

**UNIVERSITY OF HOUSTON
ORAL HISTORY OF HOUSTON PROJECT**

Interview with: Saleha Khumawala
Interviewed by: Uzma Quraishi
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Transcribed by: Suzanne Mascola

UQ: Oral history interview of Saleha Khumawala at her office at the University of Houston in Houston, Texas, July 31, 2007. Interview conducted by Uzma Quraishi for the Center for Public History at the University of Houston.

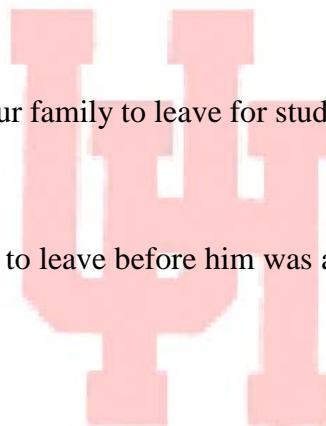
SK: This is Saleha Khumawala. In terms of the questions, why did I decide to leave my home country? Basically, I got married. So, that was a decision already made for me. Why did I choose to come to the United States? My husband was here already at Purdue University and that is where he got his Ph.D. from.

UQ: Did you have the intention to come to the U.S. at any time? Did you have the desire to come for higher studies or anything like that?

SK: Yes, I was actually doing premed. My uncle was already here in the U.S. Our family has had a pattern of migration. Two of my uncles, one of them already passed away. The other that just turned 80 had gone to Germany to do engineering studies for the . . .

UQ: When was this?

SK: This was late 1950s. He was a very senior . . . a very high level position with Tata and Mack trucks, and he installs the Mack trucks out here. So, after he finished his engineering in the 1950s, from Germany, he went back to India. He was with Tata Motors and Jamshaidpur at a very high level position, moved from Jamshakpur to Mack trucks here in the U.S. and that was in the 1960s. And these are my uncles. My father's side of the family. He is now retired from Mack Trucks. He is in Maryland and he just turned 80 this June.



UQ: They were the first in your family to leave for studying.

SK: To leave, right. The one to leave before him was another uncle who passed away. So, he was the second one.

UQ: And he (the first uncle) also came to the U.S.?

SK: No, he didn't come to the U.S. He came to Germany for his studies. Did come to the U.S. but never settled here. Went back and then later on, passed away. His children then went to Germany. I mean, yes . . . I am talking about the 1960s. His children got married in the 1960s. One was in Germany, one was in California, one was in Arizona and so on and so forth.

UQ: So, this is already something that is in your family?

SK: Right.

UQ: So, you had it in your mind perhaps you would get the chance to . . .

SK: To come here, right.

UQ: Were your parents looking for a husband for you who was overseas?

SK: No. You always look for the right guy.

UQ: I guess you must have been kind of happen that you would get this chance finally to come to America.

SK: Right. And actually, when I was in school at the time, the girls, if they went for higher studies it was always medicine. Girls never did commerce or they never did the liberal arts as we call it here. It was if you studied and you really went for the studies, it was in medicine and so on and so forth. So obviously, that is what I was doing. And then, I got married and I came here.

UQ: What year was that that you came here?

AK: I got married in 1970. So, yes, we just finished 37 years.

UQ: Wow! So you got married in 1970 and when did you come here? What was the gap time?

SK: Two years.

UQ: Oh, so he must have gone back and forth?

SK: Yes, right. And actually, I could have come right away because in those days, Visas, those problems that people face now were not even an issue, I mean. So, I was in pre-med and I wanted a fresh start because we checked and I could have come straight into medical school or come here and then finish and so whether they would accept that . . . So, it was better that I finished that and then come here and just join med school. So, it was a sacrifice in that sense but we were going to save time and not lose the years of education, so I thought in a way, that was good. And [his] being in academia, you can teach your academic classes and then come and spend the summer [in India]. So, it wasn't that we were going to be two years apart and not see each other and all of that. So, it was a decision that we made and we thought . . . because we did look into my coming and then checked with the schools here. And then, they said yes but because I hadn't

completed my [pre-med], that I would have to start and I would lose quite a bit. And so, we thought, O.K. Well, I came here.

And then, one of the things that was so interesting . . . I explored because my husband told me that, "You don't have to be a medical, medical doctor. There are so many other fields that are open." In India, you have these tracks. You have the science track or the commerce track. And then, it is very hard to switch. You basically don't switch. It is just unheard of. But he said, medicine, you always have that option so why don't you . . . so, the first semester that I was here, we were in Chapel Hill at the University of North Carolina. [REDACTED] He was an assistant professor there. So, I just took courses. I took courses in business, I took courses in computer science. At that time, computer science was just an upcoming field that was just beginning. And I really liked business. I loved accounting. I loved finance. I guess it also had to do with the professors that I had. You know, a lot of times when you are getting introduced to a particular field, who is the faculty member [REDACTED] that is teaching you and the books and all of that also has a very big impact. And I loved it. And I thought, wow, this is beginning to make sense, you know, because you are never exposed to any of the financial world. So, I thought, wow, this is very interesting. And so, I got more and more and more. And then I thought, gee, doctor? I don't have to be a medical doctor. This is years of not only medical school and then internship and residency and all that, you know. And then, I realized that for family life, academia is . . . and, at that point, I hadn't even thought of getting a Ph.D. I thought, even with a CPA, if I wanted to do tax work from home or

something, you know, I could do it because family was very important and time with the family was very important.

