

## **Growing Up**

Growing Up in an American single-family home with my extended multigenerational family, I experienced gatherings in unconventional ways—typically in open, unobstructed floor spaces.

## **Living with the Older**

Growing up, I realized that the way I lived was different from most people in the U.S. I was born into a multigenerational home, where I lived with my great-grandparents, grandparents, parents, aunts and uncles, cousins, and siblings in a single-family home in New Jersey.

The article “Social Norms: Gender Roles and Time Use; Multigenerational Households in India” by Aseem Hasnain and Abilasha Srivastava explores the continued relevance of multigenerational living in South Asian countries. The multigenerational family structure addresses both financial and social needs, which have become increasingly important due to rising housing costs and the expenses of child and elderly care. The authors argue that the joint-family system provides protection and a sense of identity, fostering deeper connections across generations while preserving traditions. They note, “Multigenerational living has evolved from traditional, hierarchical structures with shared responsibilities and simple communal spaces to modern arrangements that prioritize flexibility, privacy, and technological integration” (Hasnain & Srivastava). Thus, my family continued this tradition when moving to the U.S.

Although, looking back, the house was small, it felt spacious and comfortable for my family, as if we could accommodate more people. I remember those years of my life as being deeply connected to my family and my culture because we always found ways to gather. Recipes, identity, and traditions were strongly upheld.

## **Furnitureless Floors**

Gathering in my family typically took place in open, unobstructed floor spaces. I remember the so-called “living room” in our house was our main gathering area; it didn’t have the typical couch and coffee table. Instead, the floor served as the free, open space where we all sat and came together. The furniture that did exist was pushed against the walls and rejected. I recall when visitors would come, my grandmother would guide them to sit on the floor. It was awkward at first, but it helped guests interact with everyone and feel a part of the family and our discussions. This furniture-less space allowed for flexibility and adaptability.

## **Floor of Rituals**

This open space holds many fond memories of my family. The floor was our venue; it hosted multiple weddings across generations, baby showers, birthday celebrations, and graduation parties. The floor was our temple, where we held many religious prayer ceremonies. The floor was our dining table; every night, we gathered on the floor to eat together. The floor was our playground, where my cousins and I spent most of our time playing. The floor was our bedroom; with just padding on the ground to sleep on. The floor was our office/workspace; my

generation did schoolwork, the generation above did college and office work, my grandparents read the newspaper, and my great-grandparents relaxed, sharing stories and enjoying our company. The floor was everything to us.

### **Surface Level**

When we sat on the ground, everyone was on the same level, creating a sense of equality and connection that bridged generations. It was a space where stories, wisdom, and traditions were passed down, and our identities were strengthened. I have vivid memories of learning to roll rotis with my grandmother while she shared her experiences of immigrating to the U.S. I remember my grandparents teaching me how to do rangoli designs, my aunts teaching us how to do garba, my grandpa lighting sparklers with us during Diwali, and my great-grandmother telling me stories of her childhood in India, my parents helping us with schoolwork, my cousin and I teaching the elderly's English and how to read. It was a space where wisdom flowed freely, and through sitting together, we shared conversations, debates, and stories that united us all.

### **Courtyards of Connection**

I realized that my family's ways of gathering were deeply reflective of the houses and living styles in India. Most families, like mine, live in courtyard houses in India with extended and multigenerational family units. Traditional courtyard houses support multigenerational living—very relevant in non-Western countries—and are intentionally designed to promote gathering. The article “Courtyards: The Heart of Multi-Generational Houses in India” by Ankitha Gattupalli states that in India, the courtyard is the heart of the home. These traditional houses remain significant as they foster multigenerational living and are designed to encourage communal space. A courtyard is an open-to-sky area, typically enclosed on all four sides (sometimes three), and almost always empty. The rooms of the residence usually face the courtyard, inviting family members to use it as a shared space, regardless of age or status. The courtyard serves multiple purposes, from religious ceremonies to family meals to casual conversation. It is a flexible space that adapts to the moment's needs.

### **This Home is Not for You**

When my family immigrated to the U.S. as a joint family unit, we moved into an American home, but the rigid furniture and compartmentalized spaces restricted our ability to gather. The rooms and walls became isolating, separating us. The design of the house did not reflect the true nature of our connections and undermined the potential for multigenerational bonding and shared experiences. Sam Jacob's research, “A Space for a Blended Family,” critiques the stereotypical home design for its narrow view of family, pointing out that it's a “physical container for a fixed idea of family, rather than recognizing that the real design project is the family itself.” The potential for family is much more diverse than just a nuclear model. As the author mentions, “architecture isn't neutral,” and it needs to evolve to reflect the many ways

families live and connect today. As a result, my family had to start reimagining the elements of the traditional courtyard house within the American home to encourage gathering. By pushing the furniture back, we created open floor space where we could gather. Slowly, the existing furniture was ignored and discarded, and the open floor became our true gathering space, where all of us could sit together.

## **Final Production**

I went back home and studied my grandparent's house and the different ways we used the spaces. I measured and documented their house as it stands today. This investigation brought back all the memories of our gatherings and the different ways we exploited the floor for our needs at the moment, understanding how my family fought the isolating and compartmentalized space to make it their own gathering space.

Transitioning to the final stage, the core strategies of flexibility, adaptability, collective living, and the floor as the primary architectural element remain central. I am proposing an alternative way of living for my family—one that reconnects with my initial, deeply personal narrative. This project is my way of giving back a living space that my family has longed for. Throughout this study, I have been imagining how a single-family house could better serve the needs of a multigenerational household. Inspired by my grandparents' home, I envisioned reimagining their house as a thickened floor space—free from interior walls. In this concept, the floor itself becomes the home, where all functions and spatial experiences are embedded within the floor's volume.

This thickened floor introduces moments of discomfort and intimacy, forcing us to duck and move closer to the ground—creating a heightened awareness. The floor expands outward, even intruding and attacking into neighboring yards, encouraging interaction and gatherings with neighbors. Pockets of openings within the floor hint at traditional domestic spaces, yet the open, flexible design allows for varied uses and interpretations—much like how my family has always used shared space for different rituals and routines. The openness of the floor invites infinite gatherings in infinite contexts.

The layout is directly based on my grandparents' floor plan, making this project not only personal but also a more vivid exploration of how my family would inhabit the space. This alternative form of living reflects and responds to the unique dynamics and needs of my multigenerational family.