

A TEI Project

Interview of Shobha Govind

Contents

Transcript

Session 1 (March 24, 2010)

Session 2 (March 31, 2010)

1. Transcript

1.1. Session 1 (March 24, 2010)

Hampapur

This is Veena Hampapur. It's March 24 [2010], and I'm here with Dr. Shobha Govind. Hi.

Govind

Hi.

Hampapur

And looking forward to our interview today.

Govind

I am too.

Hampapur

Okay. So I'm just going to start off by asking you a couple of quick questions. Where were you born?

Govind

I was born in Bangalore, India.

Hampapur

And when were you born?

Govind

I was on 19 September, 1950.

Hampapur

Okay. So I'd like to start off the interview by asking you a little bit about your childhood and some of your memories.

Govind

Sure.

Hampapur

Can you tell me about your family while you were growing up in Bangalore?

Govind

Sure. I was born into the family of Rajaram [father] and Sarojini [mother] Bhalekar. I am one of four daughters that they had. I'm the third in the order. Well, besides that I had a family that--my parents were very, very forward for their times. I think that's a lot of credit where it lies as far as where I am today. I was brought up with parents who believe in educating their daughters. My father always said that, "I want you to think, be able to think for yourself and get an education that nobody can take away from you. That's what I can give you." He would often say, "I want you to be able to stand on your own two feet. Always remember that." So childhood-wise, we grew up in a very ordinary middle-class family. Basically, we girls had to manage to do a lot of things for ourselves, and we worked hard to do a lot of things for ourselves ever since we were very little. So I think that's where my very independent thinking and independent way of doing things comes from.

Hampapur

Okay. So going back to that a little bit, what were some of the things that you and your sisters had to learn to do for yourselves?

Govind

Besides doing well in school, we always had things to do at home. A good example of some of the things I learned from my mother particularly was sewing and knitting. I could sew my own clothes and my younger sister's almost from the age of about ten and a half or eleven.

Hampapur

Oh, wow.

Govind

We probably knew how to sew buttons and make a buttonhole since the time we were nine, ten years old, and embroidery and knitting and stuff were all things that we learned to do. At also the same time or maybe earlier, I believe it was earlier that I found along with my family that I had a very natural knack or talent to draw and to paint, so I learned how to draw probably along with my alphabets. I still remember an uncle of mine who saw this. He was an artist, and he drew many of the animals for me to learn how to draw, an elephant, a dog or a cat, etc., and I still remember he drew them on a non--what do you call it, the brown paper, not--what do you call that, the buff paper, rough paper that was not even white. I remember getting my first coloring box when I got a double promotion from third to fifth grade. That was my gift for doing well in school. So a lot of those things still stay with me.

Hampapur

Did your parents encourage your interest in art?

Govind

Yes, they did. But they always told me that wouldn't pay, so when they saw I had done well in school and overall everything, it was an uncle of mine who

actually kind of brought my parents to terms that I would go to medical school, because I had a scholarship to go through bachelor's, master's, Ph.D., if I pursued pure sciences when I was done with high school, and that was very tempting, because if I didn't go to professional schools--like in India, when you are a year after high school, you can decide to go into medicine or engineering, and if I didn't do that, I would have had a scholarship through my Ph.D. So it was very tempting to take that offer, because I had passed this national science exam of some sort. So when I had the top--I was on the top of the list to go into medical school, I think it was my uncle who said, "Don't miss this opportunity. Send her to medicine." We were all so young at that time, it was very easy for our parents and others to encourage us and push us into whatever they thought would work for us. So I'm certainly glad they did, because I love being a doctor. But I have a lot of interests, and at this point I have been able to go back to a lot of them.

Hampapur

Going back to one of the first things you said, you mentioned that your parents were very forward thinking for the time. Did this lead to you being raised in any different way from your friends or your peers? Did you notice any differences between what your parents wanted for you and your sisters versus your peers?

Govind

Sure, sure. Probably first and foremost, the way particularly my younger sister and I were allowed to dress in public, that was probably a lot more modern than my peers. And we were used to having short hair when we were little, which was not the common thing to see around. So it was kind of a--we had our own track, so to speak, and it taught us not to just be carried away by what someone may say. We do what we want, like it or not.

Hampapur

Okay. And what did your parents do?

Govind

My father was--he worked for the longest for an electric company called Mysore Electrical Industries. But while I was in high school, he went and got a law degree which he didn't have a chance to, and until his death he practiced law after that. My mother, she was convent educated, but she got married before she finished high school. So afterwards, again, she pursued her studies in linguistics, and she got all the way to the highest degree Hindi. She was a Hindi pravin, which is like the master's level, I believe, and she used to teach kids at home when I was growing up; she taught Hindi. So she was a very self-taught woman that, again, didn't fulfill all her dreams, but did a lot with her life.

Hampapur

Can you describe to me the neighborhood that you grew up in?

Govind

The neighborhood we grew up in was--majority of my, from the time I was eight up to sixteen, so that makes up eight years of my growing years--we spent in Malleswaram, which had a really heterogeneous type of population. But, well, we grew up listening to a lot of different languages, which we picked up. By the time we were eight, ten years old, we could speak several languages and understand them. The neighborhood was somewhat probably middle-class and high-middle-class neighborhood, a lot of professional people. But actually, the house where I grew up, we rented from one of my dad's professors from college that turned out to become my father-in-law [C.N.S. Srinivasiengar] in the end.

Hampapur

So you're telling me about who you rented from.

Govind

Correct. My parents rented this place from my husband's father's family. Of course, little did we know at that time that would happen, but this was a famous math professor, C.N. Srinivasiengar. Until we were able to move out of there, after which my parents wanted to build their own home, we rented from there. I was in medical school, getting into medical school when we left that neighborhood.

Hampapur

Okay, so around when you were sixteen?

Govind

Yes.

Hampapur

And where did you live before you were eight?

Govind

Before I was eight we lived in another area, also Malleswaram, but far enough away from this that I don't remember a whole lot. I've just sketchy memories of going to a primary school that was across the street from us and participating in a lot of cultural activities, which I always did. Singing and dancing and performing was very much in our household. If I want to remember before eight, I can still remember the first time my teacher put lipstick on me to go on stage, which was a big deal for a six-, seven-year-old. So that was also a community of middle-class people all around.

Hampapur

Okay. Do you have any memories of your neighbors, either at the first place you lived or the place you lived from age eight to sixteen?

Govind

Yes, I do. The first place we lived in, the landlady I kind of remember. She was very authoritative, and I don't know that any of us--we probably, kids, feared her. I also remember that this lady's grandson, one grandson was our friend,

and I always remember the shock that one day when I went into their house, I found that this grandson of the landlady had a very disabled brother that was bed-bound. Now that I'm a doctor, I think he had very severe cerebral palsy, and that was something that was never disclosed to anybody. Somehow even at that very young age I remember that picture of seeing this child in agony and wondering what's the matter and why didn't I ever know this person existed. The other neighbor I remember at that time was a housewife who was always maybe very fond of me and maybe my younger sister. She would always call us into her house and give us goodies. I remember that. That's about what I remember about my very early childhood.

Hampapur

What about a little bit later?

