

REPORT 2024 *to* MEMBERS

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The

NATURE

MEMBER
STORIES



of **SUCCESS**

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Farooq Kathwari is a risk taker. He was born in Kashmir and grew up surrounded by breathtaking natural beauty.



AT AGE 20, he set out for New York City with little more than an undergraduate degree in English literature, an acceptance to NYU's MBA program and a pocketful of confidence. Farooq stepped into the concrete canyons of Manhattan, having never been abroad and knowing virtually no one in the U.S. except his father, who was only in the city for a short while.

Shortly after arriving in New York, Farooq's natural confidence quickly opened doors. One day, he spotted a bookkeeping position in the classifieds. He asked his classmates what it was a bookkeeper actually did. "Don't apply," they advised. But Farooq thought, "What's the worst

that could happen?" —a motto that has served him well throughout his life.

He duly marched into the small printing company on Canal Street and presented himself as a candidate and was instantly in over his head. But, thanks to a well-timed interruption, a sympathetic secretary's impromptu tutorial and some quick thinking, he landed the job. Scarcely a year later, his resourcefulness propelled him to a financial analyst position at Bear Stearns and then to New Court Securities, a Rothschild company, where he became the Chief Financial Officer.

Farida Kathwari was born and raised in Srinagar, Kashmir's capital, and also grew up surrounded by extraordinary natural splendor. The city, with its ancient gardens and waterways, shaped her appreciation for beauty and harmony.

She learned to play a traditional Kashmiri instrument called the tumbaknaer and sang in groups at weddings and celebratory gatherings. She studied at a women's college, earning a degree in education and, after her unconventional long-distance wedding to Farooq (a story in itself), she too left her homeland for New York.

Farida Kathwari learned to play the tumbaknaer, a traditional Kashmiri instrument, in her childhood—a passion that she continues to enjoy to this day.





Farooq and Farida first met as teenagers in Srinagar, and he was instantly smitten. “He said that he wanted to marry me,” Farida recalls. “No!” Farooq laughs, “I only said I like you.” Their paths diverged for several years as they completed their educations, but they eventually came back together. And in 1968, Farooq and Farida decided it was time to get married.

When circumstances prevented Farooq from returning to Kashmir, the couple arranged what may have been the world’s first transcontinental telephone wedding. “Groom in New York and bride in Kashmir,” Farooq laughs. “Farida had 400 people in her family’s home, and I was by myself in Brooklyn.”

Farida joined Farooq in the U.S. in December that year. On her second day in the country, she took on three tasks: get American clothes, start English classes at the local community college and find a job. Within a couple of weeks, she had accomplished all three, securing a position at Korvette’s department store on 34th Street.

While Farida was conquering American life, Farooq was honing his entrepreneurial skills, convincing Bloomingdale’s to buy Kashmiri crafts sent by his grandfather. When he learned Ethan Allen, the high-end furniture company, was having trouble sourcing fabrics from Kashmir, he seized the opportunity and offered to solve their supply problems, despite knowing nothing about the furniture business.

His business relationship with Ethan Allen flourished. In 1973, Farooq formed a partnership with the company to develop products from

around the world. He set up offices in Florence, Italy, and became one of the first American businesspeople to source products from China. He became president of Ethan Allen in 1985, and by 1988, he had earned the title of chairman and CEO—all of which are roles he still holds today.

Throughout their journey, the Kathwaris have held onto their deep affection for nature, a value shaped by their childhoods in Kashmir. They lived briefly in Manhattan, but city life left them restless. “We needed the outdoors,” Farooq says.

The couple purchased their first home in the suburbs of New York City, where they have lived for 52 years, right on the Long Island Sound. In 1980, they took another bold leap—buying a 175-acre dairy farm near Hudson, New York, complete with cows, chickens and 6,000 fruit trees.

Though he knew virtually nothing about it at the time, Farooq turned his attention to farming, which included planting wildflowers and developing a lake and pond on the farm. These outdoor spaces allow the couple to recapture something of the expansive natural environment of their youth.

They became PURE members in 2017 on the recommendation of another Ethan Allen executive. PURE now insures both their primary residence and the farm. Their suburban home, built around 1850, has required vigilant care over the years.

“We’ve had to upgrade almost everything,” Farooq says. “The structure is very good, but we’ve replaced a lot of electrical, air conditioning, heating, windows—all of those things.”



The Kathwaris have been PURE members since 2017. PURE insures both their New Rochelle home and their farm house in Hudson, New York.



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The Kathwaris' home is filled with photography and other memories of their life in Kashmir and the life that they've built in the U.S.

Despite their diligence, a few years back they experienced an electrical issue that led to a fire. While the fire was small, smoke damage spread throughout the house.

"PURE did a great job," Farooq notes. "Their team came in right away and helped with everything." Despite the small scale of the fire, the restoration work was extensive, and the incident highlighted the value of having proper protection for their historic home—particularly one filled with memories and sentimental treasures.

Throughout their journey, the Kathwaris have maintained their cultural roots alongside their connection to nature. Farida still plays the tumbaknaer and sings in both Kashmiri and Urdu with friends.

“
PURE did a great job. Their team came in right away and helped with everything.”

She sometimes performs with her four grandchildren, sharing the music she grew up with.

From a telephone wedding that bridged continents to 55 years of marriage, from growing up surrounded by the natural beauty of Kashmir to building a business empire in America, the Kathwaris' journey exemplifies the spirit of possibility. "What's the worst that could happen?" indeed. ♦

