Background: Marie Goradia was born in Bombay in 1951. After earning her doctorate in molecular biology from Bhabha Atomic Research Center, she immigrated to New York for post-doctorate research, where she met her husband. After starting a family, she eventually moved to Houston. Nowadays, Dr. Goradia is heavily involved with the community, including sitting on the Board of Visitors at MD Anderson.

Setting: Marie Goradia was interviewed on February 23, 2019 at Fondren Library. The interview focuses on her life experiences, including her childhood, research career, and charity endeavors, as well as personal stories about her family and the motherhood. Dr. Goradia shares several unique anecdotes about both her personal and professional life.

Key:
MG: Marie Goradia  
DN: Daniel Ngo 
AL: Amber Lu  
--: speech cuts off; abrupt stop 
....: speech trails off, pause 
Italics: emphasis 
[Brackets]: Actions [laughs, sighs, etc.]

Interview Transcript:

DN: Okay, my name is Daniel Ngo, and I’m with Amber Lu, and we’re here to interview Dr. Goradia. Um –

MG: You can call me Marie.

DN: Marie. Um, today is –

MG: Actually, it’s Mar-ie. In America, everyone says Marie.

DN: Okay, Marie. Okay. Today is February 23, and, um, we’ll just begin. So, when and where were you born?

MG: I was born in India, in Bombay, it’s called Mumbai now, in 1951.

DN: How long did you live there?

MG: I lived ‘til I came to the US, so I lived there ‘til 1980 – 1980 is when I came to the US.
DN: Okay, what was it like growing up there?

MG: Oh, it was wonderful. We lived in a – in a tiny village, and, um, compared to a developed country, it was under the poverty level. So, we had rationing – food rationing – you got water just two hours a day, uh, sometimes the power didn’t come through. Um, there were no luxuries, we didn’t have a phone, we didn’t have a car, we didn’t have a refrigerator, but what we did have is a very good education.

And, uh, the nice thing about living in India is – you’ve never been there, either of you? – it’s very vibrant, it’s colorful, and we have all kinds of religions, all kind of cultures, so it’s a very interesting place to live in. So, across from my home, there was a mosque, and every day at 5:30, the mullah would come and, you know, do his thing at the top of his voice, so you woke up every day at 5:30. And then, they would do it five times during the day after that. On this side of my home was a Hindu temple, and they loved to sing and dance, so every festival they had, they’d be going in procession through the village with flowers and music and dancing, and it was wonderful. Except that the Muslims did not like the Hindus to make noise when they were praying, so they’d come running out and there’d be a fistfight, and my mother was the only, uh, physician in the village, so she would go and patch everybody up all the time. And I am Catholic, so further down the road was a Catholic church, and, um, we grew – the Catholics grew up very much around the church. So from the time you were little, there were groups you joined, uh, you went and helped in, um, the place where there were old people, you also went and helped where there were orphans, you helped in the church, so life was very much connected. Everybody was very connected, everybody looked out for everybody else, which means they knew all your business. You couldn’t hide anything from them. But it was a wonderful life, we played with sticks and stones – didn’t have many toys, but I think life was very – how do I put it? – you felt happy, uh, people cared about you, you were connected. If something happened, something went wrong, everybody came to help, so it was, in short, it was a wonderful life.

DN: Okay. Um, you said your mom was a physician. What did your dad do?

MG: My father worked for the postal service. Now, my parents were incredible; I think we were very, very lucky to have parents like them. There were absolutely, infinitely wonderful. Um, they had everything in life thrown at them, you know? All kinds of things happened to them, but they were such positive people, they always managed to find something good in everything that happened.

My father, his father died when he was six, and he had two sisters and a mother. So, he wasn’t able to go to college, he had to work and, you know, help his sisters and his mother, but he learned everything by himself. We used to have books, all kinds of books at home, you know, a library literally, and he educated himself. He was a great speaker, he was like, the speaker of the village, so when any of these government officials came, he’s the one that would, uh, welcome them and give a speech and stuff like that. He was also, because of what he went through in life, and he went through a lot of calamities, he had a lot of empathy for people. So, people in the village would come to him if they had a problem, he’d help them. And then, we – he had a lot of land, and they government took it all over, and he didn’t have the money to get a lawyer, so he studied law, and then he went and defended himself in the court, and he used to take me
everywhere with him, so I must’ve been just ten, and I was so thrilled to watch my father there, you know, fighting for his case. Of course, he didn’t win it – the government always wins – but, uh, that made me feel that I could do anything in life, too, because he had so little to work with, in the sense – no father as he was growing up, uh, he had to work very young, but, uh, he just went on and on and on, and he was an incredible person, so what I got from that is you can do anything in life if you want to do it and you put in the hard work to do it.

DN: Okay. Did you have any siblings?

MG: Yes, I have a sister. Wait, I didn’t tell you about my mother, I got to tell you about my mother.

DN: Oh, right, you did not.

MG: Well, she was an incredible person too. So, first, let me tell you about how they got married. My father was forty, my mother was thirty-seven when they got married, so they were very old – much older parents, and, uh, when they got married – before they got married, my father was – he had ordered furniture and stuff, and we have a two level, we had a two level house, so he was pulling up the sofa from the outside and he had his first heart attack, just before he was getting married. They still went ahead and got married. On the day they were getting married, there was this huge thunderstorm with trees falling down in the road. They literally had to walk over the trees from the church to get back to their house. So, that’s what – that’s how their life started.

My mother was the only physician in the village, and at that time, they didn’t – everybody didn’t even have lighting. And so, she’d take a lantern and go from house to house if they needed her in the night. And she was actually a very shy person, but with her patients, she was like a different person altogether. Uh, she commanded everybody, you know, they, they had to do what she told them to do. Especially when the Muslims and the Hindus started to fight with each other, she’d just go out, yell, and they’d all disperse. They’d all come to be bandaged up or, you know, whatever they had to do. And she also had this incredible sense of humor. She could – she’d find something funny in everything. So, at the end of the day, when we were all sitting and having dinner, she’d always had a story to tell and we’d double up with laughter.

And she – all her stories were, uh, you could feel them, you could touch them, you could smell them. She’d tell us stories about her childhood, and all the stuff that happened. There was a time when her sister was left in the yard, I think somebody, uh, just walked away, and a snake coiled around the sister, and they were all so scared – they still lived more in a forested area when my mother was young, and everybody’s gun was focused on that snake, you know, ready to shoot it if it would try to do anything to the child, and the snake just went away. Then, she told us a story about a lion that knocked at the door when nobody was at home except the children and maid, and, uh, the way she tells it, it’s like, so scary, because she’d go, you know, little by little, come to the climax. So, we just loved her stories. Yeah.

DN: Okay. Um, yeah, so tell me about your sister.
MG: And my sister! You asked about my sister. So, my sister was a teacher, and she’s still a teacher in a way because she’s teaching Hispanics who don’t know English; she teaches them English in the library.