Govind

A little bit later, in the house that we rented from--the big house was called the Huligadri Seva, and we were in the so-called out house, which was their rental house. It was within the--if you know India, there's a big compound, and there can be several households in there, so it was the out house that we lived in, and I have very, very fond memories of that. The fondest memory I have, which I still dream about sometimes, is when everyone in our family was a student, and in the evening you could almost hear a pin-drop silence in the house, because my dad was studying for his law, and my two older sisters were in college, my mother would be studying Hindi, and we both, my younger sister and I, would be studying too. Those are some of the very fond memories from my formative years. Then I remember I had an interview with the newspapers and radio, because I had gotten the highest marks in PUC in physics, chemistry, biology, which is a big deal, because math students score usually the top ten. Apparently, no biology student had scored in the top ten before that. Because ranking and marks are very important in India's schools. I'm sure you have heard that. So it was a big deal that a PCB student was the seventh in the order of ranks in our university that year that I finished PUC. So I remember that one of my professors came over to our house and told me and my parents that most probably my name will be in the papers and so on and so forth, and I remember kind of everybody in the neighborhood knowing about it. That was kind of strange, but I didn't seem to mind it.

Hampapur

Were you excited?

Govind

Quite. I always knew I was good, but to be measured by someone else and told, that's always nice.

Hampapur

Definitely. Okay. And what about your friends while growing up? Did you have friends in the neighborhood? Or did you meet your friends through school?

Govind

Both. Most probably the best of friends were your classmates in school. Most of the time my best of friends would be usually in the top of the class, but not always the type that only looked to books. Because of my varied interests, I always had friends who had also many interests, including sports and arts. I used to do sports review for our high school, and that was always fun. I know that there were boys who usually sports review was done by boys, and I was probably one of the first girls to do sports review. We used to present the sports review once a week, and I remember boys calling out, "Today's sports review," when they saw me. So a lot of the friends would be those who also had interest in sports. Growing up, I was a big cricket fan, probably knew all the stats of the big players and just envisioned --I had a friend who along with me, we envisioned ourselves to be two of the top players, and we'd be talking as if we were. So most of the friends were friends with multiple interests and facets in their lives.

Hampapur

Right. And what did you like to do with them?

Govind

Well, between probably--we didn't watch sports. We had to listen to sports, because we really didn't have television. And I remember sneaking out of school during the, what do you call the lunch break or whatever, to go find out what the score is in a test match. That's why we'd read the newspaper in detail, because most of the time we couldn't hear the running commentary except on part of Saturday and Sunday, so going back to--a lot of my friends were that way. I still have friends that I keep in touch with from elementary and high school.

Hampapur

Would you see each other outside of school, after school or on weekends?

Govind

Well, we would play after school a lot of times, although most of the time your playmates were immediate neighbors. So as far as in high school we were more mobile in a sense. We'd ride bikes and go to each other's house and then go out on our own. I don't know that we used to go away to movies in high school yet. We were just too young to do that on our own. That came about more in college, particularly medical school, which is really the whole college experience I had.

Hampapur

And just a more general question about Bangalore. I've heard many times people say Bangalore has changed from the time of my parents' generation, so could you describe to me what it was like, just what it looked like? Was it as urban? I heard there were a lot more trees and plants and things like that.

Govind

Yes. It is very disappointing to go back to Bangalore and see the city of cement and highrises and a lot of concrete. When I was growing up, it was called the Garden City of India. I don't know if they still call it that. We still have some gardens, but in general we would have lots of green, lots of flowers, lots of parks, lots of play areas. A lot of that has been destroyed and where there used to be one house, now there are multi-story buildings with penthouses. My own neighborhood where I grew up, Huligadri Seva, has become Huligadri Apartments that are two--where there was a big house and an out house, there are now two apartment complexes. One is business, being used for business purposes but still with multi-story apartment-like buildings, and the other one where a lot of my in-laws, sisters- and brothers-in-law live. So you can imagine, in our backyard when I was growing up, we had mango trees, we had the huge trees that produce the jackfruit and of course, bananas; another fruit, I think it's called jamun, purple fruit; and there would be green parrots all in the trees nestling, and we'd hear them and cooing in the morning. Those are all gone. That's an example of what happened in one household, but similar things have happened all over. The number of buildings built are such that they have been built without regard to the infrastructure and the availability of good water and other sources, which is kind of disturbing, and I find mostly that most buildings now don't get natural light and air, and you have to go somewhere to see the sky sometimes. That's very disturbing to me. That's not the Bangalore I grew up in. The Bangalore I grew up in was cool in many ways than just cool. We had really flowers year round and very good places to play games and to just walk and be happy. Now to cross some of the streets, I'm afraid, because there is no order, absolutely no order. The traffic is erratic. The roads are not good and too much building in too small a space. The population seems to have exploded. So it's very disappointing. It's much, much hotter now in Bangalore than it used to be, and I believe the pollution and the increase in buildings and population are trapping a lot of the exhaust and all that has to do with it. Just talking to my family, sometimes they express disappointment--

Hampapur

In how things have changed?

Govind

How things have changed.

Hampapur

Wow. You'd mentioned earlier that you learned to speak several languages at a young age because there was a diverse population there. Can you tell me a little bit more about that, what languages you picked up, and who were the types of people that were there in your youth?

Govind

Sure. The languages, basically at home we would speak a language called Marathi. That's what I was trained to do at home. The next thing was Marathi is very well-related to Hindi. Since my mother was highly educated in Hindi, it was very easy to pick up Hindi, so I learned to read and write Hindi at a very young age. So I could speak Hindi and Marathi well, and then once I stepped out of the house, there were people speaking Kannada and Tamil and Telegu very commonly. As a result, I picked up--of course, Kannada we also studied in school, in the elementary up to seventh or eighth grade, so I learned Kannada, both to speak and write and read. Then Tamil I learned to speak and understand, again because there were a lot of Tamilians around. As a matter of fact, we were very fond of neighbors' children who would come over and spend a lot of time with us on holidays and weekends. Actually, two of my nieces by marriage and a nephew, they were the grandkids of our landlord, and they would spend summers in their grandparents' house, and my sisters and I would entertain those girls and a boy so constantly that when they became relatives through marriage, I don't even consider them as relatives through marriage. I know them so well from the time they were little. That was one way of conversing Tamil, because these kids were younger than me and our common language would be Tamil, and that was a very good practice for us. So to this day, the Tamil that I learned then is what comes back. Because after my marriage to Govind [Srinivasiengar, husband], we have been in the States and really we don't speak that much Tamil. But I can always go back to it, because I learned it as a youngster. And again, Telegu was spoken by so many around, I can understand it fairly well and say a few simple things in it, and all these things came very handy in medical school, because through the clinical studies and then through the internship, when we had to talk to patients, I could always switch to their language, and that always is a big plus for patients. And the other language I probably learned very well to understand and speak a little was Konkani. Konkani is a language from Mangalore. I had a lot of Mangalorean friends, so I was pretty familiar with that as well.

Hampapur

Okay. And did you have any extended family in town?

Govind

Yes. Most of my extended family in town were cousins of my mother and my father's cousins. I didn't have any immediate--oh, I take that back. I did have three uncles, brothers of my mother who lived in the area. She had four older

brothers. The oldest was elsewhere, but I did have three uncles that lived in the general area.