UQ: You didn't have kids at that time though?

SK: We didn't have kids at that time. This is something that is very hard for people to realize. They think I am just making it up. When I tell the younger generation, they think, oh, there she is working full-time or doing her own job but tells us to have more kids and spend time. No, it is not that. The number one thing people have to realize is that children are a blessing. You can only plan so much. But children will come when God wants to give them to you. You know, you say, "I am going to do family planning and then tomorrow when I am all ready and decided, I am going to get pregnant." You may get pregnant or you may not and you may struggle for years and not have children, you see? It was just a miracle and I say miracle because not that we didn't want to have children . . . God gave us our children when he gave them to us and he gave us two and he gave us two. And he gave us one each and that is the way . . . if you ask my husband, he will say . . . if he had his way, we would probably have 5, 6 children. He says that.

UQ: He likes kids. You can tell.

Interviewee: Saleha Khumawala**Interview: July 31, 2007**

SK: Yes. So, people think, oh, we got one of each and so we stopped. We never started, we never stopped. And having more siblings is so important. It is better for the children. They grow up as better kids.

UQ: So, you had always planned that 'whatever I do, I still have to have my family as a priority?'

SK: Right, family as a priority. That was from day one. Even if I was a medical doctor, family was very important. And life at home was very important. That is something . . . my mom had told my husband when the proposal came. My mom said, "But she is very good, and she is going to go to med school and if I get her married now" . . . so, one of the promises that he had made to my mom was that "I will make sure that she studies. That is something that I can give you my word." And then, he said, "If you want to be a medical doctor, I will support you all the way in your decision but I want you to know that here in the U.S., we have these other options." There, you didn't have an option. And I was here for a semester . . . you apply for med school and all that . . . so I thought 'oh well . . .'

UQ: You must have done all that. Did you apply for med school before you came to the U.S.?

Interviewee: Saleha Khumawala**Interview: July 31, 2007**

SK: Right, because he was already here so all of that leg work was done. But the thing was when I came . . . you have got to realize, I came to a campus town and there were only 5 of us that were "international" or "foreign" students.

UQ: Graduate or undergraduate?

SK: Five. We were a cherished treasure on the UNC campus. You know, this is a pure white campus. I hate to use that term but I am just trying to give you an idea of the environment that existed at that time.

UQ: Where were those other students from? India, by any chance?

SK: No, actually, one was from Lebanon. One was from India. And I forgot the . . . the person I remember from Lebanon, his name was Munir but he was a Christian and the thing was that I had never thought of a Muslim name [for a Christian] and then I realized that no, Lebanon has Christians and Muslims in the area. So, you could have an Abdullah and be a Christian. And so, when I first heard Munir, I thought, oh, wow, another Muslim. Then, I realized, no that is . . .

UQ: What about the faculty? Were there international professors?

SK: Yes, there was one Indian professor in the School of Public Health and then there was one Pakistani professor in the School of Public Health. The Indian professor, actually, he was the department chair and much senior.

UQ: He must have been there a while then.

SK: Right. No. So, I came. You know, you are getting over a culture shock. And so, I thought the first semester, so just jumping into school, it is better that you get used to the educational system. And so, I was just going to audit some courses and all of that and I decided I'd take some courses for fun and these were courses for fun that I was taking just to get used to the environment and the whole works. I loved business. And I thought, oh wow, I am going to go to med school? It is not that I decided not to but I decided, oh, I will do some more. The next thing, I am in the MBA program and the next thing, I am getting a Ph.D.

UQ: So, one thing led to another? Do you remember which month you came?

SK: I came in May.

UQ: In May. So, the semester started in . . .

SK: I even went to summer school.

UQ: Oh, you just jumped right into it?

SK: Right. It is a campus town. Chapel Hill, the entire Raleigh Durham, the Tri-angle area has grown now but back in the 1970s, it was a pure campus town. I mean, to give you an idea, we had a student body population of 25,000 faculty and staff and all of that . . . for Christmas and Thanksgiving when students went home, the restaurants closed. I remember this because the only thing that stayed open was Pizza Inn. And so, it was a pure campus town, I mean. So, either you were on campus or you had nothing to do. And when you come from a pre-med school _____ and then you come here and are home all . . . I might as well . . . I would go to the library. I would just explore. I love to read anyway.

UQ: Did you feel comfortable on campus? Did people treat you well?

