

Interviewee: Bhuchar, Vijay

Interview Date: September 21, 2011

UNIVERSITY OF HOUSTON
ORAL HISTORY OF HOUSTON PROJECT

Vijay Bhuchar
University of Houston Oral History Project

Interviewed by: Uzma Quraishi
Date: September 21, 2011
Transcribed by: Michelle Kokes
Location: Bhuchar residence; Sugar Land, Texas

UQ: This is the oral history interview of Vijay Bhuchar at her home in Sugar Land, Texas. The date is September 21, 2011 interviewer's name is Uzma Quraishi and the interview is being conducted for the Oral History of Houston Project at the University of Houston. You can begin by just telling a little bit about yourself, your childhood, your background.

VB: Okay, we'll start with, I guess my childhood then.

UQ: Okay.

VB: I was born a long, long time ago, I hate to say when. I'm going to be 61 this year, so born in 1950 of parents who migrated to New Delhi when, actually my mom fled Pakistan in I forget the year but two years before I was born so my mom came and settled in refugee camps in Delhi and they got married in India and I was born a couple of years later. My childhood was in... I was told I was born in Karol Bagh New Delhi but then my earliest memories are a childhood in West Patel Nagar in New Delhi which are special, you know special community that was for the refugees who had left Pakistan at that time. So it was a fun childhood. A lot of neighbors, a lot of friends, a lot of you know, whatever. My dad worked for WHO, the UN, and in 1959 we got the opportunity

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of a lifetime. My dad was transferred to Geneva, Switzerland and we followed after that I think that's an event that kind of changed my life because I ended up going from you know a very, very lower income middle class family background in New Delhi to you know a much more cosmopolitan to a much more diverse life and upbringing that I enjoyed in Geneva. I went to the International School of Geneva for about three years which is 4th, 5th and 6th grades. Actually, I started off in a French school where I did not understand a word. My brother and I had the toughest time for the four or five months that we ended up in French school. But after that we ended up in an International School where I learned English for the first time besides doing "Baa-baa Black Sheep" in elementary school in Delhi. So from there I think it was... it was a great ride. We were in Geneva for three years, made a lot of... a few Indian families that were all connected with the UN or foreign services and three years there and dad, my dad was transferred to Alexandria, Egypt and spent five years there, learned Arabic, continued learning French and English of course and Hindi was the spoken language at home besides Punjabi and Multani which are dialects. These are really formative years for me where you got exposed totally. I went to an American missionary school from 4th grade through 10th or 11th grade, 5 years which you know totally opened up a new world for me. Besides enjoying everything which is still sort of Eastern because we had you know maids at home, learned Arabic, enjoyed the best of both worlds in a way. My dad was again transferred to Geneva after that where again the same old international schools, I won't go into that again. When I finished O-levels my dad shipped me off to India, to go to boarding school in, boarding college really in Delhi and that's where I did my undergrad. I have a bachelor's in English, English Honors and in that time, my dad... my parents

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were again transferred to India so I shifted back home and lived at home and completed my undergrad and my Master's at Delhi University. And... it was fun I have a great, great life as a youngster. I don't know if you need anything more. It was a dream... it was a good life, learned a lot of languages and travelled all over got to come home every two years on home leave it was just fun.

UQ: It sounds like it. It does. So when you were in India you were there until around the age of 9, 8 or 9?

VB: I was in India until the age of 9.

UQ: Okay and the area that you mentioned can you spell it for me?

VB: It's West Patel Nagar.

UQ: Okay and...

VB: You know small homes it was one... it was a one room home, one room a small storage area and a kitchen and a community bathrooms and after that I think we put in our own plumbing and our own bathrooms. I mean I don't remember exactly I was 5, 6 years old but I do remember using community bathrooms initially and then having our own which was still part of the same little 100 square foot whatever it was it was a very small home.

UQ: Right. What did your father do?

VB: My dad, he is an accountant, he's done accounting so he worked in the budget office for WHO, even at that time he worked with finance. I mean he's brilliant where finance is concerned. So his work was finance.

UQ: I see, okay. So living in this area you went to school, a local school?

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VB: A local school. I went into a school called Adarsh, I think it's Adarsh Primary School, very close walking, you know walking distance.

UQ: Do you at all remember the transition from Pakistan to India?

VB: I was born in Delhi.

UQ: You were born in Delhi, so you don't remember [laughs].

VB: I don't.

UQ: Do your parents talk about the differences?

VB: Oh yes. Oh yes absolutely they do.

UQ: What kinds of differences do they say?

VB: I think what comes out most it's not so much their childhood or what their life was, we don't get that. I think what sticks in their memory is that the turmoil of moving in that 1947 division of the country into two, that's what they remember. I have my mom telling the stories of my grandmother and my mom, my Nani and my mom literally left overnight, you know they flew probably the first flight I've heard of they flew from they were in Dera Ghazi Khan, they flew because it was just not safe for young women. They were just being taken and abducted, so my grandfather put his wife and my mom on a plane to Delhi. They left everything behind. The only thing my grandmother brought whatever gold she had she sewed inside her petticoat and that's how they made their start in, you know when they moved to Delhi, in refugee camps or whatever it was. I mean these are the stories, not so much their childhood or their existence in their home in their hometown; what I hear most are the stories about how they fled. The same goes for my dad he left, they were not married at that time, they were engaged. My dad left a little bit later but he came in a train with his mother. She was widowed. My dad lost his dad ages

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ago. So when they left Pakistan I think we all hear about the stories about the atrocities that were committed in the trains so he tells about that. How people were stripped to see who was what and they were butchered right there. Those are the stories I hear not so much, you know the good times when they were living or when they were younger. I just hear the stories about the fleeing from there.

UQ: What kind of... when they lived in Pakistan, Multan, is that where?

VB: Dera Ghazi Khan

UQ: Did they live in a city, village, town where were they?

VB: It wasn't a village. It was a town and my dad was in town because he attended, he attended school and he went to Lahore University. He attended some university at Lahore I don't know all the details.

UQ: Okay.

VB: In fact that's where my dad, I mean knew my future father in law. So they were friends from school and college.

UQ: Okay so this shifts to Delhi and this neighborhood that you lived in in Delhi can you spell that?

VB: West Patel Nagar

UQ: Oh that was it?

VB: Yes.

UQ: Of course. You lived in that same neighborhood until you left India?