Hampapur

And did you see them often?

Govind

Yes. I did see my uncles quite often. They would come and visit us.

Hampapur

Did your parents grow up in Bangalore too?

Govind

No. My mother grew up--I don't know exactly where she was born, to tell you the truth, but she grew up in then Madras, now Chennai. And my father grew up in Karnataka, but I think he had connections with a place called Chintamani. I believe his dad was registrar, registering births and deaths in their county. So they both moved to Bangalore later in life.

Hampapur

Okay. Well, you've mentioned your interest in the arts a few times. I wanted to ask you a little bit more about that. I know you mentioned you're interested in singing and dancing and painting. Could you tell me in your childhood how you pursued these things? Did you have classes? Did you do it for fun on the weekends? How did you learn?

Govind

Most of my learning of the arts was just self-learning. Again, music was very dear to me as well as my family. I had an uncle who was a very, very good Hindustani musician, and my mother was a very good musician in her own right. Again, she didn't have much training, but she self-trained and she would sing. I think my older two sisters did get some lessons when they were younger. By the time the third and the fourth came, there weren't really funds for more lessons, so most of my music is self-learned, by listening, by hearing; very good at that age to pick up things. And some of the other arts and crafts, when we could learn in school, we'd concentrate and learn. But knitting and sewing and stuff my mother taught me. As far as painting goes, I really never had any formal education until after Arathi [Arathi Govind, daughter] left home, at which time I started taking some classes and went into oil painting, which I had never done before. So does that answer your question?

Hampapur

Oh, yes. What kinds of things did you like to paint when you were younger?

Govind

I always painted anything that interested me. I could do our dog's portrait, could do any kind of landscape or anything, and again, I was at that age only interested in doing it and seeing how it turned out, and I wouldn't even save

them properly. I found that my oldest sister had saved some of my work from my childhood.

Hampapur

That's nice.

Govind

Yes, it is very nice.

Hampapur

And in terms of music, did you sing classical music or what type of music?

Govind

Actually, music--with a big classical Hindustani background, I probably liked music that kind of was within that genre, but again, not having classical training at all, the most common music we listened to was a lot of the Filmie, and among those there are many which are based on classical ragas and stuff. Those were always my favorites. But basically, most of what I learned to sing was pop.

Hampapur

And how did you--that was again self-taught? You heard stuff and--

Govind

That's correct. That's correct.

Hampapur

Okay. I'd like to switch over a bit to asking you about school. Can you tell me about starting off school, your grade school, any memories from those days?

Govind

From the very early education I just remember very little, but first through the third grade I went to a little school that was across the home that was a so-called government school, which is like public school. When we moved, that's when after testing they determined I could go into fifth grade, so the next four grades it was a private school that my younger sister and I went to. Memories from that school are very clear. That's probably where I met a lot of my best childhood friends, and I still remember a couple of teachers that were wonderful. Talking about art, I used to help one teacher who was a great teacher of history and geography and what we called social studies. She used to hand make maps and materials to teach. Her younger sister was in my class and a very good friend of mine, and we spent a lot of weekends helping her color her maps. She would have maps that we could unroll and put it on the board and then start learning. We used to--she was so good that we wouldn't waste much time in class. If a teacher was absent, we'd just roll out some handmade material and start learning from that.

Hampapur

Oh, wow.

Govind

Yes. Some of my history and geography I still remember from those days.

Hampapur

That's very unique.

Govind

Yes. I still can remember the South American map that we made and colored in the countries and identified the capitals, and we'd have maps like that for many different things, including minerals and what minerals are mined where and what are the main crops in such-and-such a place. She had a wonderful way of teaching that pictorially in addition to verbally. That's a very fond memory of mine.

Hampapur

And what subjects did you like in school?

Govind

I liked everything. I can't say that I didn't like any subject. Perhaps later on in high school I didn't care so much for history, perhaps because of the teacher. But I really liked everything that I learned, and I used to make sure that I excelled in all. So that's probably why growing up I wasn't really sure what I'd like to do with my life. One day I'd want to be a teacher, next day I'd want to be an artist, and so on and so forth, and scientist and whatnot. So it was useful that in the end I was channeled into going into medicine.

Hampapur

Can you tell me more about how that happened, how you picked the science path?

Govind

I think again by the time high school was done and I was going into PUC, it made a lot more sense to go into the sciences, because by then I had figured out that that would be what I'd like to pursue. I did like biology a lot because it involved a lot of drawing and coloring; that was one of the things. And then, of course, becoming a doctor was one of the things I liked. It was not the only one, but it was one of them, and I can tell you that probably two things that through my childhood made that important were the following. Number one, I was a very sickly child when I was very little, and I still remember the doctor that had to give me a lot of shots. I used to get ear and throat infections a lot, and unconsciously I may have developed that wish that he could cure me and I would like to cure people. Second thing was, when I was growing up I was very allergic to coconut, and I loved coconut. I actually used the principle that's used in treating allergies on myself and as much as my mother wouldn't want me to, I'd steal little bits of coconut. I'd get a rash and then a few days later a little bit, a little bit, so actually I grew out of my allergy to coconut ultimately, and I always claim that even before I was a doctor I knew how to treat myself.

[laughter] So probably those two influenced me in narrowing down what I might want to do.

Hampapur

And then once you decided you want to go on the medical path, what turn did your schooling take? Did you enter medical school in Bangalore?

Govind

Yes. I entered Bangalore Medical College and six and a half years later, at twenty-two and a half I was a medical graduate.

Hampapur

Oh, wow.

Govind

Yes. So once I got in there, I knew that's what I wanted, and it was a lot of hard work, but it was pretty straightforward from there on.

Hampapur

What did you like about it?

Govind

Through the schooling, not only the challenging subjects and having to be precise and everything. I think ultimately going into clinical medicine, I really liked treating patients. One of the other things I like about my profession is not only do I treat patients' physical illnesses, but just interacting with them I learn a lot and they hopefully learn a lot, and knowing who they are, what they are, I make sure that I combine a therapy for their mind along with their body. That's one of the things that even today my patients appreciate, because they can come and talk to me. I make sure that even if I don't have enough time, I sit down and listen to them. Sometimes that's what it takes, sitting down, looking them in the eye and giving them a chance to say what they want. That gives them the confidence and then really that's something that a lot of physicians miss. I think I build a very good rapport with my patients. As a result, sometimes they come in and just because they saw me they're feeling better, so I found that interaction with other human beings was something I enjoyed immensely, so it became clear to me that pursuing medicine would give me a lifetime of satisfaction.

Hampapur

It sounds like it was very rewarding for you to--

Govind

It is very rewarding. And at the end of the day, as tired as I may be, it's a great high to know that you have done something worthwhile, and people have come to you when they are feeling better. It's a great feeling.

Hampapur

What kind of doctor did you become?

Govind

I am what they call a primary care doctor. Basically, I'm trained in internal medicine, and I also have a year of medical oncology, which was a field that I pursued for a year and realized that I wouldn't want to be doing that for life. So I went back to general medicine, and my practice is a general internal medicine, family practice type of thing, so I see all kinds of patients.

Hampapur

Were there many women in medical school at that time?