SK: Oh, yes. Oh, people treated us very well. Very well. As a matter of fact, the first semester that I was here, that November, because we came in May, then there was summer school, and the fall . . . that November, we had Thanksgiving dinner at the governor's house with the governor of North Carolina because his daughter was on campus and she actually saw me . . . she was starting at UNC and . . . we didn't even know it was the governor, that we were being invited by the governor. She actually came to me and said, "My parents would want somebody that is away from home to come and

have Thanksgiving dinner with us." And I said, "Oh, O.K., but, you know, I am married and so it would be the two of us. Would that make a difference?" She said, "Oh, I don't think my parents would mind." So, I said, "O.K., but then I need to check with my husband." As it is you check, but back then, I was so married and I had just come - you check with your husband. So I said, "O.K., give me your name and number and I will check and I will get back to you." And so, my first reaction to my husband was, this girl came to me and she wants to invite . . . "We are not going."

UQ: You didn't know her? She wasn't a friend of yours?

SK: No. They wanted to see somebody that was away from home and, as I told you, we had our hands full. She was in the business school and had seen me taking courses. When you are far and few . . . so, she just came to me after class one day. I was in the hallway. She was not even part of my class but had seen me. And probably, they must have said, "Let's share Thanksgiving with somebody that is . . ." And she [must have] said, "Oh yes, there is a young girl." And she had said, "This will be out in the country." They had a country home. "It will be out in the country," and all that. And I thought, some farmers out in the country. Out in the country? So, I told him. "I don't want to go to some farmer's place out in the country. We are not going." He said, "No, we will go." And not knowing who it is. He said, "The thought that somebody has invited us and the thought that they had that they wanted to share Thanksgiving with somebody that is away from home is a very good thought and we are going." And I am going, you can't say no -

Interviewee: Saleha Khumawala

Interview: July 31, 2007

it is your husband. And his decision was "We are going." And my whole thing was, you know, goats? Farmers? I don't know what kind of food they are going to have. I am still getting used to American food. And then, you'd be obliged to eat something that you don't like. My whole thing was, "We are not going." And his was, "We are going." So, the decision was made, we are going. It didn't matter where it was and who they were.

UQ: And you had no idea still?

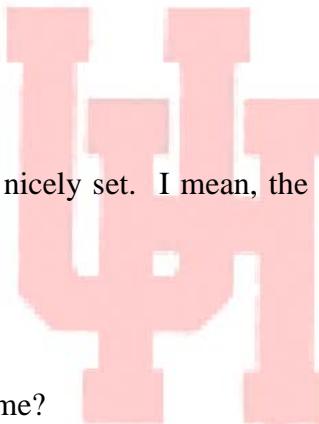
SK: No, we had no idea. And so, he called her and told her that, "Yes, we are going and that we would like to have directions." And we figured out who it was. I didn't figure this out. So, as she is giving him directions, she said, "As you drive up, then you will see this long driveway and at the beginning of the driveway is the name plate that will have the map of North Carolina on it and the name is written out," and all of this, you know. So, as she is describing and she says, "You will come to this long driveway and this name plate and it has a map of North Carolina." He said, "Would that be the governor's family?" And she said, "Yes, it is the governor's mansion. It is our home in the country. I am the governor's daughter."

UQ: This is a great story!

SK: Yes. And so, we went obviously. I made something from India, to take something to share because it is a holiday where you are sharing and giving thanks. So, I

made something and we took that. Nobody else was invited. It was just us, and the governor's brother was there. Not his entire family. The brother was just visiting from somewhere. I was too new to ask personal questions. It was very lavish, very nice. The china was not just gold plated but it had the seal of North Carolina, the diplomatic corps china because it had the seal of North Carolina on the plates and all of that that you used when you have state dinners and stuff like that. And he spent the entire day with us. He showed us around his farm and all of that and then gave us a signed bag.

UQ: So, you met his family?



SK: Yes, and it was all very nicely set. I mean, the whole thing, the dinner and we were at the table with them.

UQ: Do you remember his name?

SK: Bob Scott.

UQ: Welcome to America!

SK: Yes, it was a great welcome and, to be honest, it was such a great introduction to a Thanksgiving dinner that you wouldn't believe, but I love Thanksgiving. I love the fixings. I love the food. I will make string beans with French onions and sweet potatoes.

I can make that. I love cooking. And I have all the traditional . . . I can make a good traditional Thanksgiving dinner with a stuffed turkey and fixings and the baked stuffing. And I long for it.

UQ: So, you look forward to that?

SK: I look forward to it and every fall, I tell my class, I give them the day before, that Wednesday off. If I am teaching on a Monday, Wednesday, I give them that Wednesday off. If the campus has not declared it as a holiday and if they have classes, I will tell them, "This is your day to shop." And I tell them I really want them to enjoy. I also share my great story with them and I tell them, "You may forget everything that I have taught you but you will never forget that. So, you need to go enjoy your Thanksgiving. Then Friday, study. Do my work because Monday, your assignment is due!" So, I tell them, "I give you Wednesday off and I give you Thursday off, so go enjoy." I tell them that.

UQ: So, that was how you started out?

SK: Yes, it was great. I am a product of who I am because of the environment I was in. I was on campus and I rubbed shoulders . . . we didn't have these ethnic groups. You are within that [group] and you just never get out. One of the things that I really want the Asian students on the campus here at U of H, and by Asian, I mean everybody -

Vietnamese, Chinese, Indians - don't be within your group. You do not learn. Get out. Rub shoulders. Get involved because otherwise, the drawback . . . your horizon will not be broadened. You learn only this sort of ethnic ghetto type of mentality that you will have. That inhibits your growth.

