

Let me share a bit about myself. I'm an Indian, born and brought up in Kuwait until the age of 11. My parents moved to Kuwait shortly after my older sister was born, and I grew up there. Luckily, even though I never lived in India, Kuwait had a large Indian community. A quarter of Kuwait's population (according to Google) consists of Indians, which helped me stay connected to my roots. We had quite a few family friends from different parts of India and we got to celebrate various festivals and events together.

Kuwait also had many Indian schools, so I was surrounded by people with similar backgrounds in my school, which sort of gave me an Indian childhood without actually living in India I suppose? Even though I spent my whole life in Kuwait, it was easy for my family to travel to India since it's a Middle Eastern country and it was nearby. I spent a few summer holidays throughout my childhood at my grandparents' house. As I was young and they were quite old, and my parents couldn't make it all the time, I mostly just stayed in their house, eating snacks and watching TV. I'm definitely grateful to my relatives for making those summers enjoyable, but I didn't get to explore India much other than that neighbourhood.

Eventually, I moved to Melbourne just as year 7 began. I moved a year after my sister began university about seven years ago (she's still in uni, and we go together every day). At first, it was all about fitting in, so I stopped taking my 'traditional Indian' lunches to school, stopped wearing a bindi, and just tried to blend in. Honestly, the transition from Kuwait to Australia wasn't too hard for me—it was exciting. Sure, I miss the food and a few family friends, but I loved the idea of moving to a place with so many trees, houses rather than apartments, and less pollution. The thing I was most excited about was living in a house with a garden. Ten-year-old me would not believe that I'm no longer living in an apartment and that our home has both a front and back garden, with flowers blooming all year round!

Before lockdown, we tried to get involved in the local community, but we haven't been very active since then. It's mostly just been my family and me. I do miss the sense of community I had growing up. The local community here feels more distant sometimes, and I miss being around people. There are pros and cons, —fewer people around means fewer people in your business, but also fewer people to connect with and rely on.

Since starting uni, I've been meeting many more people. I've been meeting international students from India as well as second-generation Indians here. Since the start of the year, I've been debating my identity. Initially, I was just defensive, since in school everyone knew everybody. What am I? Am I Australian, since I've lived here for a big chunk of my life and will keep building my life here? Or am I still Indian, even though I've never lived in India? It's something I've thought about a lot. I think I've come to realise that I'm both. I may be too Indian to be fully Aussie and too Aussie to be fully Indian, but I'm a mix of both. I might not be able to read or write in my mother tongue, which is a hit to my pride, but I'm glad I can still speak it. I have memories of my childhood, the TV shows I watched, and the snacks I loved, which I can talk about with other people who have similar backgrounds.

I like being in the middle of both cultures because even if I don't fully belong to one side, I can say that I'm part of both, with pride.