Govind

This will surprise you perhaps, but in India, being a female doctor is probably a lot easier than any other place in the world. Perhaps there are a few other places where there are many, but in India, once you have gone through medical school and become a doctor, nobody questions you as to being a female. In our medical school, we're probably more than a third female. This was thirty-some years ago. It was more surprising after coming to the States that there weren't many women physicians then. The public in general, patients thirty years ago when I started practice, I had to prove to them that I was good enough to be their doctor, because I was female. That was not the case in India. Perhaps doctors and teachers, those are two professions very well accepted for women, so it was kind of a new thing to me when I came here to the States that usually Dad was the doctor, Mom was the nurse. That was a concept. A lot of times people would say, "Are you a nurse?" because they do not have the concept that your mom can be a doctor. That was actually a surprise when I came here.

Hampapur

So were girls encouraged to go into those fields as much as boys were?

Govind

Yes.

Hampapur

Okay. And so after you got your medical degree, what did you do then? Did you get a job?

Govind

Actually, I finished ECFMG [Educational Commission for Foreign Medical Graduates], which is an exam to come to the States, while I was in the last year of my medical school. That was quite a coincidence that I actually took it, because I wasn't that interested in coming over here. A friend of mine who depended on me to study was taking the exam, so actually, she and her family, her father in particular, pestered me to go ahead, study with her and go to Kuala Lumpur to take the exam. That was really how it all worked out, and lo and behold, I was the only one among three or four friends that went there that passed it at that time. So it was just something that fell into my lap. So I did not work--I worked as senior house physician in hospital for six months. Other than that, I have no experience in India at all. I came over to the States.

Hampapur

And how did your family feel about you taking the exam?

Govind

They were very encouraging, particularly my mom, and my dad too. They thought that would be my opportunity to do better things, and that was my opportunity to go out and see the world. So that's how I looked at it, and my parents had no qualms about it. And actually, my mother passed away suddenly. She was only forty-seven. It happened when she was out doing some chores, and she told the last person that saw her alive to tell my dad to go ahead and send me to the States. That was more or less her last wish. So, yes, my family was very supportive in doing whatever I wanted to do.

Hampapur

And you took the exam in Kuala Lumpur you said?

Govind

Correct.

Hampapur

Was that the first time you had been out of the country?

Govind

That's correct.

Hampapur

Do you have any memories of preparing for that, or impressions of leaving India?

Govind

Well, actually, I prepared for it just about like I prepared for any exam, I guess, and we didn't have the luxury of having online courses or any books that would give us a sample of the exams or nothing like that, just overall prepare for all the subjects. My going overseas to take an exam was quite exciting. I had never actually been on a plane before that, so it was a big deal. I have some very fond memories of visiting Singapore and Kuala Lumpur on that visit, in just knowing that outside the country was a whole different world, and that also told me that I need to explore and go out and seek more knowledge and learn about different people, etc.

Hampapur

When you were growing up, or maybe at that time, did you know many people who were going abroad or coming to the States?

Govind

Not really. I was so busy with whatever I was doing, I didn't know too many people. Probably the only person I knew that had been to the United States was actually a friend of my--actually, a brother of my friend. And actually, he was having a miserable time in the States, and he'd been wanting to come back. But in high school we had a principal that had visited the States and had brought all

kinds of stuff back. I always remember that. Apparently those days in the States there was a lot of art involving like the thread art. Are you familiar with thread that's woven onto a piece of cardboard paper, make different like ships and shapes? That was something she brought back from the States. I remember doing that. So, actually, I didn't know a whole lot of people who were going out of the country, so I felt quite like a pioneer.

Hampapur

So you had mentioned you didn't know too many people coming to the U.S., but did you know anything about America or the U.S., any ideas people had at that time?

Govind

I had very vague ideas. I can't say that I had too many sources to get a more definite idea about the U.S. So most of it was what I had read, and really when I did get here there were a lot of surprises.

Hampapur

And where did you first come when you came to this country?

Govind

I came to St. Louis, Missouri, first, right in the middle of the country, and it was a very different experience.

Hampapur

Can you tell me some of your initial impressions when you first came?

Govind

The first impressions, of course, trying to learn your way around the hospital; lived in an apartment that was right across; getting used to being on call every third night and having to work thirty-six, forty hours in a stretch. That was basically the first few weeks, trying to get used to things. And not being able to communicate with your family back in India makes that experience a little bit harder. Other than that, it seemed like a lot of my experiences in the first few months gave me the impression that this was a country of a lot of contrasts. People I met seemed to have come from such diverse opinions, and I was quite amazed at some things. In particular, having been in the Midwest to begin with, I saw some very conservative people. I thought conservatism was confined to countries like India, and I was just very shocked that there was such conservatism in this country.

Hampapur

And what did that look like? What did you observe?

Govind

Probably the shock of seeing such religious zealots, if I may, was a surprise to me, and the fact that they mixed religion with politics as well as with education was another disappointing finding for me. That was the first time I learned that conservative people did not want their children to study about Darwinism. That

I could not comprehend. I was very shocked when I was looking--I became friends with a pastor who was pastor in a southern Baptist church, and I became friends with them because their fourteen-year-old, who was in the hospital visiting some church members, saw me and she was fascinated with me, and she became a good friend. That's how I got to know her parents and visited them in a little town close by. Through them and their churchgoers I learned about the conservatism in this country. The most shocking instance I can give you is, I was looking through this fourteen-year-old--Kimberly was her name--her books, just curious to know what they learned, and when I was looking through their science books and then something came up, and when I mentioned about Darwin's theory of evolution, this girl had pure fear in her eyes, and she looked at me and said, "Shobha, don't say that! You'll go to hell."

Hampapur

Oh, my gosh.

Govind

That was such an eye-opener for me, and I said, oh, my god. These people have all these resources. They have all this wealth and all these opportunities, and look at where this girl is. Her eyes and mind are not open to anything that she's not brought up to believe in. So in a sense I felt like I had been brought up a lot better than this girl, because I was taught to open my eyes and my mind to new things and think for myself what's right or what's wrong, not just because somebody told you so. And then this going to hell business, that had never been a question in my mind. I always think that I may not want to go to the heaven that you go to, my dear, you know? So that was a shocker. That's probably the most unexpected thing I learned in my first year. Other than that, I don't know what else to tell you.

Hampapur

Did people have a reaction to you not being Christian?

Govind

Oh, sure. I'm sure they were trying really hard to try to convert me, because I was open-minded. I'd read and I'd go to services and listen to them, and it didn't affect me at all, because I was pretty much like a rock. In fact, they even tried to fix me up with someone from their church, and I told him that I had someone back home, which made him immediately withdraw. But I'm pretty sure they were trying, but they didn't know what a strong person I am.

Hampapur

Did you experience any racism for being Indian?

Govind

Actually, you know, the only time I have probably faced racism is one time when--this was in California. When I was going to the emergency room, being on call, this really drunk white guy said, "I'm not going to be touched by that

foreign--," blah, blah, blah, blah, "female doctor." And I said, "Well, I don't want to touch you either, buddy. Suits me fine," and walked away. But actually I've been quite lucky. I don't think I've had too many incidents where racism stuck its head.

Hampapur

Did people ask you questions about India when you were in the Midwest?

Govind

Oh, all the time. That's a common thing to this day. They have no idea. They ask all sorts of things.