DN: Is she older or younger than you?

MG: She’s a year and a half older than me. But she was – I was an introvert when I was young, she was the extrovert. She’d make friends with everybody, she’d have groups of people, and everybody loved her. They still love her; they call her an angel. [laughs] ‘Cause she’s always helping people, and, um, she was very vivacious, um, loved to go out with her friends, loved to teach children. She was like, I don’t know, I think all of my family was wonderful. At least to me, they were. Yeah.

DN: Is she in Houston too?

MG: Yeah, yeah. I came here in 1980, um, and then I brought them in 1992. So, she came with her whole family, yeah.

DN: Okay, um, about how big was your town?

MG: My village?

DN: Yes, your village?

MG: Oh, around the number of people, I really don’t remember.

DN: That’s okay. [MG: laughs] I was just curious.

MG: Yeah, it-it was a small village. Not very big.

DN: Okay, so you said, um, you had a very good education growing up?

MG: Yeah, well, in my village, our school was only four grades. Uh, after four grades, there were no school at all. So, we had to go to another town, which was about – in miles, I don’t know – it would take like an hour to get there, and we stayed with my father’s sister because there they had a high school. So, I think from fifth grade, kind of middle school, we stayed in another town. My father would come visit us almost every day; my mother would be working in the morning with her patients and the evening, so she’d come in the middle of the day. So, it was one day my mother, one day my father, and the maid would come with my mother to help with anything that had to be done. So, um, it was – they were incredible, like I was saying; they both had to work, but they still came an-and visited us every day for those three years that we lived over there. They used to call us “precious jewels” [laughs] because they got married late. In India, everybody would have their children in their early twenties, get married even before they were even twenty, and my parents got married pretty late, so when they had two children, and two children, they were so thrilled, uh, they-they literally told us their precious jewels.

DN: What was your favorite subject in school?

MG: Science.
DN: Science?

MG: It has always been science from the time I was young.

DN: Where did you go to college?

MG: In-in Bombay itself. But that was like an hour and a half away from where I lived, so I had to take a bus, had to take a train, then I had to either walk or take a bus to go to-to college. And the same was there for school, we had to take a bus, a train, and then walk to school or take another bus. And, in India, we have, uh, the monsoon, maybe Vietnam has it too, and the rain – if it rained, it really rained, and it would be flooded because they didn’t have a good drainage system. So, the buses couldn’t go, so we had to walk through the flood every day from the train station to go back home.

DN: Um, and what did you study there?

MG: College?

DN: Mm-hm.

MG: Microbiology for my, uh, bachelor’s, biochemistry for my master’s, and then, um, you’ve heard of the Bhabha Atomic Research Centre? No? It’s a nuclear research center. So, they had an ad in – oh, let me back up a little. So, in India it’s very competitive, so after my bachelor’s – by this time my father had passed away already, so by the time I finished my master’s, and then, I wanted to get a job, to you know, um, help my mother and my sister. Couldn’t get anything anywhere. When I finished my master’s, again, I looked all over for a job – couldn’t get – the competition is extremely high in India. And then, I saw in the newspaper a thing from Bhabha Atomic Research Center. They were looking for people to join them. And you had to go through a long interview – that was the atomic research center in India. So, you had to go through a long interview, so many people were, you know, trying to get in there, and I got in. And that was a shock to me because after two times of trying to get a job and I couldn’t, so I got in there.

And, um, it was – I loved the time I was there. I was there for ten years. And I loved it because I got the lab that I wanted. I wanted molecular biology, and we were only 200 people selected from the whole of India, and in biology, there were only ten, nine were guys and it was me. And, normally they always say, women are discriminated against, those guys gave me the first choice of the lab. And so, I got – I got the molecular biology. There were all different things – plant, genetics, there was, you know, many different labs, and I got the one I wanted. So, when I came here, and people told me, “There’s discrimination against women”, I said, “It’s so strange that in a country like India, which is underdeveloped, I didn’t face any discrimination at all.”

DN: Yeah, that was one of my questions, um, it was it like to be a woman in a male-dominated field? But you said you feel like –

MG: Yeah, I was never – my mother was never discriminated against. Um, it – it’s, I guess it’s because not many women worked. [DN: Mm-hm] If they worked, they worked in the fields, or kind of low-paid jobs, but the ones that got an education and were working, were – I feel they were not discriminated against. But who am I to know, because the country is huge, we have so
many states, each state has a different language and a different culture and a different religion, so it’s very hard to tell what it was like. In-in my lifetime, I didn’t feel any of the other women were with me were discriminated against.

DN: Um, and then, how did you end up at Columbia?

MG: Columbia University? No, I went to Cold Spring Harbor Lab. [DN: Oh, Cold Spring Harbor] But I went to Columbia also. [DN: Oh, okay.] So, after – when I was in Bhabha Atomic Research Center, I did my PhD there in molecular biology, and then you generally go for your post-doc. So, I was invited by a college in California, one in Wisconsin, and then Cold Spring Harbor Laboratory in New York. And when I saw that one, I said, “This is the one I want”, because it was the early days of genetic engineering – it was 1980 – and at that time everyone was scared stiff of genetic engineering; they had these four levels. Level four was, um, I-I think the way it was, they didn’t want any air to go out of – of the laboratory. So, level four, probably, I-I don’t know how to explain it, but they didn’t want bacteria or viruses to escape. So, every-everything was kind of new, everything was very exciting, so once I got this, I thought, “Oh, this is the one I definitely want to go to.”

And in my village, all they knew about New York was the mafia. So, all of them came to me and said, “How can you go there? They drive black cars, they shoot with guns, you’ll be dead!” And I never once saw a black car with mafia or guns. So, anyway, where was I when you asked me your question, what was your question?

DN: Um, well, I was just asking how you ended up there.

MG: Oh, so I ended up at Cold Spring Harbor Laboratory, and when I left in there, it was the first time I was leaving India, the first time I had ever flown in an airplane, and instead of eighteen hours, it took twenty-four hours because I was in a thunderstorm. So, I landed at midnight in a thunderstorm, and somebody came and picked me up from the airport because that’s pretty far away from Cold Spring Harbor Laboratory, and they dropped me off in a dorm, and in the morning, when I woke up, I thought, “Oh my god, I’ve died and gone to heaven,” because it was so beautiful. Um, you’ve never been to Vietnam or any underdeveloped country?

DN: I have been to Vietnam.

MG: You have? Okay, so, in India, it’s crowded, the – there’s dust everywhere, so the leaves are full of dust, you don’t see many trees or flowers. So, in Cold Spring Harbor, when I woke up, looked out of the window, I was on this harbor, there were white boats in the harbor, green grass, flowers, blue skies, and I thought – oh, that’s why I thought, “oh my God, I’ve died and gone to heaven”, because I had never been to a place like that before. So, it was incredible.

