A TEI Project

Interview of Savita Viradia

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1.1. Session 1 (June 30, 2010)

Hampapur
: It is June 30, 2010. This is Veena Hampapur, and I'm here with Savita Viradia. Thank you for joining me today.

Viradia
: You're welcome.

Hampapur
: I'm looking forward to our interview. So I'd like to start off with your childhood. Can you tell me where you were born?

Viradia
: I was born in Karachi, Pakistan, which was part of India at that time. As a young girl, what, five years old, the separation took place, and we landed in Bombay in a family of four children and my mother at that time, and my father decided to stay back to sell our home and the business, which did not materialize, and he eventually came to Bombay.We lived in Bombay and grew up in a joint family. My grandmother was alive at that time. My grandfather had passed away in India. Went to Catholic school to get an education. The only reason is because English is spoken or taught in a Catholic school, and my mother thought it was best to do so, because English is spoken all over the world, which was very good thinking at that time for my mother. Graduated from high school and went to college, and I graduated in interior designing from a college in Bombay.

Hampapur
: I'm going to interrupt you here. So how old were you when you came from Karachi?

Viradia
: Five years old.

Hampapur

Okay. So do you have any memories of your life there?

Viradia

Yes, I do. I remember we had a huge home. My father was pretty well off, and we had a lot of servants and several cars. I remember a few neighbors, who also turned out to wind up in Bombay, and one of the daughters--I did not know her at that time--who was maybe a year or so older than I am, met with me, caught up with me, actually, in the [unclear] School of Arts, and we just started a conversation and she said, "Where are you from?" I said, "Originally from Karachi." She says, "Where in Karachi?" And when I mentioned to her the road we lived on, and she said, "Oh, my god. We lived on the same road." And I said, "What's your father's name?" She gave her father's name and I said, "Oh, my god. My mom always talks about your dad. We were neighbors." And I realized that's such a small world. And we still are friends. She's, as a matter of fact, in Chicago, and we still talk to each other, and this is we are going back almost fifty years.

Hampapur

Wow, that's amazing. What a coincidence. Can you explain why your family moved from Karachi to Bombay?

Viradia

Because of partition. We were literally running for our lives because we were Hindus, and my father had to just pack our bags and put us on the plane just with our belongings. We had to leave everything and come to Bombay.

Hampapur

At that time, were you aware of what was going on, or were you too young to know?

Viradia

No, I was aware of it. I even, maybe from my parents talking about it and me hearing about it and reading later on as an adult, I remember children being kidnapped.

Hampapur

Oh, my gosh.

Viradia

And I have that, not a vivid memory, but real memory, because we were not allowed to go outside of our compound, which is a private property. We would look through the--what do you call it--we had a fencing, and we would look through that, and the men, which they were called--they were patans, the Muslim men, and they had these turbans, and they just were all over the place, and they would grab children. Adults tried to run from them, but they would grab the children, and they had these bags. They would just shove the children in the bag and take off, and I still have that memory with me.

Hampapur

Oh, my goodness. It sounds like a frightening time.

Viradia

It is frightening. When I tell my children, they just cannot fathom how we are so well stable and not gone cracked up. [laughs]

Hampapur

Right, traumatized.

Viradia

Traumatized, yes.

Hampapur

Did your parents ever talk about what it felt like for them to leave their home and move?

Viradia

Yes, they did. As a matter of fact, living with our father, for one year not having him around, my mother would keep letting us know that this is what had happened to us, we had everything and now we don't, so we have to learn to live with what we have. I remember her just buying just fruit for us children and having it into pieces and feeding the children, us, four of us siblings, and letting us know that you have something today, but you may not have something tomorrow, so you have to learn with it, learn to share. And I think having this, not only at that time, throughout our lives growing up as young women, and letting us know that life always goes on, always move forward. That has given me and all of us in the family a strength that you do not cry for what has gone past you in the past, but learn to live with it, because living in the past is not going to help the future.

Hampapur

So you developed, it sounds like, a survivor's instinct.

Viradia

A survival, and the strength which we have today. I am today who I am because of my mother; has given me a lot of strength.

Hampapur

Was there any fear for your father's safety, since he stayed?

Viradia

Yes, it was. As a matter of fact, he had two friends. One of them was a Christian friend, and one of them a Muslim friend. In those days, there was no difference between Muslims and Christians and Hindus. We all lived like one big family. The only people who were being killed and massacred were Hindus, because of the Hindu-Muslim religious thing, and both of my father's friends said to my father, when my father decided after one year that--as a matter of fact, when my father lived there for one year, so that he would not look different from the Muslims, he grew a beard and bought a turban and looked

like a patan, which is a Muslim leader or whatever you call them, or higher-up there. My father was a very tall man, and he kind of blended in when he had to go out, and he spoke the language, which is Hindi and Urdu, which nobody could tell him from his accent that he was a Hindu. So he lived, disguised himself as a patan and lived there for one year.But then his two friends said to him that if things don't sell, your property and your home and your business doesn't sell, we would try to sell it for you and give you the money. And my father had some kind of a hope that if that happened, which would be nice, and he said to his friends, "That would be great. And then if you do sell," either one or both of them, "we would all split it equally among us." And he came to Bombay, and I don't think it ever sold. It was all torn down, and we had to live without anything coming from that end.And then my father opened up--he was an engineer, so he opened up a consulting firm in Colaba, Bombay, and he started his living that way.

Hampapur

Okay. What part of Bombay was your family living in?

Viradia

At that time, we were living in Shivaji Park. We were the two older sisters who went to the school, which we went to Gujarati school for two years, and at that point our mother decided to send us to a Catholic school because of the English language, and we transferred into a Catholic school. We were, of course, taken a class or two backwards. And my brother and our younger sister also continued in Catholic school.

Hampapur

Okay. Just to clarify, I guess since it's before partition, so your family is Gujarati? Like people from Karachi, were they considered Gujarati?

Viradia

Yes, Gujaratis and Hindu, which they're considered Hindu, but Gurjarati. Eventually my parents were--my father was from Saurashtra, and my mother was from Gujarat, like Surat. So they were born in that country, but because of Karachi being a port, and my father's business was--my father manufactured parts for a shipping company, components for shipping-company parts, so he thought a port would be a better location, so he moved from Saurashtra as a young man.As a matter of fact, my father and mother were even married in Karachi. Their wedding was in Karachi. And my mother's family was a joint family, where my grandfather and his older brother, who also had a bigger family, they all lived in one big home. And my grandfather's brother, who owned a dental surgical-equipment business, and he was very well known and a very well-established person, and his children--his older son, actually, became a dentist, and my uncle, who also lived in the joint family, became a dentist, and he was teaching dentistry at the university in Karachi.

Hampapur

Okay. Do you have any memories, or can you describe to me your first neighborhood in Bombay?

Viradia

My neighborhood was--that neighbor who lived, who I met in college, her parents, I knew them by that name, that family lives there. I don't remember ever playing together or knowing the family, but I knew the name. My mother used to say, "Oh, they're the neighbors next door."Across the street there was a church, and there's a story I have to tell. They were a Christian family living, and there was a church there, so it was like Muslims and Hindus and Christians, we all lived like one big happy family. And one of the Christian families--I don't remember her name--she would come over, and I used to see my grandmother and my mother wearing the sari and covering their heads, because out of respect, my mother having respect for my father-in-law and being in how it was a joint family. And my father--she would always cover her head, and my grandmother also would cover her head. And every time this Christian lady would come to greet, to meet with us in our family, and she would come in a dress, and I would, of all the siblings, tell my mom, "I don't like it. She is not covering her head. How come she's not covering her head?" And for the lady, poor thing, for her to just visit, she would put a kerchief on her head to make me happy that here I am, covering my head.So as a little child, I never understood that if she's a woman, and my mother and my grandmother are women, and they're covering their heads and she's not, but I did not differentiate between a dress and the saris which my mother and my grandmother wore, they have to cover theirs, or that in their culture, they do not cover heads when they are in a house. Later on, of course, when they go to church, they have to cover their heads, which is a different thing. But I remember doing that.And next door to us there was a cinema, which was owned by somebody my dad knew, and there was another multi-story building where people during partition, they were all mainly Gujaratis, and the people who built that were a very well-off family, and they built that for housing for people who could not afford--and during partition when all that happened, people were just running, just to save their lives, leaving everything.As a matter of fact, this one story, when I tell my children, they said, "Oh, my god, how can people survive things?" My mom's parents' home, they had the backyard and the front, and during all this '47 revolution, you may call it, they left the head of a goat, chopped, cut head of a goat with a chute over it, with a note that, "If you do not leave by morning, you're going to be in this shape."

Hampapur

Oh, my god.

Viradia

And they had to run for their lives, all of them, a big family of six children, the grandparents and everybody. They had to just leave.

Hampapur

Wow.

Viradia

So that has stuck in my head, that. And in spite of all this, when we were raised, we were not taught to hate Muslims. My mother used to say, "Everybody is god's children." As a matter of fact, when we went to school, going to a Catholic school we had Christian students, Hindus, Parsis, Muslim, and we did have friends who were Muslim, who would come home and eat with us, and we would go to their place with them. But growing up as young girls, my mother always used to say, not only to us, even my brother being the youngest, but it was understood that you're to marry your own kind. Literally, they never pinpointed that you cannot marry a Christian, or you don't marry a Muslim, or you don't marry a Parsi, but you have to marry your own kind, and that was understood.And Hindus, we were not forced that it had to be a Gujarati. Gujarati or South Indian or Maharashtrian or Punjabi, we are all still Hindus. But in our days, in my days growing up, a Gujarati always married a Gujarati. We were not outside our community.

Hampapur

Okay. So it sounds like despite what was going on with partition and independence, people were still getting along quite well where you grew up.

Viradia

Yes, yes, yes.

Hampapur

Were there any tensions at all?

Viradia

No. Even as a toddler coming to Bombay?

Hampapur

Yes, yes.

Viradia

Oh, no. There was no tension. As a matter of fact, the building we lived in--well, when we lived in Shivaji Park, we lived there for a few years, and this particular story I said about in Karachi, where there was this housing of a rich family who built this housing for people, they had a lot of money, and they didn't have any education, the family, but they had a lot of money. So when they came to Bombay, my father was an engineer, so they approached a few people like my father and other few people that, "Listen. We have the money. We don't have the know-how. We have the money. Why don't you, as an engineer, and we would get other people who are accountants, who are lawyers, who can help us build something for our community for all the--," we were

called refugees, "--that for all the refugees, who have come from India and don't have a place to live. We want to do this, but we don't know how to do it. Would you help us?" So my father said, "Yes, I would help you."And so in Jogeshwari there were two brothers. They bought this huge land, acres and acres of land, which was, basically, they used to do milking, buffalo milking, or the cows--no, the milk came from--they're not cows. In India, we drink buffalo milk. So there were a lot of lands available, so they bought this land and they said, "We would build low-income housing for these people who are refugees, and we would build two buildings which will be for people who can afford to pay rent." First it was all for free, for people who had just escaped from Karachi, and they were like a hundred and twenty little one-bedroom, little huts, you may even put it that way. And there were two huge buildings, two stories, with eight apartments in one building, for people like my father and other CPAs and other attorneys who would move in there temporarily, to help build this community. So we moved there.So we were helping out, which was the best thing that did these two men--they've gone, passed away. But my father, after we moved there, my father had a stroke. We were going to school in Santa Cruz, which was--we moved from Shivaji Park then to Santa Cruz, because moving from Jogeshwari, it was in between school. We moved to--

Viradia

Okay, so my father then had a stroke, and the hospital was not that close, and it was very difficult for my mother to take care of all four of us. I had a grandmother who also was ill in bed at that time. So we had to move out of that Jogeshwari housing, and we moved closer to where the school was, in a town where one of my uncles, also who moved from Karachi, lived there. It was a little bit better for my mom also. So then we moved to Khar, and that's where we lived. I went to high school and college from there, got married in Khar and until I came to the United States.

Hampapur

So how old were you when you were in Jogeshwari and then when you--

Viradia

I was in eighth grade. So we lived there only even less than a year, and we moved to Khar. And then my mother--being that my grandmother also was ill in bed, my older sister had to drop out of school to help my mother at home. And then my grandmother, I think after two years or so, she passed away, and then my father said to my mother that, "We have to think about her education." She had been sitting at home, and at that time she would have been in high school. So we had a private tutor for her at home, to finish her GED at home, and she graduated from high school and went to college. She was then, of course--after several years she got married, and she lived in Bombay, and a year after she was married, I got married. No, not a year after, several years

after. Actually, a year after her son was born. And I came to the United States, and out of the girls, I was the first one to come to the United States.

Hampapur

You mentioned your uncle had also moved from Karachi. Did you have many relatives in Bombay?

Viradia

Yes. My uncles who--my mom--who lived in my joint family, this is my mom's, like the second cousin, no, actually first cousin--all of them came to Bombay, and my mom's brother, the oldest brother, lived in Chowpatty, and my mom's cousin lived in Khar; their family lived in Bombay, and then they used to live in a different place at that time, and the partition happened. But then my mom's uncle, who was the matriarch of the family, passed away, so this cousin, her first cousin, was in Khar, and they lived in Khar, which was good for my mom. We're a very close family, the children and us.So my dad was paralyzed, actually, from that stroke, and he was in bed for ten years. He initially could not speak. He lost his speech, he lost his arm to write. He was paralyzed on the left side, so his arm would not--so he kind of practiced writing, and his writing came first, and he started writing, giving messages, and then his speech came. And he could not go back to work because he, besides having a stroke, his kidney also had failed--

Hampapur

Oh, my gosh.

Viradia

--and his kidney had to be removed. The right side of the kidney was removed, and my dad was a pretty tall, big guy, and after the kidney was removed, he had kind of a limp on that right side. The stroke was on the right side, and he could not write, talk, or walk. But he had a very strong will, and initially he started writing, and he would give messages to us writing what he wanted, what he didn't want, and things like that.But we, as children, because of my dad telling us that we had to keep him kind of a busy and occupied, we would have--my dad had a lot of friends, and he had a Russian friend, a family where it was a Russian and a Parsi family. The husband was Russian; the wife was a Parsi, and a Hindu family. They used to come to visit my father. My parents had a lot of friends, and I don't remember at this point how we had subscription, or people dropped us books, and one of them was "Reader's Digest," and "National Geographic." And we would read articles. We would take turns. My brother was little, but still he would--reading, he would take turns, and then my older sister was mainly helping my mom in the kitchen and helping with my grandmother at that time, who was in bed, and other things, and she would on and off read to my dad, but three of us mainly would do that.And then being that my dad had the surgery, the doctors--in India at that time it was kind of

very difficult, and we, financially, were not even doing that great. So the doctor came and he said that his incision was so huge that, "You have to have a nurse clean his wounds every day, and change the gauze." And somehow I was the--out of the four of us, my brother was the youngest one, so being that he was a boy, I was kind of a strong-willed, tiniest of all, but a strong-willed, I took upon doing that, checking my dad's blood pressure, taking his temperature, which is nothing big, and then every day after his bath, changing his wounds, and I did that until he was healed.

Hampapur

Wow. That must have been a difficult time.