Hampapur

What kind of questions would you get?

Govind

Basically, a lot of times they're surprised that, first and foremost, they're surprised I can speak as well as I can, because they think coming from India you should not be so fluent and shouldn't have a vocabulary better than them. That surprises them and the education level and the fact that I'm so outgoing and able to do a lot of things seemed to surprise them.

Hampapur

Okay.[End of interview]

1.2. Session 2 (March 31, 2010)

Hampapur

This is Veena Hampapur, here again with Dr. Shobha Govind. Last time we left off with talking about you moving to St. Louis and some of the surprises you received upon coming to the United States. So we talked a little bit about you being surprised by some peoples' conservative attitude, and I was wondering if you could tell me about maybe any other surprises that you had after moving here.

Govind

It's hard to enumerate all the surprises. I don't even know if you can imagine how it would be to have been born and brought up to young adulthood in a country that's so vastly different from the United States and suddenly land all alone in the middle of a very strange and different country. So certainly the reason I brought up the conservatism being a big surprise was that I had imagined that this would be a country where everybody would have a very liberal mind, and the education level would be such that they would consider information of all kinds and then think about it. That was the big surprise about conservatism, that they were unwilling to entertain certain views or certain theories, let alone accepting it. They were not even ready to give it consideration. That's why I think that was such a big surprise. But other than

that, there were probably daily surprises. If you're familiar with the Midwest, I think there is a diverse population in a place like St. Louis, and my first rotation was through OB/GYN. The first time I saw a thirteen-year-old girl pregnant was a shocker to me. That was something that I had never seen in India. I don't mean to say it never happens there, but I think the social conservatism that I grew up with, even going through medical school, something like that was a big surprise, to see a young black girl that was almost full-term pregnant at thirteen--she seemed to have nobody else really to support her--was a big surprise. So these are almost like contrasting surprises, the first incidence of the conservatism, religious conservatism, versus a social almost neglect of children, which is, I think, a big reason for pregnancies in teens or even pre-teens. That's a very sad aspect of inner-city life in this country, as you know, and that is an aspect that we, growing up in India in a middle-class circumstance, even after going through medical school, was surprising. Other than that, there were a lot of other surprises, perhaps the biggest of which probably would be the alcohol-drug abuse in the society. Of course, in the mid-seventies when I came in, it was still the tail end of the hippie era if I may, so still long hair and braids and hashish and pot were quite prevalent. And I did run into patients with drug problems that led to other problems that led to more problems, and those were not something that I was used to. So probably those are the biggest of surprises. In spite of being prepared for a lot of changes, still, when faced with it, they're still things that you're surprised about and you have to learn to deal with.

Hampapur

And how did you learn to deal with these things that you saw for the first time?

Govind

That's a good question. I don't know if I have a straight answer for it. I think I did a lot of growing up that year, along with it also realized how close I was to my family and how much I missed them. I don't know if I told you that my mother had just passed away about six months prior to my coming to the States. I had never really had time to grieve her passing, and the first year in this country was very difficult for me. Somewhere along the way I had made up my mind I was going to go back. The only reason I stuck around the year was I'm a pretty determined personality, and I want to finish something that I start, so I wanted to at least finish my first year. So I know that I had written very long letters to my dad as well as to my older sisters. I have two older sisters. So I was not at all sure that I wanted to keep living in this country.

Hampapur

Okay. Going back a minute to the conservatism you mentioned, did you see that in certain segments of the population, or did you see that in the hospital you were working at as well?

Govind

The conservatism probably was more prevalent in a certain percentage of the population, and it did seem like a very different segment of the population. In the hospital itself, perhaps I didn't have the opportunity to really study people I ran into, for example, the medical staff or the authorities who were responsible for running our residency program. Since our association with a lot of them was fairly official in nature and more or less strictly business, I do not recollect that I had the opportunity to really consider whether their views were conservative or liberal or religious affiliation. But one thing I came to know was that at least in the Midwest, most hospitals had affiliations with religious sects, so there was always a Baptist hospital, a Jewish hospital, or there was an association with a religion. That was probably a good surprise too, because I did not expect that. Of course, while applying to programs I had made observations, Beth Israel, names like that seemed to indicate a religious affiliation, but I did not quite understand exactly how that went until I came in. And, of course, being in the middle of the country, the way I know the country now I didn't, so I may have thought that all the states in the United States were red states. [laughter] Although I didn't know about red states and blue states at that point.

Hampapur

Were there any other--was there any Indian population there, or other people from abroad like yourself?

Govind

Most of the Indian population or population that came from outside the country seemed to be concentrated in the medical residency program/medical staff. Generally, I'm sure still now that any hospital you go to in the United States, medical staff will always have foreign names. Again, I quite didn't understand why, but they imported most of residents. In the mid-seventies it was a lot more prevalent than today. So, yes, I had several friends, several people in the residency program that did later become friends, and they gave a lot of support. So among the fellow residents there were Indians, Filipinos. Actually in our first year, besides me there were two other Indians, and the wife of one of the interns was also a doctor that had just had a baby, so she hadn't entered the residency program. Ultimately, she ended up dying in an accident that year. That was a traumatic experience for us. But those were mostly the foreigners that I met, so very quickly you realized that in the general population in a place like St. Louis and surroundings, you're not going to find a lot of Indians or foreigners, and that is one of the reasons I got close to this young lady who had never seen the likes of me, coming from a small place across the river from St. Louis. All she had seen was white people, and I'm pretty sure she'd seen black when she came into downtown St. Louis, but she'd never seen a brown girl with

dark eyes and dark hair, which fascinated her. That's how I became friends with Kim that I told you about earlier. Okay?

Hampapur

So how did you make your other friends? I know you mentioned you had a few friends at the hospital. Did you have any other friends like Kim from outside of the hospital?

Govind

Most of the friends outside of the hospital and fellow trainees or attendings seemed from maybe patients and connections, but they were few and far between. I can't say that I had a big circle of friends outside the hospital. Also, I didn't quite have a car and start driving until the following April, so pretty much your ability to get around is fairly restricted. Living close to the hospital in little apartments that the hospital subsidized, we paid very little rent, and we got very little anyway, so it was subsistence, more or less. As you know, residents get to do a lot of slave labor in this country. So I can't say I had a big friend circle outside. I did know an Indian family that was a connection through my father's friend, and I found that they directed me initially a little bit, but they had two young children and once I was settled in my program, they really did not have the time to mingle with me, I guess. So outside of that, I really had very few connections.

Hampapur

How did you feel becoming an ethnic minority when you had grown up for most of your life or your whole life with being a part of the majority, with everyone being Indian around you?

Govind

To tell you the truth, when you're going through a training program in a hospital, it's so intense, you work so many hours and you get so little sleep, and you're getting used to this whole new system, I don't even think it crossed my mind that, oh, my god, I'm an ethnic minority in a big white country and what'll I do. I don't think I had time enough to think about it.

Hampapur

Right. Were there any adjustments or new skills you had to learn after coming to the U.S.?