DN: Some people say, um, when they come from India or they come from Vietnam that it seems very quiet. Did you think that?

MG: No, I was in a laboratory, and we all lived right there. We all had our dorms right in the laboratory, so no, it was never quiet. It was always, like I said, it was exciting, everybody worked, like, eighteen hours a day. And, um, in summer, I had gone there in summer, so there were symposiums, seminars, and people from all over the world were there, and then every two
weeks we’d have a lobster banquet, and then square dancing, and we were on a hill, by that time everybody was drunk; they’d be rolling down the hill. So, no it was not – it was not quiet or isolated, it was a beautiful place. Once you left the lab, things looked – it was a very affluent area, so once you left the lab, I guess you would get that feeling of lonely and isolated, but in the lab, it was, no, exciting.

Uh, people – normally, scientists are very free and open, but at that time, they were starting their businesses, right, on-on genetic engineering. So, people would lock their stuff up, they didn’t want people to see it, it was a crazy time. But extremely, extremely exciting.

DN: So, you said this was the first time you left home. Can you [MG: Yeah.] tell me more about how you felt about that, um, leaving your family, leaving everything you knew behind?

MG: Well, I thought I was going for two years because that’s – uh, I belonged to Bhabha Atomic Research Center, really, and they were letting me go for two years, and I was supposed to come back, and they would give me a lab that I would be running. But then I stayed on in the US. So, no, I don’t think it was scary for me at all. In fact, compared to most others that left and went to the US, they were – they felt – they missed the country, they missed their family, they were kind of lonely. But when I left, I knew I was only going there for only two years. So, it was like, “I’ve got to take advantage of every single thing I can, I got to learn every single thing I can.” I even went and learned belly dancing and tennis, believe it or not, ‘cause there was a college very close to me. So, no, I-I wasn’t homesick, I still write – we didn’t have phones at that time to call to India, it was too expensive. So, I would write letters almost every day, and almost every day, I was having some adventure or the other. So, um, no, it was not difficult for me. I, um, and I guess it was because I was going to be there for two years. Every moment was wonderful, precious.

I remember, um, when I went to the lab, everybody I met had something or the other that they were grumbling about. And I remember thinking, “Oh my God, you don’t know what India is like. You don’t know what you have. Just be grateful for it, because it’s not there all over the world.” [DN: Mm-hm.] And then the first time they took me to the grocery store, they couldn’t get me out of it. Because I had never seen so many things, like I said, we had rationing, we had to stand in line, and they’d give us one pound or one kilo of rice, one kilo of wheat, and that had to last you for the whole week or the whole month, I don’t remember. Even milk was rationed; everything was rationed. I think we were having a war with China at that time, so I can’t remember exactly, but I still remember everything was rationed, including milk – and I’m saying including milk because children needed milk, and you only got like one bottle a day of milk, so…

DN: Okay. Um, can you tell me about what sorts of things you did in the lab?

MG: Yeah, I worked with a bacteria called Haemophilus influenzae [DN: Oh, okay.] and then I worked with a virus called Mu. And in both the things – they were a little different, so with the viruses we were looking at whether pieces of DNA jump around; it was called jumping genes. And with the bacteria we were looking to see, again, whether plasmids entered it because – you-you know genetics, right, because it can get in and get into the genome and change it completely. So, uh, those are the two things that I did.
Very cool work.

In India, I was working on *Haemophilus influenzae*, in, uh, in America I was working on bacteriophage Mu.

So, you said you were planning on staying here for two years. So, what changed?

Oh, then I met my husband. You met him already.

I just wanted your side of the story.

[laughs] Well, he told you how we met?

He did.

Okay, so you want me to go through that again?

Like, from your perspective.

I would like your perspective.

Okay. So, in the lab, we were people from all different parts of the world, and only one couple was Indian, and they were constantly fighting with each other all the time. So, I-I was a little lonely at that point, in the sense of not-not having any other Indian with me, and then one day they gave me this Indian newspaper, and I open it, and there was, um, I think, you know, the personals? [Mm-hm] So, this was, “Looking for a friend”. And I said, “Woo, I’m looking for a friend too.” Now, in India we don’t date, so I was pretty naïve at that time. Said, “Ooh, an Indian, and right in New York”. So, I called him right away, and that was Vijay. And so, he told me, and I was supposed to be going into the city, I had never been in the city before, but I was going there because a friend of mine was coming from India, and I want – I had bought a whole lot of stuff to send back to my family, so I was going to go to that person’s house and give him the package. And Vijay said, “Oh, I’ll meet you at the subway station.” Now, I had gone straight from India – India’s a warm country, I didn’t have any-any warm clothes at all, and when I landed there it was still summer. But then, later, it got colder, so somebody from the lab took me to the Salvation Army, and I bought a red jacket and a red cap. And so, I was dressed in that when I went to the subway to meet Vijay at the subway station. And all he saw was red cap and a red jacket, and the only thing he could see was my eyes, and he said he fell in love with my eyes right away. [Aww.] So, then, he told you more about that story?

He did not. He actually only told us that he put an ad out and that you responded.

Okay, so then, we went to that house, and I gave the package and everything. Then, Vijay tells me, um, “Would you mind coming to buy a suitcase?” and I said I was a little confused by the suitcase. And he said, “Well, I’m going to India”, so I said, “Sure, I’ll come”, so, I went with him. Then, he said, “Do you mind coming to my apartment? I need to take a nap.” So, I thought, “This is strange”, and I said, “Okay”, and I went with him to his apartment, and he really went to sleep. [all laugh]
And then, later he – then when he woke up, he said, “Do you mind coming with me to the airport?” because he was flying out, and I said, “Okay”, so I went with him to the airport. And I thought, “This is a nice guy, but kind of strange.” Um, and-and that is it, and I thought I’d probably not see him again. But I guess he called me when he came back. Did he tell you about our first date?

**DN:** He did not tell us much of anything.

**MG:** You’re gonna have me here the whole day! [all laugh] So, anyway, so, he went to India, came back, and maybe he called me, I don’t remember. And then, and this was over the phone, no, no this wasn’t over the phone. I think we met. Um, yes. And then he asked me what I liked to do. And I said, “Ooh, I like to do everything” because for me this was, you know, tw-just two years, I’m going to do everything that comes my way. And I said, “I love everything.” And then he said, “Do you like the outdoors?” Now, this outdoors thing is interesting. I grew up in Bombay, very crowded, the buses are jam-packed, the trains are jammed, we hang like that. And, um, there’s buses and cars and everything going all around the place. So, it’s-it’s jammed full. The only place you can go is – we have a beach, it’s called Juhu Beach by the ocean. So, that is the only open place you go. And, to me, that’s the outdoors. So, everybody is fully clothed, they go fully clothed into the ocean because Indians don’t take – don’t show their arms or their legs or anything, so they’ll go fully clothed into the ocean. So, my idea of the outdoors was Juhu Beach.