VB: Yes. No, we lived where I was born Karol Bagh but I don't really have any recollection of that so I won't even tell you that.

UQ: Okay alright so until you were eight or nine that's where you were?

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VB: That's where I was. That was home to me.

UQ: Do you ever go back to that general area?

VB: I do. I have gone back because I had (not recently) I went back maybe 10 years ago because I had my grandmother's sister used to live in the same area, continued to stay in that area so I have gone back yes.

UQ: Okay what about the rest of your family who also migrated from Pakistan where did they go in India?

VB: The rest of my family... my mom has one sister and my dad had one sister. His sister went to Rohtak which is not too far from Delhi. She was already married at the time and I think she may have, she may have found this home in Rohtak long before 1947.

UQ: I see.

VB: So because her husband had his own business in Rohtak and my mom's sister was already in what is now India. They had farmlands. Her husband had farmlands not too far away from Delhi about 50, 60 miles away from Delhi.

UQ: So that must have influenced their choice to settle in that region as opposed to any other in India?

VB: Well you know what when the language is obviously Hindi so we ended up staying plus, we were Punjabis so you end up in a community which is Punjabi/Multani and from what I remember our family was originally from Dera Ghazi Khan there is a huge community in India it is in Kirti Nagar not too far from West Patel Nagar it's maybe 7, 8 miles away from there. That's where all the Dera Ghazi Khan refugees settled. I mean we eventually ended up building there. In fact my parents when we moved back

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from Geneva that's where we ended up building a home also was in Kirti Nagar which is about 7, 8 miles away from Patel Nagar So there's a huge... Dera community in that area. And I speak a language which is Multani so it is very few people I think still speak the language. It's going to die with me!

UQ: So do you still have that house that your family built?

VB: No my parents sold that but they moved into another community in Greater Kailash, which is an upwardly mobile it's sort of, our journey has been, depending on how dad's been doing. We've just been moving up.

UQ: Okay.

VB: So Greater Kailash is a little more what you call status community so that's where they sold the home in Kirtinagar and ended up building in Greater Kailash.

UQ: Okay alright. And your... you said that your Dada (paternal grandfather) had passed away a long time ago.

VB: Right.

UQ: How was your father able to pay for the schooling from a young age?

VB: They lived together it was a joint family so my staying with Chachas (father's brothers) you know it was continued my grandmother continued to stay with the entire family. I don't know I guess they were supported by the rest of the family.

UQ: Okay alright. Wow, you've had such a range of experiences in your childhood I don't even know where to begin. Most interviews don't start like this. So well let's fast forward to Houston and then we'll come back and revisit some of these things.

VB: Okay, alright.

UQ: So you first came to Houston when and why?

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VB: Alright, I came to Houston in 1975, I've obviously come with my husband. We were married in '72 and we went to Chicago; I was there for just a few weeks and in three years in New Orleans where Vinod did his residency at Tulane and then came to Houston for M.D. Anderson where he Vinod did his fellowship.

UQ: Okay so you married in Delhi?

VB: Married in Delhi.

UQ: Okay so typically there is some kind of assisted, I wouldn't say arranged marriage because...

VB: We had an arranged marriage.

UQ: Okay.

VB: Although I knew Vinod, I mean I knew him like I told you, our dads go way, way back. So it was... we were family friends. We are I mean they are gone. We are family friends and it was an arranged marriage though.

UQ: Did your parents consider other people for you as well?

VB: I don't think so because I was still when we got engaged I was still in college. I was I was in my first year of Master's so no at that time I think this was the first one.

UQ: Okay and he was at what?

VB: He was doing his internship. He was finishing up medical school and heading over to Chicago for an internship.

UQ: Okay alright. So you came to New Orleans and then you came to Houston. How would you compare the two cities? Not now but your first impressions.

VB: At that time New Orleans was, I don't know it was, in your daily life you don't notice a lot of things. I found it extremely difficult for me because living in India and

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coming to a new place besides that my husband had these awful, awful hours and calls and when we came we came on a... he had an H1 visa and I was obviously not allowed to work. So what I remember is being alone most of the time and not having anybody to share my life with or experiences with. There wasn't really any opportunity to make friends or meet people. That's what I remember sort of a lot of loneliness.

UQ: What about your neighbors, your immediate neighbors?

VB: No, I had a couple of friends in our building who were who were of Indian origin, but we didn't have many friends at that time. Whatever friends we had were through Vinod's work and he was... I mean we had just moved to New Orleans so he was meeting people and then when you socialize when you are working, when you are on call every 3rd, 4th night there really doesn't it doesn't leave you time to do much else. So I remember being very isolated when I first came. I remember I mean I had a... I mean if you've been to New Orleans I don't want to make... I don't want to make comments or statements which sound racist but it was a different, but New Orleans was very different from Houston, even Houston of those days I think New Orleans was very different. We did eventually make friends and I did eventually get a work permit. So I ended up working at the same university. I ended up in a psychiatrist's office working as a secretary.

UQ: How soon after you settled there were you able to start working?

VB: A long time. Like I said I didn't have work permit and by the time I got one it took about a year or so.

UQ: Okay.

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VB: So, I mean it wasn't a lot of money if I, I made \$463 a month which was not a whole lot of money but it was a great way to get out and I mean it was, it was a life saver. It was good to get out and be with people. It was strange work because our clinic, I mean our office was we did drug testing. It was a methadone, you know it was a treatment center for people who were on... it was controlled by Tulane University. We were doing urine samples. It was a unique experience from coming from you know from Delhi University and you end up doing typing and transcribing but it was work and it was time well spent. I did start going back to school. I joined University of Loyola to work towards an MBA program. I ended up going to night school, 2 nights a week, accounting, bookkeeping, you know things like that. If Vinod was busy, I was just as busy at work and with school and homework. So it was good. It's good to be busy.

UQ: What was the neighborhood like in New Orleans?

VB: The first year we stayed in a building which it was a 13 story building... not 13 no higher I guess on Canal Street and if you are familiar with New Orleans it's the main road. Most of the people living in that building worked either at Tulane or at Charity or at any of the Healthcare facilities in that neighborhood. So it was a very... I mean the whole apartment was maybe this big. So it was but it was fine and after one year we moved across to the West Bank and we rented an apartment there.

UQ: How were these two areas different?

