a hug”

---

Marian Wentworth

That is what I said to Sandy in early 2021 on the phone in a studio apartment in North Providence where my brother and I were staying for a few months as we tried to work in between shifts taking care of our mother a few blocks away. Our mother was dying slowly and painfully and required twenty-four-hour care. It was physically and emotionally grueling for both of us. Sandy knew that.

“I’ll come,” she said. I shouldn’t have asked her. She was barely twice vaccinated. Her knee—and a few other joints—were causing her pain. She had had some heart trouble. And honestly, I never felt that she was much of a hugger—at least not physically. But I knew she would come. She mentioned something about a rescheduled doctor’s appointment and that the drive was basically an hour as if she was practically in the neighborhood anyway, and I was doing a favor giving her something to do. And come she did.

With a bad knee, she walked slowly down a block-long hallway to our crazy little studio. She had a baggie of her cowboy cookies in her coat pocket. We opened the windows as another safeguard against COVID and had coffee and chatted for about an hour. Then I walked her back to her car, collected a few more hugs, and hoped she got home safely. The calm that my brother and I felt as she arrived and for several hours thereafter was palpable. It’s as if a part of Orchard Street was with us. It made all the difference.

Sandy has been there for me so many times and for so many years. She rescued me decades ago when I was unexpectedly evicted from a summer sublet. I was given a few hours to find a place to live and a place for all my stuff and the stuff of my three out-of-town roommates. There she was with that Toyota minivan. We figured it out. We drove all the stuff to the WHRB radio station in the basement of Sander’s Theatre and I and my cat, Narungi, stayed with the Nayaks until school started.

She was always ready with a cup of tea when I found myself emotionally exhausted from trying too hard and too long to be a grown-up. I did my laundry in her basement for four years. She listened to all the fights with my mother and marveled at my luck in finding my husband and raising two amazing girls. Sandy and Ranganath have always felt like a third set of grandparents to my girls. They have been there for so many of us through the years—providing housing, clothes, food (or Ranganath’s food), stories, and a no-nonsense attitude that made us feel like we might not be having the best experience right now, but we will figure it out.



*Prairie and Mercedes playing Memory with Sandy and Ranganath, in Belmont*



*Mercedes and Prairie chatting with Sandy as she costumes, at Penny Lane*

The year that Prairie was applying for colleges, Sandy and Ranganath came down to Pennsylvania to visit and to see a performance of *Nutcracker* in which both Prairie and Mercedes performed. The day they arrived was the day that Prairie received an acceptance letter for early admission to Swarthmore. Prairie was over-the-moon thrilled, of course. Then Sandy pulled out a book, a biography of a past Swarthmore president, the manuscript of which her mother, Betsy, had typed while working as an assistant. Prairie was impressed.

I asked Sandy what she would have done if Prairie had not gotten accepted. “I would have left it in the car, of course.” That’s Sandy, nurturer, rescuer, supporter.

Beyond life’s dramas, Sandy and I shared a love of mysteries, of sewing, crocheting, and nearly anything having to do with textiles. I occasionally called her with interesting problems when working on ballet costumes, and she would show me her costume challenges or successes whenever I was in town. We discussed religions, cultures, and so many, many things. It is impossible to boil nearly forty years of love into a short piece. I won’t even try. I am so very grateful to have had her in my life, but right now, I need a hug.



*Marian’s wedding, 1993: Chitra Nayak & Dipendra Nigam, Lakshmi, Anand, and Maya, Howard & Betsy Tompkins, Sandy & Ranganath surround Marian & David.*

## Nils and Casey's Wedding, Cedarholm 2018



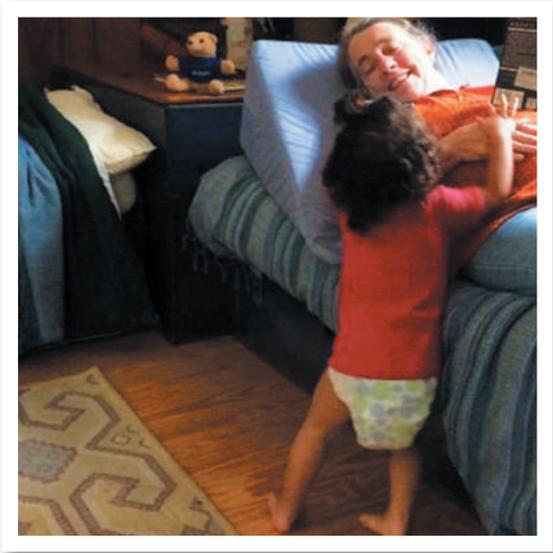
*Back row: Lisa Graustein, Anand, Ranganath, David, Eva, Casey, Nils,  
Jim Klinkenberg, Steven (Randy), Heidi holding Ayla, George  
Middle row: Deyne, Sandy, Kathie, Vicki, Wendy, Polly, Sarah, Juliet, Lakshmi, Tina  
Front row: Richard, Lela, Edie, Jim Connor, Margo, Jack, Leo, Isaiah, Milo, Maya, Asha*

# “Lela! Edie! Jim! Margo!”

Lela Meadow-Conner

I can't even remember when it dawned on me that every time I'd see Sandy for the first time on a trip home, the first thing we would hear was a joyous “LELA! EDIE! JIM! MARGO!” She would exclaim our names with a twinkle that radiated from her eyes and across her face. I did not often receive Sandy's affection in a traditionally physical form, but it was this authentic greeting that remains one of the warmest sentiments of my lifetime.

I recognize this familiar and tender salutation in the way Lakshmi, Anand, and Maya now (and have always) greeted my family, and I strive to make it a practice in my own life. It's a loving reminder of just how much it means to acknowledge a person's presence and show your appreciation for having them in your life.



*Sandy and Margo, Penny Lane*



*Deyne, Sandy, and Lela playing  
Colorku at Cedarholm*

# A Special Kind of Grace

Polly Fiveash

Sandy's presence in the room had a special kind of grace and force. She was simultaneously so acutely intelligent and observant, while also being reserved, controlled, and quiet. This gave her presence power and meant that her words carried weight and wisdom. This was especially vivid when I was pregnant and then when I was a new mother; I came to feel deeply supported and accepted by her. The support she offered was partly concrete—she helped take care of her grandchildren and of me in many practical, day-to-day ways. But the feeling of support also came from the way that she valued child-rearing and, more generally, held respect for women and the many roles of power and nurturing that they take on within their families and beyond. That influenced me deeply. She encouraged me and made me feel like I was doing a good job as a mom! That meant so much to me.

Her love for Anand was so palpable. I remember feeling that.

I often spent time with Sandy early in the morning in Belmont, before other people were up. Sitting at the kitchen table with our coffee and crunching on a piece of toast, slowly waking up together, speaking a little bit but mostly quiet, reading the paper, doing a sudoku. Her presence at those times felt warm, solid, and imperturbable.

Sandy was busy and industrious, and yet she also knew how to put her feet up and just read a good book. She'd sometimes reread favorite books multiple times, something I also love to do. But I was shocked when I learned that she liked to read the ending first!

I see her crouched on the driveway at the cape in her sunhat, weeding. I see the curve of her toes in her sandals and the color of her long braid against her caftan. I see the sparkle in her eye when she told old stories, and hear the cadence of her voice when she came to some well-known punch line. I smell the chocolate zucchini cake as it cools on racks on the counter. I feel her hug when she welcomed me on arrival (nice to hug someone just my height), and the cheerful way she said hello.

She was an anchor for me and will continue to be.



