

**BusinessWeek**

**Bloomberg  
Businessweek**

As Globally American as Apple Pie

*This article was originally published in "Working Parents" in November 2008*

My children were born in the States but they left when they were small. My daughter was barely 20 months old. She and her brother know they have American passports and they know they are supposed to come from there, but to them, America is just a vague notion, some place out there that's supposedly home.

Nevertheless, my daughter was upset when a few months ago, a boy in her class told her she could not be American because "Americans are white" and she is dark and has dark hair. The class of four and five year-olds has been discussing nationalities with their teacher.

My greatest fear for my children has always been that they, like me, would not know where they came from. I was born in India, held a Malaysian passport and was raised in Switzerland. I was a foreigner in all these places, and even as I took a little of each one with me, none of them ever felt like home. And anyway, those bits never really made sense as a whole -- until I came to the US, and in particular to New York.

Here was a place where I made sense and I became American because I felt like I could belong to America in a way that I could not belong to anywhere else. For me, being American is simple: I used to dread the "where are you from?" question because I never knew how to answer it, but now I can safely say "I'm American" or "I'm from New York," without anyone batting an eyelid or asking me where I "really" come from.

At this same time, there are all those other bits that make me up that I have acquired along the way, and now my children have in them nuggets of all the other places in which they have lived. These are parts of us we cannot ignore, but today, Barack Obama has proven to me that's it's okay to be that way. That we can have all those bits and still belong. He's the son of an African from Kenya and a White mother who grew up in Hawaii. He had an Indonesian stepfather and he lived for a time in that country. He has bits and pieces of different places in him and he is American.

This is someone I can really look toward and draw inspiration from for my family. America is not exclusionary, there is no one single American identity. In America, everyone is from everywhere, and no one has made me feel that more than Barack Obama. More than his policies, perhaps more than his abilities to be a great president, it's him -- who he is, where he's from and what he's made up of -- that gives me the greatest

satisfaction and happiness for my globally American family and all other families like ours. – *Savita Iyer*