Govind

Adjustments? Plenty. Plenty of adjustments. As independent thinking and determined as I was, still I had grown up with family around, and just getting used to being by myself and doing everything on my own was a big adjustment. And although through student days and internship and I'd had another few months of senior internship, which was pretty intense in India, in spite of being on call every third night and going thirty-six hours with no idea of how much sleep you might get, and being in the call room where you don't know whether

you're half asleep or answering the phone or answering a call, that itself was a fairly big adjustment. I handled stress very well, but I know that the changes, the change in the lifestyle and food as well as the stress level did make a lot of difference. Again, I was brought up a vegetarian all my life, and I had under pressure from friends tried to eat meat before I came here and did not relish it, and then I ended up in St. Louis--I was eating hospital food most of the time. I did find that I could find enough vegetarian items that I could manage, so I did. But the changes sort of are usual. Indian food, which you're familiar with--here I was eating probably grilled cheese most of the time for my entree, and eating tasteless salads and soaked-up beans and peas; that's the big vegetable. It was a big adjustment. I think it took a pretty good toll on me. You'll be interested as a woman that I had an experience that was baffling me myself. I think the first eight or nine months that I was in this country, I never had a period.

Hampapur

Oh, because of the food?

Govind

The stress, the food, the change, the changes.

Hampapur

Oh, my.

Govind

So I think the body and mind and the hormone systems felt the pressure of the change. You can imagine.

Hampapur

Yes.

Govind

I mean, being a physician and looking up things and then talking to--my first rotation was OB/GYN, so I'd come to know and talk--and one of my roommates was an OB/GYN resident, so I knew it was because of the change, and there's nothing I could do about it. So you can imagine what a big change it was.

Hampapur

Wow. Well, I'm not sure you had much time away from the hospital from what you've said, but--

Govind

No, not really. I don't think I had many occasions to experience any real entertainment or real--oh, I remember one event through that year that was a big thrill for me. In the hospital I had met this life insurance agent, one Mr. Amrit Mittal, who still remains a friend after all these years. He was an insurance agent, as I told you, but really a nice person, and, of course, he was doing his job. He would come--he was stationed in Chicago, but he used to come to St. Louis, which is not too far away, and he was to recruit and sell

insurance to people like us, and he befriended us and gave us a lot of guidelines and little clues on what to do, what not to do, etc. Anyway, he found out that I was a big fan of Lata Mangeshkar. You've heard of her, right?

Hampapur

Yes.

Govind

And there was a big concert in Chicago of Lata's that year. That was probably one of the first times she came to the States, and knowing I was a big fan, he bought me tickets, and he invited me to come to St. Louis. I don't remember who I went with, but I actually drove up to Chicago that weekend, and that was the first time I had seen Lata Mangeshkar live. Until this day, I mean, I have attended tens of hundreds of concerts, but that was a highlight that first year in this country that really did me a lot of good. That's one of the social events I can think of that year. Besides that, I don't think I did much more.

Hampapur

Okay. Well, I know you mentioned earlier that you were thinking of going back to India after you finished the year--

Govind

Correct.

Hampapur

--so what ended up happening?

Govind

What ended up happening is towards the end of the first year I was settling down better. I was adjusting, and my sisters along with my father had arranged the transportation, the airfare for me to come to this country. That was still a loan to be paid back. And the first year the way things were, I wasn't really able to send home money to help fulfill that. Actually, ultimately my sisters and my dad did pay that all, but I felt awful that I owed them all this for their efforts and had come to this country to achieve something and seemed really very hasty if I turned around and went back. And as I settled in and started thinking, I thought, well, I have to do better than finish a year of PG-1 and go back. But by then I had not applied for any continuation, so I had to very quickly look for a program elsewhere. So it ended up that one of the medical oncologists who had heard me present a case of Hodgkins disease was so impressed with me, he got a hold of a contact in Buffalo and got me a position at the last minute. That's how I ended up in Buffalo after my first year in St. Louis, so that's what ended up happening.

Hampapur

And how long were you in Buffalo for?

Govind

I was in Buffalo until 1978, so three years, '75 to '78. I was--Buffalo actually--my training in reverse order. I did the medical oncology fellowship one year, immediately after one year of internship, so like I said, ordinarily they would not give a position like that to someone who had not completed internal medicine. Because of this particular doctor's recommendation and his confidence in me that I was good enough that that happened. Then after one year of medical oncology, I went back to the general medicine program again, because I felt that I didn't want to do medical oncology for life, so I didn't finish the second year of that. So it was a good experience at Roswell Park Memorial Institute, which is a very well-known oncology center. It's on par with M.D. Anderson and such places. But I felt that that sub-specialty was not going to satisfy me for life, so it was kind of an eye opener.

Hampapur

You mentioned when you were considering coming to the U.S. that you felt like you needed to see more of the world, and at this point in time did you feel like you were doing that?

Govind

Well, my eyes were opening to a brand new world, and I had learned to deal with a lot of things. I told you I got a car around April of '75 and had just gotten used to driving, and from St. Louis to Buffalo it is nearly nine hundred miles. I drove it in one day, with all my belongings in my car. So, well, that was my opportunity to see this country, going through states of Illinois and Indiana, Ohio, then you get into western New York, Pennsylvania and western New York that, you know how those states are. So, actually, I breezed through a lot of the Midwest and got to the western New York area in a hurry. In fact, I had a pretty good lead foot those days. I got stopped in the state of Ohio on the highway and somehow the cop let me go, giving me a warning. The speed limit used to be fifty-five those days, and I promised him I'd drive fifty-five from there on. I have to tell you I didn't. [laughs] So thirteen and a half hours I was in St. Louis [Buffalo?]. Of course, at that point I had determined that I was going to spend a lot more time in this country, and I would make it a point to see more. And, of course, I had settled down to achieving more goals with completing training and see where it goes from there.

Hampapur

And after your three years in Buffalo, where did you go from there?

Govind

Well, when I was in Buffalo is when I met my husband. He was going to school in the Deep South. He was doing his Ph.D. in Ole Miss. And how we met, we always have a story. We say we met by accident. It so happened that I had told you we were literally neighbors growing up. It had just happened that when I had moved to Buffalo, one day my older sister, oldest sister happened to meet

Govind's older brother in Maleysrum when she was visiting a friend, and they had exchanged the news that Govind was studying for his Ph.D. in the States, and I was here in the States. In India sometimes when they say, "Oh, he's in the States, she's in the States," they don't realize how far apart one could be, and they have no idea. These days they have a better idea, but especially those days. So they had exchanged that news and conveyed it to us. I know that I used to live with a lady whom I call my American Ma in Buffalo, and one night she came in and she said, "Shobhi, Shobhi, there's a man who wants to talk to you." It was two a.m. and I'm going, "What man? I don't know any." And it turned out Govind had called me. Then we were both in very similar situations where neither of us had any family and not many friends, and we had decided to just meet for old times sake, because as kids we used to exchange stamps. We both collected stamps. So he was a grad student, I was a resident, and neither of us were so well off, but I had a car and I knew how to drive, and he didn't yet. So I had a vacation coming up in December '75, and then he said, "I'm just finishing up my prelims and such-and-such a day I'll be finished, and why don't we do something?" and we decided to meet somewhere in Florida and see Florida. Don't ask me why, but that's what we decided. So December fifteenth through the thirtieth or so I had a vacation, so I was heading south, and I think it was the next day, sixteenth, somewhere in the middle of Kentucky I met with an accident. My car got out of control. There was something wrong with the steering, and I couldn't control it and went through the median, and I found out hours later that I had been hit by an eighteen-wheeler--

Hampapur

Oh, my god.