Viradia

It was difficult, but I think something like that gave me courage, and I was able to do something which in those days only guys would do. "Oh, it is a man thing." And my father used to say, "In this family, there is no man thing." Be that [unclear] oldest one, there would be some things to be fixed, so a doorknob broken, or there was a hole in the wall, and my father would say, "Okay, I will tell you what to do, and you girls will do it," putting a nail in the wall or something is broken in the kitchen, and we were taught to do mechanical things at home. Of course the kitchen thing, my mother would say, cleaning and dusting and cooking, one at a time at a certain different age. My older sister would be there doing the cooking thing, so when she is busy, then I would go in, or until even she got married, and when she was in college, fine, but when she came home from school, that was the first thing we had to do. And we had a servant in India. We all have servants who would just clean the clothes, wash the clothes and clean the kitchen and go away. We didn't have a live-in servant, so he would just go and come back twice a day, and we kept doing that.But we were all taught to clean, cook, iron our own clothes, and we, going to a Catholic school, we had uniforms, so we had to have our uniforms we all had to iron ourselves. Even so much so that for my brother that we girls would do it, and my father would say, "No, no, no, let him do it, because someday when he's older and he has to do it himself, he has to know."And when we were growing up, funny thing, the strange thing is my mother used to say--all siblings, we argue, we fight, and people talk about sibling rivalry. We, to this day, we have no sibling rivalry, which is unheard of. We do not feel that if--my brother, who is the youngest of all of us, now that he's the man in the family, if he says something to us, we don't take it as an insult or, you are younger than I am and you cannot ask me or tell me what to do kind of a thing. We don't have that in our family. We feel that, hey, after my father, he's the man of the family. I feel personally that if somebody, or in our case my brother, or even my younger sister, a person who doesn't care about you will not say anything, that, hey, do it this way, don't do it that way. So we took it with that sense, that, hey,

because he loves us and he cares about us, that's why he's giving [unclear].So we were taught that way. My mother used to say, she used to say when we used to argue just for a little thing, then she said, "Don't fight. You have to deal with things. You argue about it, you discuss about things. Everybody doesn't think the same way. But learn to get along, because you know what? This is the best years of your lives. Who knows where you guys are going to be when you're older or married or gone? You will not even see each other that often. Isn't it better to use this time to make up for all the other times you're not going to have?"

Hampapur

Right.

Viradia

And little did we know that out of all the four siblings, we all are here in the United States. My younger sister was here until she got married. She came here when she was like twenty-eight, twenty-nine, and she stayed here for several years, or even younger than that, and then when she was to be married to a young man from India, she decided she doesn't want to live in America and she chose to live in India, so she's the only one in India. But all other three siblings, we are in America.

Hampapur

Sounds like a very tight-knit family.

Viradia

Very close family. And my sister-in-law also is like we don't feel like sisters-in-law. We all grew up together, went to the same school, and we're very, very close.

Hampapur

Were you all close in age, you and your siblings?

Viradia

My older sister and I, there's a difference of three and a half years, and the remaining three, we are two years apart.

Hampapur

Okay, so pretty close. How did your family manage financially after your father wasn't able to work?

Viradia

My father, when he started the engineering company, being in India at that time, when you own the company but you are not there working, which in India in those days they used to call it sleeping partner, and I don't understand the terminology, but he did have certain shares in the company, so he got income from that. And then he--you know, growing up in India, families do not tell children, especially when they are younger, about finances and a lot of stuff. But I remember that my father had an investment in an apartment complex

where he used to get rental income, and what we were taught was that we had everything at one point, now we don't have, so we have learned to live with the basics.We never had any tantrums as to why I can't have this and the other kids--as a matter of fact, when we went to school, we had classmates--the girls were daughters of big producers and directors, and they had chauffeurs and were picked up and dropped off in cars, but we never ever felt that, how come we don't have a car. My father used to say, "Walk to school. It's a good exercise for you." And we didn't have busing, school buses in our days, no. We had to take either public transportation or walk, so through the monsoons and through the heat, we walked, all then years.

Hampapur

Wow.

Viradia

And then, of course, in college we had to take a train, because we were living in Khar, which is a suburb. We had to take a train, and when I went to college, there were the railway stations. One is the BB stations and one the GIP, which is the east and the west kind of a thing, so we had to get off at the west side and then walk two miles to reach the college on the east side. Every day, did that for four years.

Hampapur

Wow.

Viradia

So we were yet not deprived of, "No, you can't have this," and, "You can't have that." You can't have everything, but you can have something, and we learned to live. My mother used to say, "If you don't have things tomorrow, you've got to learn to live with that, and that's what you're going to teach your children."

Hampapur

Right. So you mentioned your parents had a lot of friends. Can you tell me about some of your friends while you were growing up, where you met them?

Viradia

I remember my grammar school I don't remember that much, but when we moved to Khar, very few families from Gujarati families went to Catholic schools. As a matter of fact, my uncle who lived around the corner from us, all his four children went to Gujarati school, and my uncle used to tell my mother, "Why do you have to send your children to a Catholic school, which also costs you more money, or money?" I don't think the Gujarati schools--they were public schools, so I think there was no tuition, and we had uniforms and books besides tuition. And my mother used to say, "Well, this is what my husband and I think, that it's a good education, there's discipline."And in a way, I really admire my parents for doing that, because I remember when going to college, children who came from other schools did not have command over, like,

talking to people. They could not make a conversation. It was difficult for them, and we had no problem. Not that they were less smarter than us. They were maybe better than us scholastic-wise. But coming up front, being bold and speaking out, they did not have that.

Hampapur

Was it common for people to attend like schools based on a particular language, depending on your background?

Viradia

Yes. Yes. Gujarati children went to Gujarati school, Marathi children went to Maharashtrian school.

Hampapur

Okay. So that seems kind of like an interesting contrast, because you had those diverse neighborhoods, but--

Viradia

Yes, yes, yes. But like in our school, in the Catholic school, we had, of course, science and math is math, and English, science, of course, but we had one foreign language, which was French, and one Indian language, which was Hindi, which was compulsory, Hindi, and if somebody wanted to take an extra language, it was Marathi. So in a Catholic school, we not only had English, we had Hindi and Marathi and French. Unlike Gujarati school, they would have Hindi. They did not have foreign language like French or German. At the same token, when you started college, in college you had to take a foreign language. Now, isn't it difficult for you to take a foreign language after eleven years, to learn the ABCs of the language and not having it in grammar school? So in a way, it was an asset to go to a Catholic school because of the foreign language and learning different Indian languages.

Hampapur

Can you explain why your mother wanted to send you to Catholic school further?

Viradia

Because she realized that--she did not know at that point--my mother had no idea that I was going to be going away, especially with a girl, going to America. Had I wanted to go to America before I was married would have been questionable, because then they would think that, oh, the marriage age would be gone and that. But if I would have insisted, I think my parents would have allowed me to come to America; if not America, then England at least. But boys, in those days only boys were allowed to go to foreign lands, not the women.

Hampapur

Was it common for boys to go?

Viradia

Yes. Yes. Boys, because to further educate themselves, and coming back to India with a foreign degree, you would have better scope of making more money.

Hampapur

I see. Okay. Well, turning to your schooling, do you have any memories from school?

Viradia

School, yes, I do, real good. As a matter of fact, I always discuss it with my sister-in-law and my sister. We all went to the same school--my younger sister. We had a very good education, very, very strict. We also had--as a matter of fact, I represented that school in an inter-school art competition, in a still life with another girl, and I also played basketball in school. We had basketball. And we had something called rounders, which was like softball. My younger sister was more athletic in softball. I liked the basketball, so I was in a basketball team, and I liked art, and, of course, we also had one subject of home ec, which was sewing, no cooking, but sewing and knitting. As a matter of fact, in an Indian home, every girl is taught how to sew, and my sister and I, my older sister, not my younger sister, which the teachers were appalled at how come the younger one doesn't know how to even hold a needle, where the other two, we were so good in art and sewing that even years after we got out of school, the walls had our artwork, our embroidery work with our names on it.So that was good, and I'm so proud that I came out of a Catholic-school education, because there was discipline. As a matter of fact, when my son, who was born and raised in America, was ready for school, there was a Catholic school in our town, and I wanted to put him in a Catholic school. Nothing to do with the religion or anything, but because of my experience--discipline. Because what I heard about schools in the United States, public schools as to the way it is, maybe I am comparing it to India, because it was totally different, and I realized that my son was so hyper and very active kid--nuns are the only ones who could have straightened him out. And he did go for six years in a Catholic school.

Hampapur

Wow. Stayed with you.

Viradia

Yes. And my daughter, later on she also went and joined him, of course, and then when they went to high school, we moved into a different town, and then high school my son says, "Mom, now can I please go to--?" As a matter of fact, he's got a very good sense of humor. He said, "Mom, I think I know a lot about Jesus Christ now. Can I go to a public school?" [laughter] Which was very good. My school days, we used to go for picnics, the school. I even have pictures with me of the class going to a picnic. We used to go on the beaches

and certain picnic areas.I don't have my school friends, because I came to the United States very early. I came in 1966, and I lost touch with all my friends when I went back. As a matter of fact, the first time I went back after coming to United States was after five years, and I had no contact with my friends. But I still do have contact with my college friends, out of which one is in the United States--she lives in Chicago--and two of them are in India. One of them comes back and forth here, because her daughter lives here, and she has grandchildren, and every summer she contacts me and we keep in touch through our e-mail.

Hampapur

Did you enjoy school?

Viradia

I had a great time in school, yes. I was a very good student. I stayed out of trouble. I was very shy, which I learned when I went to college. All eleven years you have with all girls, and teachers are also all women and nuns, and all of a sudden you go to college and there are boys and men professors. And I realized, I said, oh, my god, I don't think I'm going to make it in the world if I'm not going to speak up. And then I changed, I totally changed, and everybody was shocked that I came out of it, like. And people were like--as a matter of fact, in the family, when we used to have relatives come over, for the longest time, or not relatives that much but friends, they thought that in this family there were only two girls and a boy. And also besides, I look different than my other three siblings. I look like my mom, and my other three siblings look like my dad, and they thought I was a neighbor's kid. If I was in the house, they would say, "Oh, is this your neighbor's kid?" My mother said, "No, that's my daughter." She says, "You sure she's your daughter?"You know, in India there is a typical way of people like rubbing in kind of a thing. "Oh, I don't think she belongs in this family." And it gives you a complex. And I think maybe I did have a complex for the longest time, because I looked different, and then I realized that if I don't speak up, I'm going to be pushed around, and I totally turned 360 degrees, and there's no one in this world who can--anybody who can tell me what not to do, or not to speak.And college, the first year was kind of very quiet, and then I changed totally. I became very extrovert and mixing with people, which kind of helped me, because when I came to the United States, I mean, I had never seen--I mean, I did not know, number one, that you're to do everything by yourself, or leave aside the change of weather, the winter. And I said, the first winter I said to my husband, I said, "I don't think I am going to make it in this country," because I was only like eighty pounds. And I said, "I think we'd better pack our bags and go home, because it's too cold for me."And people were different, and thank god I spoke English. Transportation was a problem, and my husband told me one day, "Take a cab and go to the next town," because he'll be working. He said, "Take a cab and

go. You speak English." And my husband, from day one he said, "Oh, you can do it. You speak English. You have no problem." And maybe in a way he got away from doing things himself, or taking me or lugging me around, and you do it because you speak English, and I got to take charge.I worked. After I graduated college, I was working with a designing company, but I never had my own checking account. I didn't even know how to write a check. In India in my days, women didn't go to work. Maybe they did in a different society, but in our community, I didn't work, and when I started working, I would get money, I would get the check over there and in the college, I would go and cash it right in the school, and I would get the money. And I would give it to my mom, and I said, "Here's my money." And she said, "Put it away on the side." I said, "Mom, spend it for whatever kurcha," you have to excuse my language, that all the expenses towards the house, and if I had to buy some clothes or something, I would take it from there.And when I came here, my husband says, "Here's a checkbook, and here's the bills." And I said, "What do I do with that?" He said, "You're going to pay the bills." I said, "I'm not going to do it." And he said, "Yeah, you're going to do it." So in a way, he put his responsibility on me and I took charge, and I learned to do everything, and he had had faith in me and trust in me that whatever I do--and I learned on my own how to do all those things. He taught me. He said, "This is how you write a check." And then, of course, my common sense. I went to school so, you pay something, you make a notation of what you paid and how you paid, and I would do things like that, and that's how I learned.And people would like look at me like I'm from the Moon, because I had the--I still do. It's funny that--you would know that--when you're in an Indian crowd, the Indian accent comes out of you when you talk even in English. And when I'm talking to Americans, because later on I worked. I was a realtor. I worked in real estate, and then I worked for my husband's business, and then I came across a lot of people, and not that I want to become an American, but to make the other person more comfortable. And my children still tells me, she says, "Mom, what is with the Indians? You get stuck between the Vs and the Ws. We, we, we [unclear] ve. For W, you don't say, ve, it's we." So that's certain things, not that I want to totally change, but everyday life you're dealing with Americans, so--

Hampapur

You adapt.

Viradia

--it's easier for the other person, comfortable. So I got into the groove of--and for my children too. And I know that a lot of Indian families where mothers didn't even speak English. They did not even go to--forget the college, very few whom I knew. There must be a lot of educated women even working in New York City and some other different states, but where I was in New Jersey, that

area, I was the only one from Bombay, and nobody spoke Hindi, Marathi, Gujarati. They all spoke Gujarati, but mostly they were all Gujarati friends. And the first time I met somebody who spoke Hindi, I was so excited to speak Hindi.And going to India after five years, I couldn't speak that fluently, because I did not have anybody to speak with here. But I made friends with the Indian families who were here, and they're still my friends in the last forty-six years. I moved here since five years from New Jersey. I keep in touch with them. I see their children being born, then graduating. Some are doctors, some are attorneys, some are accountants. They're married, they have their children. So this is the third generation I'm seeing, and we are still friends.

Hampapur

Wow. Well, going back again to your life in Bombay, outside of school, what did you like to do for fun while you were growing up?

Viradia

Well, when we were growing up, these cousins who lived close by, they had cars, and as they grew older they learned to drive, and then--oh, another thing what we did was we would like to go to the beach, and the beaches are not very close by. Living in Khar, the beach was in Santa Cruz and Juhu beach, which is farther. We would rent a bicycle. We learned how to ride a bike, my younger sister and I. The older sister was afraid, and she didn't learn. So we would rent a bike for a quarter, and we would go to the beach for an hour and come back. Then my cousins, after school we'd finish our homework, they would either come over to our place and we would hang out in our courtyard and just talk. We had no computers in those days. We had no games. I don't even remember as growing up I played with a doll.

Hampapur

Oh, wow.

Viradia

I don't think my parents could even afford to give each sibling that, oh, this is a ball. I remember we had blocks. We played with blocks and like a rattle, but as girls, I don't think--my mother always used to say to my dad--he used to travel a lot--she says, "You think you can get the girls some dolls to play with? They're playing with the boy's stuff." Because my brother was little. I guess maybe he was a boy, so maybe he's a little special or whatever. But we never complained, or we never--and because there were outdoors things to do.And then our religious or our special holidays, like we would have Diwali and we would have the Rangoli and the celebration of doing the Rangoli and the lighting and the festivals, go over to cousins' place and go for walks, go to the market, and that was our chore every day, the girls to go to the market and get vegetables. We did not have refrigerators in those days. Every day would be fresh vegetables for both the afternoon and the evenings, so my mother would

be busy with my grandmother or my dad and so she would not be able to go, or go to the grocer and give them a list of the grains we need, rice or wheat or whatever. And in our days, we bought wheat, had the wheat, and we all have to take it to the grinding mill to make the flour. We did not have the readymade thing. So the wheat came in bags, like in a sack, and we had to clean it. We had to make sure there is no rocks in it, and rice and things like that. So those were our--first thing after when you come home from school, do your homework, and then later on household things, and then on the weekend, Saturday and Sunday, we had to do the cleaning of the house.And even like for the Diwali holidays we would like do a little painting, and my father would say, "All right. Come on, girls." He'd say, "Just because a boy is a boy, he has to paint. We learn how to paint in India." And we would do things, and that was our recreation. We did not have--my parents did not have money to take us on vacations. We had no vacation.My daughter, when she graduated from the first year in college, she went to West Virginia, and she would call me, she'd say, "Mom, we all friends want to go to Keys for vacation." I said, "Vacation? What vacation are you talking about? The girls don't go out alone." She said, "Mom, these are not your days. Things have changed." I said, "I don't think that--I'm not going to let you go." Especially with her, I was strict. So we have to go with the changing of the times, but the culture we come from, and you know how our parents are. And I'm so glad that I grew up in that time, because in this time, being a parent in this time and age, I don't think I would want to do that again. It's so much stress.And our children also had to fit in. And children in schools can be cruel. In America, in schools, oh, there is no general knowledge of the whole country, how other children in the other part of the world, how people live and what they look like; people with dark skin they call black. I heard the word being used, black. What is black? Black is a color. And my son was picked on in school. They called him every name in the book, and he would come home crying. I would sit him down and explain to him, I said, "You come from a different culture. You come from parents who grew up in a different culture. You are who your parents are, and color of the skin is topical. Everybody inside is the same, and you have to fight for this. You don't come home crying. You have to go tell your teachers, your principal, that this is what the kids did to you. You don't go hit back." I taught them, you aren't going to hit back. "You have to learn to fight, because this is a tough world out here, and someday you're going to be on your own, so you have to."Things are different now. There are different ethnic backgrounds in schools, and my son was the only Indian kid, and a dark-skinned kid, and when it came to my daughter, things were different because people knew that, oh, Indian kid, Indian. Then they would say, "Oh, Indian." They'd think it's the American Indian, and there's a difference between the American Indian and the Indian Indian. That's a true

American, actually. American Indian is the true American, which is not even recognized. But it's a challenge for our children in this time and age.