So, when Vijay asked me, “Do you like the outdoors?” I said, “I love the outdoors.”

So, he says, “Okay, would you like to go, uh, out tomorrow, we’re going” – uh, he was with another – with a whole group. I don’t know if he belonged to the group, or what, and they were going in kayaks to an island. And I said, “Yeah, I’d love to do that.” So, early the next morning, and it was like, really, really early, we found ourselves at the, er, at the beach, and there were all, uh, little, I don’t know whether they were kayaks or boats, whatever they were, um, at-at the edge of the water. And there were whole group of very young people and very, they looked like outdoorsy people, all lined up over there. And then this guy who was in charge of everybody blows the whistle and says, “Two to a boat!” and everybody just jumped into a boat, and the boats took off, and it looked so smooth and so easy. And Vijay and I were there, and I said, “Vijay, who’s gonna take us?” and he started to laugh, he said, “We’re going to take ourselves.” Um, and, I said, “I’ve never been in a boat before,” and he said, “Don’t worry, I’ll tell you what to do.” He said, “You steer, and I’ll row.”

So, we both get into the boat, I think it must’ve been a canoe. [**DN:** Mm-hm] And he said, “Just listen to what I say and do exactly what I tell you to do.” So, he starts. He says, “Marie, to the right.” And, I’m-I’m doing that, and he said, “Marie, that’s not your right. Marie, to the left.” [all laugh] “Marie, that’s – where’s your left hand?” And-and this goes on, and-and, his voice, initially, it was very low, and it’s getting louder and louder and louder. And I said, “Vijay, you’re yelling at me!” He said, “Marie, you’re not listening.” I said, “Vijay, you’re saying to the right, to the left, to the right, to the left – make up your mind!” [all laugh] And, by this time – it-it – when we started, it was bright, sunny, by this time that we’re yelling at each other, the water’s gone gray and it’s gone cloudy up there. And now the boat, because of this thing yelling, between each of us, the boat is going round and round and round. Now, I do not how to swim, and so I said, “Oh my God, we’re going to drown”, because we were really going round and round, and the waves were getting higher and higher, and the boat was literally going like this,
like a pendulum. And then water started seeping into the boat, and I said, “We’re going to die. I haven’t even been here for a month, and we’re going to die. I don’t want to die, there’s so many things I want to do.” And then, from the corner of my eye, I see the Coast Guard, and I jumped up, and I kept waving my hands and screaming, and the Coast Guard comes running up to us and they say, “Lady, are you in trouble?” and I said, “Yes, we’re drowning!” and so, they ask Vijay, “Are you in trouble? Do you need help?” And Vijay’s – Vijay has like a Botox face on. He says, “No, we’re doing just fine.” So – and I said, “No, no, no we’re drowning, please help us.” So, they picked up the – it was a canoe – so they picked up the canoe or boat, who knows, and put it in their craft, and then they zoomed us off to the island. And I was happily talking to them, I was like, so grateful that they saved us, saved me from death from drowning. And Vijay just wouldn’t talk, he wouldn’t look at anybody, he was just, you know, he was really upset.

We reached the island, we get off, and I’m saying, “Thank you, thank you,” I-I was really so grateful. And we walk there, and Vijay doesn’t look at me at all, and we make friends with everybody else who’s on the island, except each other, we don’t talk at all. And then, it was time for dinner, and everybody’s lit their stove, and it smells so good. And, I was hungry, so I asked Vijay, “Do we have any food?” and we had forgotten to bring our stove, so we couldn’t cook anything. So, he hands me a package – it’s desiccated food. [laughs] I said, “Who goes on a trip with desiccated food?” I didn’t say that, I just thought in my head. Then, so, it got dark, we went to sleep, we had these-these mattresses, the air-filled mattresses, and there were, um, mosquitos, so I was bitten, I was cold, I was hungry, and I had to go to sleep, which I did.

The next morning, we get up, everybody is again – their stoves are on, they’re cooking breakfast, we’re eating desiccated food, we’re still not talking at all. And then, they say, “Oh, let’s go hike up the mountain!” Now, I haven’t slept, I’m bitten, I’m hungry, I’m not going to hike up. So, I did not hike up. And I looked at all of them, and they’re all so excited about hiking up, and I’m thinking, “Geez, do they have to have so much energy early in the morning?” So, I just sat down there, and I looked at the view, and in my mind, I’m thinking, “How do I get my revenge?” I got to find a really good way to get my revenge on him. And I’m thinking on a scale of one to ten, this date is a minus ten. And he was thinking, “Lord, why you given me” [laughs] “why have you sent me this girl?” And on a scale of one to twenty, he made it a minus twenty.

So, both of us were trying to get our revenge on each other, and we got it, because we married each other. [all laugh]

DN: Oh, my goodness. I’m curious how you got a second date.

MG: I’m curious too. Everybody asks us that, they say, “Who called whom?” and I don’t remember who called whom. I think Vijay called me because I was, I was so busy in the lab, I was there like eighteen hours a day, so I probably never called him, no.

DN: Okay, so can you tell me about your children?

MG: Yeah. We have two children. Did Vijay tell you a little about –

DN: A little bit.
MG: Okay, so, Sapphira is our older one, Kevin is our younger one. So, oh – there’s a story there too, but, you know, I’m going to keep you here the whole day if I keep telling you guys the stories. You want to know how Sapphira was born?

DN: Okay.

MG: [laughs] So, by this time, we had already gone – did I tell you about Houston? No. We’re still in New York. And by this time, we were married, and we had a house, and I was – oh! You asked me about Columbia University. Okay, so after I finished two years at Cold Spring Harbor, I was invited to do – continue by postdoc at Columbia University, and I went there but I didn’t last there very long because we had a radioactive spill, and I was working with cancer viruses there. So, Vijay was like, very horrified, and he says, “No” – and that’s when I got to know I was pregnant – and he said, “No child of mine is going to live in a laboratory with radioactivity and cancer viruses”, so I said, “Okay, I will stop working until Sapphira is born”, and naïve that I was, I thought after that I can go back to work. So, I stopped, we bought the house, and we went into the house, but we went in when I was almost in my eighth month – let me think – eighth month I think, we bought the house.

DN: So, right at the end.

MG: Yeah, right, and – in-in New York itself, but it was a different part. Not Cold Spring Harbor, it was a part pretty far away from there. So, we bought this house, and we had – that weekend, Vijay’s family was going to come and stay with us, so we had to go buy stuff like mattresses and all that stuff. So, we were in the mall, and I told Vijay, “I’m feeling very, very, very strange.” And Vijay says, “Marie, all pregnant women feel very, very, very strange. You’ll get used to it.” And it was not yet time for delivery, it was early, it was like a month ahead, so, all through that evening, I felt something was not right, and he felt it’s only normal. So, I went to sleep thinking he may be right because he had, uh, five sisters, and they all had children, and he had been through that. So, I went to sleep, got up in the morning, and he had his office in New York City, so I drove him to the train station, and he took the train. It would take him an hour to get there.