Govind

--and that was a little town called Carrollton in the middle of nowhere in Kentucky, and I was in the hospital in Carrollton, Kentucky. That was probably the biggest event that happened in that town in years, and it was like, oh, this little Indian doctor is here. We don't know how she lived. And luckily the eighteen-wheeler driver, he had a few stitches and was released. But I had a partial bowel obstruction, probably from a crushed secum, so I was throwing up and I'd been unconscious when I was--like I said, I didn't know what was happening until I woke up somewhere in the hospital. So needless to say, I had to have them let Govind know that I wasn't going to make it down. That poor guy, he had to ask his professor to finish the prelims as quickly as possible and then took a bus up and came to this middle-of-nowhere little hospital, and the townspeople were very, very helpful. Again, it was a pastor and his church. All these towns have that, and they found him a little motel, and the hospital allowed him to sit by my bedside. He would be sitting by my bedside morning till night almost for five days, six days that I was there. So that event was a life-

changing event. My life flashed in front of me in the last few seconds, and I said, oh, Shobha, you only were going to live twenty-five years. And lo and behold I made it through. So poor Govind was sitting by my side. I'd be half asleep half the time and fully asleep the rest of the time, and that was our big holiday.

Hampapur

Wow.

Govind

So hence the joke, we met by accident.

Hampapur

[laughs] Pun intended.

Govind

[laughs] Yes, completely.

Hampapur

Well, it's a good thing you weren't alone. That sounds so scary.

Govind

It is scary. And moreover, I did not immediately want to let my family in India know, because that would have been very, very traumatic to them. Had it been a different consequence, nothing much I can do about it, but certainly it was the days when telephones were very hard to use to call India, so a lot of times that was a blessing in disguise. From there on I recovered and went back to Buffalo, and after that Govind and I got to be friends and then consequently it turned into what it's been. So we got married in '78 when he was nearly done with his Ph.D. and I was nearly done with my residency. We at that point told them back in India that that was our intent, and actually he went home. His family was more conservative than mine, so he had more convincing to do. He's the ninth of nine children, so he had a lot of people around to--his dad was already dead, but his mother quite elderly, and he had eight older siblings and their spouses and their kids. He has nieces and nephew--a niece older than him, so a lot of convincing he had to do. It was easier with my family.

Hampapur

What was the convincing in terms of? Was it because you're Maharashtrian, or what was the--

Govind

That's correct, that he is Iyengar and I'm not. Doesn't matter if you're Maharashtrian or whatever. I guess the saving grace was I'm also a Brahmin. If I was not, it may have caused even more agitation, I guess. And one thing that helped us, they knew my family very well. That was good, and they knew who we were. Actually, his mother was probably the sweetest of everybody. She always seemed to like me, and she probably received me better than his siblings at that point, well, many of his siblings. That kind of traditionalism,

conservatism, is very prevalent in India, and to this day it is. I'm pretty sure they're aware of it.

Hampapur

Yes. So did you get married in India?

Govind

Yes, we did, in Bangalore. And then, actually, we both came back, and I had two more months to finish. Then I joined him in Ole Miss, Deep South, Mississippi. He was about to finish his Ph.D., so he finished his Ph.D. in December of '78, and we knew that at that point we would be leaving. So for about six months I was doing some emergency room work in and around there. Mostly I worked weekends and holidays. That way during the week we had time to spend. In fact, being a grad student, he used to spend a lot of time on the weekends and nights at school, because he needed a lot of CPU time. Those were the days when computers were humongous, with efficiency that's not comparable to any computer today, so he used to have programs that would have to run the whole night. So it made sense for me to work when he was working. So in six months I learned a little drawl, the southern drawl. [laughs] Actually, the southern people, the people are pretty nice. If you get to know people, they're all nice. That's one thing I have learned through the years. The impression that some people are evil or bad or not likeable or even hate is only because people don't understand other people, because they don't give a chance. Once you get to know people, deep down there are more similarities between people than there are differences. That's the most fascinating thing, I find, having lived in this country or practiced medicine so long. I'm fascinated by deep down how similar we all are. It's sad, it's very sad to see there is so much hate in this world and that I'm sure it's completely baseless. It occurs only because people don't try to learn about other people, don't understand what they're all about. I'm going off the subject, but that's something that fascinates me a lot.

Hampapur

So when did you end up in California?

Govind

As I said, once my husband got his Ph.D. from Ole Miss, finally we took some time to have a belated honeymoon, and at that point wherever we were going, I knew I was going to practice medicine. So it didn't matter to me where we went. For him, being an aerospace engineer, it was a question of where he wanted to work and where he would get a job, and other consideration would be where could we go so that even if he needs to change his job, that I didn't have to move. We would have to be in a stable place, because we meant to have a family and have a stable home life. So when--as I told you, I was doing some E.R. work and then January of '79 we took some time off and we went to

Florida. Finally we did that trip to Florida and actually went out of the way up to Atlanta and just did a trip for a few weeks. We went wherever we liked. We stayed wherever we felt like, no reservations, no written plans. That's, I think, the only time my husband has done a trip without knowing beforehand where we'd be at a given time, a given day, because he's a stickler for detail. You probably understand that.

Hampapur

[laughs] Yes.

Govind

But that was one of our most carefree trips, and that's where my desire to see places was very well worth it. I always tease him that those days he could still have fun without thinking about every detail. Actually, I should say that we did a few--the Florida trip was our big trip after we got married, but when we were courting, dating, he used to come up to Buffalo after each semester, and we saw a lot of New York State and actually we went up across the Niagara into Canada. We saw a lot of eastern and northeastern Canada on the way. We went up to Montreal and Ottawa, and we had a lot of fun things we did, so the travel bug I can say got Govind through those days. These days he hates to travel, because he travels so much from his work. But we did a lot of stuff. Anyway, coming back to 1979, early '79, Govind interviewed in most places that people like him do. In those days the aerospace companies were either manufacturing or more into R & D, and he was the R & D type, so he went to St. Louis. Those days, that was a big place for Douglas, McDonnell Douglas, and he went to Chicago for another interview, and he went to New Mexico, I can't remember the name of the company there, and then he came to TRW to southern California. And actually, of course, I had spent my first year in St. Louis, and I always joke that the first two places I lived in in this country, St. Louis was the left armpit, Buffalo was the right, so I didn't want to go back to St. Louis. And Chicago was a repeat of St. Louis, cold, and Govind doesn't like cold either. Then the other choices were New Mexico, Albuquerque, and I had never been, actually, west of Mississippi, I guess, by then. It's a wide, big country if you look. So somehow I had the time to go with him when he went to Albuquerque, and I remember as we were landing and I looked around at the desert sp, it seemed so desolate, and there seemed to be nothing, a lot of nothingness, and I made a comment saying, "Do we really want to move here?" So that kind of settled that. When he came to L.A. for his interview, I didn't have time to come, so I had never seen Los Angeles area. But by default, he got all the four jobs offered, and by default eliminated the other three, and we just packed up and came to California, February 29, 1979. We drove. We had come back from the Florida trip, so basically we took the 10 from end to end almost and just drove into California. In fact, I remember there used to be a hotel not far from TRW

on PCH [Pacific Coast Highway]. That hotel since has been demolished. It's a little--I'm trying to think of the name of it. I know it. Anyway, I know that's where they put us up, so we came off the 10 and then got on the 91, came straight to this hotel, and we lived there about four weeks until we found an apartment. Then pretty soon I went in for my California license. I was licensed in New York State as well as Missouri and Mississippi, and I think I had a license also from Louisiana or Tennessee, Memphis, yes. Anyway, to make a long story short, I had to go to Sacramento and talk to these examiner. I had my license by May, which was my first opportunity to take the exam. The rest is history. We never left.

