

AL NAGARAJ: HARD WORK PAYS OFF FOR ROTMAN GRAD

By Mary Ann Gratton

Sometimes the toughest competition is the one with yourself. Al Nagaraj (MBA '01) believes that is the case, but if his current position is any indication, he seems to be winning that contest. Nagaraj landed one of the top jobs of anyone in his graduating class, joining Oppenheimer Funds in New York as a senior analyst and associate portfolio manager.

"I try not to compete with others, because you can never win that game. I have high expectations of myself and I owe a lot to my parents for having high expectations of me."

At 29, Al has come a long way from his early years growing up in Madras, India, where he and his older brother and parents lived in a house on the edge of the slums. "We lived in the first concrete house in the area, so we were comfortable and had a roof over our heads, but I played with kids who did not. They slept under thatched roof huts, and when they turned 13, they went to work. I was fortunate to stay in school."

His father is a retired trade unionist, and his late mother came from a well-respected local family. "We didn't have a lot of money, but we had a fantastic time growing up. My mother wanted me to be a scientist, but I wanted to be a mechanic or a cook."

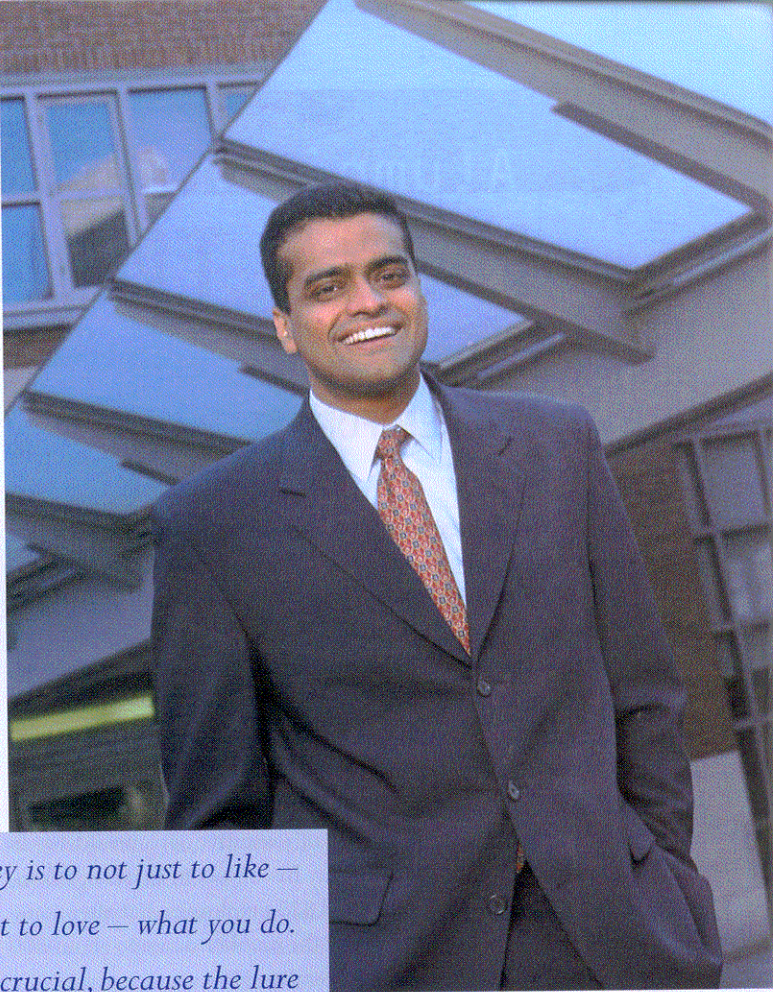
None of the above, as it turns out. Al's computer savvy led him into hi-tech, a field in which he has thrived. He earned his Bachelor of Engineering in Computer Science at India's Coimbatore Institute of Technology. He then moved to Halifax, where he earned his Master of Computer Science at Dalhousie University. After graduating, he began working in the hi-tech industry, first for Nortel in Ottawa and later moving to Nortel in Dallas, Texas. He served in various capacities, as a systems engineer and software designer for Nortel and later as a product manager for Marconi Communications in Texas.

While on holiday, Al visited Toronto and "fell in love with the city, and with the University of Toronto. I walked down St. George Street and decided I wanted to study at this campus."

"When I first came to Canada, I saw what life could be. That gave me the incentive to do my best and get involved with things. I loved every minute of my time at Rotman."

He also enjoyed participating in the Rotman mentorship program, which paired him with Claude Lamoureux, Chief Executive Officer of the Ontario Teachers' Pension Plan. "That was a tremendous learning experience. To have one of the world's top business executives listen to me and share his thoughts on various issues was a fantastic experience."

Nagaraj had planned to return to the hi-tech field after completing his MBA, but the job at Oppenheimer Funds in New York was a natural



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fit. Although he no longer works directly in hi-tech, his job draws on his experience. He chooses technology stocks and recommends them to Oppenheimer portfolio managers in charge of different growth funds.

A typical workday begins at 6:30 a.m. and ends 12 hours later, but Al is a self-described workaholic. "The key thing is to not just like — but to love — what you do. That's crucial, because the lure of compensation runs out after a couple of years, so it is a passion for the job and a sense of shared vision with your colleagues that keeps you going after that."

Does he regret moving to New York in light of the Sept. 11th terrorist attacks? "I have no regrets. These events have not made me look at life differently. I believe it was an attack on our way of life and our belief systems, so the best response I can make is to do my job well. I believe that it's very important to keep on with life as usual. So these days I work harder than ever."

Al expressed gratitude for former friends and colleagues after the terrorist attacks. "I was amazed by the number of phone and e-mail messages I received from people at the University of Toronto, and I want to thank everyone for their kindness and concern."

When he is not working, he loves to read, cook, watch movies, and dine at fine restaurants. Asked whether his family back in India is proud of his career success, he laughs. "I am just starting my career. Sure, they might be proud of me on the inside, but nobody lets anybody get away with anything in our family. I get no respect! When I'm at home, I still don't get to handle the TV remote!" **RM**

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