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## McNair Andrew - Callison College One Pager

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I was in Graham, North Carolina in early September, 1972, after the year in India. The extended family had gathered for what was to be a final family reunion. We were in my grandmother's home and my Aunt Dot was making the same proclamation so many of my older relatives made to open a conversation with me. "Well, that must have been an interesting experience."

Indeed. An interesting experience. Aunt Dot had used perhaps the most lackluster word in the English language to describe an experience that was to be life-changing, a profound cultural tutorial, an experience that would create a path for me for many years.

Like many of my classmates in Bangalore IV, I had taken a decent variety of courses during the year. Yoga, Batik, Religious Scriptures. They all stayed with me, but the gem that lingered and never left was being introduced to and studying the Bhagavad Gita. It was my first real exploration into Sanskrit vocabulary. I looked at the Devanagari script, fascinated with the swirling shapes—strips of cloth hanging on a taut line in a breeze. The vocabulary, I began to learn, was incredibly multi-layered. It drew me in.

After that family reunion, I had a few decisions to make. Where to continue my college education. It was 1972, and I had a draft number of 6. That decision was made quickly, stay in school. I applied and was admitted to UC Santa Cruz. I chose religious studies at Kresge College and had an astute professor immediately hand me a well-worn Sanskrit primer. He generously tutored me on his own time and slowly I began to learn the complexities of noun declension, eight cases, three genders, and verb conjugations to befuddle any twenty-year-old La Jolla surfer boy.

I persevered, immersed myself, and eventually became fluent enough to attend UC Berkeley. Years later, after being really really humbled by the Mother Tongue, and a second trip to India to study with a Brahmin Upadhyayi in Varanasi, I received my Master's.

Learning any language is a concrete steppingstone for learning others, especially if it is one of the Classics. To say that it has helped me over the years would be an understatement comparable to Aunt Dot's.

Andrew McNair