Why did I decide to come to Houston? Because I took a position here at the University.

UQ: O.K., so I assume you both were looking for positions?

SK: Yes, we were both looking for positions and actually, for U of H, it was very important to draw my husband because he was very well-known in his field and it was very important for them to get a big name and attract a big name. And so, I did have options. I could have gone to NC State, I could have gone to Duke which was right there in Durham and NC State was in Raleigh. We could have stayed at UNC. My husband already had tenure and I had to graduate so we could have stayed in the area. But one of the things was that I told him, "Let's go to a big city," because I was very lonely. Now, everything is available from all over the world everywhere. Back if you look . . . I am talking about 1973, 1974, 1975 - we had one international store in Chapel Hill where you could get a few lentils or something and that was considered gourmet. I got some of the spices and all of that from New York by mail order stuff. I was just very lonely. I had gotten used to it. And as much as I enjoyed cooking and I learned a lot of the non-

traditional, non-Indian cooking by being with the Americans and being exposed to some great events and all of that, but still, to do anything, you either had to write mail order and get it through catalogs . . .

UQ: So did you miss people of your own culture as well, your own language, that kind of thing?

SK: Yes. I was also very young. You know, Islamically, you are married and then you find out. So, here you are married, you are living with a new person. You have got to get to know him. You are in a different country. You are away from home. My parents didn't have a phone when I left India. Then, the phone came later on. And then, calling was very expensive. You wrote letters. Things are very different now. It is hard for somebody to imagine. It took 10 days, 12 days, to get a letter. And so, I thought maybe if I went to a bigger city. Being in Chicago and any of the Midwest was all ruled out because of the weather. My husband didn't want cold weather. He says he has lived for too long [in the cold] and he hated the snow because 8 months out of the year . . . so, New York and Chicago were ruled out in terms of big cities. He didn't want to go to LA.

And Houston was really pushing for him. University of Houston was really pushing for him and we were very blessed because to this day, he is the only one in the Bauer College of Business that was two chaired positions. He is a Bauer fellow plus has an endowed chair. The only one in the college to hold that. It was very important for the

college to not only get big names but attract and keep them because in 1 year, we had practically . . .

I hated Houston. Coming from Chapel Hill, I hated Houston. And then, the more I got exposed to the *desi* community, I thought this is ridiculous. People don't understand Ph.D.s. They would see CPA and I actually even had one family, one woman asked me, if I am a CPA, why am I not practicing and she thought I am teaching so that means there is something wrong with me. Because, see, they come from India, Pakistan and they think a CPA is somebody that does taxes, is all knowledgeable. Teaching . . .

UQ: It's a notch down.

SK: Is a notch down. There is something wrong with me, that is why I am teaching. And I am going . . . you know, I had come from a pure academic community. A campus town . . . and UNC is very good. It is a flagship campus . . . to a community . . . where there, we had very few people from our culture but anybody that was there was also a Ph.D. and was also at the University. It was purely academic. The Pakistani professor, he was also in the School of Public Health, the Indian professor – he was a department chair in the school. So, anybody that was there was also a Ph.D. or you were a student. You had no other business being there. So, it was all you were just . . . it was all nothing but intellect, intellectually stimulating. You come here and I am going . . . I was just so sick. I can now stomach a lot and I've matured. People have gotten over it because now

their kids have started to go into colleges and I can see now that their eyes have opened up and now, they look up. But at that point, they had little kids . . .

UQ: What year was that that you came to Houston?

SK: We came to Houston in 1978. Your father-in-law was at the University of Houston Clearlake getting his Ph.D. over there. We had Eid prayers here on campus. And the first Islamic ISGH was established in a small home on the corner of Woodhead and Richmond. And we were very few. But nonetheless, I think your father-in-law, Dr. Kazi, was the only one that was in academia, and there was one other professor, Fazle Hussain, who is very well known in mechanical engineering. He won the Esther Farfel Award, the highest award that is given to a university professor on this campus. He got awarded that. He is from Bangladesh. And I could see why the Hussains never met with the people in the community because he was also so intellectually high that you just can't relate. And I had a real hard time. I honestly did have a hard time because I was young .

..

UQ: Even though you came here as a professor?

SK: As a professor, because we would go out in the community and the Muslim community just couldn't relate. You know, you were always looked down upon, or I literally would see people looking up at women that were medical doctors. And this mentality of professor and teaching, what are your hours and they said "Do you actually

work?" I said, "where are we? From where have we come?" We actually resigned. We told the dean here that we were going back because he [her husband] had tenure and we had taken a leave of absence; again, that if you go to someplace and you don't like it, you have . . . you never resign from a position unless you absolutely . . . so UNC said, yes, sure. They gave him a leave of absence because they also didn't want to lose him. So, that was an option. The dean there was so happy [to have him].

UQ: So, after you moved here, you decided to . . .