*Asha, Sandy, Leo, Polly*

# I Needed Cookies

George Langford

At some point, Sandy decided that I needed cookies. Her cowboy cookie recipe has of course been widely praised by all and the brass cookie pot in the dining room is well known. Upon arrival in Belmont through the back door, it has always been my first stop after greeting whoever is in the kitchen. Stash the car keys in the key dish, go find the brass pot in hopes of cowboy cookies. Sandy of course noticed this early on in my infiltration of the Nayak family, and soon she was surreptitiously squirreling bags of these cookies into my jacket pockets every time I saw her.



Entering this family as Maya's partner was so smooth and also a little daunting. I was welcomed from the start, but with so many characters swirling around, it was difficult to remember names or, better yet, feel like I was being remembered. But maybe that made things easier as the New Boyfriend. Anyhow, Sandy was the early adopter.

It was the fall of 2005. Maya and I were still pretty new to each other and had fled Providence for a couple of days at Penny Lane. One morning, we heard an unexpected car come down the driveway. Maya rose quickly and welcomed Sandy—who may or may not have known anyone would be there, and after a few beats, I shyly emerged from Nani and Grandpop's room and joined them at the dining table. Our introduction was a surprise for both of us, but Sandy didn't bat an eye. From our very first conversation, I felt wholeheartedly welcome, drawn in, and permanent.

There was a thread tied to that morning, and every time she'd sneak those cookies into my possession over the years, it was like a continuation of that thread. Here was a little secret. Here was a little reminder of her love and appreciation. She was thinking of me, and she had eyes on me in the family swirl and she was happy I was a part of it.



*Visiting with Babbi Akka, Bangalore, 2015*



*Listening to the storyteller*

# Ode to Adi

Asha Langford

---

Adi is the smell of freshly baked cookies.

Adi is a bundling warm hug.

Adi is a storyteller of infinite stories.

Adi is a ray of sunshine falling upon her ripe cherry tomatoes in the backyard.

I see her in the dining room, sewing on the buttons I picked for my stocking,

I see her in the kitchen, cooling cookies on the countertop.

I hear her singing lullabies to me late into the night on Christmas Eve.

I see her crocheting shawls upon shawls upon shawls for her loved ones.





# Excursions with Adi

Leo Nayak

When we were anywhere with her, Adi would always find a way to include the younger cousins, like going to the science museum with us or even just making hot cocoa for us (in the middle of the summer).

I particularly remember the day when Adi took us to see the USS *Constitution*—the old navy ship in Boston Harbor. It was so amazing going there, seeing all of the masts and rigging still standing after nearly 230 years. I saw the most gigantic rope ever!

We were all excited to be there—Adi most of all. I remember how she was walking with us through the little museum beside the boat, answering our questions and telling us about the history of the ship.

However, that's only one of the times Adi took us somewhere. I can also remember the many times she took us to the Museum of Science in Boston because everybody else was walking around Clay Pit Pond and we had nothing to do. (The real reason I wanted to go was the space shuttle.)

Another place she loved to take us was the Museum of Natural History in Brewster. We would walk around inside for a little while, looking around at the various exhibits on the top floor, but eventually we would always go down to the aquarium. There, we would go to the touch pool and stand there with our hands in the water, looking at the starfish and hermit crabs until it was time to go. (Unfortunately, the touch pool closed down in the last few years because the oil on the hands of the kids was bad for the animals.)



*Leo, Asha, and Adi (Sandy) at the touch pool, now a no-touch pool*

Which brings me to Cape Cod. In the summer, we always go there once or twice. We've been there so many times that it almost feels like another home, and I know that it was one of Adi's favorite places. The minute we got there, I and the other cousins wanted to swim in the pond or go to Nauset beach after which we knew that Adi would make us hot cocoa.

All of these things show us how willing Adi was to let the kids join in, and how much she loved us. Whenever we were bored or tired, she would always let us help her make cookies, or tell us a story to try and cheer us up. I will never forget the little things she would do every day we were with her to make us kids happy.



*Mom recalled Anamma hinting to her, early on, “Mangalsutras are good for babies to teeth on.” Many babies and toddlers loved playing with her mangalsutra in her arms, as Leo shows here.*



*Peeling—and eating—pomegranate*



*Mumbai, India, 2017: Polly, Malu, Shirish, Gautam, Anand Sandy, Leo, Jack (Ranganath is taking the photo)*



# Someone to Look Up To

Jack Nayak

It's always great, especially as a small child, to have someone to look up to. Adi was just that.

There were so many things which I admired about her when I was growing up, like the way her eyes would light up and her speaking would quicken every time she started to tell a story about my dad's childhood. Like the way she would always make sure that I knew when she was making cookies because she knew how much I loved to help. After we were done, she would also make sure I got my fair share of cookies.

When I would wake up in the morning at the Belmont house, I was usually the first up. But I always knew that if I went downstairs to the kitchen table, I would find Adi sitting there, ready to say good morning. Her presence was always a positive one, and I will forever miss having that positive, helpful, smart, and kind person in my life.



*The Cedarholm kitchen, circa 2007: Lakshmi, Grandpop (Howard),  
Sandy with Jack; Eric Yablonowitz, Liza Atreya, Anand Atreya*



*With Akka (Lakshmi) and Adi in Belmont*



*Making cookies with Adi at Penny Lane*



*Watching Adi prepare the spinning angel candle holder*



*Hawaii! 2019*



*Happy Birthday to Akka, 2014*



*Margo, Parrot Leo, Asha, Edie, and Jack, summer 2017—all costumed by Sandy*



*Is Sammy carrying wood with one hand? Summer 2021*



*Carrom! Adi, just out of the picture, is an amused audience for Asha, Leo, Jack, Kabir, and Sammy, summer 2021*



*Summer 2021, at Hangar B, on the Cape: Lakshmi, Sandy, Jack, Leo, Asha, and Sameer. The kids' vaccines weren't available yet, so we ate outside. We had no competition for seats!*

# Books and Laughter

---

Doris Jackson

I got to know Sandy late in life because her son Anand was the boyfriend and then husband of my stepdaughter Polly. Later, we were fortunate to share two grandsons, and so became part of one another's extended family.

I saw Sandy as combining two very strong elements in her character; in one aspect she was the assured matriarch, the dispenser of practical wisdom as well as wide-ranging knowledge. On the other hand, she seemed to me to retain, to an extraordinary degree, the outlook of a child. Some interactions that I enjoyed very much came from this latter quality. I will try to tell them, though they may seem very simple.

Once, when Sandy and Ranganath were at my house, I had found, at a used bookstore, a children's book I had never seen by Rumer Godden, an author I knew that Sandy also admired. When I was about to be busy in the kitchen and the others had gone for a walk, I showed the book to Sandy—she too had never seen it, although we both probably thought we had read all of Rumer Godden by then. She fell on the book with a cry of fascination, opened it, and was completely absorbed for the next half hour. I felt absurdly pleased that I had found something she would enjoy, and that she made herself at home in my living room while I cooked.

The other memory comes from a visit to Polly and Anand's house when Jack and Leo were small. I think the parents were out somewhere, and my husband Michael was engaging in a game with the children, with his trademark wit and silliness coming more and more into play. As I recall, he was going around the room and making up jokes for each person. I'm not sure Sandy had ever seen that side of Michael, and I became aware that she started to laugh with a sort of surprised pleasure and to respond to the game the same unself-conscious way the kids were responding. I so enjoyed that moment and feel happy to have it in memory.