VB: We had a lot more green first of all. We rented an apartment on the ground floor. It was I guess life in America. It's an apartment. We had more neighbors, more, it was just different. And different from the other place where people... a lot of the people living in the other building were students or... nurses, doctors, interns, very young, very

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young population almost like a dorm. It was a different. This was more of a residential people, real people.

UQ: I can see it would be hard to establish kind of ties with people who are busy.

VB: Right it's like going, you know going to a dorm building that's what it was.

UQ: Okay so then you moved to the more residential area. What were your interactions with your neighbors over there?

VB: Minimal. Really, very minimal. I did... by the way I did have a, we had gotten a dog by this time. I did have a little Pomeranian, but I don't remember any interactions with neighbors per se it's more people at work and people from Vinod's work who we socialized with.

UQ: Okay any Indians in that population?

VB: Some Indians. New Orleans did not have many Indians no.

UQ: Who was mostly there?

VB: I mean whatever the local mix of the population. Just it's a regular community. But no very few Indians. In fact one of the first experiences I remember I think I was so starved to meet other Indians I had gone down Canal Street and I had a couple of Indians that I met I stopped them on the way and we ended up just chatting with them and inviting them over to our apartment for dinner. So I do remember that but I think there were so few Indians that I think we were hungry to make that connection.

UQ: Yeah, so you were there for a couple of years and then you moved to Houston. What was your initial impression of the people of Houston?

VB: I think, obviously, you have a different make up, you had a different racial mix in Houston, you had a lot more Hispanic population and even in the 70's that was quite

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obvious that this was quite a different, a different population then what we had in New Orleans. I think in New Orleans we had a very large, not very large I think it was 30, 35% black and 60%, 70% Caucasian whereas when we moved to Houston we found a much larger Hispanic population. I think these are just visual impressions it doesn't mean anything.

UQ: Sure.

VB: But that's what we noticed when we moved here that a different mix of a population.

UQ: Could it have been the areas that you moved to for example the neighborhoods you lived in, in New Orleans were?

VB: No.

UQ: No?

VB: No.

UQ: That was the city itself.

VB: I think that was just the city as a whole. And the same goes for Houston we lived in when we first moved here we lived on Bellaire near Southwest Freeway there is an apartment complex there.

UQ: What year was this?

VB: 1975. We stayed in the apartment for about 2 years and I again ended up working at... at the Biochemistry Department very near to... you know we had one car at that time so my job always was very close to wherever Vinod was going. So he worked at MD Anderson and this was University of Texas, Biochemistry Department which was right across the street.

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UQ: Medical Center?

VB: Medical Center yeah.

UQ: Okay.

VB: So we would commute together going morning and evening unless he was on call, then I would come home and he would stay on.

UQ: Did you have a chance to finish your MBA?

VB: That's... no I did not. I did well after working a couple of years our first,

V____, I got pregnant with V____ and I had her in 1977 and that's the time we bought a house in Missouri City so we moved out from Bellaire to Missouri City.

UQ: Okay.

VB: Then after a couple of years, when V____ started going to day care that's when I went back to school at U of H and got into an MBA program but cut short I got pregnant with V____ and ended up with a problem pregnancy and bed rest so that was the end of I had V____. My daughter was born but no, that was the end of my MBA but...

UQ: Alright.

VB: Which is fine.

UQ: Back to the Bellaire apartment. You were there for a couple of years. What was that neighborhood like? I always like to get a sense of what you see?

VB: Okay very young people. I didn't really get a sense of the mix. I mean everyone was... it was a very... I find now when I think about it everyone kind of keeps to themselves, though we were in a complex we had our own little fence and the pool was right outside our apartment. I used the pool quite a bit but it's not like you, it's not like we were friends with any of the people living there.

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UQ: Do you think that's maybe partly because of the fact that you are an immigrant, would that have anything to do with it?

VB: I don't think so. I think it's just that's the general but at the same... we had started we obviously felt the need to connect with people and we started going, we started going to U of H for the weekend programs that they were having, the movie screenings, whatever it was we started going there to try and meet, meet people. But I kind of gave up on that that wasn't very successful. I mean the people we ran into we didn't find anything that connected us. So that was the end of it, we tried it for a little bit but we started meeting friends through whatever, I stopped people in the mall I met people in the mall and anyway now of course now by this time meeting people, we did have a circle of friends, primarily Indian friends. But we had a fairly active social life. Like our community Friday, Saturday, Sunday is always, it started getting full at that time. By the time we all, we were all starting off with our little children, all of us were having babies at the same time. So we were meeting a lot for children's activities during the weekday or on the weekend of course, birthdays and socializing a lot by that time.

UQ: Were a lot of the women who were having children were they stay at home moms at that time?

VB: At that time yes. Just about everyone unless they were... the only ones who were not were the physicians, the women who were physicians they were... I think they were the only ones who were working through it all. The rest were giving up even if they were working before were giving up and staying home.

UQ: Okay so when you first came to Houston how quickly were you able to find a job after that?

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VB: Immediately, within you know, within a week or two.

UQ: Okay. So if you had to compare just your impressions or preference of living in New Orleans versus Houston.

VB: I think Houston, definitely.

UQ: Even from the very early.

VB: Even from the very early, yes. I think probably first of all in New Orleans was a time when we were starting our married life together. The first year of marriage it's a lot of adjustments. So I think there was so much else going on by Houston by the time we moved to Houston we kind of settled into you know it was good. So I think all of that maybe figures into the whole thing as well.

UQ: Okay.

VB: Plus we had gotten used to life in USA so that was I had gotten used to working outside the house and inside the house which I think most of us when we come from many of us who have come from India have not done a thing...

UQ: Inside the house.

VB: Right! So by the time we came to Houston all of that has fallen into place and its adjustments have been made so maybe that was one of the reasons also.

UQ: Were there other things you liked about Houston?

VB: I did.

UQ: Or perhaps unique to the city?

VB: I'll tell you what we liked, in New Orleans to get groceries to get Indian groceries was an ordeal. Houston had a little grocery store where you would get Indian groceries, I think it was the connection, more of the connection to things Indian then we found in

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New Orleans. I think that made it easier. I think we made a lot more friends. I think that made it a lot easier. It was just, it was just a much more the transition was a lot easier let me say that.

UQ: Okay. That first or those friends those Indian friends were you able to make them very soon after settling here?