SK: No, Houston was not the place to live. We hated the city, we hated everything. But the dean here literally told Uncle [the interviewee's husband] that, "I cannot do anything about the city. This is not as pretty as Chapel Hill. I cannot make the environment. I can't change that, but if there is anything that I can do in the college to keep you, make you stay here, anything that is within my power, I will do. But it is very important for us that you stay. It is very important and we will do whatever it takes. I cannot do anything about Houston," which we understood. And actually, we had left. I went to India that summer. Uncle [the interviewee's husband] went back to Chapel Hill because we had a home there. And then, when I came back from India, the dean said . . . I was gone away for 3 weeks. My brother was getting married. I came back and the dean said, "Before you move and before you literally . . . I have not accepted your resignation. I just have it on hold." And whatever he said, I don't know what . . . whatever he did to us . . .

UQ: Magic!

SK: Right, or whatever . . . we decided O.K. We got another year's leave of absence and the maximum that a university gives you is 2 years. So, we got an additional year's leave of absence and we told them to put it on hold for another few months and he kept working and working on Uncle [the interviewee's husband].

UQ: What was the teaching environment like here for you?

SK: You know, a Ph.D. is a research degree. So, the teaching environment . . . I never teach much anyway. As a researcher, we hardly teach, I hardly teach 6 hours a week. I have my TAs that do all this stuff. But we came here thinking it was a big city, we will have more people of our own culture, we will have that environment, the Muslim environment that we were looking for. And then, I realized that the Muslim environment is not all that. Unfortunately, I don't mean to be a snob or anything or put anybody else down but I guess I was too naive to realize that once I come here, this is not a campus town and that the Muslims here are not all Ph.D.s.

UQ: And you really needed that intellectual . . .

SK: Interchange. Yes. I guess I couldn't accept . . . I was just too naive to realize that and I couldn't accept that these people had no clue what a Ph.D. is. And when somebody actually thought that there was something wrong that I was teaching and not doing my CPA practice, I just thought, how could you be so dumb, you know? But then, that is dumb of me in the sense that not everybody is exposed. And there were people from all walks of life because this is a big city.

UQ: And I guess the [*desi*] women who were here tended to be not very educated . . .

SK: Yes, anyway, you see . . . now, a lot of the women, not that they have gone out and gotten degrees but now that their children are grown up, it is very . . . they know about the colleges. They know about that.

UQ: And you feel that it is different in the way that people treat you now within the community?

SK: Oh, yes, and not only that, now I have reached the point where I don't care. I absolutely don't care. I could care less. I mean, we have never felt that we should . . . we were the first Muslims to move into West University and we moved into West U because of the college. The college said that was a great area to live in. We had faculty here. We would have either lived in West U. We had two houses that we had narrowed down: West University or Memorial because Memorial is all wooded and very nice. Chapel

Hill is all wooded. Or West University in terms of intellectual, the homogeneous in terms of the professional crowd. And so, we chose West U because it is so relatively close by. We had a bunch of faculty living in West U so we thought, oh, that's . . . and ever since then, we have lived in West U and we never had the need or felt the need to live in Sugar Land, meeting with the people. And I have reached the point where I don't care. I don't care whether somebody gives me a lift or not. And you don't have to agree with my values. I have gotten over that hell, as they say. So, how people treat is not important to me anymore. I guess I was too young. And it is not too young, I just couldn't understand . . .

UQ: You had an expectation also . . .

SK: Right, because I had come from . . . see, I came from India into such an intellectual environment that I thought that all of America [was like that], you see? And then you come here and then you . . .

UQ: So, what changed? At what point did you realize Houston is where we are going to stay?

SK: Well, then we stayed and then we had children. And then, as you have children, you realize a culture and Islam and all of that. And so, we decided we would . . .

UQ: So, for the kids?

SK: For the kids, yes. Several times, we thought of going because we had some very great positions. UCLA was just after Uncle [the interviewee's husband] like anything, you know. He has had a deanship offer also but then, when we reached a point where the children . . .

UQ: When was your daughter born?

SK: She was born in 1984. His deanship offer, I think was 1986 or 1987. And we thought of moving because that was a very great offer. UCLA was after him with a very nice endowed chair position. And then, as they got older and then for the kids, we just decided we were going to stay. And, you never know if God wills, we may leave.

UQ: O.K., so it was for that reason that you decided that Houston is worth staying maybe not so much for your intellectual stimulation but for the children's community and sense of identity?

SK: For the children, right. Right. And in some ways, I thought that I was contributing to the community, to the Muslim community, and I thought I was very needed, helping a lot of people. And so, I felt that well, maybe I am making, in whatever little way, maybe some difference.

UQ: So, in what ways have you been active in the community?

SK: One of my biggest contributions has been just counseling a lot of children, a lot of young kids. Like this young lady yesterday. You know, at 25, she is not a kid anymore. And I basically advised her. I told her, I said, "You know, I will be very honest with you. Bauer College is very expensive. It is one of the expensive colleges on campus. Getting education in Bauer . . . because you are paying over and above the regular tuition of the University of Houston." We call it differentiated designated tuition. It was Bauer's added fees. I told the young lady that the graduate education at Bauer is even more expensive. And I said, "For you to just take an introductory course in accounting or an introduction to finance just to see whether you like the field or not and whether you want to do an MBA, to do at Bauer, I would not advise. That is very expensive, for you to realize that you don't" . . . because he didn't even know what the term asset or liability meant.

