

Wonder, Reclaimed



লেখিকাঃ Madhumita Datta
 যোগাযোগঃ madhumita.datta@yahoo.com
 পরিচিতিঃ Madhumita earned her BE from Jadavpur University (JU) and PhD from the University of Maryland; she is an Electrical Engineer turned Patent Law professional, lives in Sunnyvale, California, with her husband and three-year-old son, and works in a law firm in Palo Alto, California. Creative writing is her favorite hobby. She has served as the newsletter editor for the JU Alumni Association at Washington, DC, before she moved to California.

People in their mid-thirties are complex creatures. They have seen the world enough not to remain the blissful believer that they were in their twenties, but they still don't accept that they have done everything they could have done. So they take calculated steps, and try to fiercely justify each of their actions.

That's where I was having a little trouble. I have really struggled to come up with a strong enough justification for why I moved from Washington, DC to the San Francisco Bay area – from the Atlantic coast to the Pacific coast – after twelve good years. There is a short and uncomplicated specific answer that I give to most of my colleagues at my new job. My husband has accepted a job with Google in the Bay area, and that necessitated the move. But, was the move absolutely imperative? Probably not. We had a house in Greenbelt (a DC suburb in Maryland), and an enviable social circle in the DC area. We really liked the distinctly different four seasons there. I had a great job. Our three-year-old son was having a blast at his pre-school. My husband was exploring some pretty coveted career opportunities on the East coast. And honestly, he could even have worked for Google from their East coast satellite office, with occasional traveling to the West coast headquarters. But there was something brewing inside both of us that got catalyzed by the Google offer. We realized that wheels were growing beneath our feet! May be, it was a premature case of midlife-crisis, where there was no real crisis. As one of our friends joked, "What happened? Don't you any longer like the land that doesn't shake or burn?" California was in the news for the wildfires at the time we were gearing up for the move, and I don't have to educate anybody that the Bay area stands on seismic fault lines. Apparently, those known evils couldn't make a compelling enough case against the decision to shake our life into which we had settled well. California symbolized that uncharted frontier for us, which had the hard-to-resist lure of comforting familiarity and undiscovered possibilities.

The emotional journey towards California has not been without its complex moments though. I don't think of myself as commitment-phobic. For a very long time, I have thought that I am committed to the DC area, as DC makes me feel happy and satisfied.

I have openly expressed my preference of East coast over the West coast. So, I was surprised to see myself less sad about leaving DC. I was a little ashamed of my apparent disloyalty. I needed to apologize to someone, but I didn't know to whom. So I went into denial. I kept telling everyone that I am not necessarily giving up my stake in claiming DC as my 'home.' But deep down, I knew that the move is not temporary. I was moving to make California my new home. That knowledge tortured me from within. When did I become so adept in abandoning something so close to my heart so easily? When did I change so much?

I found my listener and healer in the trees of Maryland. There is a less-traveled, tree-lined road at the far end of the vast NASA Goddard campus in Greenbelt, where we went frequently just to escape from the thousand demands of a busy day. On the day when the movers were packing everything to be loaded onto the moving truck, I drove to that road, and stopped under the trees. I knew I was going to miss seeing them revel in Fall colors this year, in just a few short months. I silently uttered my sincerest apology to the trees: "Hope you understand." I felt lighter.

After coming to California, the first short trip we took was to Point Reyes on the Pacific coast, north of San Francisco. As soon as we veered into the storied Highway 1 by the ocean after crossing the Golden Gate Bridge, the moist and pure aroma from the Eucalyptus trees greeted us. At that very moment, I thought of my healer trees from Maryland. I knew they understood.

I have always maintained that growing older is not a bad thing at all, because you grow wiser as well (hopefully). But, the one thing that I have constantly lamented is the gradual disappearance of the sense of wonder. When I was a little girl, a drive by the airport used to build up so much anticipation – if I was fortunate, I would see an airplane taking off or landing, and that would make my day! And now, airports have become almost as routine and unexciting as a grocery store. I wanted to feel a little more like my three-year-old son Gogol, whose eyes still sparkle when we tell him that we are going to the airport to pick someone up or to go somewhere. I longed for that uncomplicated feeling of astonishment and anticipation.

German may not be the most romantic language in Europe, but at least to me, no other word is as romantic as the German-origin word "wanderlust," the insatiable quest for exploring. 'Wander' and 'wonder' may not be etymologically connected, but, to me, they are connected in the soul. I wandered from the familiar warmth of my city in the East coast to reclaim my sense of wonder. And so far, no regrets at all.