

U.S. citizenship hard to come by

June 4, 2010

Clifton D'Cruz climbs the steps to a Catholic shrine, where a woman lights a candle in front of a statue of the Virgin Mary. The former cruise ship worker gazes for a moment over the sea that looks yellow in the fading sun before turning to watch a throng of parishioners leaving Mt. St. Mary's Church in the westernmost section of Banda.

A murder of crows has settled in the trees here, one of the city's holiest places for Catholics like Clifton and his family. Only the children bursting firecrackers in anticipation of the Hindu holidays causes them to stir. When they do, the sky turns black with birds.

Clifton, relishing memories of his youth here, is one of the lucky few who has made the transition from cruise worker to permanent U.S. resident. He spends most of the year in Indian Harbour Beach, in South Brevard County. He works at a Citgo gas station on State Road A1A in Indialantic and lives with his brother, a professor at Florida Tech, who sponsored him years ago for a green card.

Clifton plans to move his family to Indian Harbour Beach. Already, he has worked for five years on the requirements for moving them legally to the United States, a process now in the final stages.

"My main goal is to have my own gas station," he says. "There is a better future . . . America is a land of opportunity."

Nearly 192,000 Indians immigrated to the United States legally between 2001 and 2003, the latest statistics available. Incoming Indians were second only to Mexicans, according to the U.S. Department of Homeland Security. Today, more than two million Asian Indians live in the United States, including nearly 2,000 in Brevard County, the census bureau reports.

Lawyer Stephen Moon said while some have immigrated illegally over the years, the most popular method still remains for crew members to marry an American citizen.

"It's the old-fashioned way," he says, "and they do it."

Attorney Tonya Meister says that many crew members she deals with would love to acquire green cards to stay in the country permanently.

"Unfortunately, this is difficult, if not impossible, for most of them," she says. "It is hard to do, and generally, they need a sponsor."

Cruise ship crew members carry a C1/D visa that allows them to work on ships that sail to the United States but not work on land. In order to change the status of their visa, they must return to their home country and apply for the change there.

One day from now, Clifton's younger sister will leave India for London -- possibly for good. She's a nun with the holy order Daughters of the Cross, and she has been assigned to help hospice patients and their families overseas.

"That makes me sad, man," he says, his eyes bulging with seriousness. "I don't know when I'll see her again."

It's a vulnerable-sounding comment from a worldly man whose own father worked on cargo ships. Clifton himself spent 11 years working for the cruise industry. He now spends months at a time in Brevard County, thousands of miles away from his wife and children.

Advertisement



"Every time you go away, to work on a cruise ship or in the Gulf or to the states, it's like a death in the family of the Asian Indians living in the United States," he says. "It's terrible."

In the 1800s, some Indians immigrated as unskilled laborers, many finding work building railroads. But after the Civil War, the U.S. Consul began discouraging Indian immigration. These restrictions were relaxed in 1910 as demands for laborers grew stronger. But more restrictions would soon follow. World War II, as well as Indian independence, eased the

reliving a field hockey memory from his youth.

He walks down to a park on the shoreline, where he dismisses the peddlers and beggars who approach.

In three months, he will be back in Brevard, again without his beloved wife and children. But this night he can't stop thinking about his sister, one more member of the Indian diaspora.

from
To: **Print Powered By**  **FormatDynamics™**
2.2 million Indians living in the United States.