And so, I basically suggested to her that she go to a community college. I said, "It is inexpensive. Take an introduction to those courses. You need to know the business jargon to be able to take the GMAT. And if you like it and you feel that you are getting excited, then you will have to repeat those courses but once you get into the MBA program, our MBAs, a lot of them are professionals that are working downtown and they are coming in the evening. So, they have already had this professional exposure. They are working in the corporate world. You have a biology major, you have no idea of the

business terms and it doesn't matter whether you like it or not. Even if you don't like it, for your own benefit, in whatever field you decide to study, you need to know what your assets are and what your liabilities are. These are terms you need to know for your own personal financial planning.

I am not saying you need to go out and work. Not that you have to get a job but even for your own . . . you may end up marrying a wealthy man. So, you need to have that business jargon just to carry out your own life." And so, she realized that, that what I was saying made sense. I said, "You talk to a boy. You meet a lot of young men. You have already been doing that. If you are talking, you have to be intellectually . . . you have to have some basic background to be able to communicate." And so, she realized that because she did talk to some young men that were in banking and so on and so forth. Her mother has called me and said, "Here is a resume. Can you evaluate this for us?" And she turned some of them down because she could not relate to them. And because I knew the history, I told her that. And so, she realized that and that is what she is going to do this fall.

UQ: Is that the kind of counseling you've done? Students come to you through the campus? They come knocking on your door for . . .

SK: Yes, they come. I have had parents that have come and they said "the kids tell us 'Mom, you just don't understand.'" So, the parents will come to me and say, "Can you explain to us what is going on?" And I have counseled a lot of mothers because I know

what the children are doing. So, I will say no. I have mothers that have said, at a dinner table at one of the weddings, I just happened to be sitting and there were these . . . you know, how you are sitting and someone else will come and sit? And there were these three women talking and I am listening and this mother actually said, "I am literally so upset. He had a chemical engineering degree and now he is doing his MBA and he has no sense of business." I said, "No." I butted in. I said, "No, he is doing the right thing. Engineering and business, it is a very good combination. He needs that MBA to do in engineering what he is doing." And she kind of looked at me. And then I told her who I was and I told her . . . Bauer now has a name and a lot of students are in the Bauer College and so on.

We were at dinner Saturday evening in Sugar Land and I met this woman for the first time. And her daughter here is an accounting major. She didn't know who I was. I was wearing traditional clothes. And we had just finished, I was in my typical [ethnic attire]. She said, "Oh, my daughter is in the Bower College. She is taking accounting." And I told her I was a mentor for her tax case. She said, "Who are you?"

UQ: So, do you feel like you provide that unique perspective . . .

SK: Right. And I feel that there are very few Muslim women out there [who are] doing [this]. And so, I am not doing this for money. We are so blessed, by the mercy of God. In some ways, I feel that I am loaded, I mean, in terms of what Allah has just . . .

UQ: All your needs are met.

SK: Yes, we are very blessed. Allah has loaded us. That is what I mean when I say I am loaded. I am loaded with all these blessings from God but I feel that as a Muslim woman, I contribute and I need to be out there just for that.

UQ: You also did some work on . . . I think you still do, on collecting things for the needy in other countries.



SK: Yes, we still do and actually, there is a project on the way for Balochistan with all the floods and all of that. I am waiting for the shipping company.

UQ: Is it under a specific organization. Is it some name that is . . .

SK: If it is going to Pakistan, we send it out through ICNA [Islamic Circle of North America] Relief, or we also send it to Pakistan through Rotary Club of Houston. We will partner with Rotary Club of Islamabad or the Rotary district chapter in Karachi.

UQ: About how often does that occur?

SK: Oh, and then with the earthquake, we partnered with Gifts in Kind International, with Prudential Insurance through their foundation, Phillip Morris through their foundation. So, we have reached out to a lot of foundations and they have helped us. I run a charity myself because there is something else that I do that there are hardly, very few Muslims [do]. I specialize not just in financial accounting but I specialize in government and nonprofit accounting. ISGH wanted me to be on the board of trustees, on the nominating board to nominate people for the board for Dar ul Arqam [the ISGH parochial school]. They appointed me as a chair. And in one week, I told them that this is the way it is to be done and if you want us to do it, this is the way we do it or not do it at all. And he said "no, no," . . . and so, the person that responded was not in the position to respond because my email was not for that person . . .

[break]

No, I came on a green card. I came to the United States on a green card because in those days, there was no such thing as a student visa. I just came.

UQ: There weren't H1s or H2s?

SK: I went to the Embassy and they gave me a green card. So, my husband, they saw his credentials, visa, so that was good.

[At this point, the interviewee reads straight from the list of questions]

I already described my life after I first arrived.

“Did you have a network of friends? “How and when did you find . . . other hardships or struggles? Have you been able to . . . have you kept up with news and public . . .” Yes.

