

Our Journey to US Citizenship

By: Rupama Pattrea

Eight years ago, when my husband Biswa and I first came to this beautiful country with our two children, we all had a dream to be a part of America. We knew that this is the place for our children's education and the future of all of us. In the first 2-3 years, we struggled to adjust to this very new environment, but we were able to get our green cards and become lawful permanent residents.

We got our green cards for the family through my husband who applied in a very special category: Persons of Extraordinary Ability. Such individuals can apply for a green card through self-petition, without any sponsorship. Very few selective immigrants are granted lawful permanent resident status under this category, because it is reserved for people who have demonstrated that they are at the very top of their chosen fields. Some examples of the people who are granted green cards under this category include Nobel laureates and Olympic athletes who have achieved great success in their individual field. We were elated when my husband, a professor in engineering, was recognized as one of those few immigrants of exceptional ability.

At the time when my husband was preparing for the green cards we lived in Devon, Pennsylvania. I went to the Tredyffrin Public Library and was a student of the ESL class, as well as a regular volunteer at the library. I received many suggestions and support from the library. Our ESL coordinator, BettyAnn Monash, ESL tutors Anne McAssey and Pat Ellison, and my one-on-one teacher Nora Jenkins, and other library staff offered great support. We will never forget their cooperation, help, and the positive impact they have had in our lives. They were true friends. The library also published the good news of our green cards in their newsletter. We felt very honored.

With that new status of 'lawful permanent resident,' we knew that we would be able to apply for US citizenship after five years. Time passes quickly. Five years have gone by and many changes happened in our lives. We moved from Pennsylvania to Georgia because my husband got a fine job at Georgia Southern University. We became members of our regional library at Statesboro. I did an online librarian assistantship course, started volunteering at the library, and am doing an online translation job. My son graduated from the high school and joined Virginia Tech. My elementary school aged daughter became a middle-schooler and we bought our first house. We applied for US citizenship and our applications were approved. We are now US citizens!

The citizenship test was held in Atlanta. There are three parts of the citizenship test – an interview, a reading test, and a writing test. When the immigration officer was satisfied with my answers, she stopped asking the questions and said "You passed the test".

When I next saw my husband, he had a smiling face. Immediately, I understood that he also completed the test with a positive outcome. Within a few minutes my son came out smiling too. We were bursting with joy!

The last part of the process was the oath-taking ceremony. Before taking the oath, we surrendered our green cards and after the ceremony was over we received our citizenship certificates. That was the most wonderful moment in our lives!

This is the story of our journey to live in this country, from 'alien' permanent residents to United States citizens. There were many interesting moments and twists inside the process of getting our citizenship. One particularly interesting part was that our interview day coincided with my birthday. It was May 11, 2015. I got my first birthday wish from the lady officer, who was conducting my interview.

Furthermore, every candidate got a number for the interview. My husband's number was 17. The current number was 8, but one immigration officer came, called for number 17, and invited my husband for the interview. Other people were bit surprised but the officer explained others will be called when the respective officers are ready. It seems each officer is assigned with some specific applications and that officer had reviewed my husband's application already. Biswa went before many other applicants and finished his interview very quickly. Biswa told me later that the immigration officer was very nice and asked him about his academic experience indicating that the officer was aware of the special category of his green card application.

Thirdly, wrong information was written on my son's citizenship certificate. Instead of writing the nationality of my son as Indian, it was written Oman as he was born in Muscat, Oman. But as soon as it was brought to the attention of the immigration officer who was in the oath ceremony, my son received the citizenship certificate with his correct information.

We don't have any picture of this memorable event. We took our camera but unfortunately we left it in our car. When the oath ceremony started and we asked our daughter to take some pictures, we became aware of this blunder. Although we don't have any picture with the citizenship certificates for the rights of voting in all elections, we considered ourselves as proud citizens of the United State of America.

Our story is not finished yet. There is one more twist, which is last but not the least. The Tredyffrin Public Library has requested that we write about this news for their website. So, on behalf of my family, I wrote this article for all the readers. Thank you so very much for giving us the opportunity to share our experience with all of you.