Hampapur

While you were growing up, did you have a radio or listen to the radio?

Viradia

Yes, we did. We had radio, and we had our certain special days where they would have just the songs, and I loved music from day one. My son, as a matter of fact, is a musician. Maybe he gets it from me. He plays guitar. I love music, and I think music, everybody should have something of music in them, because that's the soothing--the music takes away all the pain from within you.

Hampapur

What type of music did you listen to?

Viradia

I listened to--in the mornings, we would have classical music, like more religious music, one station, and then other songs, like movie songs, and the good singers, special singers from India. I still to this day, even coming to this country, being that I love music, I like even American music so much that when a song goes on, within two notes or three notes, I know what song is playing.

Hampapur

Oh, wow. That's pretty impressive.

Viradia

Yes. I do, I do.

Hampapur

You must have a good ear.

Viradia

Oh, very good. I love music. It's a therapy. In a way, it's a therapy for me. When I'm cooking, I turn the music on, especially now on the Internet we have on Google all the Indian music. In the morning now we have some religious musics. But I like my era music more than the modern songs. Certain modern songs, unless I've seen the movie, I don't really know them, but I like the sixties, the fifties and the sixties songs and the seventies songs. Even at work I put classical music, American classical music real low while I'm working, and I listen to that. But at home, when I'm cooking, I turn the music on, if it's Indian music or American music. I just, there's always music there.

Hampapur

Did you learn music while you were growing up?

Viradia

I was growing up. I learned the harmonium, which is like a piano, and I did not kind of pursue it, and my mother said, "Well, if you're not going to--." I wish I had continued it, but I did learn the harmonium.

Hampapur

Okay. Did you go to movies at all when you were growing up?

Viradia

Oh, yes. As a matter of fact, the apartment complex we lived in, there were eight apartments, and there was a famous story writer who lived in the top floor, the second floor, and there was a director, two directors who lived there, and a songwriter, and across the street there was an actor who lived there. So we were lucky enough to get passes to go for the premieres, and we've seen a lot of movie stars. Maybe that was another influence for me to get --I definitely have an ear for music. So we were fortunate enough to go to a lot of movies.

Hampapur

That must have been exciting to see.

Viradia

Oh, very exciting to see. As a matter of fact, one of my cousins, my mom's cousins, my second cousin, was married to Ashok Kumar's daughter, who was a famous actor at that time.

Hampapur

Yes. Wow.

Viradia

And being a famous actor's daughter, we had a very small--the wedding was just the family, but the reception was at a football stadium; not a football, a cricket stadium, for a thousand people.

Hampapur

Wow.

Viradia

And there were all the movie stars, all the famous movie stars, Raj Kapoor, Dilip Kumar, Kishore Kumar, all the famous actors.

Hampapur

That's amazing.

Viradia

So we have a famous person in our family. As a matter of fact, this is another thing which should go into your archives. My mom's uncle, which is her dad's brother, growing up in Karachi and his children being born there, when they were children, he had six sons. One of them died when he was pretty young, maybe in his late teens or early twenties. He had decided, he said, "I'm going to choose brides for all my sons, and they are going to be all interracial," which was unheard of, and he wanted to break the bar by saying--arranged marriages were the thing in our days. But he did not believe that his children should find the brides for themselves. He's going to find a bride of a different nationality.So when his oldest son, who came to the United States, to University of Pennsylvania, to do dentistry, was coming back after four years of education,

he tells his son that, "Well, now you are ready to get married, and we've already chosen a bride for you." And he says, "What do you mean you have chosen a bride for me?" He said, "I don't want to marry somebody you choose." He says, "That's not going to work." He says, "Number one, I'm your father, and you don't even question that. And this person whom you're going to marry is the daughter of friends of ours, who the ladies at that time were pregnant--your mother was pregnant with you, and the bride's mother was pregnant with her, and they decided that if either one of us have a boy and a girl, we'll have them marry. It was a promise given to them, and you're going to keep that promise."

Hampapur

Wow. Was it an interracial--

Viradia

No, that was the same, a Gujarati family. That was the first one, first one Gujarati. But this was the promise. A promise is a promise kind of a deal. And he said, "I don't care about the promise." So he says, "Is this the reason I sent you to United States to get an education, and now you come back and tell me what to do? You're going to marry this woman. There's no two ways about it." And he had no say in it.

Hampapur

He married her?

Viradia

He married her. They had five children, three boys and two daughters, and my uncle passed away, I think, first, and then she died. But he treated her like a queen. They made the marriage work, and that was the way he was, the father. And then the second son's marriage, he chose--another thing also, when we hear the story about my mom telling us this, that in a way, in our family, we thought about that, but it was understood that we had to marry our own kind. But I still have a feeling that being that my mother--my father was very adamant in his way too, but he also had certain principles, because he would say--my father had passed away before--I was a little different among the three girls. After I graduated college, I became very bold, and had one of us come home telling our dad that we want to marry somebody who is not from our caste, as long as he was educated, it would have been okay. I have a feeling it would have been okay, because I think my father knew his daughters better than he knew the stranger they were choosing, and it would have been okay with my mother too.I think because she raised us strong enough to--she gave us the training to be a good wife, a mother and taking care of families, and knew that we would be able to handle an interracial marriage.

Hampapur

And by interracial, do you mean from a different part of India?

Viradia

Yes, a different part of India, not United States, to India. That might have worked too, but I cannot vouch for that.

Hampapur

Right. That sounds pretty open-minded.

Viradia

Very open-minded, very open-minded. So my mom's other cousin, his father, he had a friend in Kashmir. He was a major general in the army. Now, Kashmir is northerners. From Kashmir is Punjabi, but northern. They speak Punjabi, different food-style eating, all Indian food, but northern food, and they are meat eaters. They eat fish and chicken and everything. They had six daughters. And my mother's uncle goes to him and he says, "We are good friends, and I want your daughter for my son," just like that. And he says, "Who is the major?" He said, "You may be major in the army, but I'm calling the shots for my son. I want your daughter." Now, the daughter could not even say that I don't want to marry--she had not even seen him or met him yet. The father said, "Yes." He gave the promise to his friend, "Yes, my daughter for your son." So the second one comes from Kashmir, marries the second son.So the third one marries somebody else. The fourth one marries someone from Nashik, which is a Maharashtrian-speaking state, and the fifth one marries a Gujarati girl. So maybe my mother also had this in her, that in her side of the family, they were marrying from a different state from India. But it was understood, you're not going to marry a Muslim, not because we hate, everybody hates Muslim, but because by religion, Muslim religion, you can marry more than one woman. A man can marry more than one woman. He can have four wives. When a woman marries a Muslim man, she's a citizen of their country. She's a naturalized citizen of a country--a Hindu woman or any woman marrying a Muslim man becomes a citizen of their country.

Hampapur

Of Pakistan?

Viradia

Of Pakistan, Pakistan, yes.

Hampapur

Oh, wow.

Viradia

Pakistan or Iranian or whatever you call the Muslim, Afghanistan. There are stories, I don't know if you know, from United States when we were in New Jersey, there was a family in New Jersey not too far from where I lived, the town. The woman was American, and the husband was Muslim, came to this country, educated, whatever, and he married this woman, and they had a daughter. If you have to rent a movie and watch this movie, it was--

Hampapur

Oh, is it "Not Without My Daughter"?

Viradia

Yes, "Not Without My Daughter."

Hampapur

I read the book, yes.

Viradia

Okay. You should see the movie, get it on video. It was on HBO recently. That was a true story made from this true story, that she has a daughter and then the guy, no signs of anything, and one day he said, "Well, she's old enough to take her to my country." And you know the story, right?

Hampapur

Right, right.

Viradia

So she falls for it. That was a long time ago, but recently, within the last--I've been here five years, right--within the last eight or ten years, a similar story happened, and the husband goes there and takes the girl. When she comes back and she sort of said, "No way you're going to--." And he killed her. She died. The other woman, the first movie you saw, she escaped with the daughter. She brought her back. But the woman who was killed, her sister, from United States attorneys or whatever she did to fight, gets an order to go to this country, gets the girl back and fights a case against him, and he's in jail now.

Hampapur

Wow.

Viradia

So the Americans--Hindus will know. And still, I mean, things are happening in India. In India, girls are living in India, are marrying Muslim boys against the parents' wishes. They get married and then legally they can have four wives. They don't even marry. They have another woman living with the wife and that kind of a thing.

Hampapur

That's legal in India?

Viradia

They do this in India. They can legally--I mean, who would want to fight them? To them, killing is nothing. They go straight to heaven if they kill. One of my friends who went to college with me, her daughter married a Muslim boy, and they have two children, and the whole family--the brother didn't want to speak with her. Her parents cannot--you know, you don't talk to your children, but you cannot disown them. You had your children; they are your children, after all. And the girl--and coming from this family, which we are--Buniyas are very strict family. She eventually last year, two years ago, she had brain cancer and she died, and the two children--the mother was afraid how to raise the children.

They're going to be--I said, "You know, that's not your call." And then she became a widow. My friend became a widow. Her husband died. And I said, "How are you going to financially take responsibility? And he's going to be in your life." I mean, so it's a difficult situation. Women still do it.You know, we come from the school where even in our country, widows--now things are changing, but remarrying--like my mom became a widow at the age of fifty-two. She would never think of remarrying. And for a man to marry a widow with four children--no man would marry in India. That's another thing, an Indian thing. If a woman dies, a man right away next day he gets married, because he cannot take care of the family or the children. So things are different.

Hampapur

Going back to your college days, were you always encouraged to go to college by your parents?

Viradia

Yes. Yes. My mother said, "You're getting older. If you don't study, then you're going to get married." We don't want to get married at nineteen, twenty, eighteen, nineteen. So as a matter of fact, when we got married at the age of twenty-one, twenty-two, we were like old maids. People were like--and people would come in and tell my father, they'd say, "Aren't you--." My father passed away when I got married. "Aren't you concerned about your daughters? They are getting older and they are not married yet." And another reason too that you have to marry within your own kind, own kind meaning that people from Saurashtra have their daughters married in Saurashtra, people from Gujarat marry them in Gujarat, which Gujarat means [unclear]. Saurashtra means on the other side of Gujarat.In our days, the men did not even go get one degree, leave aside two, go to college. They had businesses. Fathers--they were mill owners, they were millionaires, they're owning mill. But my father would say, "It doesn't matter if he's a millionaire. You have to have his credentials. He has to have a bachelor's, a master's degree. If a daughter has bachelor's degree, they have to have master's degree, equal if not more." So the boys in our days, men, they had no college degrees. So here we are, graduates, and no college-degree guy, and my father would say, "No, no, no, no, no, no. I don't care if he has got big bungalows and five cars and servants and maid and the nine yards. No. She's not marrying a millionaire for his money. They are not marrying for money. He has to be educated."

Hampapur

Was your father college educated?

Viradia

My father was an engineer. So then we had to marry our own kind. So then my sister was twenty-one already, and my father says to my mother--and my

mother also; my mother came from a different state than my father; both Gujaratis. But she, because it's my father's name, she was looking for husbands for us only from my father's region. So my father says, "Look in my region," and compared to my mother's region they were more businessmen than the farmers, which were in my father's region. They were all farmers and they are all land owners. "There's no education in my region. You can go to your region or a different region who speak Gujarati to look for men for the husbands." So then my mom had no choice, because there were no educated people there.So then my sister, older sister--my brother-in-law is from Baroda, but he went to England to get his degree in engineering, so through another relative, we came to know about him. We always have like some relatives who take initiative in finding matchmaking. So he called up my mom and he said, "Oh, I know somebody who's coming back from England, and he's got an engineering degree, and if you are interested for your daughter."

Hampapur

Was it more prestigious to have your education abroad? Or was it the same?

Viradia

It doesn't matter to my parents, as long as you are educated. So my mother said, "Fine." So my mother told my sister--and my mother, who I am so proud of, she said to my sister same thing she told me. She says, "If the marriage is arranged or even if you bring somebody home--," there was no such thing as dating. You could not go out of the house. If somebody who was interested would come home, my mother would say, "Fine. You can sit in the back room and talk, but no taking my daughter out and walking in town, because everybody knows us, and you come back and say next time, next week, 'I'm not interested in marrying your daughter,' it's not going to work, because then nobody will marry my daughter." You understand that.So my uncle who lived there said, "Okay, why don't we have a meeting in my home." And my mother said to my sister, "You meet with the gentleman and whatever you talk, I don't want to hear what he asked you or what you asked him. For any reason, whether you don't like his looks or what he said or what he didn't say, I don't want to know. If you don't want this to happen, it's not going to happen." Unlike a lot of families I know, that the girl doesn't even meet the boy, and the parents said yes. Why? Oh, my daughter is going to be happy in their family. They have a lot of money. They are rich. That's how a lot of my cousins have been married into families like that. So my mother said no way, this is not going to happen. If my daughter is not happy for any reason, if she has anything against it, it's not going to happen.

Hampapur

Okay. So you went to art school and then you started working as a?

Viradia

I was working as a designer.

Hampapur

So what did you do for that?

Viradia

They would have, like somebody would want to design their home, would come in and say we would like to design their home, and then we had a chief designer, a head designer who would go to their homes and take the measurements of the home and everything and come home. I was a newcomer, so assistant, just apprentice, so we would have the drawings to make by plan and elevation. He would roughly do it, and then we would have to set into plan the elevation and then present it. And then we were not only the designer, but we were also furniture makers where I worked in Bombay. So then the chief designer would take--once it was approved by the owner, would take it to the shop to make the design. As a matter of fact, we even designed the furniture of one of the famous movie stars. Sohrab Modi was an actor, and we designed his home. And I worked there for about a year and a half; then I got married.

Hampapur

Okay. And did you enjoy working?

Viradia

Yes, I enjoyed working.

Hampapur

Was it unusual for women in your time to start working after college?

Viradia

Yes, it was. As a matter of fact, a lot of relatives and my uncles' friends and other friends who would come to our house to see my dad and talk to us, would say--it was looked down upon for women. "Why do you have to send your daughter to work?" Because it looked that a father is not bringing enough money at home, so the women have to go to work. But it is amazing that if I went to college and I became a doctor or a lawyer, things would have been different. They would not have questioned, I guess, because it's a high position, or whatever it is. Because in those days, there were women doctors too. There were women doctors. But so my father would say, "Well, the reason I send her for education, there was a reason for her to be smart, and she is smart. The children are smart. The girls are educated, and until they get married if they want to work, fine. If they get married and if the husband won't allow them to work, they should continue working too. It gives them an identity."

Hampapur

So did you choose to work, or did your parents suggest it?

Viradia

No, I chose to work. No, what do I do, sit at home? That doesn't make any sense. When the parents have put you through college, you should make

something out of it. So I went to work, and then, of course, my younger sister was there after me. She was also home. But, see, my father--I was in high school when my father passed away. So my grandmother died before that. My father passed away, so my mother had a lot of help. So then she said, "You know what?" Even when I was going--as a matter of fact, my younger sister was two years younger than I was, so when I was in the second year of college, my younger sister was ready to go to college. So my mother says, "Yeah, you don't have to stay home for me and help me to cook and clean. I'm all by myself. You have to go to college. Otherwise, father's going to look from top there and say, 'What are you doing, woman?'" [laughter] So she went to college and got her bachelor's in economics.

Hampapur

Okay. Did you come to the U.S. first, or were you married first?

Viradia

No, I got married in India.

Hampapur

And when you got married, was your brother already in the--

Viradia

My brother had come--actually, my brother came to United States six months before my father passed away, and my father passed away in--my brother came in December of that year; no, my brother came in July, and December my father passed away. Then the following summer, because in India when there's a death in the family, you cannot marry, so six months later I got married, so the following year I came to America. So my father passed away six months before I was married.