“What has been your interactions with your neighbors?” Where we live, our neighbors are all . . . and we have a very good relationship. We invite our neighbors. We have a lot of what you would call interfaith dinners and what have you. We have an open door policy. As much as my husband loves children, in West U, I don't know if people know this but it is a very family-oriented neighborhood. And it is mothers staying at home. It is the other way around now. The in thing is to be home. The three decades of . . . in the 1970s, you were not even born probably then but the culture was . . .

[end of tape 1]

So, I came in an era when Women's Lib was on the go. And so, basically, over 3 decades, people have realized what that has done to the children. And, of course, given the affluence of our neighborhood, it is not only that the women are home, then you have nannies. Next door, they have 5 kids. They have also realized that this whole concept of having 1 child - he is a lawyer. Two doors down, he is another lawyer, doing very well. Peggy is home full-time, has a full-time nanny, has another maid. I mean, so the affluence is there, so they can afford it. But besides afford, the culture is you have got to

be home and spend time with the children. That is the in thing now, to be home. Now, if you go out, you can make ends meet, that is where the . . . so the trend has reversed. But the thing is, our relationship with our neighbors, we have an open door policy with our neighbors' children. They all come knocking. "What are you cooking? What is going on?"

UQ: Even though you have no small children?

SK: Because Uncle [the interviewee's husband] gives candy.

UQ: Yes, he does. He hides it in his pocket. Even my kids know your husband very well because of it!

SK: Yes, so they will come and we will tell them, only so much for today. Anyway, so we have a very good . . . I walk with my neighbors. I walk in the morning at 5:30 after *fajr* [the early morning prayer]. I am also in the neighborhood book club. We have a women's book club. And our criteria is it has to be within walking distance. We don't drive. And we have a book club that meets every month.

UQ: Oh, O.K., so wherever you meet, you walk to that location?

SK: We are within our circle, so we are walking to each other's home.

UQ: So, that really strengthens those ties with your immediate neighbors?

SK: Yes. If somebody wants to come, they can come but we are not driving. If somebody from outside wants to join our group, they can but we don't . . . we are 8 and we walk to each other's house. We are 3, 4 houses down from each other or on the next street.

UQ: So, you find that obviously your relationship with the neighbors is very strong?

SK: Very strong, yes. And you choose the book. I chose the *Kite Runner*. I chose *Reading Lolita in Tehran*. I have been in the book club now for 2 years and it is once every 6 months. Then, the last time, I choose Wangari Maathai, the Kenyan woman that won the Nobel Peace Prize in 2004. We read her memoirs. So, these are books that I selected. So, whenever it is your turn, you select the book.

Would you recommend that other family or friends migrate to the United States? All my entire family is in India. My entire family is in India. I have nobody here.

UQ: Really?

SK: Yes.

UQ: They are all set there? They have no interest in coming to visit their children?

SK: Yes, but now, you have got to realize, the global force has changed. India is such a world economic power, so the worst migration has already taken place. So, their younger children, I tell them and I have already told them that you have more opportunities here than in India. You can even work for U.S. firms over there. And actually our son-in-law-to-be, my brother's daughter, just got engaged. The son-in-law-to-be is working for a U.S. firm in Bangalore. So, you have opportunities there. Don't come here.

UQ: What about your husband's family? Did any of them . . .

SK: Yes, his brother, his older brother who knows your father-in-law very well, he came back in the 1960s. He came on a Fulbright scholarship at the time and he got his Ph.D. and so on and so forth. And then, his oldest brother's son is also settled and married in Chicago.

UQ: He still has a lot of family back in India as well?

SK: He doesn't have any sisters. He has only a small family, 4. His mother had only 4 sons. So, he is here. Out of the 4, he came here first. His other brother came. And so,

[from] the youngest brother, nobody has come. He has his entire family. And the oldest brother has a green card, comes back and forth because he has a son who is already settled in Chicago with his wife and family there. So, he comes back and forth. So basically, it is only the youngest brother who has his entire family there.

UQ: Before you came to America, do you remember what your perception was where you had anticipated what America would be like? What did you know of it?

SK: In the 1960s, there was a lot . . . you have got to understand - even though I had never traveled out of the country, my family had already been exposed to overseas because I had two uncles in Germany and one of them married a German woman. And he had come back with her. They did the *nikkah* [marriage vows] and all of that in India and so on and so forth.

UQ: Did you think the similarity between Europe and America, both Western countries, was it . . .

SK: We were exposed to sort of the Western people, if you would say. But in the 1960s, you have got to remember, especially on the West Coast, the hippie culture. And, you know, media picks up the top stuff. And you read. There was no TV. TV had just come out in the late 1960s. My uncle was a member of the Gym-khana [a recreational/country club] and so when he went to his Gym-khana, they had one TV and

he saw it. So, I knew what a TV was like and what was TV. But you read. I grew up reading *Reader's Digest*. I mean, that is something we get. Even to this day, my family gets *Reader's Digest*.

UQ: O.K., so you had *Reader's Digest* to familiarize you with . . .