And then, I called the gynecologist. Now, I had met the gynecologist only once because we had moved from Cold Spring Harbor to that new house, and when I told the gynecologist what I was feeling, he said, “You’re in labor, get over here right away.” Now, the car that I had – we had crashed my car like the month before that, and so I had this rental car, and it was huge. I-I had to sit on cushions just to see in front of me or the back of me. So, I crawled into that car, and I drove to the doctor’s office, and he looked at me, and he said, “Go on to the hospital, you’re going to deliver in an hour.” And all this time while I was coming, every red light was like, “Thank God for a red light”, because I could start breathing again. It was like, you know, I was getting those, um, what do you call it, cramps, [DN: Mm-hm] all the time. And he never even thought of asking me, “Do you have your husband with you?” and I never thought of saying I was – I had come their alone. Because nobody really goes alone if they’re going to be in labor.

So, I crawled back into the car and drive to the hospital, and I ask the guy there, uh, oh, he asked me, “How long are you going to be here?” because I had to park the car, and I said, “How long does it take to deliver a baby?” and he was so shocked he literally fell off his chair, and he
pressed the alarm, and people came running out, and I think he told them to come and get me. So, people came running out, they put me on, they ran in again, and then I told, uh, the nurse, I better call my husband. So, I called Vijay, and he says, “Marie, you can’t deliver this child until I’m there! Don’t deliver” [laughs] So, I say okay, and I’m-I’m there, and he comes back – it took an hour for him to come – he came back, and, um, I’m over there, and he says, he suddenly remembered that the night before, we were in the store, we bought a video camera. He says, “I gotta go get the video camera!” So, I said, “Vijay, you can’t go now! I’m going to deliver this baby in an hour!” He says, “Don’t deliver the baby! I’ll get the video camera and come.”

So, he runs to the house, he gets the video camera, comes back, and then he’s – and we had only been to one Lamaze class, where they taught how to breathe and everything. So, Vijay thought he was, um, very comfortable with that whole thing, while I probably wasn’t at that time, so he puts his arm around me like this, arm to arm, and he’s walking me up and down. And he’s breathing, like, really loud, the way they told us to breathe. And it was so irritating. If there was anybody I would slap, it was at that time, but I didn’t. And he’s holding his watch like this, and then he says, “Marie, you’re not telling me when it starts and when it stops.” He’s going like that. And I said, “Vijay, it’s not starting and stopping, it’s just going on. It’s a pain.” And he says, “Okay, let’s start again now.” And he goes on and on and on. And I’m thinking, “What’s wrong with this person?” So, by this time we were yelling at each other, and then the nurse comes in, and the nurse says, “What is the problem?” And Vijay says, “She’s not telling me when it starts and stops.” And I said, “It doesn’t start and stop, it just goes on and on.” So, she ran and called the doctor, and the doctor came running in, and, um, the doctor checked me out and said, “You-you are in labor, you need to go in right away.” So, I’m over there, and, um, they ask whether I want – what’s that called, what do you give, uh…

DN: An epidural?

MG: An epidural. And, uh, Vijay says, “No, no, no, she said she didn’t want anything, she wanted a natural birth.” I said, “I don’t – I want something to take care of the pain.” Vijay says, “No, no, no, you told me even if you ask for it, not to let you have it.” So, he doesn’t – he doesn’t let the doctor give me an epidural. And I’m-I’m so mad with him at that time, but then Sapphira is born, and she’s wonderful. The-the cord was wrapped around her neck, that’s why I guess I-I had just one screaming pain. And Vijay at this time had hyperventilated, so the doctor had to look after him rather than me. [laughs] But Sapphira came out perfectly normal, she was small, she was just five pounds three ounces, but she was normal, she was wonderful, and that was how Sapphira was born.

DN: Okay, so, um, what kind of values do you try and instill in your children?

MG: Actually, when you think about it, they instill values in me. [laughs] Well, my parents instilled in me, um, the fact that I could do anything in life if I worked hard enough and got a good education. So, that is basically what I transferred to them. And then, the other thing my mother used to always say, never say anything bad about a person unless you walked in their shoes. So, that’s something I transferred to them as well. And from my father, I got that – because my father passed away when I was very young. I understood that life is very precious, and it’s a gift. And so, you’ve got to live it to the fullest. So, I think I passed those three things to
them. Yes. Maybe more things than that, but those are the main things that – for me those are the main things in life.

DN: Do you ever try and promote your children knowing their, um, like culture? Their background?

MG: Um, we go to India every year, yeah. So, we went to India every year since Sapphira was born. Sometimes we used to go twice because Vijay’s mother was still in India. And then, when we – did Vijay tell you about Kevin? We adopted Kevin.

DN: A little bit.

MG: Yeah, so, after we adopted Kevin, we still kept going every year. We used to go to the orphanage as – and we also stayed with his family. So, we go to India all the time, and Kevin doesn’t care for it too much, but Sapphira loves going there because Vijay has a huge family, half of it is in India, half of it is in the US, but the Indian family is really huge, many children, many grandchildren, so she loves to be with them, and she will go to India as many times as possible. In fact, we just went to India in December, and she’s going again in, um, March.

DN: Wow.

MG: Yeah.

DN: Um, and what are your children doing now?

MG: Well, Sapphira runs our foundation, and, uh, I don’t know whether Vijay told you, but she supports several nonprofits. Did he tell you about Project Echo [DN: Yes, he told us about the foundation.] and Sightlife?

DN: He did not tell us the specifics, he just kind of gave an overview of the Goradia Foundation.

MG: Okay, okay. So, uh, she supports a lot of non-profits in India and in the US. In the US, there’s one called iEducate, where they pay college students to come into the classroom and help children that are falling back because the teacher can’t take care of everybody. So, they – that’s iEducate. Pratham, he’s probably told you about.

DN: He told us about Pratham.

MG: Did you tell you about Sightlife?

DN: No.

MG: It’s for corneal transplants, and, uh, it really started in the US, in Seattle, and then Sapphira helped them get to India. [DN: Okay] And Project Echo, have you heard of Project Echo?

DN: I have not.

MG: It’s all over the world now, it’s in every-state in the US. So, Project Echo, there was her-roommate in college, her father started Project Echo. He was a specialist in Hep C and HIV, and he had a three and a half, uh, year long waitlist. And he was not one of those that
wanted to make a lot of money, so he said, “Why don’t I teach—teach primary care physicians all over the state how to deal with this, so that they—we don’t have to have a waitlist and they can all learn how to do it.” And so, I think he gave all of them the equipment so that they could, every two weeks, video conference. I don’t know whether it was video conference or what it was, but he got all the primary care physicians in the state to come together every two weeks and then he’d have a panel with him. He was—he’d have a cardiologist, a pulmonologist, a nurse practitioner, what-whatever he needed. And then somebody would bring one patient that they could not cure, and then all of these would give their feedback on what to do. And within three to five years, their success rate was as much as his. And so, from there, it’s gone to every state in the US, they have it at MD Anderson also, uh, it’s went to different country, and recently they got an award of twenty-five million [DN: Wow.] from Co-Impact.