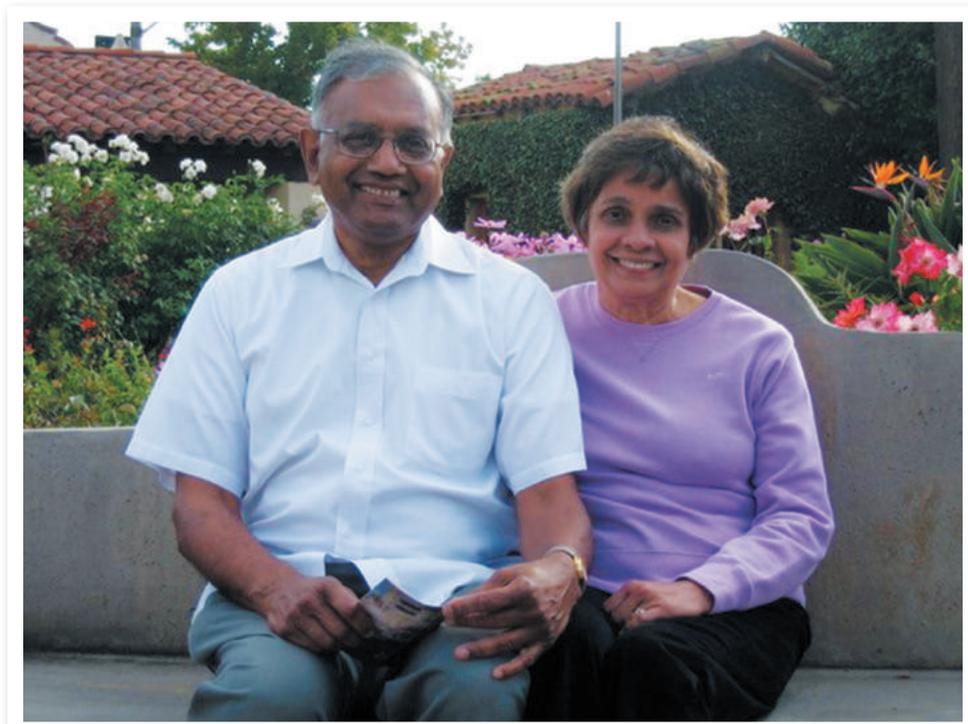
# Bonding Over Coffee and Chocolate Cake

Shobha Nayak

I am Shobha, Sandy's sister-in-law. My last memories of Sandy are from my visit to Boston in the summer of 2018. I wanted to visit some of the museums in Boston that I had not seen, and Sandy kindly offered to take me and do the driving.

The first museum we visited was the Isabella Stuart Gardner Museum. This is a small museum with a stunning courtyard, architecture, and some great art. Sandy loved this museum. After the visit, I suggested we have coffee and dessert in the museum restaurant. We talked about family, children, our grandchildren, and the places we had travelled to recently. The dessert was a delicious dark-chocolate cake. I call it bonding over coffee and chocolate cake. The talk turned to Sandy's chocolate cake, which I have had so many times. If someone in the family was having a birthday, there was always chocolate cake. It amazed me how quickly she could whip up that cake. Several cups of coffee later, we realized that we were the only ones in the restaurant and the staff was waiting for us to leave. The visit to this museum will always be special to me.

The next day we went to the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. After the visit, we headed to the gift shop. Sandy and I both knew that museum gift shops were great for getting some unique gifts for our grandchildren. I finished my shopping and waited for Sandy outside the gift shop. Sandy came out with a big bag on her arm. She smiled at me and lifted the bag up. I understood that she had found some treasures for her grandchildren and had a good shopping day. This is my last memory of Sandy, smiling and happy.



*Narayan and Shobha*

# Listening to a Tale

Heena Mutha and Mike Hughes

We are heartbroken about losing Sandy. She welcomed us into the Nayak home with open arms, great stories, and an unmatched amount of generosity. We will always cherish the garlands she made for us for our wedding, the alterations she made for my ball gown to attend my work gala, and the many fires she built for us on the Cape on chilly winter mornings.



*Getting married with the garlands  
that Sandy made, 2015*



*At the gala in the dress that Sandy altered*

We found a photo from your fiftieth wedding anniversary—a day filled with celebration and great joy, and many gathered around Sandy to hear the tale of all the different cake themes to celebrate the occasion. When we think of Sandy, we'll always think of being at a table, listening to a tale of growing up in the wide-open West, a story of driving a newborn Anand around Pune, or how the Belmont women's book club is strategizing next year's book selection. We're so sorry that she won't get to meet our soon-to-be-born son and that he won't get to hear those tales directly from her, but we'll pass them on just the same.



*Sandy and  
Ranganath's  
50th  
wedding  
anniversary,  
2018*



# A Twinkle in Her Eyes

Sujatha Mizar

I think of Sandy Mai every day when I knit, quilt, read, hear birdsong, listen to a story . . . the list goes on. Sandy Mai was truly someone who could make you feel welcome and accepted. She was the consummate narrator of interesting stories and often funny anecdotes. There was never a dull moment conversing with her. She always made time to talk to everyone, regardless of their age or interests.



*When Sujatha's sister, Sunita, visited from abroad, 2017  
Sandy, Sunita, Pete, Sujatha, Sid, Siyona surround Ranganath.*

She was one of the most down-to-earth, loving, thoughtful, creative, and insightful people I've ever had the good fortune to spend time with.

I have so many fond memories of Sandy Mai—so many that sometimes a hidden memory suddenly surfaces at the most unexpected of times and it makes me smile and then immediately miss her so much!

I remember the two of us exchanging notes about a book we had both loved. The book was about a shepherd's life in the Lake District of northern England. Sandy Mai told me that she had finished the book and promptly started reading it again. This inspired me to reread the book as well!

During the early parts of the COVID pandemic, Sandy Mai decided to learn how to knit. I knew she was an expert crocheter, but I was completely surprised by the speed at which she learnt to knit! She watched me knit for a few minutes and then calmly proceeded to take it from there. When I expressed how impressed I was with how fast she had picked it up, she humbly attributed it to my teaching. She always found a way to make others comfortable.



We had many conversations about crafting, sewing, fabric, yarn, crochet, knitting, birds, family stories, etc. Talking to Sandy Mai made me think deeply about things and also made me want to do better—always! She had such a twinkle in her eyes when she spoke about crafting. It was infectious. I'm more aware of the reuse of fabric and yarn because of all the tips Sandy Mai shared with me.

One of my dearest memories of Sandy Mai was our visit to Penny Lane after her knee surgery in November 2021. We had a short weekend visit, and Sandy Mai and I sat together and knit away an entire wonderful morning. We settled into this comforting silence, and all I could hear was the click-clack of our needles and the gladness of my heart from just being there and sharing this moment with Sandy Mai.

Sandy Mai has made such an impact on so many lives. Her memories will be a blessing to so many of us.

# A Much-Admired Friend

Shreedhar Kanetkar

*A letter to Gene Fax, December 2022*

Lakshmi had told us that Sandy was going in for surgery. It was expected to be a long operation—10 to 12 hours. That was all we knew until Friday night here in India. Suchitra often goes for a walk before bedtime. I am usually fast asleep by the time she returns. This time, she woke me up. Lakshmi was on the phone. By the time I could gather my wits, the call was over. Despite being at the eye of the storm—we could hear her tell someone, “I’m speaking to my Indian brother and sister”—Lakshmi managed to convey that the odds had not been good going in (50/50), that Sandy was as prepared as anyone could be and that she had had a chance to talk to children and grandchildren.

It took us a long time to get to sleep that night. We spent most of it alternating between silence and reminiscences. We knew there were many to whom we would have to convey the news, including both sets of parents: mine knew Sandy from the 1970s when she was a neighbour in Poona, India; Suchitra’s knew her from the 2000s (when we got married), even though they are distantly related to Ranganath. One thing made it easier to come to terms with the news: unlike couples where one partner knew Sandy and the other did not, both Suchitra and I had memories that went back a long time, many of which were shared.

Over the next few days, we got in touch with others who were equally bereft. Slowly, facts trickled in. We still have only a fragmentary picture, but it is starting to make a little sense. I had been wondering about the surgery itself and why it failed. The gist of it seems to be that the tissue of the aorta was simply too fragile to hold the stitches that would be needed to fix the problem. It also became clear that postoperative recovery would have been difficult under any circumstances. There seems to have been a material probability that Sandy’s physical well-being would have been impaired even if the surgery was successful, if not right away, then eventually.