SK: Right, plus I studied in a convent, right from kindergarten to high school was at Mount Carmel Convent which was missionary schools run by the nuns.

UQ: Was it a boarding school?

SK: No, it was not. And we had St. Xavier's which was for boys which is where Uncle [the interviewee's husband] went. And then, there was a St. Xavier's College which was coed. The college was coed. And I went to the college there. So, we had Sisters and the Fathers, as we called them, that were from overseas. We had a Sister from Sweden. The Catholic order of the nuns. That is why when I came here, my English was very good. I grew up reading *Reader's Digest*. I went from kindergarten all the way education . . . I never had to take TOEFL or anything to get into . . . I took the GRE to get into the graduate school but I never had to take any TOEFL and didn't have this. So, that is why that typical accent isn't there. It is not just because I have been here so many years but . . .

Interviewee: Saleha Khumawala

Interview: July 31, 2007

UQ: It was spoken to you from a very early age.

SK: Yes, because my nana did business with the Britishers. You know, India was under the British rule. And he was an educated person.

UQ: In India?

SK: In India. And my uncles, my mother's brothers, they are both . . . my uncle is still alive . . . he is a leading, one of the top lawyers in Bombay. I mean, the equivalent of the top lawyers here in this country. That is how powerful he is. So, he was educated. So, my mother came from an educated family and made sure that we were . . . so, my uncles were always at St. Xavier's and my aunts were in convent. So, we went . . . and obviously, the children go through . . .

UQ: Do you have siblings as well?

SK: Yes, I have 3 brothers and 3 sisters in India. My entire family is in India.

UQ: And they all . . .

SK: All my sisters went to convent. Their children are in convent. My brother has a granddaughter now. So, our generation, my sisters all, my brothers' daughters, all went to

convent; my sisters' daughters went to convent and now my brother has a granddaughter - she is 4 years old - and she is in convent. She just got admitted into convent because they also ask you for legacy and who are the people . . . and so, we have pages that we fill out. And so, when the Sisters look at that, it is like . . . it is very hard to get into those schools but Alhamdullah, she had no problem. And, of course, we knew she would not. When you have got . . . and both the daughters . . . both my brothers have their older sons married and their wives that they have got, are also convent educated. Her name is Aisha. So, when we applied for Aisha [the grand-daughter who has just started her education at the convent], her mother, Tahzeen, who is one of the wives, plus nieces and my brother's daughter which would be her aunt, Aisha's aunt, plus Aisha's grand pupis, you know . . . it is a whole family. Yes, so it is just pages and pages, you fill it out, yes, [for example] which year did you graduate. . . . And we have always kept great contacts with them so they know us very well in the convent.

UQ: Did your sisters pursue higher degrees also?

SK: They all have undergraduates but one of my sisters, besides her undergraduate, also has . . . they would call it beauty school. She did her diploma in cosmetology under Shenaz Hussain. Shenaz Hussain, the beautician, she has schools all over India. So, after her undergraduate, she also did that and is very good at that. Another sister, she has an undergraduate in the commerce/business and she is . . . and the older one . . . they are all younger than I am but the oldest of the three, I am not sure whether she finished her

masters in psychology. She had a BA in psychology. She does medical transcription so has a lot of medical knowledge because this outsourcing that we have from here. So, she went actually to school to learn all the medical terms and the drugs and all of that because when you are transcribing, you have got to understand what the doctors are saying. So, it is like being a half doctor.

UQ: How often do you go back to India?

SK: Every year. Sometimes twice a year.

UQ: And the kids?

SK: The kids . . . see, Mubeen is 20. I would say he must have gone 15 times.

UQ: So, frequently.

SK: Yes, very frequently.

UQ: Where in India do you go when you do?

SK: Ahmedabad. But the children have seen the rest of India as well. All the way to the south.

UQ: They are comfortable?

SK: Oh, very comfortable.

UQ: They look forward to going?

SK: Yes, they look forward to going.

UQ: And they speak your language?

SK: Yes, they speak our language. We have some rules at home and when they were young, you know, Uncle [the interviewee's husband] had these rules like . . . like when he said, "We are going to this [dinner out in the country]. Whoever invited, it doesn't matter – we are going." So, when they [the children] were young, he said, "We are not replying back to them in English." That is it. I mean, these were laws that were made. And you didn't argue. So, from childhood, they . . . and then, he taught them how to write in Urdu. They are not very good in writing because, you know, you lose practice. And then Naz, because of Bellaire, took 4 years of Hindi and she can read and write Hindi very well. It was a Magnet transfer based on language because we were zoned for Lamar. And then, they understand Gujarati because that is our state language.

UQ: So, do they speak Gujarati as well?

SK: A little bit. Broken. But they can pick up when we speak.

UQ: So, when you go back, do they speak fluently with your family? Well, your family all speaks English anyway.

SK: Yes, no problem. But with Nana and Dadi and all of that, yes, they can speak [in Urdu].

UQ: Is there anything else you wanted to add before we stop?

SK: No. I think I have covered everything. Much more than what you have probably wanted.

UQ: [laughs] No, there is never too much! Thank you.