Hampapur

Okay. And was your marriage arranged as well?

Viradia

Not kind of arranged, but my husband is related to my cousin. My first cousin's husband and my husband are brothers, and my first cousin and her husband--from Karachi, we had no kind of relations. But from Karachi, my uncle and my cousins moved to a different state, and we were not in a good relationship with, even when I was born, I guess, with my uncle and my father, so when partition happened, we split. We came to Bombay and they went to a different state. So we had no communication or connection with each other, so we never saw each other grown up, or we never had any family gatherings or anything with them.But when my cousin got married, when she got married, her husband--there are three brothers, so my husband is the middle brother. He graduated high school and he did one year of college, and he wanted to come to United States. But my cousin and her husband knew of our family, my father's name, that he's the engineer from India, and they're very modern. They would call,

say, modern, because they're a very forward family, and there are three daughters and a son, and my father was an engineer, so my husband says to his brother that I want--and my husband's brother was a sailor in merchant navy, so he said, "I want to be an engineer. What do I do?" And my husband's brother says, "You know, I don't know anything about engineering, but you go to college in Bombay. Go to Khar. My wife's uncle lives in Khar, and he's an engineer. He can give you some guidance."

Hampapur

I see.

Viradia

So my husband started--I think he was finishing high school at that time. So he and another friend from Africa--and he lived in boarding school, because they were all born in a different village, and his uncle brought him to Bombay to go put him in school, so he comes with his two friends to our house, and he tells my--he introduces himself to my father. He says, I'm so-and-so's brother. He asked me to come to you and if you can give me advice on how to be an engineer. So my father says, "Go to the United States." It's even before my brother; he was planning to send my brother. And my husband goes, "How do I do that?" So he said, "Go to the public library in Bombay and get names of universities throughout the United States in mechanical engineering, and get applications, fill those applications and mail them and see what happens."So he did that, and he got--I guess he did not want to wait for several--I mean, at that time I don't think they knew about--and another thing, money was issue too, because tuition, coming to America, even the tickets in those days, flight, airline tickets were like a thousand dollars in those days, and nobody came to America, because England was close by. Everybody went to England for study. My husband said, "I don't want to go to England. I want to go to America."

Hampapur

And why is that?

Viradia

I don't know. He just had this thing in himself that, I want to go to the United States of America.

Hampapur

And that's what your father had recommended too.

Viradia

My father recommended to him, go to America. England, he says England, there are a lot of Indians already in England. You go to America. So he got admission at University of Missouri in metallurgy, mines and metallurgy. So my father says--there were a couple of other things too. He says, "You want to be a mechanical engineer? Go here, because--." My father was very well read. Not that he had come to the United States, but he was very well read. "--

because, first of all, it's going to cost you a lot of money to go to the United States, and tuition and books and living, and in the State of Missouri it'll be less expensive." So he applied, and there were very few people coming at that time, and he got the admission.Then until he got all his paperwork, he would come to our house, back and forth and back and forth, and then he knew that in the conversation--my mother was very social too. And then my mother would say, "Listen. You're here, so you don't think that you have no family. We are your family. If you need anything while you're here still," blah, blah, blah." And my mother knew that his family is in the village somewhere.And when my husband, he went to [unclear], even he says about it, he says, "I have never gone--I have gone to places, people's homes, and I have never seen children talking in English," because we, among ourselves, would talk in English at home. There was a rule when my grandmother was alive, that we would talk in Gujarati, and we would talk that too, but it's habit. Every day you're in school with children speaking English, so among us and siblings, we would talk in English, and he found it very amazing. It was amazing. He says, "You guys all used to talk in English." So he was kind of in awe that, here I am seeing this family who are not living in big homes or a bungalow, and a small family, and they are so forward in the sense that outgoing and talking. It was not that just because you were a girl that we had to hide in the back and not come out and things like that.So he talked a lot with my mother, and so then my mother must have said, "My girls, they're going to go to college." So he had this thing in his mind that he says, oh, my god, I've never seen a family--and my father was so supportive--whose thinking is so different, that in his own family, he said, "When I went to ask my brother, my brother couldn't even tell me how to guide me to become an engineer. But I come to this family, where I see this man telling me what to do and where to go, and I see this family with children who are speaking English." And we used to be dressed like in cute dresses and you know.So then he gets his admission, and then he tells my father that I have to [unclear], because my father-in-law, my mother-in-law, they were working on a farm. My father had a little shop, but initially they were all farmers, and he did not have that kind of money. And his brother's wife--a brother was not in good terms with their family, because the brother's wife, his wife did want to give a penny to help out. So that was not an issue to even ask the brother. And so he tells my father that, "I have to get money for my ticket. I have no money." So my father said, "Okay. You'll go to places--there is--." Remember when I said that from Karachi this family came and built this community?

Hampapur

Yes.

Viradia

They had a fund for education, and he knew the person who was in charge.

Hampapur

I see.

Viradia

And he said, "Go to this office, talk to the gentleman and tell him I sent you, and you are entitled to get some kind of a scholarship and aid to go to the United States."

Hampapur

Wow.

Viradia

So he did that and he got some money. Some money my father helped him, and my father, in Karachi he used to travel a lot. And Karachi was a port, so it was pretty cold, so winters were really chilly. And my father used to travel for his business outside Karachi, and he used to have winter clothes. And my husband still talks about it to this day, that he said, "People have no idea. You're going to freeze over there." And my father gave him this winter coat. It was all 100 percent wool. He gave him this coat, and he says, "You take this and you use this until you can, or give it away, because you need some warm clothes there, and make sure you take sweaters from here," blah, blah, blah.So he had enough money to get the ticket, and the day my husband--not the day, but a few days before that, he comes to my mother, and he says to my mother, "I need to speak with you." So my mother said, "Okay." And we were not home. I don't know where we were. He says, "Now that I have got this good guidance to go to America, and I'm going to be an engineer, and someday I'm going to be somebody, but before I go, I need to ask you something." So my mother says, "What?" And my husband was only nineteen years old, okay. He says, "I want to ask for your daughter's hand in marriage." So my mother says, "You do?" He says, "Yes." She says, "Which one? I have three of them." So he says, "The middle one." That's me. So she said, "Okay, we'll see. You want the middle one?" My mother didn't ask him why not the older one. He says, "I want the middle," because my mother must have known that age-wise they are closer or something. She didn't even question him. She says, "Okay. Well, we'll have to make sure," she said to him, "that until the older one gets married, we can't get a second one married." She said, "But we have a whole lot of years to go. We'll think about it." So that was that. That was a conversation between them.And my father used to keep diary, all the diaries. Every time or everything he would write. So then he writes in the diary, which when my father passed away, I had gone to India and my brother and I were going over his papers, and we found his diary and we were looking through it, and he had written in that date, that page, that Batuk Viradia is going to United States to become an engineer, and he asked for Savita's hand in marriage, and I approve of it. I like the young man, and he's going to be a self-made man someday.

Hampapur

Wow.

Viradia

And I saw that in writing. But anyway, so after that my husband comes here, he gets his bachelor's and he gets his master's. But in the interim of the five, six years, he had no idea about--I mean, to me, growing up in India, going to college, we had comprehensions to do for test. You go take the [unclear] test and they ask you a question. You write pages and pages, not multiple choice, tic tac toe answering. And his credits--and he used to write to my father, "What do I do? I have to take so many credits this semester. What do I do?" And my father used to write back to him, "Take this credit, do this, do that." So they kept in touch with each other through writing all these years back and forth.So then finally he gets ready and he writes to my mother, "I am a full-fledged engineer with a master's degree, and I'm coming home, and I want to marry your daughter." So that's the time my mother tells me.

Hampapur

So you didn't know about any of this?

Viradia

All the six years, she didn't tell me. So she tells me. She said, "Do you know your cousin's brother who used to come to your father and he used to ask all this advice and went to America, United States," and blah, blah, blah, this and that. So I said, "Yeah." So she says, "So he's coming back from America. He's a full-fledged engineer." So I said, "So?" "So he wants to come back and he wants to marry you." I said, "I don't want to marry him." She said, "What do you mean?" I said, "I don't even know the man." So my mother says, "So in other words, how are you going to know the man?" I said, "I don't know him. I don't know what he likes, what he does not like, his nature. I can't just marry somebody because you tell me to marry." And my mother looked at me and she says, "That's not going to work out. If you think you're going to go out with somebody, but this young man, we have known him for so many years, we admire him, and look where he has come to from where. And it was your father's wishes, and you have to meet. He is going to meet with you." And I said, "Okay, we'll see." And I said, oh, my god, there we go.So he comes and against his mother's wishes and all. There's another thing that in his family, because his older brother's wife--in India, when the girl gets married, she goes to the husband's house and, naturally, stays with the husband. My husband's brother, his wife, she has a sister and she didn't have any brothers, so her father said to the men who would marry both the daughters that the husband had to move in with their family, which my husband's brother did, and my mother-in-law and my father-in-law did not like that. It was like giving the son away. Rather than gaining a daughter-in-law, giving the son away. And they were

very selfish and did not want financially to support anybody, and my mother-in-law just hated her, and then when my husband told her that he wants to marry the daughter of the other brother, which was us, she said, "There's no way you're going to marry. We already have one girl from that family. We don't want another one in the family. I'm going to lose my second son too."Which is very difficult for other than Indians to understand that. It could be, but we had no connection with that family or nothing. I mean, even two siblings. We are three sisters, but we are three different people. Even born from the same parents, two sisters could be so different too. Nobody is alike. But she never understood that, and my husband said that, "I don't care if you like it or no; I'm going to marry her." And against her wishes, he married me, and my mother-in-law never accepted me as a daughter-in-law. Like in India they give you jewelry and this and that, and never did that. But that's okay, fine.But anyway, so he came and we sat. My husband had another uncle, a different uncle who was close with our family. We knew him before even I knew my husband. As Indian relatives coming from the same region, because my father had a well-known name, and people would say, "Oh, Mr. Patel from Karachi." That would be my father. And they would come and meet with him to talk to him and all. So then my mother said, "Remember that gentleman who used to come? That's his nephew." So I said, "I could care less. He could be the Queen of England's nephew." And my mother would say, "Oh, my god. Is this why I raised you? You are talking back." I said, "I'm not talking back. I'm just letting my mind--letting you know what I think about."So we sat in the room and we talked by ourselves, and we were asking all kinds of questions and all. I had no idea about United States whatever. So he says, "Well, what are you planning to do now?" I said, "Well, I'm working, so I want to be a designer." And then I said to my mom, "No, I don't want to get married. I don't want to marry this man," blah, blah, blah. And he then wanted to go--he was there only for like two weeks, so he had gone already spent a week with his family, then he had to go to the ticket office in Bombay, and so he said to my mother, "Can I take Savita with me?" And my mother says, "Not by herself." I mean, it's part of knowing him often for so many years, and so he says, "Well, you can ask your uncle to go with you." So then my mom allowed me to go with him. So he just wanted to talk to me in other than my home surroundings. We went out and then to Bombay, and we came back.And then, oh, the reason also, when he came back it was six months my father had passed away. In India, you don't get married if it is not six months yet. So he said, "Well, let's just write to each other," and blah, blah, blah, "and we'll see." So we started writing to each other.

Hampapur

He went back to the States?

Viradia

He came back to the States. He came only for two weeks.

Hampapur

Okay. He was working here?

Viradia

Yes, he was working here. Well, he graduated and he was working for New Jersey Bell telephone company. So he came back and then--no, no, no. The first time when he came that time, that was when his father died, and we couldn't get married. And then my father died. Within the two fathers it was six months or six months, but then he came to that [unclear]. He was not planning to get married that soon, because it was like just announcing that he wants to marry me, and I can't say yes in that one week, you know? So then he came back, and then it took like another year or so. For one year we wrote to each other and trying to convince his mother and his sister; sister and brother were okay.

Hampapur

And he had convinced you?

Viradia

Yes. He said, "You're the one I want to marry," and that's why I kid about it right now. I say, "You want to pack my bags and send me back now?" [laughter] But I'm telling you, it was a trip when I came. But like he knew. My husband, there is nothing--he said driving. I said, "I'm not driving. I never did drive in India, and everything is on the wrong side." I said, "I can't." He said, "No, no, no, that's okay. You can do it. You can do it." And he just gave me--always encouraged me, like my dad. "Oh, you can do that." And even the kids' school, the teachers, the conferences, and I would run to school, and he would--then we went in our own business, and he traveled a lot. He could not be there, and I said, "You've got to be there for your children. The children will never forget it."And my son, every season, it's the basketball season? He's playing basketball. If it's football, he's playing football. To go to his practices, go to his games. And then only one thing I did was, when I was pregnant with my son, I was, of course, not working at that time when I came to this country, I lost a lot of weight, and, of course, I was home. And then when I got pregnant with my--and I didn't want to have another one until he was old enough to go to school, because it was a nightmare. And then later on I put him in a daycare, and then I said, "I have to go to work, because I was working in India. I'm going crazy staying home."So I went to an employment agency and I filled out an application, but I saw this ad in the paper, and it was close to my house. So I go in for the--I never understood. And so I said, here I come, I've got a college degree and I speak English, and I still don't understand English, because this was American English. Not American English, but maybe I did not understand the terminology of job hunting. I filled out an application. It was a telephone company, New Jersey Bell, being a telephone operator, long-distance telephone

operator. So I filled out high school, college, blah, blah. So the woman who's interviewing me, she says, "You're overqualified." So I said, "Isn't it good, then? I'm overqualified. I'll do a good job for those people, and maybe I'll get a good pay." She said, "No, you can't get this job." I said, "What do you mean I can't get this job?" She says, "You can get a better job in public relations somewhere else, if not the same company. You'll make more money." And I said, "And where is that, the same building?" She said, "No, it's in downtown." I said, "What is downtown?" I didn't know what downtown was. She said, "It's like six miles from here, downtown." "No, I don't want a better job, I don't want to make more money. I want this job." She says, "May I ask you why?" I said, "Because it's close to my house." It was like a mile from my house.I said, "I have a little boy. When I put him in a daycare and I go, I have to pick him up, come home." And little did I know that when I'd work, for newcomers you don't get eight to five, five days a week. One day it's nine to twelve and it's six to nine, or it's eight to five. One day it's six to morning, eight o'clock, that kind of work. So I said, "Now I want to work there." She said, "Okay, fine." Ninety dollars a week paycheck, and I started working there. Then I worked there for a year. After that, my son was already four years old, I planned to have another one. I got pregnant and I worked for a little while, and I said, "I don't want to work until nine months, and I want to leave because I want to put on weight this time." When I had my son, I was ninety pounds. I had lost a lot of weight. He was only five and a half pounds. So I worked for the telephone company and--

Hampapur

I'm going to actually pause it.

Hampapur

Okay.

Viradia

So I worked for New Jersey Bell and then I left when I was pregnant with my daughter, and after my daughter was born, my husband went into his own business, and then I decided that I would help him out. Also, the girl who was working for him in the office, all the desk work, was leaving on maternity leave. So I stayed home for six months until my daughter was little, and she was a winter baby, so she was born in December and I waited till the summer, and then my husband's business was thirty miles from my home, so I would take her with me, with her formula and her clothes and diapers and go the company and be there for several hours and work there, and I'd leave in time, at two o'clock, to come home to pick up my son from school, who left at 2:45, and then bring him home.

Hampapur

Wow, busy.

Viradia

Busy, yes.

Hampapur

I had one question, one more question about India. So when your family moved, you mentioned that you were refugees, so did that label stay, or that feeling of being a refugee stay with your family?

Viradia

Not really. Not really.

Hampapur

And then my other question that I wanted to ask you about while you were still in India is, did you know anything about the United States?

Viradia

No, I didn't know about, per se, about the lifestyle or work ethics. I knew that it was beautiful things and fashion and things like that, but there was more knowledge of England than America, because we never even knew of anybody who came from America, personally known somebody that would talk about America.

Hampapur

And your brother hadn't gone at this point?

Viradia

No. My husband came here first, and then my brother came later on, yes, because my brother was still younger. He went to college, and my brother came I think several years after.