Hampapur

Wow. So what were your initial impressions of L.A.?

Govind

You know, impressions of L.A. was a bustling urban community, and since we ended up in--I think that's Manhattan Beach, and his work was in Redondo Beach, and the two people that we had contacts with, one was a former professor of Govind's. He was his advisor. He was from California. His wife was from California, so he left Ole Miss and came to--actually, he was working in TRW, and they lived in Palos Verdes. The other contact was a friend of his, my husband's brother-in-law, and he was in Torrance. So we happened to see Palos Verdes, Torrance, and then we were in initially Redondo and Manhattan Beach area. I have always been an urban girl. I actually pretty well adapted very quickly. Actually, I learned the highways and bi-ways and freeways way before my husband ever did. It so happened that as soon as I got my license I just found this job that was a bunch of clinics. They had clinics from all the way in Oxnard and Ventura down to Fullerton, Anaheim, almost halfway down to San Diego, so each day of the week I'd be going to two or three clinics, depending on what area I was in, because, for example, in Orange County they had a clinic in Orange, one in Anaheim, one in Fullerton, and I could do three clinics in one day, because they were close by. So I had learned how to go from way up and I had found all these different ways, the pretty ways to come, along the ocean back from Oxnard through Malibu and all the way down to almost San Diego. I'm very good with directions, and I have a good sense of where I am, where I need to go. So within weeks I had a pretty nice idea of what it was, and then we found out there were a lot of cultural things going on. There'd be Indian concerts. There was Indian Music Association. We both love music and we found we could go and enjoy South Indian music, North Indian music. There was anything that you wanted. Food-wise, nobody laughed at us for being a vegetarian, because on our way to California--I can cite you some examples--you have to come through Texas, and Texas truly is a different country. If you have familiarity with it--do you?

Hampapur

I do. I do.

Govind

You go to, what's the town, Abilene, Texas, and you go try to find a restaurant where you can get vegetarian food, they'll look at you like you are from Mars and say, "You're in the wrong part of the country, man. We don't do vegetables here." You know? It is really amazing. I don't know. We do go to Dallas and Houston and usually in bigger cities things are different now, but I'm sure rural Texas is still the same. Hey, it's cow country, and you don't eat cows, there's something wrong with you. I think that was the biggest thing about California, that you could be whoever you wanted to be. The mix of the population, the mix of the culture, it's truly a melting pot, I think, compared to any other area of the country. There's no diversity of population anywhere compared to California and particularly, I think, southern California, because if you go to central California, you don't find that to be always true. And northern California, depending on the places you may or may not, but certainly I think southern California was a very pleasant place to come to. As far as I can remember, coming here we never felt like--when I look back.

Hampapur

Did you find an Indian community here at that time?

Govind

Yes. Yes, we did. Like I said, we had two contacts initially, and one of them, Dr. Pogorzelski, he's an American guy. The other one, he and his wife are kind of older than us, but they introduced us to actually--you know them, Veena and Rangappa.

Hampapur

Yes.

Govind

They're closer to our age, so we had to thank G.B. for introducing us to Veena and Rangappa, and from there on we found more friends and formed our social circle, so to speak. Of course, I'm comfortable with mingling with everybody, but again, you have your roots and your connections, and you don't want to give up what you were brought up with. So certainly for the first time in the States, I felt I could settle in. That's probably when I realized that I would be a misfit if I went back to India.

Hampapur

How so?

Govind

How so? I had really never worked there as a doctor, and it was already about five years since I'd left. Now five years doesn't seem like a long time, but I'm sure you at your age, you feel five years is a long time, don't you?

Hampapur

Yes.

Govind

It's all comparative. Then you've got a husband who's settled in a kind of a job that probably doesn't exist in India, and I think feeling very comfortable here made it like, oh, this is home. I don't think until I came here I felt that way. And pretty soon we were able to buy our first house. That was in Torrance, and that house appreciated so well, within a year we were able to move to P.V. [Palos Verdes]. That was all before we had any children, so that felt pretty good. Here I was driving a Mercedes Benz. All those things when you are that age feel, oh, this is okay. So you get comfortable in your skin and your surroundings, and it grows on you. Then your children come, and your children are born here and brought up here, and they don't know any different then after all. And then back in India, people that are most of them older than you, your previous generation, every time you go there's less of them. And then when your older sisters are getting old and then you're getting old, it's a different world, and then this is your world.

Hampapur

Do you visit India?

Govind

Yes, sure, I visit India. I visit India probably more often than my husband does. He's more detached than I am. I'm very attached to people. If I had my choice, I'd want to go every year. I usually don't have the luxury of time, and it does take a lot of resources too. So I probably on an average go to India every two to three years, because I'm very close to my sisters. I have two older sisters and one younger sister, and we're very close.

Hampapur

So they're all still in India.

Govind

Yes, they're all still in India. They have visited here several times. No, my younger sister has visited only once, but my older sisters have visited multiple times, but they're all in India. I still miss them and, of course, nowadays I talk to them whenever I want, however long I want, and we go online and visit on Skype, so it's a lot different world, and instantly we all know what's going on everywhere. That's been the wonderful part of living in this time. I think amazing things have happened through our life. Your generation, you kids came in when already Pac Man was here, and you got used to computers as little kids. I'm sure you know advances are occurring all the time, but you still-- we have an upper hand that we understand that. [unclear] some years ago when we came here, communication was a real problem, and little things we take for granted today were absolutely unavailable. That made life a lot different. I'm

pretty sure if I had come into this kind of a setup, I would not have been so lonely, I would not have been so isolated, would not have felt so anxious and distraught and reacted in the manner that I did during my first several months. So the world today is really in many ways so different, and much of the things we take for granted, I think our generation probably appreciates it a lot more than you can, mostly because we know, we've seen the difference. I'm pretty sure that was true with our previous generation that had seen the advent of automobiles and airplanes. They were there before those times. That must have seemed like a big leap to them, that we were used to since we were little. So whatever it is, life's been good.

Hampapur

Okay. I've actually reached the end of what I wanted to ask you. Are there any things that you want to mention that we didn't get to?

Govind

Well, without knowing we were coming to the end, I said, "Life's been good." How about that? I don't know what I can top it with. But it's been a journey that has been enjoyable, and I am a very positive person really and believe in living each day to its fullest. I always say I want to do that, because nobody knows what your last day is, so live each day as if it were the last so that if it is, then you have no regrets. On that note I'd like to wish you all the best, and I can't think of much more to say.

Hampapur

That's great. Thank you.

Govind

You're welcome. Thank you.[End of interview]

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