VB: Yes, some from work because some of my... though from work I had friends who were not necessarily all Indian. I had whoever was working in the office I had made friends obviously with the people who were working there but there were some Indian it was a biochemistry department so there were a lot of Indians doing Ph.D.'s and what not so we became friends with them as well and with a lot of the physicians who were working at MD Anderson, so it was easy. I think we found I think we gravitate towards our own and we found a lot, you know a lot of a lot of people to gravitate towards.

UQ: When you started seeking out Indian friends did it matter whether they were Punjabi or Multani or was it just...?

VB: No.

UQ: ...anyone who's Indian?

VB: Anyone. No it didn't matter.

UQ: Okay. And since they came from all regions of India what was the general language of communication?

VB: English.

UQ: English, okay. What about at home what language do you speak at home?

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VB: English and Hindi combined but between my husband and me but the children all speak English. My girls understand Hindi but they hesitate to speak it. My son does not, he does not understand Hindi or speak it. Which I'm told now is my failing.

UQ: They have a running list, I'm sure, that's how kids are [laughs].

VB: To answer that question with V_____ the first one we spoke only Hindi with her at home because we wanted her to learn the language and felt that she would learn it at school anyway. But the first time I put her, I started putting her in Mother's Day out when I, I forget which year some church Mother's day out we had a lot of trouble there because I would give them instruction in Hindi if she says, *dhu-dhu*, it's milk and *su-su*, and it was just horrendous because then they thought she was hard of hearing and then they thought she was a little slow and then when she told me that. I said, "You know we've been trying to hard at home to teach this child Hindi" and we're speaking I think English is my first language. I think in English and it's we made a special effort to speak in Hindi with her and we found it difficult and it kind of backfired on her and on us because she had so much trouble at school. But then immediately we switched I said, "Okay we're going back" and immediately we switched to I said, "Okay we're going back to English" because she was having such a difficult time and Mother's day out, whatever it was. So no after that it was English for all three of them.

UQ: Okay and your last child your third is a boy or a girl?

VB: He's a boy.

UQ: Alright.

VB: Now they are seeking, they want to learn Hindi. They took it in college and my son wants to learn, so yeah.

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UQ: How old is your youngest?

VB: He's 30.

UQ: Oh well I guess college is over then.

VB: Yeah... no actually college is not over. He is... he just started an MBA program at Rice, so no college is still on.

UQ: Okay well hopefully he won't have three kids along the way so he will be able to finish that one up [laughs]. Alright the neighborhood you moved into Missouri City, how did you choose Missouri City since your work is in the Medical Center...

VB: Very close. There were two things that you considered. One was affordability and the second of course was the proximity to if you go down 90 to the Medical Center it was not a bad drive. It was I think in those days it was 25, 30 minute drive. Not anymore I know. So it was fairly close and our first home was \$37,000 so it was, it was what you could afford.

UQ: Okay. Did you look within the city of Houston at all?

VB: We did not. We wanted a new home and I think in the City of Houston first of all most of the homes are older homes you would buy an older home so Missouri City was close to work and a new home so that was the choice.

UQ: Okay were you thinking about school, quality of schools at that time?

VB: No. Actually V_____ was not born yet she was born after we moved in within a week.

UQ: Good timing. Okay and what was your neighborhood like in Missouri City did you like it were you pleased with the move?

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VB: I loved it. I loved it. We had a lot of stay at home moms. Actually that was one of the most I mean functional neighborhoods that I can think of. We had babysitting co-ops. We had we'd watch each other's children. It was really a great neighborhood. We made a lot of friends on our street and in that community and we did a lot of things together.

UQ: What was the name of the neighborhood?

VB: Hunter's Glen.

UQ: Okay. How long were you there in Missouri City?

VB: Three years.

UQ: Oh a short time so you sold the house after that?

VB: We sold the house and built a home in Sugarwood which is goes to Dulles.

UQ: Okay. Again same question how did you choose because you're now moving further away from work?

VB: Yeah we are. I think we're trying to get a bigger home, a nicer home. As Vinod is finishing up his residency and starting private practice. We were moving to a bigger home and I had two, by that time I had two and I was I think I was pregnant with B_____ at that time so we were just going for a bigger home and yeah we did move a little bit further out but not too much further. I think... actually Vinod had started his practice by then and he was at Southwest Memorial. So from Sugarwood to Southwest Memorial was a very short commute.

UQ: Okay. When you first came here to Houston and you started interacting with the University of Houston crowd you said that you didn't really find people who could match your interests, who were those people mostly who were coming to the events on campus?

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VB: I think age wise they were pretty much my age people. I mean I was in my... gosh I was young. I was in my early 20's, mid-20's at that time. But we just didn't see a connection with the people who were coming there. It was just it just didn't see a connection.

UQ: Were they students largely?

VB: There were a lot of students but there were some couples also. There were some... and everyone in those days they used to be so young. But they were the same age just didn't click, I mean nothing clicked so that didn't work out for us.

UQ: Did they come from professional backgrounds?

VB: I'm not sure, possibly not.

UQ: Did you know Prahba Bala?

VB: Of course.

UQ: And was she there at the same time that you?

VB: You know I got to know Prahba recently about 10, 12 years ago.

UQ: Oh that is recent. She also was linked in with that same U of H crowd and she's quite active.

VB: Okay alright, yeah, yeah. Prahba is a dear friend yeah. So that's why when you say, "Do you have people from other Punjabi?" No Prahba is one, is actually one of my best friends is Rajam Rajeshwari from Arda so it's not like we're limited to Maharashtrian I think it's more our way of thinking rather than whether they are Punjabi or whether they are south Indian or Bengali. I think it's, it's just a question of being on the same wave length and having the same interests and that's what.

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UQ: I see, that makes sense. I don't know if you can answer this but other interviewees have pointed out that several of these students who were settled here from India they were marrying from outside of the Indian community. Are you familiar with that at all? Did you see any of that going on?

VB: Not predominantly I know I mean it's like we're talking about 30 years ago. I know there were a couple who did marry but I can't make any... it didn't stand out for me that I would remember it or make a comment on it.

UQ: Okay and what about now do you see it increasing as far as out marriage amongst the next generation?

VB: My son just married a Chinese American, yes definitely.

UQ: Okay, so in your own home? And how does the community generally react to that?