Hampapur

Okay. And was there awareness of the fact--so before 1965, you couldn't go from India to the U.S., right? So was there an awareness of the fact that this was suddenly possible? Is that why your father suggested--because you said your husband came in 1966?

Viradia

No, I came in '66.

Hampapur

Oh, so he came before 1965.

Viradia

Oh, yes. He came in--I came in '66, so he's got six years of college, so he came in '59, I think.

Hampapur

Wow. So there must have been very few Indians.

Viradia

Very few Indians. Yes, there [unclear].

Hampapur

I've never met anyone who came before that.

Viradia

No, my husband, he's seventy-one years old.

Hampapur

Wow. That must have been something.

Viradia

Yes, yes.

Hampapur

And how did you feel about moving to the U.S.?

Viradia

I had no idea. I was just coming here because I was married and I'm coming to my husband and my home.

Hampapur

And was there an idea that you guys would stay in the United States?

Viradia

Well, when I came, we talked about it that I came in September, and then come December, I mean, September it was cold enough for me, and comes winter and I said to my husband, I said, "I don't think I'm going to be able to live in this country. It's very cold." Of course, initially I learned to drive, but, "I don't drive, and I don't have any family, I don't have any friends, and I was working in India. If I have to get out of work and everything, how are we going to do it?" He was going to grad school at that time, and besides, he was making only like $110 a week salary, and he was sending money home to his mother and his younger brother and his sister, who had widowed at the age of twenty-five with four children. "And how are we going to support ourselves if you have to do this? So we're going to go to India." So we talked about it and my husband said, "Well, I have to still stay in India for a few years to make enough money, because if we go back to India and we have to have our family, we'll need money. So let's live for about three years."

Hampapur

In the U.S.?

Viradia

In the U.S. And I said, "Fine." But then I said to him, I said, "If we--." And my thinking also I feel a lot of ways almost like my mother. I think ahead. A lot of people do, I guess. "That if we are planning to live in India, go back to India, and people are coming to America not that much, but like you came to America now, more Indians will want to come to America. Would not that be difficult, to come to America for children? Why don't we plan to have a kid? Because if we go to India and we have a kid, our kid will have tough time to come to America for education."

Hampapur

Okay, okay.

Viradia

So we said, okay, so we plan to have a kid, and I had a kid after a year. So my son was born, and then my husband, he worked for three years, and then we said, okay, maybe one more year, and then maybe one more year, and then I said, "My god, it's almost five years now. I should have another kid." So I wound up having my daughter, and then he went into business at that time, and once he got in the business, we were kind of stuck, that the business, it has to continue or get better. It got better, it flourished, and we became really big.And then the first time I went to India, I saw my mother was after five years. So I came in 1966 and I went after five years to India, and my son was four years old at that time, four and a half years old. It was the first time we went. So we were, I think, at that point--I said, "He's only four years old." Blah, blah, blah, "We'll go back." And then he got busy in his business and he did a lot of traveling. Then we bought another business in Boston, and by then the kids were in grammar school, and I said, "Now to wind up everything and go to India, they don't even speak the Indian language." In schools, even if they were definitely going to go to Catholic school, they don't speak Hindi, they don't speak Gujarati, which they understood a little bit. But Hindi, they stare at you when you talk Hindi.So this was the case and then we said, "Well, I guess--." And then for my husband, like what my brother thought of it, that to go to India and to do business in India would have been another nightmare. You get so set in your ways, because things are so straight in United States. At that time it was, not anymore now. So here we are, forty-some-odd years later. This year, September, it's going to be forty-five years for me.

Hampapur

So you've spent most of your life in the U.S.

Viradia

Yes.

Hampapur

Okay. I think that's a good place to--[End of interview]

1.2. Session 2 (July 7, 2010)

Hampapur

It is July 7, 2010. This is Veena Hampapur. I'm here again with Savita Viradia. Thank you again for joining me. I'm excited to hear the second half of your interview.So last time we left off just beginning to talk about you moving to the United States, and I was wondering if your husband had told you anything about his experiences in Missouri, going to school here, before you arrived in the United States.

Viradia

No, nothing. When he was in school, he did write letters to my father, being that my father kind of guided him through his schooling, and he would just ask about what credits should he take, and it was hard for me to grasp this credit system, which we don't have back home. Other than that, he himself being a young student and living a student life, did not in general write about the lifestyle in United States or the food and dos and don'ts, and it was kind of a shock to me when I came to United States that growing up in India, we did a lot of stuff at home, because being young girls, the training we got from my mother, our mothers, that you have to go do your own shopping, and you're to do your own laundry and learn to drive, if you don't want to drive it's a handicap in a way, so it was like a starting-from-scratch experience.And I was so kind of--I was blessed in a way that I spoke English, and I had no problem communicating. Only problem I had was understanding the American accent, which I would ask the person I would be speaking with if they really understood me, thinking that I speak different than them, and they had said that they had no problem because I spoke beautiful English. So when I came, my husband had--initially they were all living as roommates, a few friends of his, and he rented a two-bedroom apartment, and knowing that I am coming from a background of interior designing just thought that if he went and shopped for anything just to get everything ready or fill up the space, I may not like his choice.So he did not have anything in the house except for a bed and a television, and to me television was something I had never seen before, because we didn't have television in India in those days. And the color television had just come out, and this was in 1966. And whatever few kitchen utensils he had with him, he brought that along, thinking that in the morning first thing I would wake up, I would want to have tea or coffee, whatever I was drinking. And one of his friends lived in the next town, which was like maybe a mile and a half or two, who also had married six months prior to our marriage, and his wife was already here, and they had their place pretty much organized and established, and my husband would drop me in the morning before going to work, and I would spend the day with the lady. That was the first time I met. And in the evening on his way back, my husband would come there and we would have dinner together, and he would pick me up.And as a matter of fact, four of us, we would go out shopping together to set up our apartment. And once I was in the apartment, I think in the whole complex, which was maybe at least two hundred apartments, we were the only Indians.

Hampapur

Oh, okay. Wow.

Viradia

I came in September, and to me it was--I was freezing, because it was fall, and in New Jersey. Then one of my neighbors, she saw me or both of us at one

point, and introduced herself, and she had a fourteen-year-old son, so to me she was like my mother's age, so she said to me that she will show me where the laundry is. And I said to my husband, I said, "What do you mean show me where the laundry is?" I had no idea that clothes can be washed in washing machines. So each complex had a four-apartment kind of a block, and each block had washers and dryers in the basement, so she took me down there and she showed me, and you've got to put the quarters in and the soap in, and this is the way you do your wash. So in a way, she was like a mentor to me, like a mother, and I learned a lot from her.I came in September, and my brother, who was in L.A., a student, I hadn't seen him in over a year, and he had decided that it was summertime vacation, that he would come and join me and meet with me. So he came to New Jersey, and the next day my husband goes to work, and he says, "All right. Let's go. We have to find a motor-vehicle agency." I said, "What's a motor-vehicle agency?" And he says, "Well, you've got to learn to drive." I said, "I'm not going to learn to drive. I didn't even drive in India." To me, even in India, when my cousins had cars and we would sit with them, I would try to figure out how can you have--in India, most of the cars are stick shifts. In those days, they were all stick shifts, and how do you drive where you have to do four things at a time? You have the clutch and you have the brake and then you have the steering wheel, and I said, "I'm not never ever going to drive." So my brother says, "Well, if you don't learn to drive, your husband's not going to take you all around, and he's not going to do a lot of shopping and running around. Everybody drives in America."My husband had a Volkswagen, a stick shift, and not that I--I had that thing in my head about the wrong side or the right side, because in India we have the English--we drive on the other side and the steering wheel is on the right side. So in a way it was good that I didn't drive in India and I learned here, so it was a fresh start. So we went and picked up the book, and he said, "Now read the book." And he says, "Thank god, you will have no problem, because you can read and write in English." So I read the book and while he was there, I went and took a test, and I passed. And then I said, "Okay, then we'll practice," and then my husband will take me, will drive, and then he would get upset that if I'm not--and I think it was--any woman who has to learn to drive has to learn from anybody but the husband. I guess they don't have patience, and if you're learning, your tendency is to make mistakes.But anyway, so I did get my license, one shot, and I learned on a stick shift. And then, of course, from that day on to this day, which I have been married for forty-five years, going shopping and any other chores is like I did it all the time.

Hampapur

Okay. So just taking a step back from when you first moved here from India, what did you bring with you? What did you pack and bring?

Viradia

Oh, well, I just had my whatever, because of the way baggage or weight which we were supposed to carry, I had my personal belongings, and a lot of my--knowing that I'm coming to a foreign land, at that time there were no Indian stores. Everybody was a student, and nobody had any kind of any business where they would have Indian, I mean, forget the restaurants, but stores, grocery stores. So my mom had prepared a crate, which came in a month's time, which had all my sort of utensils, my spices, little knicks and knacks and decorations and items which, Indian art things, which would be something unheard of in those days to have in America. So little by little, every weekend we would go shopping for furniture and for bedroom things, so I set up the apartment.

Hampapur

Okay. And in terms of the Indian food things and other things that you needed, did you mom continue to send it from India?

Viradia

No. Initially it came; we had that. But then we found--I guess every Indian, one Indian knows and a hundred Indians would know that in New York City there was a store owned by a Jewish gentleman. It was called Kalustyans, and he had all international food, so he carried food from all over the world, and being that it was Manhattan, every nationality lived in Manhattan. So people would go to his store. He was the only one at that time, and this is what he sold, this is what the price is, take it or leave it kind of a deal in that store. So we would go there every three months or so and buy lentils and spices and tea and other things, basically all food, flour, cooking, whole wheat flour, and spend like almost a little over a hundred dollars, which was a lot in those days. My husband's salary was $120 a week. But being that it was in New York City, which from New Jersey it was a good forty miles, and in traffic it would take longer, we would not go that often. So we just did that one-shot deal and bought whatever we needed for so many months, and then if we ran out, then we would go back.But then there were a lot of students who lived in Newark, which was downtown, and there were a lot of Asian stores. And then there were open like farmers' markets, and you would go, and one Indian friend would know and would call the other friend, and that's how we got to know that, hey, if you go to this section in Newark, you can get cilantro. I mean, to get cilantro--I didn't even eat--I was not very fond of cilantro in India to begin with, but I guess when we didn't get it at all, we would drive thirty miles just to get cilantro.

Hampapur

That wasn't in the supermarket?

Viradia

No. And still back in New Jersey, unlike in Los Angeles, you do not get ginger or cilantro and certain Indian vegetables in Indian stores. So a lot of Chinese vegetables, Asian people eat also a lot of our vegetables, so we would specially find out a Chinatown area. Like the Chinatown in New York City was one of the best. But then you go to Newark, and every city, town has--not each town, but a certain section has an Asian market, and then they would carry the rice, like long-grain rice. We never had the basmati rice at all in those days. So then we would go to--and basic vegetables we would get from the stores is cabbage, cauliflower, and eggplant, besides potatoes and onions, and never knew that there is such thing as frozen items, like frozen vegetables or frozen--and so if we didn't have any fresh chopped vegetables, you would pick it up from the freezer, frozen.But then in Jersey City, there's a Stevens Institute of Technology, which is a lot of foreign Indian students and other foreign students come to go to school. And there used to be little other American stores who started carrying Indian little groceries or little Indian items for the students, and some Indian gentleman must have been like a genius, that he decided that, why don't I open up an Indian grocery store? And that was the first Indian grocery store; this was in 1967. He opened up this little store where, I mean, we had to go to Manhattan, which is on the other side of the river, but we went more often to the store in Hoboken, because he started getting all Indian lentils and flours, cooking flour, and different kind of oils, and vegetables, and he had a small little store and then over the years he made the store real big, so that's how we got into--

Hampapur

And what city in New Jersey were you in?

Viradia

I lived in Belleville in New Jersey. And then also my son was born, and we lived in this apartment for two years, well, altogether three years. My neighbors were like--we, as Indians, we eat pretty late. My husband would come from work, and we would have our tea and whatnot, and then I would cook, and then we would eat around like seven o'clock, eight o'clock, or sometimes even nine o'clock. And then we had a nice big huge backyard, and all my neighbors would come out in the summertime at least, would sit down and they would wait for us to come out, and says, "Why do you guys eat so late? You have to come and sit with us. Enjoy the summertime, because the winters we're all indoors." And we would just--that was our--because at home I was by myself.But then from my neighbors, especially this lady who was like a mother to me, she taught me a lot about the American food, and I would ask her--and I love to cook, and I knew about Indian cooking, everything. I could have written a cookbook in those days, if I had the means and know-how. So she would tell me--I would tell her what our food is, and I would say, "So what do you eat?

What is your lunch like? What is your--?" And I realized that they are big breakfast people, so they eat big breakfast, and lunch is light. Lunch is also pretty substantial, and the dinners are kind of early. So they would say, "All right. We have to have a meat, and we'll have to have some kind of a vegetable, and some bread or pasta."And after my son--oh, my son was very small, like a very tiny baby and bad eater, and then I would feed him Indian food, without the spices and everything, and he would like make fusses. So I learned how to make pastas, and then, what is a basic Indian thing for a kid? Peanut butter and jelly. So then we lived there--we bought a house in the same town, and we moved to the house, which was a good neighborhood and which is one of the best times in the forty-five years I've had, where every family had the same--had a couple of years' difference of children in the block. So my son, when he was four years old, I put him in a Holy Family daycare, and that's when I found a job and I started working for a while.

Hampapur

Just to interrupt a minute, so were there any more Indians around when you moved to the house?

Viradia

In the apartment?

Viradia

In the area.

Viradia

Oh, no, no. Even when I moved in the house, we were the only Indians. As a matter of fact, when my son was--when I put him in the Holy Family grade school, he was the only Indian child until he finished sixth grade. For six years and kindergarten, actually; seven years he was in that school, and after he left the school, I would hear from my other friends whose children went there that there's an Indian family, because they did not--not all of them, but a few of them went to the--and I guess it must be also that the parents knew about the Catholic schools from India or education.And another thing it was good is because every kid in the block went to the same school, and I realized that if I put my son in a public school, he's going to be picked on. Not going to the same school, and he'll have nothing in common with the other kids, and I think I had that foresight that the kid has to be part of other kids.

Hampapur

Were the other kids all white?

Viradia

They were all white. There was one Filipino family, and the boy's father had a Ph.D. And my husband, of course, an engineer, and everybody else in the family were--either they worked for somebody, or they had their small little--my neighbor, next-door neighbor, he was a jeweler, and he worked for a very

big department store. So the only two people, my husband and the other little Filipino's parents, they are the only one with degrees, master's degree and Ph.D. But being that children can be cruel, and my son--everybody was mostly like Italian, German, and we were the only Indians, but my son being dark-skinned, he was always picked on, and they would call him every name in the book, or you're this and you are that. He would come home crying, and I would sit him down and I would explain to him that, "They are not better than you. We're all equal. You are as equal as they are. They are born in this country. Even their parents came from somewhere else. No one is a natural-born--the real American. Real Americans are the Indian Americans, who are not even recognized. But always be proud of who you are and where your parents come from. First you're Indian, you are American-born. You're a citizen of this country, so don't let any other kid push you."And he was a small, tiniest, skinniest little thing, and he would get beat up and come home crying, and I had to teach him how to fight back, that if you keep on coming home crying, and they are going to always get on your case, they're going to fight with you and pick on you. But he went through a rough time.When my daughter was born later on, I guess at that time even in the school, which is five years later, she went to the same school for about a year or so and then we moved out of that town, and we went further west to a different town.

Hampapur

Were the teachers supportive when that was happening to your son?

Viradia

Well, in the school, yes. The nun, the principal was a nun. It didn't happen that much in school as much as it happened in our block where we lived.

Hampapur

I see. And how did people react to you and your husband? Did you have any issues as well?