You know what is Co-Impact? All the big rich people of the world fund Co-Impact. And they got a twenty-five million grant, and Pratham got a twenty-five million grant. But Pratham has to take whatever it is doing for education and vocational training, it has to take it to Africa. So, the money has to be spent in Africa. But both of those got a twenty-five million grant, so we are super excited.

DN: Okay. So, how did you end up in Houston?

MG: Vijay had to come here because his-his office was in New York, but he was dealing with oil and gas, chemicals, petrochemicals, plastics, so it was better for him to be here where he’d be much closer to the people he bought from and sold to.

DN: And when was that?

MG: 19, mm, let’s see—Sapphira was born in ’83, so we came in ’85. We came in ’85. And before I came, my idea of Texas was people with boots and hats riding horses, and you know, there was that show Dallas on TV, [DN: Mm-hm, yes] and I thought that was what it was. And it looked bare, right, on TV? And I said, “Oh my God, New York is so beautiful and green, I don’t want to go to Texas. So, when we first came to visit, Vijay had us go up in a helicopter to see what-what Texas was like, and it was so green, and I said, “Okay, we’ll live here.”

DN: So, what did you think when you first came to Houston?

MG: I loved it. But then, I loved New York too. I love everything. But I found that Houstonians were much more, um, friendly, um, more helpful. In New York, also they were that way, I was in a lab, so really, um, everything was wonderful for me in the lab, but even when I stayed outside, I always joined a group, so when Sapphira was born, there was a mother and child group, and when she went to the gym, I had another group. So, I always liked to be a part of a group. So, in Houston, as soon as I came, at-at the country club they had this thing on the first of the, I don’t know, which month or whatever where they invited all newcomers to come in and join different groups, and so, Houstonians, I feel are very, very friendly. They said hi to you when you’re on the road whether you know them or not, when you walk in the morning, they greet you, which is not the way it is New York City, or in-in England either because we were in London and I remember walking in the morning on the road and saying hi to somebody, and they looked me at me, like, what’s wrong with you, lady? [all laugh]
DN: So, um, how have you seen Houston change over time?

MG: Well, we lived in Kingwood when we came, then we came to the Woodlands. And the Woodlands was more, um, more green, more trees, whatever, and now a lot of it has been cut down after it was sold because people want to come there and live. We also have Exxon-Mobil close to the Woodlands, so all those people need housing, so they’ve cut down immense tracts of trees there. So, that’s what I don’t like. But, um, the people are wonderful there.

DN: Okay. I’m kind of jumping around, [MG: Sure.] but I know you said you didn’t have any, any issues as a woman in science in India, but did you –

MG: Me. Just me.

DN: Yes, I understand.

MG: Now, I don’t know if that goes for all women. [DN: Of course.] Women in India are treated like second-class citizens, most of the time. But like I said, if you’re educated, I don’t know about the rest of the women, but I feel if you had an education, you probably were not.

DN: So, I – my question was did you ever face any issues when you came here and were at Cold Spring Harbor?

MG: Not really, because I was in a laboratory. Laboratories are like unisex, right? I don’t know, in college do you have – in college did – do you have discrimination? I have never faced discrimination, so it’s hard for me to answer that question.

DN: That’s fine, no, I’m just curious.

MG: Though my daughter did say, “Mom, sometimes you may not even know you’re being discriminated against.”

DN: Okay.

AL: So my question then is, like, what kind of organizations are you involved in in Houston? Like, are there any Indian-American or Asian-American organizations that you’re a part of?

MG: Well, I’m a part of Toastmasters, you know what’s Toastmasters? [DN: Mm-hm] You speak. [DN: Yes] And I’ve been with them – and actually, it was because of Pratham that I got involved with them; I’ll tell you that story later. So, I’m in Toastmasters. I’m also a dancer, so I do ballroom dancing. Then we have Pratham, which is [DN: Mm-hm], you know, I-I was the president of it for two years. Um, what else...? Then, in MD Anderson, I am part of cancer prevention group, and I go around giving talks about cancer prevention.

But a particular Indo-American group? I think I have joined groups based on what I like to do, more than being just a part of an Indian group, it’s—it’s just me.

AL: No, I get it, I’m just curious.

MG: Yeah, most Indians do want to belong to a totally Indian group. We have a temple in the Woodlands, and it’s open to everybody to come and they have yoga and everything there. And
my friends run the yoga, uh, session, but I have a gym so close to my home that I just go to my
gym everyday automatically at seven in the morning, so then I don’t, I don’t go there. But, yeah,
I—I’m friendly with them and everything, but I think my group, the Toastmasters group is much
closer to me, the dance group is much closer to me, um, the MD Anderson part is also closer to
me, because I’m—I’m doing something, I’m part of it all.

DN: So, I’d like to dig a little bit deeper into those, so you can you tell me about, um,
Toastmasters first?

MG: Mm-hmm.

DN: So, how did you get involved with that?

MG: Well, I – you–you know, about Pratham. [DN: Mm-hm] So, there was a Montessori school
in Houston and that was an Indian community, an Indian Montessori, and they had raised money
for the children in India, because they were all part of Pratham. And so, they called me, and they
wanted to give the check to Vijay, and Vijay was overseas, so I said, “He’s overseas”, they said,
“Can you take the check?”, I said, “Sure, I’ll come take the check.” And they said, “And can you
give a speech as well?” Now, I was used to giving speeches in science, and you know how it is,
it’s very, very to the point, I have my slides, and you know, and I – it’s, it’s not the way I’m
talking now, it’s very matter of fact. And I thought, “Hey, can I talk to a group of people?” And,
uh, just then I opened the Woodlands newspaper, and it said, “Woodlands Toastmasters: 7AM
Friday”. And that was, um, Thursday. So I said – and, and “Visitors welcome.” So, I went there.
And I listened to the speeches, and there were three speeches, and I got a feel for how they were
open, the points in the middle, and then how they close. And I said, “I can do this; this is not
hard.” So, I did it quickly, and the next day I went, and I gave the speech over there. Also, took
the check. And, um, there were children, and there were parents. For some reason, I thought
there would be only children. But there were children and parents. And so, I had to change it,
like, on the go, and so I talked about it, and really, I was talking about India, the children in
India, education, and about Pratham, kinda just put it all in-in focus. And they loved it so much,
so, and I felt like, “Wow, I can do this. I can talk to laypeople. I don’t have to just do science
talks.” And, uh, when I came back, I said, “I have to go back to Toastmasters.” So, I went back
to Toastmasters, and I’ve been there – this was 2005, and I’ve been there since then. I’ve been
the president of the club, the area governor of the club, I’ve been a mentor to the Exxon-Mobil
club, and then, I got my Distinguished Toastmaster – you get that after you do, I don’t know,
fifty speeches or something, or more than that – and, um, yeah. It’s—it’s a wonderful group.

