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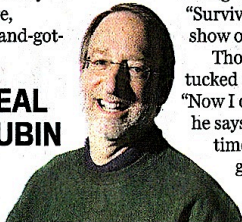
Keith Famie finds people still living the American dream

Everyone from India told Keith Famie that you don't go there in May. Unfortunately, they passed the word after he'd already gone and come back.

Not only did he hit the world's second-most-populous country in its hottest and muggiest month, he got sick. Way sick. Worst-travel-nightmare, thought-he-was-gonna-die-and-got-mad-when-he-didn't sick.

But he's upright now, and it'll be worthwhile when his latest documentary shows up at 7 p.m. Saturday on WXYZ-TV (Channel 7).

NEAL RUBIN



Or at least it will be if nobody does something thoughtless like reminding him of how god awful he felt.

It's only marginally accurate these days to describe Famie, 49, as a celebrity chef. Yes, ran restaurants, and then he suffered through the second incarnation of "Survivor" and wound up with a show on the Food Network.

Those are leftovers, though, tucked in the back of the refrigerator. "Now I only cook dinner for holidays," he says, and he spends the rest of his time either shooting TV programs or scraping together the cash for them.

"Our India Story" is the fifth in his series on Michigan immigrant groups. It's probably the most timely, because it's a reminder that people are still finding the American dream, even as so much is disappearing.

The price of the dream

By the end of the trip, Famie says, he and his team had spent 40 hours on airplanes traveling 27,000 miles across 13 days.

One of their destinations was a town called Waigaon where Avinash Rachmale

Please see Rubin, Page 6E

Rubin

Continued from Page 1E

of Bloomfield Hills grew up without plumbing or running water.

Rachmale, 44, owns Lakeshore Engineering Services in Detroit. His company is helping to revitalize a good-sized chunk of the New Center, and he and a colleague recently pledged \$250,000 to the Wayne State College of Engineering.

In Waigaon, Famie says, "he's like Rocky Balboa coming home. The whole town comes out playing music to greet him."

For all his means, he can't persuade his mother, Prayag, to leave the village. She doesn't read or write, and she decided Waigaon was going to be her life even as she encouraged him to go find a better one.

When mother and son hugged goodbye, Famie says, "I'd be lying if I said we didn't all have tears in our eyes. It's a real-life story of what you give up to chase that dream."



Chris Kassel

Avinash Rachmale of Bloomfield Hills says goodbye to his mom, Prayag Rachmale, after a trip home to India.

The ideas keep coming

Chasing the chasers, Famie has given up a formerly nice income, offset only somewhat by DVD sales of past shows at www.ourstoryof.com.

It's a constant scramble to

budgets, he says, but instead of coming away discouraged, he keeps coming up with ideas for new programs.

Next up in the "Our Story" series, in no particular order, will be the African Americans, Irish and Armenians. He's also working on pieces about blindness and local World War II veterans.

In every venture, he says, there are "Oprah moments," those scenes so poignant they make the scuffle worthwhile. The other recurring theme is the wisdom of elders, not surprising since each ethnic group or nationality had a hardy cadre who arrived here first.

"Our India Story" ends with a famous Indian guru, quoting of all people Mark Twain. He's probably telling everyone to stay the heck home in May.

Reach Neal Rubin at (313) 222-1874 or nrubin@detnews.com.

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