Viradia

Everybody was pretty okay. But like when we moved in, my next-door neighbor, who is my best friend, she thought that we were like black people moving in. She came from Italy, didn't have any higher education. I don't know whether she even had a high school education. But from Italy, her parents went to Argentina. They could not come straight here, and they were all, basically, mason workers, jewelers, that kind of a thing. So they came. They settled in Argentina and from Argentina they started coming to America. So when she came, she didn't even speak English that well. Her husband also was a jeweler, a watchmaker by profession and jewelry later on. Also like high school maybe.We lived there for nine years in that block, and as a matter of fact, I was the one who got after her, and I said, "You have to learn to drive." I took her to take a test. I taught her how to drive, would teach her parallel parking and

everything, and took her with me for the test. And her husband, who was in his own business at that time, always used to say that for her not to work. I said, "Why aren't you working?" When I moved into that house next to her, she was pregnant with her daughter, and I only had my son at that time, and he was two years old. She had the baby, and later on, four years later I had my daughter, so we were all homemakers and we stayed home because of the kids. And then once my daughter started school and her daughter started school, I used to always tell her, "Why don't you work?" "Oh, my husband says we pay too much taxes if you work." I said, "So you make money, you pay taxes. You've got to get out of the house, and you've got to work."I took her--I said, "You let your husband know I'm doing this, okay, because I don't want him upset." So I said, "What do you feel like doing? What do you think you can do?" She said, "Well, I don't mind working in a department store." So I took her with me to the department store. There was an ad for the particular--not too far from where we lived. We went there, and I went to the office and I said to her, the person who was there, I said, "I'm here with my friend for the job you have available, for her." And she looked at me. I said, "She's going to fill out the form, and I'm going to check over it." No, actually, I filled out the form. I would ask her and she would tell me and I'll fill it out, and then she signed it, and I said, "Can I sit with her for the interview, if she has any problems, not that I speak Italian, but she's my friend and she wants this job."Well, anyway, she got interviewed and she got the job, so she started working, which was good for her, because both the kids were in school. Then between the two of us, we decided that the kids we would walk to school. We would walk with them until we saw the school. In those days, everything was so safe, and our kids played in the street. They were not allowed to go outside our block, but they played on the street, and we never even had alarm systems in our apartments or homes even.But in the wintertime, it's pretty cold in the morning, so her husband used to work in New York City, so he used to drive the car and park at the subway and then take the train. So in the mornings, he would drop them, and I would pick them up, because I drove. She did not drive at that time. I picked them up from school, so we had this thing going. Her son and my son were in the same class, and her daughter was two years older than my daughter, so all four of them were dropped off and picked up. So much so that when they would come home from school, they would wash up and either have a snack and milk in their home, or my neighbor would drop them in my home for them to do the homework, because she was not able to help them do their homework. So I would sit all four of them and make them do their homework, give them cookies and milk and all, everything done, and then they can watch TV for a while, cartoons or whatever, and they'll all go play out--it's summertime, play outside. Even in the wintertime they would play out, make snowballs and things, but that was our

routine.So I stayed there for nine years. My son was two years old when we moved, and we lived there for nine years. So this is what we--the kids grew up together. Then my daughter, who was two years younger than her daughter, were like twins, always did things together. As a matter of fact, my neighbors were Italian Catholics, and she was having her communion and confirmation. My friend did not drive at that time, and we had to go shopping for her little outfit and all, and we went, and so my daughter would say, "Where are we going? What are we doing?" I said, "We're going for Cindy's communion." And she would just, from a week before that, "Oh, Cindy's having communion. I have to have a communion too, and I need to buy a dress." And my friend got so tired she says, "Oh, my goodness." I said, "What are we going to do with her?" And then I explained to her, I said, "You cannot have a communion, because you're not Catholic." She never understood that. Of course, now that my daughter is thirty-six years old, well, every time we talk about the good old days and she laughs about it. She said, "Did I do that?" I said, "Yes, you did."And my friend got so tired that she said, "Just put my daughter's dress on her, take a picture, and so this way when she's older, she'll feel that she had a communion." And we went shopping for the communion. So my neighbor's children, I went when they had their communion, they had their confirmation. Every occasion they had, we were part of their family. We were always together. We even did the shopping together. So my daughter and her daughter were always playing together, and they would write little, little notes about--now, one day I found a little note, "Cindy and Angeli are going to be the best friends forever. We are never, ever, ever getting married. We are both going to become teachers, and we're going to stay together." And I saved that note, and when my friend's daughter got married, I took that note out and I gave it to her, which was years back. And I said, "Do you remember that?" She said, "Oh, my god." She says, "You saved that?" I said, "Yeah." And as a matter of fact, when she got married, my daughter was the maid of honor at her wedding.

Hampapur

They stayed friends.

Viradia

They are still friends. She's in New Jersey, my daughter's here in L.A., and they like talk to each other, e-mail, and she's got two children. And my friends too, like we did things together, we went on little mini-vacations together. Even from New Jersey we used to come for a trip to Las Vegas, and my friend's family, then eventually her parents and one of the sisters and a brother, they moved to Palm Springs, and since I've been here in L.A., I went to meet her when she was here. Her mom was ill at that time. And then last year her mother passed away at the age of ninety-eight, and she came for the funeral, and I knew. She called me about her. And then we drove from here for the funeral

and met the family, and these are all the children. I knew her brother's children who were little, they have children who are teenagers now, so this is like the third generation I know.

Hampapur

Yes. It's a long friendship.

Viradia

Yes.

Hampapur

Did your friends in New Jersey ever ask you anything about India or your life there before coming to the U.S.?

Viradia

My friends in?

Hampapur

In New Jersey, when you were first living there, all the friends that you'd made. You'd mentioned that you were the only Indian family.

Viradia

My American friends, yes, yes.

Hampapur

So would they ask you anything about India?

Viradia

Oh, yes, they would ask me. Just like eating--when they would be done with their dinner, I would be cooking, putting my pressure cooker on to put my lentils in, and she said, "What are you doing with that noise?" Then I would explain to them. I said, "This is what we eat, and we are vegetarians, but not necessarily." And I, after my children were born, especially my son, he says, "Mom, how am I going to be big and tall if I eat vegetables?" And another thing which I learned from my next-door neighbor, after moving in there also, that she would go, like the schools would always look for volunteers for helping out, and then Fridays she would go to help in the cafeteria. So I asked her, I said--this is before my daughter was born, and I said, "Can I come with you?" She said, "Yeah, sure. Why don't you go to the principal and you talk to the principal." So I went to the principal and I said, "I would like to come Fridays to help in the kitchen." And she says, "Fine."So I started doing that, and I'm very good at like cutting, chopping. I did chopping in India on a cutting board when I was growing up. That's the way we--my father taught us how to do the cutting of vegetables and all. So I would go and I would help, and that's the way also a lot I learned about how to make tuna fish. Each day they would have a different thing, like cole slaw, and they had the machine to do cole slaw, and I would be the first one to do all the chopping and cutting and preparing. This is--you're talking about 150 kids. Then the teachers, of course, had lunch too. And then being that I went to art school, it was a Friday would be a fish

day, and they would have a fish. Like mostly they would have tuna fish, because kids at that age do not eat fancy foods. So I would take a nice big platter, and I would put the tuna fish, shape it in a fish, and I would put olives for the eye, and I would put celery leaves for the fins, and I would put paprika to make it look like salmon, and little cherry tomatoes and make it so decorative, and I would--"Who made lunch today?" "Neil's mom." The whole school knew me as Neil's mom. Every kid knew Neil.And the minute--I would get a note from school. Now I think of it, that he must definitely have ADD, very hyper, very active, into everything, sports, everything. Taking part in the school drama, he's the first one has his hand up. The first day he started to school--every year this would happen--I would get a note from school. "Mrs. Viradia, we need to see you." And I said, "Oh, what now." I go, she says, "Your son talks like an old lady. He's distracting the children," blah, blah. He would make all funny faces, and he's a cartoon. He's a real comic. And so I said, "Just sit him by your chair facing the kids." So they had to try every trick and do that. Then I would get another note once holidays would come and say, "Well, Neil says that you went to art school. We are having a United Nations--," this is before, even the summertime, "United Nations Day, and we want you to make a United Nations flag." And here I would go to the fabric store to pick up material, and then after the lunch was over with all the kids, I would lay like three tables, join them and put the cloth on it and make the flag for the stage.And come holiday time, even when I went to Catholic school in India, Christmastime we would have the show about Christ and Mary and when Christ is born and the three wise men. So the teacher in the class would say, "Who would like to take a part in the holiday thing?" Neil, first one. So he was one of the three wise men. "Oh, my mom can do this. My mom can do that." So then she calls me again. I said, "What?" "Well, we need you to make--." And I sew too. I'm a very good seamstress. "We need you to make costumes for the boys." And here I would go buy material and measure all the boys and make costumes. I had a sewing machine at home. I would bring it home and I would make the costumes for the kids, and then they would have the show and he would be--any show.There was another play which he was a comic in it, and he comes out, and he had a very husky voice from the time he was little. So that happened for seven years he was in that school. And later on when he was in the sixth grade, fifth grade I think, he started--he wanted to play guitar. So I took him for a few lessons, and he did have an ear for music, but he was not disciplined enough, and he didn't do his homework well, so after a year the teacher says, he said, "You know what? I think he must have attention deficit too. He needs to do his homework. You're wasting your money and my time. He's really--whenever he's serious, then you think about it." So I sat him down and explained to him, I said, "You know, we just can't--because if you are not

here nor there with your schooling and this--when you're ready, we'll talk about it."But then the sixth grade homeroom teacher was a nun, and she played a guitar too. So once in a while after school, all the three of them would walk back and I don't see him. And they were old enough at that time. And I would walk back and I said, school's closed, what's he doing? I would go inside. The nun--both of them are playing guitar in the class. So that's his first love. He's in a band now here. Oh, as a matter of fact, he's playing in Marina. I don't know if you're interested in that--

Hampapur

Yes.

Viradia

In a place in Marina on the twenty-fourth is a Saturday? The one after--the twentieth is his birthday. Yes, I'll give you the name of the place.

Hampapur

Yes, that would be great.

Viradia

Yes, you can stop by there. So then we moved to a different town.

Hampapur

Is that when you moved into the house?

Viradia

No. We already were in the house. With my neighbors? That was the first house. The same town, we bought a house. We lived there for nine years. And then when my daughter was born, in that house also, my husband went into his own business.

Hampapur

Okay. What did he go into?

Viradia

Manufacturing. He made air-pressure control equipment, which was thirty-five miles west of where we lived.

Hampapur

Okay, what city?

Viradia

The shop was in Dover, Dover, New Jersey, but then we chose to live in Morristown, which the schooling and everything was good there, so we moved from there after nine years to Morristown. So then when we moved there, that's the time my son comes in and he says, "Mom, I think I know enough about Jesus Christ. Can I go to public school?" So he went to public school, and he was there for like a year, I think. And my husband's business, we had a problem with a union, and we had to shut it down.Then my mother was here at that time in L.A., and we thought we just want to make a change, and let's just get out of

here. We should have done that a long time ago and moved to California. So we moved to L.A., and that's where we lived in Palos Verdes.

Hampapur

Okay. Can you tell me a little bit what L.A. was like back then? Or what you thought of it when you first arrived here?

Viradia

Well, we lived here in Santa Monica with my brother for three months, and then we moved to Palos Verdes. To me it was, comparing with now, less crowded. It was different living than New Jersey. The change of seasons was one thing which bothered my children also and us. We didn't like this hot weather all the time, and no snow for Christmas was another thing for my kids. And the school--they were here only for a few months in Santa Monica schools, but then my son was enrolling in high school, or grammar school. We lived there for like a year, and then my husband bought a small business in Orange County, so we moved to Orange County, Garden Grove, for a year. And while we were there for a year, we still, while our business was closed in New Jersey, we still owned the property, so my husband had to go back and forth for that property, and while he did that for sale of the property, while he did that, he came across another deal, business deal.And he tried to get settled here with the business, but for him it was different compared to the East Coast, even business-wise. He had to establish new contacts, the business contacts, the bankers, the lawyers, which he had said everything he knew. He would pick up the phone and he would call the bankers, and everything would be taken care of. And even psychologically, business deals which he back East, being that we lived in New Jersey, not in New York City, that we never came across any deals with any other foreign people. Like over here, with the business he dealt with was with a Korean gentleman. So he, I guess, learned a lot doing business with different kinds of people. But so we were lucky. We should have actually bought a home at that time, so we could have still kept that home. But we were renting, and so my kids were in school at that time, and when he found this other deal, we moved back after two years.

Hampapur

While you were here, was it ethnically diverse where you were living?

Viradia

Yes. Yes. There were two Indian families where I lived, which I didn't find that much in New Jersey. Over here in the schools, there were a lot of Spanish and Asian children.

Hampapur

Okay, so that was the difference from--

Viradia

That was different, yes, yes.

Hampapur

And then you went back to--

Viradia

Back to Morristown, the house. Our house was still--the bank had leased it to somebody, so we had to get that person out to move back into the house, and then my husband went back in the business there, and we were there.

Hampapur

Okay. Did you visit India at all?

Viradia

Oh, yes. The first time I visited India was four years, five years after I came to America, because at that time my husband also was doing his grad school, and money was an issue, because in those days, the fares were like a thousand dollars, and my husband was supporting his family, his brother and his mom and sister and everybody, so he was sending money back home. So when my son was four years old, that was the time when my husband's brother was getting married, so I went there for about three weeks, two to three weeks.But in the meantime, my mother was in California, so I used to visit. Every summer I came here to L.A. with my children and stayed with my brother for a month or so.

Hampapur

And your brother was in the restaurant business back then too?

Viradia

My brother was in the restaurant business, yes.

Hampapur

And were you homesick at all for India, when you first came here?

Viradia

I was homesick, not really kind of homesick, but I missed seeing Indians, seeing our people. And the few people I got to know--and my husband, like they were all roommates, there were four roommates, and each one went, one after the other. Only one of them was married, who already had a child when he came here, so when his wife came, his son was already four or five years old. So when they moved out--everybody moved out in their own apartments--they were the first couple I got to know. We are still friends, and her name is the same name as my name, Savita. And their child was the only child we all knew among our friends.And then the other partners also, the other gentleman where I used to go in the morning--my husband used to drop me off--he was the other roommate of my husband. Then he had two children, and we all lived not to far from each other, so we kept mingling with each other. As a matter of fact, when my daughter was born, we decided, we few friends decided that--and they were all working for somebody. This is before my husband was in the business, I think maybe even before my daughter was born--that we should do something

for our children so they know about our heritage, and we should open up some kind of a cultural association, like a club.So nine friends, we all took out a thousand dollars of our personal monies, and we opened up this nonprofit organization called India Cultural Society, and we started having programs, like celebrating our religious holidays. And then my husband--I would have the India Cultural Society's telephone number and answering service in my basement, a different phone, and I would leave my voicemail messages as to what programs are we having. My husband then, with his other friend, two other friends, they got into a small business, and they started getting reel-to-reel movies from India, and we started showing movies in our club. And then the first movie ever shown in the whole United States of America was in our India Cultural Society, which was "Dimple Kapadia" is the movie. You're too young; maybe you don't even know the movies. That was the first movie ever shown.And then we lived in Belleville, and the next town was Nutley. That's where my children's school was also, in Nutley, the Holy Family School. So being that I knew the school and the town, I went to Nutley Board of Education and asked them if we could rent their gym, school gym, to do our Navratri holiday for the nine nights. So I would get the permission, and it is a nonprofit organization, so I don't think they'd charge anything. But at that point, a lot of Indians lived in Belleville, started living in Belleville and Nutley and the surrounding areas, so we started making fliers and advertising, and we started having the Navratri programs, and it was one of the best Navratri programs ever to have happened. Singers also we had. Then a lot of people we knew voluntarily will say, "Hey, I play tabla." "I play harmonium." And a few of my friends' sisters were from Gujarat, not from Bombay, and they were good Gujarati singers. So we all started participating.So much so that in the programs, another friend of mine, one of the members' wife was a friend of mine--she also sewed like I did, and she had a sewing machine. We would make a set of twelve costumes. She had two kids, and I had one kid at that time, and we would sit and make costumes for them, because the monies also we would have--when we started making movies and having programs, people would come and entry was free. Movies you had to pay, so if we had little monies from there, we would take the money out to buy the material. If we didn't have it, then we would personally each one put money in and then we would make costumes. And we started having that kind of programs.Then we started having Diwali dinners, and one thing led to another, and somebody donated or volunteered to say, "Okay, I'll give you so much money." And there was land available in a different town, which is Wayne, New Jersey, and they bought like ten acres of land that someday we will build a temple and a bigger hall and things.

Was there no temple?