DN: Can you tell me about your role as leader – in leadership in these?

MG: In?

DN: So, as president or area governor, what kinds of things did you do?

MG: As president, you run the club. As area governor, you have many clubs that are pooled
together to make an area, and then you go, and you visit each one and see if they have any
problems. Like in the Woodlands, we have about seven clubs, we have in Conroe two, so when I
was area governor, I had to go to each of those clubs. If they had a problem, if they didn’t have
enough people, you had to help them get people. Um, if-if they didn’t know how to plan
something, you helped them plan it. So, it was just different things in each club. Some of them were very good clubs, some were very small clubs, so I just helped the whole bunch of them.

**DN**: Okay.

**MG**: Then, we had a Toastmasters contest, in fact yesterday and the day before I’ve been running a contest for Toastmasters. Yeah, it’s a, it’s a wonderful thing to be a part of. You probably have it in your college, right?

**DN**: I do not know. I’ve not heard of it.

**MG**: Oh, it helps you really well, too, to be a good speaker.

**DN**: I’m sure it does. Can you tell me about ballroom dancing, then?

**MG**: Yeah, sure. That also started in 2005. Now, how did I get there? I think we were at a New Year’s Eve party at the Houstonian. And I saw one couple and they were – everybody else was just *ta-ta-ta-ta* – and they were dancing, they were really dancing. So, I went up to them and I asked them – and they were from the Philippines – I said, “Where did you learn to dance like this?” And they told me at Fred Astaire Dance Studio. And the very next day, I called Fred Astaire – they gave me the number – I called them, and they said, “Sure, come over and see whether you like us.” And this was in Westheimer, which means I had to drive an hour there. But I still went, and in that first session, they taught me how to do waltz and foxtrot, and I loved it. And, um, so I started going there, I think I went there, like, twice a week, one hour each way, but I loved it so much that the first time that they were going to have a show, they asked me whether I wanted to dance, and I said yes, and that was also in Westheimer. And then after that, I started taking part in competitions, and it just went from there.

**DN**: So, what kind of dances did you, do you know?

**MG**: Oh, a lot. Waltz, foxtrot, tango, uh, pasodoble, rhumba, cha-cha, um, merengue, a whole bunch, salsa…

**DN**: Do you have a favorite?

**MG**: I love the smooth, smoothest. Foxtrot, waltz, those are smooth dances. Latin dances are rhumba, samba, salsa, um, all the rest.

**DN**: Okay. And then, tell me about MD Anderson. and what you do there, and how you got involved.

**MG**: MD Anderson, somebody nominated me to go on the board of MD Anderson. And MD Anderson has two boards, one is where they have their physicians and whoever, their directors, and they make all the rules and the plans for MD Anderson. The other is called Board of Visitors, where there are 250 people on the Board of Visitors. Are you getting to the end?

**AL**: No, no, just making sure that it’s still recording.
MG: Okay. So, um, there are 250 people on the Board of Visitors, and really, the Board of Visitors is made up of people who’ve either had cancer – and they are all affluent people. The first time I went there then I told Vijay there’s 250 people, he did a rough calculation and said, “That—that was so many billions.” Because all these people, the names I was telling him, they were all billionaires. And – but whether you’re a billionaire or not, you – you’re prone to get cancer, somebody in your family may get cancer, somebody may die from cancer, so what I found is everybody there is so grateful to MD Anderson because they have saved lives [DN: Mm-hm.] people in their families or they themselves had had cancer and recovered. So, whenever I go there, it’s such a strong feeling that they care a lot about MD Anderson and they do a lot for MD Anderson, but MD Anderson also does a lot for them in terms of [DN: Mm-hm.] making sure they’re – they live instead of dying. And they live in a human way, not tied up to – to… So, you probably know about that from being in medical school.

Oh, and how I got into, um, uh cancer prevention? I think I just sitting there at the meeting, and they ask us to join different groups, and there are all different groups, like one group would be dealing with the government, one would be dealing with, um, talking more about MD Anderson, you know, uh, in the news or whatever, or putting something on TV so people got more familiar with it, all different things. And then, this lady heads the cancer prevention group, and so I was telling her that I had signed up for a group and nobody called me as of yet. And she said, “Oh, come and join my group, it’s cancer prevention.” And I said, “Sure.” So, I went there, and then, I-I go for the meetings, if I can’t, because they’re very early in the morning, like 8 o’clock in the morning or 9 o’clock, so for me to go there all the time, so I just call on the phone and-and do a conference call with them. But then, I asked them, “Would you like me to talk about cancer prevention?” and they said, “Yeah, we’d love you to.” And so, I started doing that.

DN: Okay.

MG: So, my Toastmasters groups get to know about cancer prevention. And we have so many in Houston, huge numbers, so…

DN: Oh, I meant to ask when you were talking about ballroom dancing, do you ever get your husband to dance with you?

MG: He dances with me, and I’ve also taken him to, uh, Fred Astaire and had them teach him, and so they taught him waltz, they taught him foxtrot, they taught him cha-cha, they taught him rhumba. Still, when he dances, he dances his own dance. Regardless of the music that is playing, he’ll dance his own dance. So, now we are going on a trip to South America in March, and there – by the way, we went to Argentina and we did Argentina Tango there, uh, Vijay and I, but when we went in the evening to the dance place, he didn’t want to dance, so he asked other people to dance with me. I think he – he just wants to do his own thing, but they’re going to teach him before we go to South America again. They’re going to teach him, they said, at least salsa, and at least hustle he needs to know. So, I said, “Okay.”

DN: Okay. So, um, you received an award for impact on humanity from the Indo-American Chamber of Commerce, can you tell me about that and what it was like to receive that award?
MG: Well… It’s wonderful to receive an award, but I get more thrill out of doing stuff. [DN: Mm-hm.] You see the difference? [DN: Of course.] It’s – because I feel, um, what, I literally feel I’m having such a great time in life, what are they giving me this for? I’m not doing it, um, all the stuff we’ve done for Pratham, it–it gives me such a thrill to know – because we go there and we see the children, I don’t know if Vijay told you [DN: Yeah, told us.] we just came back from India and we met with all the children, and… So, it’s so thrilling, it makes you – it gives a high. I’ve never taken weed, but I feel it must be that, you know, the high that you get from weed. Because you really feel so thrilled to know that you’re changing somebody’s life, you know? When we first – when Vijay first got involved in Pratham, we had 100 million illiterate children in India, and now 16 million have become literate, so it is such a wonderful feeling to feel that. And then Pratham also does, I don’t know whether Vijay told you about entrepreneurship for women, did he talk about that?