VB: I think to my face they all reacted very well and I think they've gotten to know Jennifer I mean she's been around since high school so she's been coming to a lot of events and she's just been around for a long time so I think everyone's gotten used to her being there. So I but I don't know what the reaction is I'm assuming fine. They all say nice things about her so I think I don't see anyone saying otherwise.

UQ: Okay how common is second generation Indian marriage to Chinese Americans?

VB: Not common at all.

UQ: No, so if they are marrying outside of the community who are they marrying?

VB: They are marrying either Hispanic or they are marrying Caucasian.

UQ: Okay and is it more common for Indian men to marry other women or is it the same whether...

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VB: I think it's the same male or female. I mean in my experience it's the same. In fact I'm invited to a wedding next weekend where the girl is Indian and she's marrying a Caucasian. So I'm I think the people I know... I think it's even. But my girls are both marrying, the boys are both Indian.

UQ: Are they raised here the boys?

VB: Yes... actually no, V____ is marrying her fiancé is from India although he's been here for about 10 years.

UQ: Okay.

VB: And V____'s fiancé they have grown up here.

UQ: So a couple of questions I don't want to forget any of it. You are saying that people are primarily marrying Latinos or Caucasian Americans.

VB: Actually more Caucasian Americans rather than...

UQ: Okay so Latinos is kind of the exception?

VB: In my own...

UQ: Just from what you see?

VB: From what I see yeah. It's more Caucasian though I have seen actually one of my friend's daughters married a black man and she got divorced and now she's marrying a white boy. So it's the same... it's hard to tell what's I mean there's not a trend per se but this is what I notice.

UQ: Without naming names or anything can you talk about some of the reactions to this girl who married the African American person?

VB: I think she had some reaction within her own family. But, initially, but I think in the end I think they all accepted plus the family that's in India they accept that.

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UQ: Oh, you mean the extended family?

VB: Yes the extended family in India. I mean that's all I can really say. I think once you get to know the person it doesn't really matter if he is a nice young man it just didn't work out for them.

UQ: Okay and is it the same kind of reaction to her marrying a Caucasian American?

VB: I haven't heard, I don't know.

UQ: Okay.

VB: But she has a child, she has a son by her first marriage and now she's marrying again next year.

UQ: You said that one of your daughters is marrying someone who was raised in India, did you help suggest anyone for your daughters or did they choose their own partners?

VB: They... we did suggest over the years I mean just tried a little bit of match making but gave up on it. I tried match making for my sister which was an awful, awful experience. This was I don't know 15, 20 years ago. So no, I did not match... we did not match make for the girls.

UQ: Okay so the few suggestions that you did make, what were you looking for what kind of criteria were you looking for to match?

VB: You know similar family background, professional, pleasant, good looking you know the usual qualities we look for when it's not "love" you know the same qualities that everyone looks for, similar family background.

UQ: What do you mean by similar family backgrounds?

VB: I find, I feel that in our family we are all very family oriented. We are a very close knit family and we, you know, we try to seek out people who share the same kind of

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values of families first and you live life with dignity and you know... good moral, I won't use the word moral, good standing in the community you know the usual things that we look for.

UQ: Okay.

VB: So we would look for people if we tried to match make it would be people within the community that we are already familiar with that we know, children that we would know.

UQ: Okay.

VB: But like I said it didn't go anywhere so...

UQ: Good looking how would you... what is good looking for you since that differs from person to person?

VB: I think besides the physical attributes I think, if I'm looking for my daughter who is tall and who is I think are attractive young women I would want someone who would be tall and who would be well we know what good looking is, you are good looking.

You know just attractive and personable and comes across as gentle, as has a personality. When I say good looking, I'm talking about everything combined. I think if you don't have if you don't have what's inside then you don't... looks don't matter and looks wear away very, very quickly.

UQ: Okay. You mentioned matchmaking so I'm wondering are there people in the Indian community here who function as formal match makers?

VB: I think we all try our hand at it, but not really I mean not... All the parents are always trying to say, "Oh this one and this one" but like I said it doesn't really go

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anywhere. Our children I mean I think either it clicks I think it clicks on its own and like I said my girls are past the... they are in their 30's so they found their own matches.

UQ: Sure. So when your... when, if a friend of yours for example wants to find someone for her daughter there aren't particular people she can go to who may have kind of have interest in doing this? I have a friend who loves match making, it's something she loves to do.

VB: Not officially actually no I don't know of anyone.

UQ: Okay interesting okay. What are your views of your children dating when they were in high school?

VB: In high school I was, it freaked me out but they didn't really... I mean they didn't date the same way they all went in groups but we were all paranoid about I think we need to change the way we think I really do. I think it's the Indian way of thinking. I think I used to be it would be hard for me to let them go out and be late. I would say, "Be back by 11:00" and they'd say, "Nothing happens, no party is starting at 11:00." So I think we were very rigid in the when my kids were in high school I think once I think after they came back from UT and finished the school I'm like "Whatever."

UQ: Did they come back and live with you at home after college?

VB: For a short time, yeah, for a short time. Actually my son lives here now he's still at home.

UQ: We'll talk a little bit about your kids what do they do, where are they?

VB: Okay, my daughter V____ is in California. She is in pharmacy school. This is her last year and she is getting married next year. My V____... I'm actually, shouldn't be giving names but anyway delete them.

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UQ: The names?

VB: Yeah she is done her MBA from U of H MHAMBA and she is also working for dad. She does his billing and she's got a real estate license so she does both side by side. And B_____ he was in New York for several years after UT and came back about three years ago. He worked here for a non-profit and then went back to school just now.

UQ: Okay so a couple of them are close?

VB: Yeah actually V_____ is moving back also because her fiancé lives here. He is a pharmacist also.

UQ: Oh good match huh?

VB: Yeah.

UQ: When you were in Chicago and you knew that you were going to settle in New Orleans at that time since you were such a short time.

VB: I was in Chicago for three weeks so I mean it's literally it was a newlywed after 5, 7 days after the wedding came to Chicago and we were there for 3 weeks literally when Vinod was finishing up his internship and I don't really have any...

UQ: So you knew that you were going to be coming to New Orleans?

VB: Yes.

UQ: That was the question.

VB: All we had when we came to Chicago there was a set circle of friends that Vinod had and most of them were bachelors but I remember having all these you know very affectionate group of people who welcomed me when I came to Chicago but like I said it only lasted three weeks and we moved, we drove down to New Orleans.