Viradia

No, there were no temples. There was maybe a temple; it started in New York. But there were no temples. So we started that, but we had a tough time getting a bigger chunk of money to really--we bought the land, but to then create what we wanted to create, and it never materialized. Finally, after, oh, my goodness, twenty years, maybe after fifteen years or so, somebody else comes in and they took over, and they built a bigger building where you can even feed two hundred people. You can have wedding receptions and things like that, and people could come there. They brought a pundit and had a mandir there. So we were the people who started this.

Hampapur

That's amazing. That's so hard for me to imagine there being nothing there.

Viradia

Yes. And as a matter of fact, before we even made this place, I don't think we--we were not part of it when the building was built, but when we used to rent it from the Nutley town--and we had to make the prasad. So all friends, we would all call up each other and say, okay, one will bring the food, one will bring the halwa, one will do this, and we all from home, with our own money, we would bring all the [unclear] at the end of the garba to give to people.

Hampapur

So it sounds like it was pretty important to you and to others to preserve your cultural heritage.

Viradia

Yes. And then even the children, like when they grew, they would come with us too, and then even my daughter learned to do the garba, so they know where they come from and who.

Hampapur

Did they enjoy it?

Viradia

Yes. And all this thing was very good until the girls and boys were in high school. Once they went out of state, like they could not be there, because our garba falls during their school time, so they kind of lost touch with that. But they did enjoy it while they were growing up.

Hampapur

And were all the other families Gujarati as well, or was it a mix?

Viradia

Initially, they were all Gujaratis, but then others--and certain people who are not Gujaratis, they're like Punjabis who lived in Africa; anybody who lives in Africa knows how to do garba. And I could tell they're not Gujaratis because they did such good garbas. And I would say, "Wow, you guys do such great

garba." She says, "Yeah, we are from Africa." And I said, "Oh, wow." As a matter of fact, I did not even know how to do garba. In India, being that I went to Catholic school, we did not participate, not that because of the Catholic school, but I did not go to all the garbas, and when we started this, I did not know how to do the garba. So I'm telling this friend of mine and she said, "Well, you just follow me. Do what I do and you'll learn," and that's how I learned to do garba and the stick dance and everything. I mean, at this age, even if I do garba, I'll be the last one to get out of it. I'm so good now.

Hampapur

So you had garbas, you had religious programs.

Viradia

We had dramas, live dramas, short movies, and even later on, any pundits or gurus came there, we would have the gathering for them too.

Hampapur

You had mentioned last time we met that other people didn't speak Hindi. Is that what you had said?

Viradia

Oh, yes. These friends of mine, they are not from Bombay, as a matter of fact a majority of them, that they are Gujarat, which is a different state. So they went to Gujarati school and at home they spoke only Gujarati. They didn't even speak English, leave aside Hindi. So all the men, they came here to go to school, and even among the men, only the men who went to college in Bombay--like my husband spoke English because he was from Bombay. My husband's friends, they learned to speak English after they came here, and their English, even to this day, is you can tell that like they are just come from India.And also another thing, unlike a lot of us, I'm not saying only me, while they are raising their children, a lot of them never--like when you're working, you are not--nowadays, Indians, we're the only Indian in the whole workshop or the office or whatever. But Indian families never--they would associate with Americans at work, but having them over to their place or doing things with them, I never saw my other friends doing that, which we did. We went on vacations with our friends. We invited them to our house for dinners.And another thing also is, most of the women were all vegetarians. They never cooked any non-vegetarian food. That must be one of the reasons. Actually, my son was the one, when he was in the first grade and when he went to school after Thanksgiving, he comes back that Monday and he said, "Mom, how come I was the only kid in the whole school who did not know--every kid was talking about the Thanksgiving, what they had to eat, and it's the holiday and a turkey. How come we don't have Thanksgiving?" And it really hit me in the head, and I said, "You know what? From now on, you're going to have Thanksgiving. We're going to celebrate Christmas. We're going to celebrate Easter. We're

going to celebrate Diwali and Holi and everything."So I called up all my friends, Indian friends, and I said to my friends, "We have to do this for our children, because someday they're going to rub it in and they're going to let us know that we didn't do this for them. I'm going to have Thanksgiving, and I know all of you people are all vegetarians. I'm going to learn how to make turkey. I will bake the turkey and bring it. We'll all take turns. First year, I'm going to have it in my house. We'll all take turns." But, see, also among all our friends, we were the first ones to buy a house. Everybody lived in an apartment for the longest time. So I said, "Even if it's an apartment, fine. We all will sit on the floor and eat. But we have to have Thanksgiving and the Christmas and everything."So I went to my neighbor--this is the neighbor, the old lady from the apartment. They were still friends when we moved into the house. She was more like a grandmother to my children, my son. I asked her, I said, "What is this turkey business?" She said, "Okay, this is--," blah, blah, blah. So she told me what to do, and I said, "Okay." I wrote it down, of course. So I said like Indian cooking. We were taught how to cook from my mom. We never wrote down any recipes. But this thing, you don't know these things. So then also with the next-door neighbor, also I would ask her, and we went shopping together and all, and I had the Thanksgiving dinner. My son was so happy. I think my children have the best of both the cultures. Even Easter time I would make egg hunts in the backyard. I would boil the eggs, and I would paint them and decorate them and then hide them.And this year my daughter, she said my grandson one-year-old [unclear], but second year old, she said, "Mom, I remember you used to do that for us. I want to do it for my son." And she said other than boiling the eggs and everything, she said, "I'll just buy the little plastic eggs and I'll put little toys in it or candies in it, and we will hide in the backyard so he has a memory that my mom did this, like I have memory." I felt so good for my children, that I'm so glad I did that, because this way they can do it for their children.

Hampapur

Why was it important for you to do that?

Viradia

Because I feel that someday--I had no idea that I was going to be--someday I thought we will go back to India, we will with our children, and then even if our children went with us, if they were not old enough, they would always come back to America for education or something, and I did not want to let them feel that, oh, my mom and my dad didn't show us anything about what Christmas is all about. My American friends are doing it. How come I didn't do it? That is one of the reasons.

Hampapur

Do you think your kids felt like they fit in better once you started doing all those things?

Viradia

Oh, yes. My children were never embarrassed or felt awkward in any crowd, and they fit in so well, and I never said that, no, you cannot have Indian friends or you cannot have American friends. You can be friends with everybody, older or younger. It doesn't mean you have to be friends with your own age group. If your next-door neighbor is older than you and you become friends, you have to continue that friendship. And all the holidays, even barbecues, I started having barbecues, and my son was always so proud of me. He said, "Oh, my mom can do this."As a matter of fact, when we were--even before my daughter was born, with this neighbor of ours, the American couple, we would go out to eat. She would say, "You have to take us out," which a lot of Americans, I don't think, families did that. "You have to take him out with you so he learns to eat in public, he learns to share, and this way he is behaved." So we would go to restaurants, and she would tell me, "You sit with me on the left side and my husband can sit on the other side," and she would make my son sit with him, and she would say, "Here's a fork, and here's a knife, and you're going to eat like we eat." And that also I learned a lot from the American way, the children, that they have to--you don't--or, "You can't do this." Nothing negative. "Oh, you can do it." If you've dropped something, "That's okay, you can pick it up and wash it and use it again." So that I learned a lot from Americans.And also I like to read. I read, and even watching television, certain shows, like family. Like in our days, there were a lot of family shows about moms cooking and baking, so I would ask her, I said, "How do you bake a cake? What do you do with that?" And she would say, "Okay, this is what it is." I mean, I bake from scratch. I do all American baking. I make all kind of American food, and I learned because of my children, because someday I do not want them to feel that my mom didn't do this for me. Not only my children, my friends' children also. Thanksgiving is a four-day holiday. People would go to Florida to go on vacation, and my kids' friends would say, "We don't want to go to--we'll go to Neil's house for Thanksgiving." I started having only family Thanksgiving. Then I would have my family, not only us, but my friend, because you're vegetarian. It got to a point where I would have thirty people, and all the kids wanted to come to my house.And then my son would, when he was little--actually, he was the one who made me do a lot of this cooking thing. We would go to restaurants when he was a teenager, even before that, he had this palate. He knew what he was eating. He would say, "Hey, Mom. You know that Polynesian restaurant we went to eat, and we ate that dinner we ate? I think I tasted ginger in it, or garlic in it." I said, "I think so." And then I'll be watching TV, and I liked to watch Channel 13. At that time, that were not this many

cooking shows. There used to be Channel 13, and I would watch the shows, and I would say, oh, my god, this is so simple, much easier than our Indian cooking.And then being that I started cooking, I started having all the American spices and American baking things, and in my pantry, I would have one shelf of all--I started keeping different shelves, where all Chinese food, one Indian food, and one American food. I would look at a simple recipe like macaroni and cheese, and if I would have cheese in the house, and if I would have this in the house and macaroni in the house, as soon as I'd get up from there, I quickly would jot down if it's measurements, or this basic thing would stick in my head. I'll go in the kitchen, I would make it right away, so that would be giving me confirmation that I can do it, and that's how I learned, and going every Friday from the school, like making meatloaf, making meatballs. I mean, so much so that my children, my daughter and my son also make sauces at home. They don't buy it from the store.From the neighbors, of course, they learned my neighbor's recipes. So all this my children have. A Christmas tree also. I would have a Christmas tree for them. I had severe allergies before, so I could not bring the real pine tree, and I would just bring an artificial tree, at first a small one, and put it in the picture window and light it up and everything. And then my son would say, "Okay, Mom. Now we are old enough, no more of this little tree making it look big. We are going to have a real big one." And then I think I outgrew my allergies, so we started getting a real pine tree and decorating the whole house during the Christmas, and Easter time also, outside. My daughter was a lot into Easter too. So they had the best of both the cultures.

Hampapur

Right. It sounds like you worked pretty hard to have American and Indian traditions.

Viradia

I did that because I did not want them to feel that shy about anything, and go ahead and do it. Go ask. Do not be afraid of anything. My daughter especially was very shy, and I used to make her--I said, "Go fight your own battle. You come home crying, I'm going to punish you." There used to be a little bully in her class who would take away her penny or nickel every time, and I would say, "You have to go and you tell the teacher or the principal." And she would not do that, and one day I had to go with her to school, and I said, "You are to go, go tell the principal." And the principal called the kid in the class and said, "You can't do this." She was a little shy one, but she came out to become even tougher than my son. So they are not ashamed or shy or embarrassed about doing anything or going anywhere.

Hampapur

It sounded like they had Indian friends too, from the--

Viradia

Oh, yes, they still do.

Hampapur

And did their friends mix? Because it sounded like most kids at school are white, and then for their cultural activities they had Indian friends?

Viradia

No, and yes. Because our friends' children became their friends then, that way, because we made it a point that on the weekend we drove thirty miles to be with our friends. That was our socializing.

Hampapur

I see.

Viradia

Because the children were little, we didn't go to movies. Indian movies used to come once in a while in the schools, in the Stevens Technology, they used to have schools, and then you would want to go there, so my husband would--I would call up my friend and say, "Hey, why don't we take turns? I'll watch your kids and you guys go, and the second show we will go." So we didn't do that often, and we did not have any even videos in those days, to bring home to watch Indian movies. So our socializing was, especially in the summertime, because in New Jersey the winters were so cold, so winters we were like you go to the malls and do things that way, or even drive to our friends' home and sometimes on the weekends just stay over and be with them. So that's what they knew. They all grew up together.

Hampapur

Okay. You mentioned earlier that the other Indian families mostly had just Indian friends. They didn't mix as much socially.

Viradia

No.

Hampapur

Why do you think that was?

Viradia

Well, I guess maybe the ladies felt that if they cannot cook their food, what are they going to feed them? And some families, I didn't know them personally, but even were told that you cannot go to any American's home, because you cannot eat their food. They are not vegetarians, and you can't bring--their children cannot come to our house, which I feel leaves a negative impact on a child. And then these are the family children who did things hidingly, without letting their parents know. Like the children, when they were little it was okay. I mean, when they were little, not that many, only like four friends we did Thanksgiving, five friends Thanksgiving together, but a lot of other friends, which they did not eat, but it was okay for their children to--these are the friends, eventually, they'll let their children have meat in the house and cook

chicken in the house.But there were very few friends I know where they said that, "You cannot eat eggs. You cannot do this." But when they came to my home, they ate, which I told my children, "You want to eat this? Or you want to do? There's a time and place for everything. You're not going to come out right now with a beer bottle in your hand, you're only fifteen years old, because you'll get locked up. So there are dos and don'ts." But I never said--and these children--and I said, "This is like double standards. What makes you think," the parents I'm thinking about, "what makes them think that the kids are out--they go to college, they're surrounded by more than 50 percent," at that time, even 90 and 10, 10 percent Indian, 90 percent Americans. You're hanging out with them. Our Indian food is not available outside. What do you think they're eating? And they learn to eat, and they are so afraid to come home and tell their parents.I used to tell my children when they were growing up, at whatever age, like they were teenagers and they see other American girls and boys have girlfriends and boyfriends, I would tell my son, who was the older one, that, "You are going to go out with any girl? You ought to bring that girl home to your parents. You're not going to be doing anything behind our back. It's okay for you to bring. I will not say it's not okay to you." Then they're going to do it outside. And same thing with our daughter, that, "You can marry whoever you want, but you have to, when you're going out with somebody--." And I explained to, I said, "Even we were not allowed to date." I said, "The culture was different, but we had to respect our parents and had to respect our culture. Over here, you can do that."And even every time they were in school, each new year class I would make sure that I had a little diary, even those days, that get to know their friends' parents, their names, their telephone number. Like my daughter would say, "Oh, can I go over to my friend's house, a sleepover?" "Fine. I want to know who they are, where do they live, the parents' names, and the telephone numbers, and when you're going to that parent's house," especially when they were eleven, twelve years old, "don't you wind up from that house to somebody else's house." And I used to be very strict with my daughter. I would tell her, I said, "If you go away without--if I find out that you've gone to a movie or anywhere without even letting us know, your father's going to lock you in the basement. He's not going to let you out until you are eighteen years old." I used to do that to her, which I may be wrong, but my children were--it's not like, "You cannot date this one. You cannot go on that." And a lot of her friends' marriages, even the children born over here, their marriages are still arranged, which there's nothing wrong in it.

Hampapur

So when your kids got older and were in high school and stuff, they were allowed to date?

Viradia

Yes. My son was in high school, I think actually, I don't know if you would call it date-date, but for--and another thing which I learned later on, this prom, that you are to take your girlfriend or boyfriend or whatever to prom. And one of our friends, these very close friends whom first time I met when I came from India, their daughter and my son, they all played together for the Indian programs and everything, and so he asked her to be his date for the prom. They were friends. They were not dating. They were just only, what, sixteen years old, so he asked her. And then later on, kind of, they became like a girlfriend-boyfriend kind of a thing, always doing things together, and even there too, I even said to my son at that time, I told him, I said, "Neil, you remember, if you are dating this girl, number one, she's your dad's friend's daughter, and you have to be respectful of that. And you always also remember, not only particularly this girl, any girl you date, always remember that somebody else who dates your sister, you are to be respectful that she's a lady, she's somebody's daughter and somebody's sister. Like you would not want your sister to be hurt." I mean, at that point, what words do you use, right?

Hampapur

Right.

Viradia

So you have to be--so they were friends at that time. And my daughter, when she was in college [unclear]. She had friends, but they were like--and like we would tell them, like even when the marriage time came, would say, "Oh, you know, see so-and-so, my friend so-and-so, he's a doctor. How about--." She said, "So what if he's a doctor?" She said, "I can't even go on a date with him, leave aside marrying somebody like that." And it has worked out. There are two best friends, their children have gotten married. But my daughter dated an Irish boy and an Italian boy and moves to California and winds up marrying an Indian boy. So it is destiny, you know?

Hampapur

Yes. So I know today New Jersey is known for having a big Indian population and stores and restaurants and things like that, so was that a gradual change while you were living there? Or was there suddenly a boom in the Indian population and what was available?