From what we have been able to piece together, Sandy herself did not suffer unduly. In my mind’s eye, I picture her allaying the concerns of those around her, going to sleep under anesthesia, and just not waking up again.

This is the point at which I find myself face-to-face with sorrow.

My memories of the 1970s and 1980s are punctuated by annual visits when the Nayaks would stay with us, first four and then five intrepid travelers, always with suitcases marked “N” to make them easy to pick out at the airport, containing treasures guaranteed to delight a bookish lad—everything from the Boy Scout handbook to *The Timetables of History*. Even our tastes in detective fiction were influenced by Sandy’s fondness for Dorothy Sayers and her aristocratic sleuth, Lord Peter Wimsey.

My first few years in America were spent in California, so I didn’t see much of the Nayaks. But then came the turn of events that accounts entirely for this message to you. I moved from California to Texas and graduated with no clear idea of what to do next. Sandy, who doubtless thought it was time I entered gainful employment, carried my résumé to Sherry. She gave it to Ralph. He passed it along to you. You took a chance.

Something you may not know is that from the time I started working to the time I had earned enough to buy a secondhand Toyota Tercel from a mathematician at UMass Dartmouth, Sandy drove me to work every morning. There was no easy way to get from 12 Orchard Street in Belmont to 135 Beaver Street in Waltham. She would drop me off in the morning. I would walk back in the evening, listening to Indian classical music on my Walkman. In all those days, I remember only one occasion on which she had something else to do and asked Lakshmi to step in for her. Looking back, those were extraordinary days. I was seeing leaves change colour for the first time in my life. Other than that, I don't think there was much Sandy and I talked about in the car. It was a very companionable time. Now, in retrospect, I see it as a time when an honorary aunt became a much-admired friend.

If work and marriage are milestones in a young life, Sandy was well ahead of me. Suchitra was finishing up at Brandeis when I started working at Cadmus. Once she floated into 12 Orchard Street, it was a matter of time before the pieces fell into place. Only much later did I realise, much to my chagrin, that I was not quite the daring young man on the flying trapeze I would have liked to have been. It took me a while to muster my courage and propose to Suchitra (on Cape Cod, deferred—not to say declined) and propose again (in London, accepted, much to my relief). Through it all, Sandy took a characteristically enlightened interest in proceedings. Once a date was set, she travelled all the way to India, representing all the Nayaks at the wedding. She made an unexpected conquest there: my great-uncle, who was delighted to discover that she knew Allahabad, where he lived and taught music (and without whose enthusiastic tutelage I would know far less of the joys of Indian classical music). Those who travelled back with them on the train from Hyderabad to Poona still remember what a joyful occasion it became, with the entire carriage enjoying his spontaneous renditions of traditional songs—inspired in no small part by his joy at meeting Sandy.

Sandy was as adept at making friends in her blue sari in India as she was in her blue dress in Boston.

My mother, when Suchitra and I went over to convey the news, said, “She was always there.”

It is hard to believe that she is not.



*India, 2011: Ranganath, Sandy, Suchi, Jack, Shreedhar, Anand*



*Sandy at Penny Lane, Cape Cod, USA*

# One Rare Person

---

Ashok Kanetkar

*A letter to Ranganath, December 2021*

Every day, Kimaya comes by herself to our house for breakfast before going to school. This morning, however, both her parents accompanied her, and I could make out from their faces that what they wanted to say was something serious. I, however, did not think it would be so shocking. Sandy's passing away is painful for many reasons. A great woman who had the exceptional knack for helping and keeping together so many people from so many different walks of life, especially the young people, is no more with us.

She was one rare person who took tremendous delight in the happiness of others. I went down memory lane remembering the '70s when we all had such great times in Pune. Those were not the days of the Internet and computers, and she was always there to satisfy my desire to know as much as I could about the U.S. and all things American.

She even once went to great lengths to make cheese fondue just to show me what it was really like. I do not know how, in those days of restrictions in India, she managed to get the wine and the cheese.

Lots of my understanding about U.S. history, I owe to her. I also remember her explaining the ballet *Nutcracker* to me and also prevailing upon me to see the movie *Casablanca* (specifically at the Brattle theater in Cambridge) as they were part of the American tradition.

Well, there are too many things really that are crowding in my mind right now. I even learned from her that one can pack many more things into a bag if one did it in a systematic way. She came all the way from Boston to attend the wedding of Shreedhar and Suchi and even travelled with us on the train from Hyderabad to Pune. Her presence made the occasion doubly grand.

Your loss is too much to bear. A companion of so many years is not there anymore. The mind and the body find out ways to overcome pain, but some remnants of such a loss stay forever. May God give you the strength necessary to face the future without her presence by your side. The departing person is free of all the travails of the world, but a void is left in the lives of those left behind. I think of you and the children and the grandchildren but also of many others who, like me and my family, enjoyed her hospitality and help when they really needed it. I also think of Deyne and the other two sisters. May God give them the strength to withstand the loss.

A great soul is no longer with us! Please accept my condolences!

# She is / She was / She will be

---

Lakshmi Nayak

December 2021

One of the hardest things is referring to her in the past tense.

Was she gone the night she went into surgery—when she went to sleep and didn't have the opportunity to wake up again? That would be Wednesday night, December 8<sup>th</sup>.

Or was she gone the next morning, when the surgeon called to say, "It's not going well?" Or forty-five minutes later, when he called back to say, "We have to stop trying now?" Or about an hour after that, when I got through to him and he said, "We declared her dead one minute ago." "Dead" is a pretty final word. It felt both horribly real and unreal at the same time.

Or was she gone each time that morning or the next day or the next that I gave the news to someone who loved her? She was alive to them until they knew.

Was she finally gone when I washed her clothes that came home from the hospital, and the clothes hanging in her closet? Or a week later, when I changed the sheets on their bed?

How about when she was cremated? That would have been Tuesday morning, December 14. I almost didn't tell people about it—it was scheduled to take place at Mt. Auburn cemetery at 10:00 AM, and only at 9:30 that morning did it occur to me, in the fog in which I was existing, that people might like to know.

But even that didn't seem final enough.

Maybe she was gone each time a package came in for her and she wasn't there to receive it—items that she had taken pleasure in ordering for Christmas, gifts for the grandchildren and surprises for the stockings. She was excited to finally be having stockings for the grown-ups again. I had to play Santa and guess who she would have given things to, beyond the obvious. Beatles? Ultimate Frisbee? That's for Jack. An apron that proclaims, "An apron is a cape worn backwards" I knew was for Leo, and the peacock hair clip had to be Asha, in memory of Hawaii. And so on.

As many people have written or said, they refuse to believe she is not sitting at the kitchen table, dispensing wisdom and stories and calls to action. Who needed Wikipedia when we had her? Linguistics, history, archeology, anthropology, sociology, world travel, religions, family connections, costumes and props, knowledge and skills and wisdom earned through study and practice and lots of living.

For everyone who doesn't live here, in a way she will be alive until they come and find her not here. We've heard from so many that they spent the whole day that they found out, the whole next few days, the following week, talking to and writing back and forth with the people they know who knew her, people they could share memories with.

I know, I know, she lives on, she lives on in our memories, in her stories, her recipes, her gifts both material and intangible, in her ideals and principles mothered and auntied and inspired into us. It's not the same. It's not enough. But it's still a lovely image: people all over the world, all ages, each cherishing a spark of eternal flame that is a bit of her.