UQ: Had you heard of New Orleans before the U.S.?

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VB: I had, from “A Street Car Named Desire” I think?

UQ: Okay.

VB: Some play, but I had. But then my schooling was very different from... so yeah I heard about that.

UQ: What were your impressions of sort of the U.S. before you ever came here?

VB: Before I came here?

UQ: Before you came here did you have any idea what it was going to be like?

VB: You know I really didn't know what to expect. I expected... Europe. You know, I expected something like Europe when I came here but I found here that the population mixes were very different from what was there in Switzerland. I think Geneva was a totally it was a totally white city. I think the only foreigners were people like my dad and his associates and the foreign services. But I think when you come to USA you realize that there is such a mix of populations. I hadn't seen that earlier.

UQ: So that was surprising to you to see so many groups?

VB: It was. I didn't say that. But otherwise like you say it's the land of milk and honey. I mean those are the stereotypes that you come with. But it was a tough life when we came because like I said internship and living on a very meager budget and very tiny, tiny quarters, it was it was an eye opener.

UQ: Yeah and especially not having sort of a life of your own aside from... Let's see, were there differences between your neighborhood in Missouri City and your Sugarwood neighborhood?

VB: Yes. I think Missouri City was in those days if I remember correctly.

UQ: Let's put a year on it.

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VB: In 1977.

UQ: '77 okay.

VB: It was a completely white neighborhood in '77, I think we had one other Indian family when we lived... in fact they live close by now they lived on our street.

Otherwise it was very young families, young couples with very, very small children. I think we were the only... no there were two Indian families but the rest were all white families.

UQ: Okay.

VB: When we moved to Sugarwood we had a lot more Indian families in the neighborhood. That's what stood out and then when we moved here I think we are surrounded by Indian families.

UQ: Okay more and more Indian as time passed so the neighborhood is progressing?

VB: Exactly.

UQ: Okay was that perhaps a factor in choosing the Sugarwood area?

VB: No.

UQ: No? What about this one?

VB: We couldn't afford Sugar Creek which is further down, which is closer in and we chose... we a little bit further, one exit further out and I think it was only a monetary decision. It was a new home that was going up. It was \$40,000 cheaper. So no, we did not know when we moved what kind of community we'd have.

UQ: Okay. I just lost my question. I'm sorry I'll ask another one. Having settled here in Houston now for so many years the people that you mostly socialize with, who are they, what kind of people?

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VB: The same people I met years ago. The same people I met in the 1977, 1980, I socialize with the same people. Our kids have grown up together. They are all, all from different parts of India, from Bombay, from Delhi from you know from all kinds of places. We also have a very close connection with our family. My sister in law and brother in law live here. Mom and Dad live, actually they moved here about 10 years ago.

UQ: Your mom and dad?

VB: Mom and Dad, they live across the street in Woodstream and I have friends that I have made through the country club that I socialize with and do lunches and things like that.

UQ: Are they also Indian?

VB: No, they're not but most our socializing is either done in the Indian community or with my husband's, you know, colleagues...

UQ: His professional circle?

VB: Professional yes. Then we have, the other circle I have made over the years I have been very involved with local charities with for the last 15 years what do you call it? Community act whatever you want to call it community volunteer. So I have done a lot of volunteering and being on the boards of different things. A lot of my circles have grown from that also.

UQ: Okay what groups have you been volunteering for?

VB: I started ages ago with the Indian Doctor's Club with Alliance then with TMA, Texas Medical Association Alliance with the Indo-American Charity Foundation with Pratham with DAYA, currently I serve on the Fort Bend Literacy Counsel.

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UQ: Fort Bend?

VB: Literacy counsel.

UQ: Literacy, okay.

VB: A lot of different, Food Bank I mean these are various boards that I have served on over the years. So a lot of your social circles also start from these associations.

UQ: Okay.

VB: Plus a growing family.

UQ: Sure. I'm going to ask you a couple of questions about current events. These questions are just your opinion on different things. Affirmative action, what do you think about that?

VB: I have mixed feelings. I think especially in the current environment with unemployment rate the way it is we have so many people out of work looking for jobs. I don't know if there should be any single group that should be... you know that should have the special privilege.

UQ: Okay.

VB: I think maybe there was a time, I think there was a place for it maybe a couple of decades ago, now I'm not sure that we need to have something like this.

UQ: Okay. How would you compare the safety within the city of Houston versus in the suburbs since you've lived in Missouri City and Sugar Land?

VB: Okay, I know in the rankings where, of Houston and Sugar Land I know we rate very, very high where safety is concerned. But I'm finding lately I'm reading more and more about home invasions of burglaries. I know a lot of Indian homes that have been burglarized, lately. But in terms of comparing Houston to Sugar Land I don't know...

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there is a perception that it's safer because it's smaller it's a suburb but I'm not sure that applies anymore. I think Sugar Land has become so huge I don't think we can say, "We're safe just because we're Sugar Land" and I read more and more about break ins into automobiles, into homes, into... maybe not violent crime but a lot more crime catching up and maybe that's a sign of the times because these are bad times, these are hard times.

UQ: Where are you reading about this what is your source?

VB: There is the newspaper, obviously, and there is a news letter that comes regularly online. It's all the community happenings, crime reports, things like that that are coming.

UQ: Okay.

VB: But like I said these are... not violent crime but small break-ins into cars, break-ins into this. As far as home burglaries I know other people who have been burglarized.

UQ: Personally?

VB: Personally.

UQ: Okay. Would you say that America has a discrimination problem?

VB: I think discrimination exists everywhere. I mean no matter what we think and say and what we imagine the ideal world to be, I think discrimination exists everywhere.

UQ: Okay so no greater here than anywhere else?

VB: No.

UQ: Okay.

VB: I think in India we discriminate just as much and I mean discriminate like you asked me before. That's why I asked you why are you only doing North Indian because

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there is so much discrimination where North Indian, South Indian, East... that exists also that's why I wondered why you were doing only Western India.

UQ: Yeah I've got to limit it in some way.

VB: Alright.

UQ: Immigration, how do you feel about immigration today?

VB: I am mixed. I mean with all the rhetoric I hear from about the border control I'm really mixed. When I know we are all immigrants. Our children are the children of immigrants but when I see more and more about unemployment and how it's going to affect this next generation and the generation after that. I've got mixed feelings. This country is a nation of immigrants. I don't know how I feel I'm complex about that.

