

# THE COMPANY WE KEEP

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Every search, every day, every client, every colleague and every candidate is a surprise and a challenge

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## WHERE WERE YOU BORN, AND WHERE DO YOU LIVE NOW?

My roots are tangled! My father grew up in a small village in India, with no electricity. My Indian-origin mother grew up on a cotton ginnery in rural Africa. As students, they met on a bus in England, and decided to start married life in India. I was born in Kampala, Uganda and grew up in Calcutta (now Kolkata), India. I have also lived in London, and briefly in the USA. Bombay (now Mumbai) has been my home for three decades, but given the amount of travel I do, I am equally at home in the air.

## WHAT DID YOU STUDY AND WHY?

My parents wanted me to get a real degree, like Engineering, but I wanted to study Art. We compromised and I earned a Bachelor's in Science (Economics) followed by a Master's in Business Administration (MBA) from the London Business School.

## WHAT CAR DO YOU DRIVE?

I don't. I gave up driving soon after I moved to Bombay. In that traffic, it pays to have a driver. He uses our Toyota Hybrid.

## FIRST JOB?

When you grow up in a family business, your first job tends to be an informal apprenticeship around the dinner-table. My father founded India's first recruitment company and my earliest memories are of adding moustaches and pirate eye-patches (and the odd black tooth) to the photos on the stacks of CVs he would bring home to screen. Contrary to where you think this is going, my dream was to be an artist, or any job involving words and images such as journalism or advertising. I dabbled in creative at an ad agency, and in a global bank. Both helped me decide what I didn't want to do. After business school my plans to head to Eastern Europe were shelved when I was yanked back into the family recruiting business

## WHAT'S THE BIGGEST SURPRISE ABOUT YOUR JOB?

Every search, every day, every client, every colleague and every candidate is a surprise and a challenge. If you are inherently curious and a problem solver, you will never be bored in this profession.

## BIGGEST RISK YOU EVER TOOK?

Coming back to India from the UK, just as the economic liberalization of the country began, and moving to Bombay almost overnight with no planning, no place to stay and almost no friends. And then in a year or two, deciding to branch away from the main recruiting business to set up a financial service practice, followed soon thereafter by the retained executive search practice – a very nascent concept in India at the time. And sticking with it.



## WHAT MAKES YOU FEEL BETTER ON A BAD DAY?

Dogs. I am partial to German Shepherds

## MY MOST REDEEMING QUALITY IS...

My inherent sense of empathy and fairness. The belief that what goes around comes around.

## I HAVE LEARNED TO COME TO TERMS WITH...

The fact that things will not always work out, but what's important is that you do the right thing. At work my mantra is always do what's best for the client. This is good for the consultant, the candidate, the client and eventually, the cash register.

## WHAT'S THE THING THAT PEOPLE ARE MOST SURPRISED TO LEARN ABOUT YOU?

That I am still terrified of flying.

## IN THE LAST MONTH, WHAT IS THE MOST INTERESTING CONVERSATION YOU HAVE HAD?

A fascinating discussion with an animal conservationist about the rehabilitation of working elephants in India.

## LAST (OR MOST LOVED) HOLIDAY?

A recent weekend in a private rehabilitation game sanctuary where I was able to interact with an insane variety of wild animals ranging from big cats, exotic birds, elephants, hippo and rhino, and reptiles, including a two-headed snake.

## BEST BOOK YOU'VE READ IN THE PAST YEAR?

The Covenant of Water, by Abraham Verghese, a fascinating and dreamy insight into female empowerment in 1900 South India, the medical profession and much more. It was on Obama's Best Book List 2023, and there was an elephant in it. I'm currently reading Smoke and Ashes, Amitav Ghosh's brilliant account of the opium trade and how it shaped modern-day India, China and Britain.

## YOUR BINGE-WATCH SERIES?

Lots of crime dramas, but I never know whodunnit because I invariably fall asleep!

## BEST GADGET YOU OWN?

My Nespresso machines!

## CHARITY/ CAUSE CLOSEST TO YOUR HEART?

Animal welfare.

## I HAVE A COLLECTION OF...

miniature elephants from my travels in 45 countries (and counting). Probably a hangover from my early life in East Africa, but they find me everywhere - from Murano in Italy to flea markets in Paris, and the gorgeous glass ones in Prague. And of course, from all over Africa and Asia.

## IN MY FRIDGE YOU WILL ALWAYS FIND..

Italian cheese, and some bubbly.