

## **What some internationals leave behind**

June 22, 2003

**By Mildred L. Culp**

Workers at all levels from countries around the world continue to embrace jobs with lifestyle challenges many Americans wouldn't even consider. These jobs may require unpleasant tasks, demanding schedules or culture clash.



Rustic Motel in Rolla, Mo.

### **LEFT BEHIND**

Take Bhupendra ("Bob") Desai, who owns and runs the 25-room Rustic Motel in Rolla, Mo., a town of 24,000. Born in the central African country of Zambia and educated in India, he waited for 14 years to obtain final approval for immigration. Zambia was having multiple problems, including poor health care, inadequate security, a declining infrastructure, and corruption. He owned four businesses in Kitwe, Zambia: a tire retreading company, a retail tire store and two shops with the customary range of consumer goods, including clothing, electronics, kitchenware, and beds and mattresses. "We used to sell anything and everything," he comments. "There was lots of red tape to continue to do business."

He and his family also left behind two servants running a five-bedroom house with three bathrooms, a large lounge and a yard: "Life was good there," he explains, "but I had to make a choice for the family."

Andrea Elliott, a South African international regulatory law specialist, left her country's East Coast and today is practice leader at Global Visa Solutions, a partnership in Newport Beach, Calif., specializing in immigration in 100 countries worldwide. She traded a three-bedroom house on a beach and a Porsche sports car for a two-bedroom apartment here. When she closed her office as a (sole practicing) barrister, she abandoned a clientele of attorneys. "I gave up a lifestyle," she says, to marry an American.

### **CHANGE**

Desai and Elliott have been changing ever since they came here. He arrived with some savings, intending to gain experience in motels, where he thought jobs would be easy to get. Living in Philadelphia, he spotted an advertisement in the Indian newspaper for an opening in Atlanta. "The owner was a former schoolmate," he mentions. "I interviewed over the July Fourth weekend and was hired." His English facility and manner cinched front-desk work from 8:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m., while his wife did housekeeping. They lived in motel's furnished accommodations -- "depressing in the beginning."

Subsequently, Desai became marketing manager, when he continued to bide time for almost 18 months. Then he became general manager at another motel in Atlanta, where "promises didn't materialize (including a \$14 per hour salary)," he reports. "I felt cheated and frustrated, because we'd had a gentleman's agreement. The (financial) situation was terrifying."

Desai spotted a billboard advertisement for temporaries at \$8 per hour. The repetitive assembly work required him to stand all day. He expected to be temp-to-hire in three months for a more responsible position, until another schoolmate from Kitwe who owned a motel in

Rolla found the Rustic Motel. "The (American) owner kept his word; I kept mine; and we closed on it," Desai remarks.

Guests arriving close to midnight ring a bell that wakes him up. Every morning he collects soiled linens, throws them in the laundry and removes trash. Fortunately, his guests are "very, very good people, who leave rooms in a tidy condition. I treat all guests as if they've come to my house. I bend over backwards to please them." Many come back. Desai eagerly anticipates April 27, 2005, the day he'll be eligible for citizenship.

Elliot has confronted isolation while rebuilding the network she began to form in high school. "You develop a professional reputation, build up credit, have status in the community," she says. "Succeeding at starting over takes a lot of courage and determination." Today, running virtual teams worldwide, she monitors caseload in this country with corporate clients, primarily Fortune 500 companies, "who believe that if they shout louder and make noise, their end goal would be achieved much quicker.

"South African society is more deferential," she explains. "We don't believe that the most noise gets the most attention. It could be that you'll get it anyway."

She now projects her voice more. "But I don't believe the end justifies means," she says. "As long as I'm in a free society, I can adjust my temperament without compromising my values."

Clearly, the demands to change in the workplace are great for immigrants, who couldn't possibly have prepared for it.

*Dr. Mildred Culp comments upon the workplace in national media. Look for more of her helpful information at [www.workwise.net](http://www.workwise.net). Copyright 2003 Passage Media.*