UQ: Okay.

VB: And as far as immigration, border immigration is concerned I don't think this country could survive without that huge, you know worker force that works here and I know a lot of them are illegal's. I don't think we could survive without them being a part of our underground economy.

UQ: Okay. How would you define the American Dream?

VB: I should define my dream right? What do you mean?

UQ: How do you understand it? Because we hear this term tossed around.

VB: That's what I'm saying I don't know what that means.

UQ: When people hear it, what's their thinking? What comes to your mind?

VB: What comes to my mind is stability, safety, financial stability, and security. The confidence that you will be taken care of, you will have a retirement, you can look forward to that and I know that's all up in the air right now. Housing, affordable housing.

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You know just financial stability. Not having to worry about your next meal, having a roof over your head, having financial security and personal security.

UQ: Okay. Do you believe that everyone has access to that?

VB: No.

UQ: Who doesn't?

VB: A lot of people.

UQ: Why?

VB: I think I think education, and education has a lot to do with whether you are going to have, whether you are going to have all of this. I think it's your ability to earn and make yourself a comfortable living and not everyone does have that.

UQ: Not everyone has the ability because education is obviously available. It's a requirement.

VB: It is but there is so many... even in my circle of friends there are those who have not availed of it... I mean the opportunities are there, education is there but a lot of people have not availed of it, have not been able to pursue it. There are so many people who have fallen through and don't have, don't have... and then again the American Dream means different things to different people so but I do feel that everyone who's... even though our children have free education there... everyone is not benefiting the same way that others are.

UQ: Okay and so when you say that people in your community are not availing themselves of what's there you're saying that children aren't doing the best they can in school? Is that...?

VB: Yes I am. Yes.

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UQ: Okay. Do you think there is a race problem in America today?

VB: No.

UQ: No? So the Civil Rights Act in '65 that really went a long way to...?

VB: No. I don't know how to answer that to tell you the truth. Racism exists, so I don't...an Act, legislation cannot, legislation cannot accomplish that. I mean you can legislate all you want to but racism does exist and that's my perception of it.

UQ: Have you seen it occur?

VB: Yes. I mean I cannot put a finger on it but I do know that it does it exists.

UQ: That's a hard thing is to point it.

VB: Absolutely.

UQ: Do your friends ever talk about it?

VB: No.

UQ: Maybe not with that name, I guess but just different incidents that have perhaps taken place?

VB: No, not really no. But you know it we all know it when it's there. We all feel it when it happens. So yes, it is there, it is there.

UQ: So you would say even from your own experience that it's...

VB: It is there.

UQ: ...sort of under the surface?

VB: Absolutely.

UQ: Okay, are there some groups toward whom there is greater racism than others? Immigrants or anyone else?

VB: I mean we're all immigrants. What do you mean? Narrow that down a little bit.

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UQ: I mean any... I guess if you compare different racial groups and their experiences do you think some experience greater racism than average? So Latino Americans, Chinese Americans, African Americans, Indian Americans?

VB: I can't comment on that really because I cannot put myself in somebody else's shoes.

UQ: Aside from the economy what would you say is the greatest problems in the U.S. are today?

VB: The wars which I do not understand. I think that's a big... some of the foreign policy that does not make sense to me, leadership. The two party system which I think is a tremendous detriment to this country. I think that's what undermines the strength and stability of this country. That gets me riled up, don't get me started!

UQ: Okay alright. Looking back at India, I heard some interviewees comment on ideas of beauty. I just interviewed someone and he was saying that going back to India and he was surprised to see all the commercials about these skin lightening creams.

VB: Yeah.

UQ: Would you say that's an old idea in India this concept of fair skin?

VB: I mean when I was young the concept of beauty in India was always the lighter you are the more beautiful you are. And I think... they actually created a product, bleach yourself. So no I think it's ridiculous, I think it's absolutely ridiculous that they are the biggest selling product in India is a bleach that makes you lighter. I think that's ridiculous but I know they are making huge sales and yeah.

UQ: I guess people really do feel that that's the case, if everyone is following this idea?

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VB: Yeah right.

UQ: This is an idea that you heard even in your childhood?

VB: I did not hear it in my childhood, no, but I did hear that the assumption that the lighter skinned you are the more beautiful you are so that I've heard from childhood. So I remember as a young child we had gone to see Queen Elizabeth who had come at 26th January and she was far far away doing an address... I mean doing an address and everyone just swooned how beautiful and all you could see was that she was very light skinned that's it. So... but yeah that's been one of the eastern way of thinking that the lighter you are the more beautiful you are.

UQ: Does it usually refer to men or women or is it both?

VB: I think more to women.

UQ: Why do you think that is?

VB: Because we are a sexist community, I don't know. I don't know but it is.

UQ: There is a different standard?

VB: There is. There is a different standard for women if you hold that as a standard, then yes it applies in my, like in our family when they were matchmaking this was you asked me what criteria that was one of the criteria of the same coloring and we thought that was silly because the men could be whatever complexion and the women had to be you know fair skinned or whatever light skinned.

UQ: Okay. So it's not just in India, do the same types of ideas start circulating here among Indians as well?

VB: No it's less.

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UQ: What about in the next generation, what do the second generation say about these kinds of things?

VB: You tell me! I haven't heard from my children. I haven't heard that. I haven't heard them make that kind of a, no...

UQ: So people that your children have chosen to go out with (not necessarily the ones they are engaged to) but whoever they've gone out with, that hasn't come up at all?

VB: It hasn't come up no, no.

UQ: Okay. Have they been open to dating people who are not Indian your daughters?

VB: Yes.

UQ: Okay. Did you have a preference that perhaps they marry somebody from India?

VB: I think every mom does. I shouldn't say that because now I have a Chinese American daughter-in-law. But I think deep down every parent does want for whatever reason wants to see an Indian daughter-in-law or Indian son-in-law. So yeah I think they still do. I mean everybody in my circle of friends would like and that's pretty much what's happening. The majority of them are gravitating towards the same, the same ethnicity.

UQ: So you say the majority of the second gen Indian Americans are marrying Indian Americans?

VB: Yes.

UQ: The out-marriage is sort of the exception to...

VB: Yes.

UQ: ...the rule?

VB: That's my observation.

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UQ: Gosh, I think we're actually coming to a close. Anything that we haven't covered that you think should be?