And I know, I know I wouldn't wish her back into an unexpectedly and suddenly disastrously fallen-apart body, where the lining of the aorta had separated from the wall of the aorta for an enormous span, about from just above her heart all the way down into a leg. Who would want to come back to at least four weeks of hospitalization with very high risks of stroke and other complications? After the shock, I was angry that that hope had been held out as "success." There had been a 50 percent chance she would come through the operation, and she would have woken up to that?! It still makes me upset to think about it. But that's all water under the bridge, now.

I know she had seventy-six and a half years, more than many people get. And a good life, with complications and challenges, of course. A fifty-three-year marriage still going strong. And in these times, I am also thankful that she did not die in the early stages of the pandemic, when they might not have let us in to see her in the ER to say hello—what we now know was goodbye.

Was there a clue, when I was able to get through to the kids and grandkids and one sister on my phone, patching into the hospital's network since I had no cell reception there in the basement of the hospital, and I heard her tell each of them, "I love you very much"? She wasn't one to use those words in the normal course of events. Her love was expressed in the delighted tone of voice with which she answered the phone if you called, in the way she took care of things for you, in the shoulder available to lean on.

Was there a clue in that she gave me some instructions? I no longer remember the order of them or the specific words, but in general, they were to locate a particular pageant costume if possible, to make sure all the grandkids' gifts were ordered and seen to, to "look after him" (my father, standing on the other side of the bed), and to finish decorating the tree with the grandkids when they arrived.

Finally, almost three weeks later, I woke up on Monday morning (December 27) remembering one more thing she had said to me just before she was wheeled off, that Wednesday evening in the hospital. She brought up one of the stories I had grown up on: when I was about three, and we were living in India, she lost a pair of twins fairly late in pregnancy and ended up with a very serious case of pneumonia. I do have my own memory of that time: standing at a window, watching a car drive down the street, holding someone's hand. I know that my father is in the car and that he is driving to the hospital to see my mother, who is very sick. I know I will be OK because the person holding my hand is projecting a sense of comfort—that person will look after things. (That was either my grandmother or my aunt.) But the story, from her point of view, is that she was sick, she had lost weight, she was deeply depressed and wasn't getting better—when my father brought me in to see her, reminding her that she had me at home to get well for, to look forward to watching grow up. And it worked. It can be hard to resist a very live three-year-old. And as she would go on to say, the other times she had told this story (not this time), eventually she did get better, and a little more than a year later, my healthy and wonderful baby brother was born.

Back in this hospital, a few weeks ago, on hearing this story again I said, "Well, I'm fifty-plus now instead of three, and I'll still be waiting for you to come home!" But now, I wonder, was that story a different reminder?

That as I lie here recovering from COVID-19, not wanting to get up into a world where the reality includes her absence (not to mention everything else going on out there: global warming, pandemic, violence, injustice, politics, etc. etc.)—well, there are all of you to get up for. Even if you are not all cute three-year-olds.

Let us commence.

Her life is a gift for which I am grateful. Let us gather in literal and virtual community, now and over the years, to celebrate the glories and the mysteries of this great gift—through remembering her, honoring her talents and ideas, and also by cherishing and nourishing each other and the connections between us, as she did.

Amen.

# Jazz Piano Piece Composed for Sandy

Engin Ozsahin

January 2023

THE END IS THE BEGINNING  
PIECE FOR S. NAYAK.

Engin Ozsahin  
25.01.2023

G7sus4 E- F G A B<sup>b</sup> B<sup>b</sup> E<sub>3</sub>

Listen to this composition at [www.prnayak.org](http://www.prnayak.org).

# Love and Memory

---

Maya Nayak

January 2023

How does one distill one's mother into words on a page? The body that birthed and nourished you, the first voice you ever heard, the eyes most familiar to you, the arms that taught you what it was to be held? It aches to try.

I always thought of my mother as a sort of public figure, the hub of a well-oiled wheel, a powerful centrifugal force that constantly pulled people to the kitchen table at 12 Orchard Street. And there, over warm drinks and endless treats, she shared so many stories, which she honed and retold in her masterful storytelling style we all so enjoyed. I couldn't tell them better. For now, I prefer recalling her voice, her words, her cadence, her version.

The things I think about most often are the moments in between the stories, the moments that may seem ordinary to anyone else, the still and liminal moments that perpetually linger in my memory.

Like the many hours we spent alone together in cars throughout my childhood as she tirelessly chauffeured me to all my extracurriculars, sitting in silence or listening to musicals or whatever mixtape I was currently obsessed with.

The way she would say my name, with completely different intonations depending on levels of exasperation or delight. Her patient sighs in response to my persistent campaigning (for anything and everything I wanted). The way her hair smelled. The way her hands looked, her veins impossibly blue through her thin, pale skin. The way it felt to sit in her lap as a small child and, later on, as a child bigger than her own mother, who still needed to be held sometimes. What it felt like to play with the end of her braid. What it felt like to watch her tell stories, and what it felt like to watch people fall under her spell.



I hold these gauzy, sensory-based memories so incredibly deep in my heart, happy that they are mine, and whisper them to myself in the midst of the powerful surges of longing that come over me as I learn to live without her.



*Fiftieth wedding anniversary/seventy-third birthday, wearing a wreath made by Maya*

# The Hearth in My Soul

---

Anand Nayak

March 2023

This poem by John O'Donohue speaks truly to my experience since Mom passed. At first it was almost impossible to think of her without suffering. My regrets were many. Life became, indeed, strange and untrustworthy. How could she be gone, whom I had known in every minute of my life? She whose voice, face, way of thinking were infused in my own. I felt, and still feel, her absence as an empty place in my chest.

When You Lose Someone You Love  
by John O'Donohue

When you lose someone you love,  
Your life becomes strange,  
The ground beneath you becomes fragile,  
Your thoughts make your eyes unsure;  
And some dead echo drags your voice down  
Where words have no confidence  
Your heart has grown heavy with loss;  
And though this loss has wounded others too,  
No one knows what has been taken from you  
When the silence of absence deepens.

Flickers of guilt kindle regret  
For all that was left unsaid or undone.

There are days when you wake up happy;  
Again inside the fullness of life,  
Until the moment breaks  
And you are thrown back  
Onto the black tide of loss.  
Days when you have your heart back,  
You are able to function well  
Until in the middle of work or encounter,  
Suddenly with no warning,  
You are ambushed by grief.

It becomes hard to trust yourself.  
All you can depend on now is that  
Sorrow will remain faithful to itself.  
More than you, it knows its way  
And will find the right time

To pull and pull the rope of grief  
Until that coiled hill of tears  
Has reduced to its last drop.

Gradually, you will learn acquaintance  
With the invisible form of your departed;  
And when the work of grief is done,  
The wound of loss will heal  
And you will have learned  
To wean your eyes  
From that gap in the air  
And be able to enter the hearth  
In your soul where your loved one  
Has awaited your return  
All the time.

But the edges around that place have ceased to gnaw and burn as they did at first. My memories have grown more peaceful. Now when I think of her, I mostly see her quick smile and that twinkle in her eye when she was telling one of her many stories. I think of her eagerly and purposefully navigating a Mumbai market street in one of her brightly colored saris. I think of the delighted and un-fakeable smiles on the faces of people who hadn't seen her in years. The genuine, unflagging interest she held for the world and its people. The quality of her listening. The joy and gusto she displayed in countless conversations about history, religion, human folly, brilliance, cowardice, and bravery all rolled into one. How much she loved and took care of her parents, her sisters, my father, and of course her kids and grandchildren.

I know I am getting closer to O'Donohue's "hearth" when I start to think of those things that seem peripheral but were, in fact, the fabric of daily life. That tan coat she used to wear, followed by the blue one. The Toyotas she drove until they literally fell apart. The sweet-and-sour fish she used to make. Her requisite morning cup of coffee. Her waist-length hair. The way her accent would change depending on who she was talking to on the phone.

