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VELDHUIS

### I am Proud to be American

My father was born and raised in Europe. My maternal grandparents were born and raised in India. Each with different intentions, when my father and grandparents immigrated, they both decided to start a new life in the United States. After sacrificing everything familiar, including leaving their own families, they departed to an unknown place. They arrived in America with nothing, learned a new language, and assimilated to a different way of life. Despite the hardships my relatives faced, Americans helped them feel part of a community and thrive. America was the land of hope for them and continues to be for many today. America welcomed my relatives and enabled them to have a new home and a better life for themselves and their own families. I wouldn't be here without my grandparents or my father. I am proud of America for the freedom and hope it will offer my family for generations.

My mother and siblings were born in America, and we all feel that despite having immigrant parents, we were never shunned, excluded, or isolated. Being different is hard, but only in a place that has its mind set on not allowing new ideas, communities, or thoughts. America is accepting of everyone. Regardless of one's racial background, socioeconomic status, or native language, America still welcomes all.

I am proud of America for its acceptance. I am proud to be standing on ground that is not restrictive to others who want to live here. I am grateful for the various people I meet who think differently than I do. I cannot imagine a life where everyone is banned from celebrating how they want or must conform to a set way of living. America has considered acceptance as a core value for hundreds of years now. When Americans make a mistake, we try to learn and become even more open minded.

My family, relatives, and ancestors were and are all welcomed. I am American and I am honored to grow up here. Everyone I know is accepted and has basic freedoms, which is why I am proud to be an American.