



# The Elephants in My Backyard: A Memoir

*Rajiv Surendra*

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Rajiv Surendra (the rapping mathlete from *Mean Girls*) read *Life of Pi*, discovered it was being adapted into a major motion picture, and embarked on a ten-year journey to land the role of a lifetime—but this is not a journey of goals and victories, this is a story of obsessively pursuing a dream, overcoming failure, and finding meaning in life.

*The Elephants in My Backyard* is not a journey of goals and victories, it's the story of process and determination and, in the end, of failure. In many ways, it is *Eat Pray Love* for millennials—those adults coming of age and wondering what to do with their lives—a view into what it means to follow a passion and go where it leads you, to dream big and, ultimately, fail. It's a book that gives one the courage to take a leap of faith, but also allows the reader to look back on past endeavors—be they successes or colossal defeats—with new appreciation and meaning.

In 2003, Rajiv Surendra was acting in *Mean Girls*, playing the beloved rapping mathlete Kevin Gnapoor, when a cameraman on set gave him a copy of *Life of Pi*, inadvertently changing the course of his life.

Rajiv dove into the novel, mesmerized by all the similarities between Pi and himself—both boys are five-foot-five, with coffee colored complexions, both lived by a zoo, both share a South Indian culture. When Rajiv learns that *Life of Pi* will be made into a major motion picture, he is convinced Pi is the role he is destined to play.

To land the role he must embody the character of the sixteen-year-old Tamil schoolboy. He takes a great leap of faith, quits university and buys a one-way ticket to India. Thus begins the journey of a lifetime. From Rajiv's native Toronto to the sacred stone temples of South India, he travels to the frigid waters off the coast of rural Maine where he befriends an actual castaway and, eventually, finds resolution in the most unexpected of places—the cobbled streets of Munich.

*The Elephants in My Backyard* is a profound and inspiring story of self-discovery in the face of failure—poignant, funny, colorful, and absolutely unforgettable.

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