Sometimes—and this is when I know I'm there—I can hear her singing me to sleep from the depths of my childhood.

My heart glows with the memory of being truly, unconditionally loved by her in ways I am still coming to understand. I will always be grateful.

I love you, Mom.



# Why Do I Love You?

---

Ranganath Nayak

January 2023

At Sandy's and my fortieth wedding anniversary, in 2008, I read out a piece I had written, titled *Why Do I Love You?*

## **Why Do I Love You?**

Many years ago, we went to the wedding of one of our hostesses, a young woman from Malaysia who was a student at MIT. The wedding took place at an evangelical church on Route 2 in Belmont. The pastor was of Southeast Asian origin, and he gave a fascinating sermon on the meaning of the word *love*, distancing it from the romantic concept and tying it to the quotidian acts that denote love, such as calling home regularly when you are traveling, but not always having to say, "I love you" to prove that you do.

I wanted to answer the question "What does it mean when you say you love Sandy?" (Perhaps I am the only person who asks me that question but let that be.)

I decided to answer a different question, but one that is closely related: "Why do you love Sandy?" My answer, "Let me count the whys," follows, with apologies to Elizabeth Barrett Browning.

## **Let me count the whys**

Because you are beautiful, and I like to look at you.

Because you do not create a mess in our bedroom and bathroom with endless bottles of creams and lotions and perfumes and nail polish and other paraphernalia such as I have often seen in movies as well as in other people's bedrooms and bathrooms.

Because you have let me do my work, including my being absent for long periods, without making a fuss.

Because you have tried to keep me free of worry, sometimes going to extremes, by not troubling me with your physical ailments.

Because you are talented and knowledgeable and smart. You are incredible at making costumes. I do not know anyone who has a better and more interesting grasp of history. I do not know anyone who solves day-to-day family problems better. You are a great storyteller, and you seem to have an incredible memory for the details of things that happened a long time ago.

Because you loved and looked after Penny even though she was "my" dog.

Because you were a true friend to my father and my mother and my sister.

Because you remember things about me and my family going back to my early days, including things I did not know and that you do because my mother or father or sister or other relatives told you. You make me feel like a whole person, connected from my past to the present to the future.

Because you help fulfill my dream of an extended family through your endless energy in hosting family and friends, and particularly in looking after your parents.

Because, when at the end of the day, I get into bed and am cold, you wake up enough to snuggle up and warm my back so that I feel like I am in heaven and fall asleep within two minutes.

Because when I think, “What would she think?” I refrain from doing a variety of bad things. Like Jack Nicholson said in the movie *As Good as It Gets*, “You make me want to be a better man.”

My prayer is, “Let this wonderful time, now forty years running, and getting better every year, continue for a long time into the future. It feels good.”

She liked it. At least, she gave me a big hug after I read it out.



*Ranganath and Sandy at their fortieth anniversary party; visible in the back are Michael Fiveash in the doorway, and Doris Jackson holding Jack.*

Sometime in the last two or three years, I asked her to read it again. She did and said that it was good, but I had not listed the thing that she thought was her most important character trait: being truthful. I have thought about that over the years and personally find that the importance and value of truthfulness depends on the circumstances although I certainly do not believe in lying. But we did not discuss our difference of opinion, so I do not know if she had a more nuanced view and what it may have been. And while truthfulness was very important to her, I did not feel that it was an important factor causing me to love her.

Anyway, what she said has made me think every so often, “What would I add or subtract now?”

I would subtract nothing, but I would add the following:

Because of your amazing ability to absorb and remember vast amounts of information in many different fields (religion, history, child development, linguistics, anthropology, archaeology . . .) and then piece it together in interesting ways that create valuable new insights. As an example, consider what Paul Santos wrote in another entry in this book.

Because of your ability to examine complex things and see a way to simplify them. I have seen you examine a tangled skein of wool for a minute or two, and then figure out where to pull in order to unravel it. Or look at our cuckoo clock and figure out the mechanism and how to repair it. Or read what was going on 500, 400, and 300 years ago at different places in the world and see a story of global interplay in the changes.

Because of your down-to-earth quality despite your intellectual brilliance. You would repair the cuckoo clock, make costumes in your basement sewing room, crochet as you listened to conversations, and make wonderful dairy-free chocolate cakes.

Because of your love of children. You told them stories, you cooked with them, you carefully chose gifts that each one would love. At church, you taught them how to act (while Alfa taught them how to sing), and you taught them Why Bad Things Happen to Good People according to different religions.

Because of your amazing creativity, which showed up in the costumes you made, the crocheting you did, the origami creatures you made, the things you taught.

Because of your attitude (as I saw it, you never actually said this) that the reward for your work was the work itself. Thus, you enjoyed teaching kids to act because it was wonderful to see them learn and create a great show six weeks later, not because they went on to become actors. And you planted vegetable gardens because that was enjoyable. It didn't seem to matter to you that bunnies and gophers ate much of the produce, not you and your family. I suspect you thought, “Animals need to eat too,” (which reminds me of your comment to Tuli, “We need buttons too.” Tuli tells that story elsewhere in this book.)

Your simple joy in finding things in the garden—fresh basil, a baby strawberry in our window box outside the kitchen, a couple of cherry tomatoes, berries in the raspberry patch.

Above all, your vast treasury of stories and your ability to match them to the occasion. I am missing that a lot.

That may sound like a lot, but there is a lot to love.

Love,  
Ranganath



*Joking around at Rekha's wedding at Cedarholm*



*Kabir, Sandy, Maya, Ranganath, Anand, Lakshmi, Polly*



*One of the June 9<sup>th</sup> birthday/anniversary celebrations  
Front and middle: Soley, Asha, Emily, Wendy, Sandy, Reginald, Ayan  
Across the back: Jeannie Graustein, Jim Klinkenberg, Michael Seif,  
Eric Yablonowitz, Lydia Seif, and Peter Mattison*



*The once-in-a-lifetime Hawaii family vacation, spring 2019  
Anand, Jack Polly, George, Ranganath, Sandy, Asha, Leo, Maya, Lakshmi*



*Akka Camp, summer 2021, at Penny Lane, Cape Cod  
Ranganath (Ajja), Sandy (Adi), Sameer  
Asha, Leo, Jack, Kabir*

# Excerpt from Sandy's Journal

Sandy Nayak

From *Gitanjali* by Rabindranath Tagore

Feb. 19, 1967

Early in the day it was whispered that we should sail in a boat, only thou and I, and never a soul in the world would know of this pilgrimage into no country and no end.

In that shoreless ocean, at thy silently listening smile my songs would swell in melodies, free as waves, free from all the bondage of words.

Is the time not yet come? Are there works still to do? Lo, the evening has come down upon the shore and in the fading light the seabirds come flying to their nests.

Who knows when the chains will be off, and the boat, like the last glimmer of sunset, vanish into the night?

Tagore wrote it as a song to God. Ranganath gave me the book last fall, and this is our favorite passage. It has so many meanings.



*Looking out to sea from Kathie and Albert's deck on Isle-au-Haut, Maine*

# Appendix

---

Thank You

Index of Contributors

Timeline

Vacations

Videos and Media

Recipes



# Thank You

---

Thank you to all of you who sent in stories, memories, and photos. For someone who didn't like to be photographed, we found a surprising number of photos that let her light shine through!

Thank you, Michael Seif, for digitally cleaning up several of the photos. Your help was invaluable.

Thank you to all of you who loved her, worked with her, talked with her, learned from her. There are countless treasured stories and memories not mentioned or shown here—a lifetime's worth.

If we keep people alive in our hearts and memories after they are gone, then all the people she kept now belong to us as well. Let the stories continue.