VB: There's one... I think I don't know what you I mean it depends on what's the outcome of this, I have no idea. So depending on that you're the best judge.

UQ: You know something that's important to you that you want to be included on your interview?

VB: You know something which I'm really proud of is, Vinod had a vision years ago of this group of this organization, not so much the organization, the effort which is now the Indo American Charity foundation which was to raise funds within the community to help local charities. To raise funds for like the Women's Center, Houston Food Bank, the Star of Hope, you know local Houston charities but as an effort of the Indian community. So that was something that came into existence since 1988 and it's still going strong. And do fundraisers and raise over \$200,000 a year to benefit the local charities in Houston.

UQ: Okay so does that go hand in hand does the fundraising and the monetary contributions, does that go hand in hand with actually volunteering at some of these local charities?

VB: It does, absolutely. We have built homes with Habitat for Humanity, volunteered at the Houston Food Bank, at the Women's Center. In fact DAYA is something that's started along the same time but as a part of... you know with funding from the charity foundation, the Indian Doctor's Clinic started with funding from the charity foundation. But yes volunteering is part of it. We did build homes for Habitat and I'm not so actively involved in it anymore but I served as President of this organization. My sister in law

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Sonal has served as the president of the organization, my brother in law, but you know it's a different, it's under different leadership right now but yeah volunteering does go hand in hand with the actual funds given to the local charities.

UQ: Okay so it's an ongoing effort it hasn't...

VB: Yes.

UQ: ...it really hasn't subsided

VB: The second thing I want to say is my sister in law Sonal she's running for the state race. I mean these are things I've developed over the years which tells you how far the community has come. She was on the Fort Bend school board she was president of the school board and is now running in the same spot that Charlie Howard has just relinquished. So I think things are really, the Indian community is moving. It's integrated. I think integration is more... we are building roots into 40 years, 35, 40 years out we are really rooted into in the main stream community so that I find I notice more and more. I think when I first started my children we were too timid to go into leadership roles except for volunteering in schools and now I'm so happy to see that we are taking leadership roles on the boards and on school board and in local political races and the women are taking such a strong such a strong lead in that.

UQ: Okay, when are the elections for your sister?

VB: The primaries are in March, of next year and then November of course for the election.

UQ: Okay, are there many who are at high positions in sort of civic leadership like your sister?

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VB: Yes there's a couple. There's male, on the city council we have two Indians on the city council in Sugar Land, Tom Abraham...and Harish Jajoo In Houston we had Mr. Khan...

UQ: M. J. Khan.

VB: M. J. Khan, he was on city council. Who else can I think of? I mean besides the obvious ones like Bobby Jindal, Nikki Haley I mean these are national, they have made national headlines. But I'm finding locally in Houston and in Fort Bend more and more of us are serving on local non-profit boards, on corporate boards. So it's good to see, I think we are entrenched.

UQ: Okay alright.

VB: And we're not going back.

UQ: Meaning back to...

VB: Yeah, back to where we came from.

UQ: A question about that since the Indian economy is booming it's a strong economy are you seeing people who were older then you were...

VB: An exodus yes.

UQ: ...heading back or retiring there?

VB: They are but I'll tell you what they are coming back. They think in my circle of friends people who have made the experiment to go back after 3, 4, 5 years, it's a failed experiment. They are heading back over here.

UQ: Why, what is not working out for them?

VB: I think every day life is very difficult in our, in India, in Pakistan, you know, it just it's a very difficult everyday living. To get anything done there's so much red tape,

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there's so much bureaucracy and you know the heat, the dust, the water... the electricity all of these issues after my exam I can go back. I'll do my own cooking. So like I said my mom and dad moved here about 10 years ago.

UQ: Did they move here from Delhi?

VB: From Delhi, yes.

UQ: And they are okay here?

VB: They're okay. They're okay. They have, my dad's 86, my mom's 80 she's driving. She learned driving when she came here. I mean they're walking. They are right across, yeah, they've made the move just because there's nobody left in India. My cousins, I mean distant, not immediate family.

UQ: Do you have any reason to go back to India if parents are here?

VB: I go often. I go very often.

UQ: What's in India now, since mom and dad are here?

VB: I'll tell you what's in India. I've got weddings going on. Vinod's brother still lives there in Bombay so we go. We go for shopping. We go for now we'll have a new family in India. Karan, my *samdhis* (daughters in-laws' parents) are going to be in Bombay. We go for shopping, we go to visit every two years.

UQ: Have you been to Bombay before?

VB: Many times, yeah. Every two years. Every year or two years we go back my kids also go back regularly.

UQ: Did they grow up going back to India regularly?

VB: They did.

UQ: So they have a strong connection.

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VB: They have a strong connection.

UQ: Okay.

VB: And you never know like you said India's booming. You never know in the future if things continue to be like this here you never know who's going to end up heading back.

UQ: Sure.

VB: You never know who's going to end up where. But I'll tell you what I don't know if this is on or not.

UQ: It is.

VB: When I go to India I feel for the first three days that, "Oh this is where I belong. Everyone looks like me I love it here." After about a week, I want to go home. So it's sort of a love/hate.

UQ: I understand.

VB: But I do like the idea, when you asked about... I like being where everywhere looks like me. I don't have to spell my name. I don't have to say Vee-jay I can say Vijay and it's, everyone understands my name. I love when I go to India that I don't have to explain here I always have to change my name first of all. So these are things you get over them but these are the things which endear, you know which take you back and you go back for that and then after a while, it's okay no...

UQ: It sounds like you still strongly identify as an Indian and as an American.

VB: Absolutely yeah.

UQ: Okay.

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VB: And I like... I think I'll even turn this off it doesn't matter. You are an example of that too. You've done your [PhD], maybe you wouldn't be able to do this back home. You could do what you are doing because you're... now that we've done the American Dream, that is the American dream to be able to do whatever you please whenever you please and no one questions it. That is... in India every neighbor will ask "why" or look and why and what? Here I take my first American Dream back that is the American Dream to be able to do whatever I please and no one questions, no one critiques... no one you know. I can be independent and my own person here and without any interference from anybody.

UQ: Okay alright. Before you hang up... hang up before we end the interview. The only last question I have is can you say your name the way you want it pronounced?

VB: Vijay Bhuchar.

UQ: Thank you. Alright, Vijay we're done.

End of Interview