

When an American Citizen Cannot Travel Home to America

Oct. 6, 2015

By Erika Agbi

BOSTON – Even though she was, and still is, an American citizen, she could not enter her home country at the age of two, because she was travelling with her mother, who was not a citizen of the United States. She got stuck overseas for six months.



Karishma B. Desai in 2015. Photo by Olya Yordanyan.

Karishma B. Desai was born in 1990 in Los Angeles to Indian immigrant parents, who at the time held U.S. permanent resident status, and now are American citizens. Karishma grew up in Raleigh, N.C., and is now a 24-year-old graduate student in journalism at Boston University.

In the 1980s, Karishma's father came to America to pursue a master's degree. After graduating, he met Karishma's mother in India. They got married, and chose to settle down in America, as Karishma's father was working in Los Angeles.

At the age of two, her mother took Karishma with her for a visit to India, and upon return to America is when the problem arose. Because of some issues with her "green card," Karishma's mother was not permitted entry into America. So even though Karishma herself was a citizen, she could not enter her home country, because she was a minor travelling with someone who was not permitted entry.

Karishma was too young to be able to remember the incident, but she has been told about it, and the experience has left an aftertaste. "I think my one opinion on immigration is that they need to be more humane," Karishma said, sitting on the black couch beside me, wearing a pink sweater with colorful patterns and dark pants. Her black hair was tied back in a ponytail, with a few loose strands on the sides. She said she believes that when children are born in America and gain citizenship but their parents do not, there should be some sort of exception to the rule. "People should not be stuck overseas, when the children have the same rights as any other citizens."

Karishma said she can generally see the arguments from both sides when it comes to America's immigration policy. She said many people beat up on Mexican immigrants especially, and claim that Mexicans are taking their jobs. Karishma said she does not agree, because many Mexicans work the jobs a lot of Americans do not want. Karishma suggested that perhaps the immigration policy should be a little more lenient, and that if someone is just willing to work hard, maybe that should be enough to apply to be an immigrant.

For Karishma, she said the most important aspect in politicians' view on immigrants and immigration is that they do not view immigrants as any less than other Americans that have been living in the U.S. for generations. This topic of fair and equal treatment seems to be one of Karishma's major concerns, which also goes back to her own story of when she as a 2-year-old was kept away from her home country for half a year.