# Contributors

In alphabetical order

1. Ajit Sarma	190	40. Gopalkrishna Nayak	118
2. Alfa Radford	269	41. Hans Sachdeva	133
3. Alice Ammon	315	42. Heena Mutha & Mike Hughes	387
4. Anand Nayak	3, 6, 401	43. Henry Doan	354
5. Anand Pai	197	44. Howard & Elizabeth Tompkins	80
6. Ananda Burra	252	45. Issa Mikel	289
7. Aniruddh Patel	194	46. Jack Nayak	379
8. Anne Que	352	47. Jayoo Patwardhan	275
9. Antonia Woods	298	48. Jean-Philippe Deschamps	342
10. Arjun Appadurai	86	49. Jody Lisberger	202
11. Arudra Burra	287	50. John Doan	355
12. Arvind & Liza Atreya	146	51. John Schlorholtz	344
13. Asha Langford	374	52. Judith Lahav	308
14. Ashok Kanetkar	103, 180, 394	53. Julie Goetze	282
15. Audrey Lin	325	54. Jyoti Kanetkar	116
16. Azar Rezaee	333	55. Kate Searle	271
17. Bill Graustein	62	56. Kathie Fiveash	235, 246, 249, 324
18. Billye Toussaint	350	57. Krishna Prabhu	291
19. Carla Mond	188	58. Kristen Kimball	244
20. Carolyn Bishop	124	59. Lakshmi Nayak	3, 135, 164, 276, 305, 361, 395
21. Chitra Nayak	192	60. Lalitha Prabhu	210
22. Chris Arumainayagam	170	61. Lela Meadow-Conner	370
23. Christopher Ong	358	62. Leslie MacIntosh	302
24. Cindy Soule	162	63. Leo Nayak	376
25. Claire Hruby	255	64. Lilia Burtonpatel	357
26. Cristina Jenkner	250	65. Lin Shaw	167
27. Cynthia Freeman	222	66. Lucinda Dhavan	67
28. David Story	337	67. Madhav & Gitanjali Prabhu	290
29. Deyne Meadow	8, 37, 111	68. Malcolm Cross (Uncle Mac)	25
30. Dhamayanthi Pathmanathan	165	69. Malcolm Cross (Cousin Malcom)	51
31. Dilip Gaonkar	87	70. Margot Law	263
32. Doris Jackson	385	71. Marian Wentworth	366
33. Dorothy Gatewood Gelb	45	72. Marieme S. Lo	206
34. Douglas Palmer	189	73. Mariko Findell	270
35. Engin Ozsahin	398	74. Martha Moore	228
36. Eric Yablonowitz	303	75. Maya Chaudhari	316
37. Eva Bergman-Larsson	114	76. Maya Nayak	3, 399
38. Gabriel Stalberg	272	77. Melissa Braaten	341
39. George Langford	372		

78.	Meron Power	273	119.	Sundar Burra	88
79.	Michèle, Bob & Louise Tanner	293	120.	Susan Garau	58
80.	Mike O'Connor	307	121.	Sven Sommerlatte	225
81.	Mythili Prabhu	292	122.	Tuli Patel	198, 200, 242
82.	Nancy Chu	329	123.	Valli Subbiah	320
83.	Nandan Kamath	214	124.	Vasant & Harshita Kamath	331
84.	Nayana Linn	204	125.	Vera Sistenich	330
85.	Neera Burra	101	126.	Vicki Smith	8, 34, 50
86.	Neeti Nair	347	127.	Vivek Rau	318
87.	Nicole Galland	284	128.	Wendy Tompkins	8, 32
88.	Nirmala Ravishankar	314	129.	Zeenat Potia	257
89.	Nirupama Rao	182			
90.	Nitin Patel	176			
91.	Pancho Chang	90			
92.	Pandurang & Mala Nayak	295			
93.	Paul Santos & Anne Stuart	285			
94.	Paula Phipps	209			
95.	Peter Mattison	60			
96.	Polly Fiveash	221, 371			
97.	Rachel Rosenbaum	83			
98.	Ranganath Nayak vii, 75, 84, 91, 122, 177, 259, 404				
99.	Rani Sarma	322			
100.	Reid Whitlock	187			
101.	Rekha Doraiswamy	126, 186			
102.	Rob Whittlesey	346			
103.	Roberta Logan	340			
104.	Robyn Trem	327			
105.	Roger Burtonpatel	356			
106.	Sandeep Kochar & Sylvia Zetterstrand	183			
107.	Sandy Nayak 29, 36, 42, 52, 57, 71, 92, 97, 98, 105, 134, 138, 140, 142, 171, 178, 200, 227, 279, 296, 336, 349, 410, 421, 422, 424				
108.	Santosh Shenoy	363			
109.	Sarah Klinkenberg	219			
110.	Seble Alemu	334			
111.	Sharon Vanderslice	283			
112.	Sherry Jones	278			
113.	Shobha Nayak	386			
114.	Shreedhar Kanetkar	391			
115.	Stephanie Aldrin	301			
116.	Steven Anderson	359			
117.	Suchitra Shenoy	310			
118.	Sujatha Mizar	389			

# A Partial Timeline

---

1945

Sandy born, June 9<sup>th</sup>  
Lives in Media, PA

FDR dies  
WWII ends

1947

First little sister, Deyne, born March 29  
Family moves to Rogers St., Ridley Park, PA

Pakistan and India gain independence  
from Britain. Partition happens.

1948

Second little sister, Wendy, born Sept. 18

1949

Third little sister, Vicki, born Nov. 30

1951

Family moves to 105 Russell St., Ridley Park  
Sandy starts 1<sup>st</sup> grade at Tome St. School

1957

Family moves to 513 Ogden Ave., Swarthmore, PA  
Sandy enters 7<sup>th</sup> grade at Swarthmore Jr. High School  
Sandy plays the cello in high school orchestra.  
She takes lessons with Francis DePasquale, a cellist with the Philadelphia Orchestra.

1960

Family moves to Albuquerque, New Mexico,  
Lives at 4101 Marble Ave.  
Sandy attends Highland High School, does not like it, but loves New Mexico.

1961

Spring: Family drives to Sedona, Arizona, to look at a boarding school called Verde Valley, for Sandy and Deyne, for the following year.  
Summer: Family moves to Bethesda, MD, so Mom can be treated at NIH for a neurological condition.  
Sandy and Deyne attend Verde Valley School in Sedona, Arizona.

1962

Sandy joins her Scout troop from Swarthmore to go to Europe for 8 weeks.  
Sandy interviews at Radcliffe, just after returning from her trip to Europe.

1963

Sandy graduates from Verde Valley School,  
Becomes a freshman at Radcliffe College

1964

Sandy spends the summer working at Hell Gap archaeological site in Wyoming

1966

Sandy works at Hell Gap, Wyoming, and helps with the move to New Mexico, to start the Armijo archaeological site near Albuquerque.

1967

Sandy graduates from Radcliffe

She gets a Fulbright scholarship to teach English in India

Sandy goes to India to spend the academic year at Allahabad University.

Sandy meets Ranganath's family.

1968

Sandy and Ranganath are married on June 9<sup>th</sup>, with a Hindu ceremony held at the Purchase Quaker Meeting House, in Purchase, NY.

They live for three months at Swamy and Roxna's Cambridge apartment at 10 Fernald Drive, then get an apartment at 74 Larch Rd., in Cambridge, MA.

Sandy starts studies at Brandeis University for her master's in anthropology.

1969

Sandy goes to Patzcuaro, Mexico, for fieldwork for her master's thesis. Ranganath joins her there for a month. On the way, back they fly to Chicago and then drive to Kalamazoo, Michigan, for the wedding of Lucinda Nelson and Ravi Dhavan.

1970

They have baby Lakshmi, born on July 14 at the Beth Israel Hospital in Boston, MA

1971

Sandy and Ranganath and Lakshmi move to 21 Standish St., Cambridge.