Viradia

No, it gradually happened. Like this one store which was opened by the college. He opened up and then they were all students at that time. And then I guess eventually when the students are there, some relative is always there, and then somebody else opened up a little bigger store, and then somehow in Jacksonville, if you go to Jacksonville, New York, it's like in New York there's Little Italy? There's Little India in Jacksonville. So Jacksonville was one of the first ones, opened a big one, and there is a temple, a big temple, more than one

temple, and there is a Sikh temple there, there is a South Indian temple there, there's a lot of temples.So then from Jersey City little stores, the Queens was the biggest shopping thing, so people started going to Queens. So that was I'm talking about in the seventies. Then in the nineties, yes, nineties or maybe fifteen years, or mid-eighties, in Edison, New Jersey, like the Queens thing opened up, things opened up in Edison. So there are a lot of Indian grocery stores, there are little restaurants, boutiques, and so you don't even have to go to New York anymore. So that was in Edison. Now there are in Morristown, the town north of Morristown, then little, little shops would come up in each town, because in every town there is Indians. I mean, they are all over. So in emergency you would go to this little store to pick up, but when you want to do your wholesale groceries, you would go to Edison or something like that.But in Parsippany, which is another location where there's a temple now, more than one temple, and there is a stretch of Indian restaurants, and wherever there are Indian restaurants there are Indian grocery stores, so people don't have to go thirty miles to do their groceries. You know, pay a few cents for gas or a few cents for groceries is the same thing, so they're all over, grocery stores.

Hampapur

And did more associations start?

Viradia

Yes, a lot. At that point, when we started doing the Navratri and everything, then Jersey City was one of the biggest then, and there is a Raritan Center, which is in New Jersey. There's a college there, and you can have ten thousand people there. So each community, somebody wants, "Oh, let me do this," and maybe the guy has a lot of money, or he's doing it out of his goodness, and all the little things started happening. And then people used to drive far away to go to this one location. Now you don't have to go that far. Little temples are all over the place.

Hampapur

And as the population grew, did people tend to stick to their own type of Indian, or did people still mix with the different states?

Viradia

When I came, there were only Gujaratis. Then I met somebody, a Gujarati person, who was married to a Sindhi person, so there was mixed. But now if you go in South, there are South Indians, there are Maharastrians and Punjabis and Sindhis and all.

Hampapur

Do you have any idea why everyone was Gujarati when you first came?

Viradia

Well, I guess maybe not everyone is Gujarati, but because Indian students were looking for Indian students, I guess, so they hung out with them. So when I came, I got married, so my husband's friends, their wives were my friends.

Hampapur

Okay, that makes sense. Okay. And then I don't know if this affected you or if you heard about it where you were in New Jersey, but did you ever hear anything about the dot-busters and the incidents going on with them?

Viradia

That happened in Jersey City. I was [unclear] far away from there, but that also is another area where an Indian community, it happened there. I think I was at that time in New Jersey. This happened in the eighties, I think?

Hampapur

Yes, in the eighties or early nineties. I'm not quite sure when.

Viradia

Yes. But see, what happened there, also in our days, like when my husband came, they came here for education. Over the years, like then people started coming. Maybe they had money. They started buying 7-Elevens, little liquor stores, little motels, and then when they had motels, they don't want to spend money to have American workers clean. It's more money. They started bringing people from India, with no education, don't speak English, giving them really low wages and bringing them, so the quality of people went downhill. So these young boys who started coming into New Jersey at that point were like from not a well-off family, and they got into this like stealing and giving hard time to people who are living there. And first of all, you come to the United States, and you put up a fight with the local Americans who live here, well, what do you expect? The word that I heard about that is that somebody was killed there.I remember my son saying one time they had gone in that area and a fight broke out, and these Indian kids, I mean, you kids, you are Indian and you're proud of who you are, so my son, he doesn't have an Indian accent, he has an American accent. He's born and raised over here, and he cannot speak Hindi. He speaks Gujarati a little bit. And these kids started fighting with him and started telling him that he's Indian and he's putting up a show that he's an American, and they started throwing things at him. And he comes in and he said, "Mom, they were talking bad words. I didn't know what they were saying, so I asked my friends what they were saying, and they were Indian bad words." I said, "You don't have to get into all that. You stay away from that." And my son was not sixteen years old. He was like twenty-five, twenty-eight years old. And I said, "Just when things happen like that, stay away from that." So all this creation has happened, the Indian kids created all that, and somebody was killed.

Hampapur

Wow.

Viradia

You don't come to a foreign land and try to be a big bully and try to fight with the people who own the land. And even with this Raritan Center, a lot of things started happening, especially after a lot about Muslims and things happening with there, and then the girls--and my daughter, I never let her go on her own. Even with their friends, I made sure there was a chaperone. If I didn't go, I would make sure that one of my friends, the girl's parent was there. But girls would go on their own and things would happen. I heard a couple of times, I think, that one or two girls even got raped.

Hampapur

Oh, my gosh.

Viradia

And till two o'clock in the morning? Two o'clock? No. As long as you live under my roof, you're not going out till two o'clock in the morning. No. There has to be--my son, every time he went to parties and things, even my friends' daughters who grew up with him--as a matter of fact, one my friend's daughter, she wound up marrying my nephew. She was the only child, and her mother said, "If Neil picks you up and drops you, that's the only time you go to parties." So my son had to chaperone her, drive thirty miles from Morristown to go on the other side of Edison near Brunswick to pick her up and go to the party, and then the next day she would call me. She said, "I am sick and tired of your son." I said, "Is that the way you talk to your aunt?" I said, "What happened?" She says, "He is like a hawk. He is watching over me, and he would call me, say, 'Move over here. Don't stand too close to this boy.'" I said, "Well, he's like a brother. Your mother trusted him. That's why he's picking you up and dropping you."To this day, they are so close. Now, they grew up together. As a matter of fact, when she was born six months after my son was born, I went to help her mother out. With my son with me, for a week I stayed at her house, and he is still like an older brother watching over her. It's not that they never thought of dating each other or nothing. It's just that they're born, was their brother or sister born, where she didn't have a brother, and she always felt that, I can depend on Neil.

Hampapur

Right. And they're so close in age.

Viradia

They're only six months apart, and I'm like a mother to her. If she wants anything in the middle of the night, picks up the phone and calls me, and that's the way it just turned out, that there was no love connection between them. [laughs]

Hampapur

It sounds like you had a very strong community in New Jersey.

Viradia

Oh, yes, when we were growing up, yes, which was good for our children. And now the people don't even meet everybody. They don't even--and then a lot of the children are marrying into non-Indians. But this is--you come to a different country.

Hampapur

Was there any effect in your community after September eleventh?

Viradia

Not really. But we were there. We were not that close, but we know of people who were there at that time, that must have gone through a trauma.

Hampapur

Right. You mentioned some of your other siblings came to the U.S. as well?

Viradia

Yes.

Hampapur

Did they come to New Jersey?

Viradia

My sister came to New Jersey, older sister came to New Jersey still before my son was born, and they stayed for like two months, three months, and then my sister at that point decided she could not take the winters. It was too cold, so they moved to California.

Hampapur

Okay. So it sounds like a lot of your family is here.

Viradia

Yes. My older sister is here, and they have one son. Their son is the one who married my friend's daughter. And my brother, of course, came to study. He went to UCLA, USC, and he's here, and he has two children. My younger sister came here when my daughter was born. She came to New Jersey first and then she was with me for six months. Then she came to L.A. and that was the time when my brother opened up the Indian restaurant Dhaba.

Hampapur

I know your brother studied engineering. How did he end up opening a restaurant?

Viradia

Well, after he finished engineering, he could not get a job because he did not have a green card. So another Indian friend and--both of them--the other Indian friend has his M.B.A., so they had to do something. The other Indian friend's father was alive, and he was very well off in India. My father had passed away, and my brother had to support my mother and my sister, and so they decided to open up a restaurant. So neither one of them knew how to cook, growing up in India as boys. So my older sister was here, and she lived in Orange County at

that time. So he called her up and he says, "Well, we are planning to do this, and you've got to help me with Mom's--." He wanted to open up a restaurant, not a typical restaurant, but a restaurant to feed Americans, not to typically feed Indians, because in Indian restaurants, Indians tend to cut the vegetables small, and he said, "I want to make food for Americans. They like to see what they're eating. So I'm going to have Indians--it's an Indian restaurant, Indian style, but it's going to be a little bit different, not too over-spiced, not too much garlic, not too much salt, and healthy."And then he would call me up and he would say, "How did Mom make this eggplant? And how did she make this?" So what they did was they rented, on Main Street in Santa Monica, they rented a small pizza place which was going out of business. Then they went to a lot of garage sales and picked up tables and chairs and slapped four tables and chairs, and they hired a Spanish guy and some American girls to help out as waitresses, and taught one of the American girls how to make pooris. And my sister would come down. She didn't come down that often, but she would come down to help him out a little bit, to show them the masala and everything.And then they liked what they were doing, and he says, "Why waste your energy and time in an office eight to five and make somebody else rich?" So then they said, okay, then from that they went to Dhaba, the location now, got a bigger place, and then they opened up that one. And then my brother comes to New York, and in Manhattan there is a place called Dean and Deluca, which is very famous. It's a deli/market. So his other partner says, "Why don't we open up something like that?" So he goes to Paris, after my brother comes back he goes to Paris, and he gets some French ideas of making rolls and croissants, and then they opened up the Rose Cafe.

Hampapur

Oh, wow.

Viradia

And both of them said, so much for the education. So they became successful, and they like what they're doing, and they're enjoying that.

Hampapur

And did you continue--as you moved around New Jersey, did you continue to work as well?

Viradia

Well, I quit my telephone-company job after my daughter was born. Or, actually, I was pregnant with her and I quit that, and my husband went into business. So when he went into business, after she was six months old I started going, because the girl who was working for him was leaving on maternity leave, and in a new business and you're hiring somebody, and I said, "Well, I can answer phones. What's the big deal?" Because I've got very good at talking to people on the other side of the phone, telephone.As a matter of fact, there's

another thing to note is, when I started working in the telephone company, my teacher, I would always ask her, because we're coming from India, we have the Indian accent, and going to a Catholic school, we still have that little British also. Like my children still make fun of me, my daughter especially. She'll say, "I cahn't do it. What's I cahn't? It's can't." I said, "No, no, it's cahn't." So I asked her, I said, "I thought that people will not understand me. Face to face is one thing, but when you're not looking at a person, when you're at the other end of the phone," and I asked her--sol I had two weeks training. It was my job, paid job with two weeks training, and I said to her, I said, "You think I'll be hired? How do I sound on the other end of the phone?"And also another reason for me also, like I watched a lot of talk shows, news a lot, and I learned the way of talking. So it's funny, my children still say, she says, "Mom, you're very strange that when Indian people are around you and you talk English to them, your accent changes, and when the Americans are there, your accent changes." I said, "Because to make the other person comfortable," I said. I said, "When I am with Indian, the Indian comes in me, because I feel good that I'm with my own people." And I get a little Indian accent, and I talk Indian words in between. We Indians have a tendency to talk English and then throw Indian words in it. But when I'm talking--so I said, "When I'm at my workplace, I even slow down. My speech is different. I don't do it to put up a show, but I do it to fit in that environment."And a lot I learned is from the telephone company, where I think I worked for a year or two years or so, that will people be able to understand me. And my trainer said, "Yeah, there's no problem at all. You speak beautiful English." She says, as a matter of fact her sister-in-law came for a job, and she was German, typical German, and German accent is the hardest accent. She said she was not hired, so she said, you won't have a problem. So I was--I would get phone calls and I would know the Indian accent, and I would start talking in Hindi. And I said, "Are you Hindi, or are you Gujarati?" She says, "Well, how do you--?" Then I would get my Indian accent out, and I would talk. And people would say, "How do you get a job in a telephone company?" I said, "I think I'm good at what I'm doing," so I got it. As a matter of fact, maybe I was the only person, or the first person, actually, to be hired by New Jersey Bell as a long-distance telephone operator. There was no one there at that point, at that time. But now, of course, which New Jersey Bell became AT&T, and had I listened to the woman when I went to put the application and gone for public relations, I would have gone to AT&T Newark, which was in downtown. And I said, "I don't want to drive to Newark. I want a job close to my house." But had I listened to that woman and gone there and worked for AT&T in public relations, I would have been there, somewhere up there. Would have been even--she said that, "It would be more money." But I just wanted to get out of the house, to do something different.So my children--I'm

so glad that I did this for my children. And my friends, which they are there, like most of my friends are married to Gujaratis. Some came from India, the spouse, the girl or the boy came from India, or some they lived here, and a lot of them dated even. Like some aunt would say, "Oh, my friend's daughter is here," and blah, blah, blah. "Why don't they meet?" like a blind date, mostly like a blind date.

Hampapur

And how did you end up moving to Los Angeles?

Viradia

Well, we had to wind up our business after 9/11.

Hampapur

Why is that?

Viradia

Because we owned the property, and at that--that's five years ago, or more than five years ago. A lot of manufacturing was outsourced. We wanted to sell the whole thing, and buyers would come and either one buyer would just want the business and not the land and vice versa, and then we wasted time on that, and then we finally decided to sell the land, and we moved our inventory to Philadelphia and started working out of there, which wasn't doing so well. The whole economy had changed, so that was the time we decided, because my daughter, she said, "When are you going to move?" So I said to my husband, I said, "I mean, when people retire, they move south, not west. But why not be where the children are? Come tomorrow, we have grandchildren." So we kind of moved out of there and it's kind of downsizing ourselves into life, living lifestyle. But we have our own family, which is more important than homes and other nice, fancier things in life.

Hampapur

And how do you enjoy living in L.A.?

Viradia

I like it. I like it anywhere. You can put me in a jungle in Africa, and I have no problem. But I'm a people person. For the moment I'm with you, I'm enjoying right now, and then tomorrow is another day, so I don't worry. I mean, everybody worries, but I don't dwell on things, because if I'm miserable, people around me are miserable. And I have my children, my brother is here, my sister is here, we do things together. We have a few friends; most of them live in Orange County, which is another nightmare [unclear] the freeway. It took me, psychologically, it took me, even driving, and I've been driving for forty-five years--I have no violation, never have had a ticket, stopped for a red light or anything or nothing. But it took me--and every time I came from New Jersey, I did drive locally. I would take my brother's car, drive, drop the kids off to school or something here. But like when I came here looking for a job, I had to

go to Beverly Hills, drive around.But getting stuck in traffic, it kind of made me wonder. I said, "Where have I landed?" that just to get from Point A to B, which is only like three miles, it will take you like you're going ten miles, you know? And then the Fridays, the freeways, I can't even believe this. And people's driving--where are you going? There's so many cars, and there's no--they're on top of you. And back East we did not have this U-turn light, U-turn thing, which I'm not used to. It took me the longest time. People are honking, like, okay, let me look at the light, like I know I'm getting old, but you know? But so far so good.

Hampapur

And what do you like to do for fun around here?

Viradia

Well, we can go for walks, a lot for walks. My sister-in-law calls me to go walk on the beach, or then my daughter would call and I'll go with my grandson to, like two weeks ago we went to Manhattan Beach, spent a couple of hours there, or take him to the grove or any kiddie thing happening. Sometimes I want to be by myself, just read a book or watch some news. I like to watch news, find out what's going on in the world.

Hampapur

Right. Are you involved in any Indian cultural or religious activity?

Viradia

No, not here, not here, because everything is back over there in Orange County, all the temples, but nothing. Whatever time I have, I spend it with the kids.

Hampapur

Okay. Is your son here too?

Viradia

My son is here too, yes.

Hampapur

Oh, okay, so the whole family is here.

Viradia

Yes.

Hampapur

Do you foresee yourself staying in Los Angeles in the future, you and your husband?

Viradia

Yes, this is it. No more, no more moves.

Hampapur

Like after coming to this country, when did it start to feel like home, like this is where you lived and were going to stay?

Viradia

To me personally, I'm a very positive person and living for now kind of a thing. I think when I came back from India first time, after meeting my mom, and I felt it even more while I was there, because when I was there, my children were like, I would say, "I want to go back--I want to go home. I want to go home." My mom said, "This is your home. You grew up here." I said, "Yeah, but this is different now." So it wasn't that far. It was pretty soon. When I got involved in--especially after our son was born, so which was like maybe a couple of years after I came. And I made friends very quickly, some Indian friends, American friends, and I got involved with the club, so I kept myself real busy.[End of interview]