1972

Visit the Southwest U.S.

1973

Move to 346E Sind Cooperative Housing Society, Aundh, Poona, India

1974

Anand is born on October 20, at the Telang Memorial Nursing Home in Pune, India

1976

Move back to the USA. Live at Cedarholm, in Canton, MA, for three months, then move back into the apartment at 21 Standish St. in Cambridge.

1977

Move to 12 Orchard St. Belmont, MA.

1981

Maya is born January 21 at Beth Israel Hospital, Boston, MA. Sandy recognizes the head nurse, who was the floor nurse the night Lakshmi was born!

# Sandy and Ranganath's Vacations

---

*Usually with as much family as possible*

**Massachusetts:** Many wonderful times on Cape Cod from the late '70s onward, especially at Penny Lane, Brewster (1993–present)

**USA:** Southwest (1972 and 1984), Niagara Falls (1978 or '79). Cross-country drive in 2003, driving 13,500 miles in 9 weeks to visit friends and relatives across the country. Hawaii—Kauai and Maui, with all kids and their families (2019)

**Mexico:** Three times, once with all our kids: Patzcuaro (1969, 1984, 2008), Mexico City (1969, 1984, 2008), Guadalajara (1984)

**India:** Poona, Bombay, Delhi, Orchha, Udaipur, Ranakpur, Bandipur Wildlife Sanctuary, Hyderabad, Udipi, Gangolli, Katapadi, Mangalore, Mahabalipuram, Kerala—many different years

**Italy:** Duino, Venice, Ravenna, Locorotondo, Rome, Florence, (1998, 1999, 2005)

**Japan:** Tokyo, Kyoto (1978)

**Nepal:** Kathmandu, Pokhara (1986)

**Belgium and Netherlands:** Brussels, Bruges (1990s)

**UK:** Five shows in one week in London! (1995?)

**Canada:** Toronto, Montreal (1990s)

**Peru:** Lima, Machu Picchu, Cuzco, Lake Titicaca (2011)

# Videos and Media

---

All of these items are posted at [www.prnayak.org](http://www.prnayak.org).

Awakin.org podcast interview with Sandy and Ranganath

- “Spirit of Service” [2012, March 31]

*Note: The site asks for your email address, to keep out spammers.*

Sandy’s Salons for the Orchard Street Salon Group of 2020 and 2021

- “Religion Across Space and Time” [2020, August 6]
- “Who Were the Magi?” [2020, December 3]

Belmont UU Church Tribute to Sandy

- “Just Because” [created over the winter of 2020–2021]

Sandy’s Talk for the Alliance at the Belmont UU Church

- “Forty Years of Musicals” [2021, September 9]

Online memorial service, hosted by the Belmont UU Church

- Sandy Nayak (1945–2021) [2022, March 19]

Composition by Engin Ozsahin

- Jazz Piano Piece Composed for Sandy [2023, January 25]

# Recipes

---

## Cowboy Cookies

Sandy Nayak

*Recipe received from a friend in the 1970s and adapted over the years*

Preparation:

- Find all ingredients and cookie trays.
  - Flour can be all white or all whole wheat or any combination, and include some wheat germ and/or ground flax seeds. *[Our usual: at least 1 cup white flour, and about 1 Tbs. each of wheat germ and ground flax seeds.]*
  - Let the shortening be at room temperature or soft enough to beat.
- Preheat the oven to 350°F.

Ingredients	Steps
1 cup shortening (2 sticks butter) 1 cup white sugar 1 cup brown sugar	Cream shortening with sugars.
2 eggs 1 tsp. vanilla	Add eggs and vanilla, beat well.
2 cups flour 1 tsp. baking soda ½ tsp. baking powder ½ tsp. salt	Sift flours with baking soda, baking powder + salt. Beat in slowly. If using a hand mixer, clean it now.
2 cups oatmeal (rolled, old-fashioned) 2 cups assorted chocolate chips, dried cranberries, walnuts	Mix in by hand: oats, then the chocolate chips, dried cranberries, and nuts (if using).  Drop on lightly greased cookie sheets. Bake at 350 °F. Time ranges widely.* Transfer promptly to cooling racks.

Note from Lakshmi: I don't recall Mom ever greasing the cookie sheets, but you could, or bake on parchment paper or silicone mats for easier cleanup. \*Baking time will vary widely from ~10–15 minutes, depending on your oven and on the width and thickness of your cookies. Watch for smell and color; the color will vary depending on whether you use any whole wheat flour, and the darkness of your brown sugar.

# Chocolate Cake for Birthdays (and other festivities)

Sandy Nayak

Preparation:

- Find all ingredients
  - Blend zucchini with just enough water so the blades don't clog
  - Let the shortening be at room temperature or soft enough to beat
- Preheat the oven to 350°F.
- Butter and flour the cake pans; Sandy usually used two 8-inch or 9-inch pans; the wider pan just makes a thinner layer.

Ingredients	Steps
2 cups white flour 1½ tsp. baking soda ½ tsp. salt 1½ cups sugar	Sift flour. Re-sift with baking soda, salt, sugar.
3 ounces unsweetened baking chocolate ½ cup butter (1 stick)	Melt the chocolate on stove top or microwave. Beat with the butter. Mix in to the flour.
1½–2 cups blended zucchini 1 tsp. vanilla ½ tsp. baking powder	Slowly mix in the blended zucchini, vanilla, and baking powder.
2–3 eggs, lightly beaten (amount depends on size of eggs and how much blended zucchini you have)	Mix in the beaten eggs for about 2 minutes.
Pour into prepared cake pans. Bake at 350°F for 30–40 minutes. Cool in pans on wire racks for 10 minutes, then turn out onto the racks to finish cooling. Frost and decorate once fully cooled.	

Note from Lakshmi: This started as a devil's food cake from Nani, probably originally from *Joy of Cooking* or *Fannie Farmer*. Then, in the early 1980s, we had dinner one evening with the Nadkarnis—Ravi and Sarah, Maya and Asha and Neela. After we had bitten into the cake, they revealed the surprise ingredient: zucchini! Sarah had grown so many zucchini in her garden that summer that the girls had rebelled and vowed not to eat any more of it. So she put it in cake, and once they got over being tricked, they loved trying it out on visitors, asking the guests to guess the secret ingredient, which no one could.

Sandy started using blended zucchini in place of milk for her cake, and this became our standard recipe for all family birthdays. Lydia often brought over extra zucchini from her abundant garden, which Sandy would blend and freeze in 2-cup increments in Ziploc baggies, ready for cakes at any time of year.

## Wendy's Icing

Ingredients	Steps
3 ounces dark chocolate ¾ cup sugar 2 Tbs. cornstarch	Chop the chocolate and mix well with the sugar and cornstarch.
Boiling water, 1 cup	Add 1 cup <b>boiling</b> water and stir over medium heat until it puds (thickens).
1 pat butter (~1 Tbs.) 1 tsp. vanilla Pinch of salt	Take off heat. Stir in butter, vanilla, salt. Use immediately to frost the cake.

We used to have a thriving patch of black raspberry canes, which only bore fruit for about ten days in early July. We'd freeze any that didn't get eaten the day they were picked, and Sandy would make the frosting recipe twice: once as is with chocolate, and once with a Ziploc snack bag's worth of black raspberries in place of the chocolate. The berry frosting was the filling, gluing the two layers together. The chocolate frosting covered the outside. Delicious.

# CAST-IRON PAN CARE

---

Sandy Nayak

2016

- 1) Cook using vegetable oil.
- 2) Wash and scrub with soap and steel wool or scrubbies and hot water. Nothing will hurt them.
- 3) Dry thoroughly. If you have scrubbed them really hard, then wipe them with vegetable oil on a paper towel.

I have been doing this to my cast-iron pans for fifty years and they get better with use.