DN: He did not.

MG: So, Pratham does education for children, the, uh, illiterate child – not just the illiterate, now it’s going right up to high school, uh, but, uh, education for children. They also do – girls in India drop out by the time they’re in eighth grade, either because they have to look after their siblings, or they have to work in the fields, or they start menstruating then they’re not allowed to go to school. All different reasons, but they drop out by eighth grade, then they get married off, and they have children. They’re barely seventeen, eighteen, and they’re having children. And there’s a lot of violence associated with that because the husband may be much older, and you know, they get beaten up, all that kind of stuff. So, what Pratham did is, it trains women to become – to either get a job or to become entrepreneurs, the ones that are really good at what they do. And so, they’ve started these beauty salons, all over India. They’ve been trained in how to deal with money, how to deal with people, how to do accounting, all that kind of stuff Pratham trains them, teaches them how to run a salon. They start the salons, and they’re all over, and they are making so much money, and the wonderful part is, they–they were, of course, funded by Pratham. They return the money within two years. The guys don’t do that. The women do that. And the women not only start their beauty salons, make money, but they found that some people who come to their salons to get their hair done, whatever, may not be able to afford paying them, so they say, “Okay, we’ll train you how to do it”. And so, it’s been going that way. You know, start a beauty salon, people cannot afford it, they train them, they start their salons, and it’s gone all over [DN: Wow.]. It is an absolutely wonderful thing. So, it’s education, now they’re also using, um, they call – what do they call it? – what I call an iPad, what do they call it? Tablets. And they give it to these children who are not even in school, and the kids just click on stuff, and they start to learn how to use it. So, they start to learn A, B, C, 1, 2, 3 – of course, it’s in an Indian language, and then, every state has its own language, so you can imagine how difficult that is to do. But we saw that when we went this time in December, and it’s like a miracle happening all the time.

So, I love getting an award. In-in Toastmasters we get an award every time we speak, in the sense that there’ll be three or four speakers and one will get an award. So, I got like a million of those little gold cups. Not really a million, but I exaggerate. Uh, but even when I give a speech, the thrill is in giving a speech. Whether I get the cup or not, I love to get the cup, but even if I don’t, um, I’m still happy that I gave it. So, the same thing with–with the awards.
DN: Okay, so kind of going off of that, what would you say your greatest accomplishment is thus far?

MG: Being a mom. I think that’s my greatest accomplishment.

DN: Okay. And, um, if you had advice for younger generations, what would it be?

MG: Just be in the moment, and I’m not always in the moment, I can tell you that, but be in the moment, and – okay, I’ll tell you what my daughter once asked me. She asked me, “How did you find your passion?” How – literally, she was saying, how did you get to be a scientist. And I realized that I didn’t particularly choose to be a scientist. Whatever I did, I just fell in love with what I was doing, and that moved me on. So, I would tell everybody – and sometimes you may not like what you’re doing – but if you put yourself into it, and kind of get really involved, you’ll begin to love what you’re doing. So, that’s what I tell my children, that whatever you’re doing just love it and-and it will take you wherever you’re going. So, I can’t say – when I was young, I wanted to be an astronaut, I wanted to be a lot of things, uh, but life didn’t get me there, so I think at some point – I think it was from my father, looking at my father, um, I realized that life is short, and, uh, you-you can’t keep saying, “Oh, this one did that to me and because of this, because of that”, you just got to take what life throws at you, enjoy doing it, and move on. Yeah.

DN: And then specifically, do you have an advice for young women who are trying to balance career and family?

MG: That’s a hard one for me because I did not have to balance career and family. I worked first before I had my children, and then I stopped, thinking I would go back, but I never went because Vijay was setting up his business in different countries in the world, so he would be gone for six months of the year. So, I didn’t – an-and we were affluent at that time, when I came to this country, I came with $25, that’s it. So, I didn’t feel it was right to leave the children with somebody else, though they felt it would’ve been much better if I had gone to work because I’m one of these focused people, and, um… well, my poor child, my poor daughter. So, I signed her up for everything under the sun when she was about five years, so for theater, for ballet, for tap dance, for music, for swimming; I signed her up for everything. And she was, she was four or five, and she sat me down and she said, “Mom, I know that you didn’t get a chance to do all these things in your life, but you can do them now, so go ahead and do them. I only want to do two things.” She only wanted to play the piano, and she wanted to, I think, do gymnastics. And she said, “I do not want to do all the other things”, and I said, “Okay, Sapphira.”

DN: Wow. Okay, I think I’m out of questions. If Amber has any –

AL: If you have anything else that you’d like to share with us…

MG: Well, just ask anything that you want to.

[Audio clips]

MG: So, Kevin was born in, um, in a hospital in-in Bombay. And we had lost one child, so Vijay wanted to adopt a child, and I did not want to adopt a child at all because I said, “How can I love anybody more than I love Sapphira?” But anyway, Vijay pushed on it, and he went to
India, and there was a little baby boy that was born, and he said, he’d like to adopt that child. I hadn’t even seen the child. And then, Kevin got very sick. He was not called Kevin, he was called… um, who’s that, it’s an Indian name, um, anyway, can’t remember it. But Kevin got very, very ill, and he was literally a bag of bones, I still have that picture of him. So, Vijay has large family there, so they took him home, they made him nice and round and plump, and then we were only allowed to take him when he was four months old. So, we went there when he was four months old. And Vijay, huge family, Kevin was going to every one of them, as soon as they put Kevin into my arms, he started screaming, like, who the heck is this person? And I said, “Oh my God, I’m not going to like this kid at all.” And then the whole family is looking at me, like, “Why doesn’t he like her?” And then, on the plane, he goes to Vijay, he goes to Sapphira, as soon as I take him, he screams. I said, “Ah, this is going to be really hard.” We come home, we come to Houston, whole neighborhood comes to see Kevin. As long as he’s with Sapphira or with Vijay, he’s fine. As soon as I take him, he screams. And I said, “[sucking breath] This kid —”

DN: How old was Sapphira at this time?

MG: Sapphira was seven years. And then, Kevin, one day was in the bedroom, and Sapphira was throwing a ball on the wall. And Kevin suddenly – and all this time, he never smiled, he never laughed – Sapphira’s throwing the ball on the wall, and suddenly he starts laughing like guys laugh when they’re at a-a ball, like a basketball game, something, you know, that big guffaw, and I said, “Oh my God, that is my son now!” [laughs] And Kevin and I are actually so much alike, Vijay and Sapphira are very alike, Kevin and I are alike. We both have curly hair, we exaggerate, we, um, we love to talk, we tell lots of stories. Sapphira will tell a story this much, Kevin will make that same story so big. And the same, Vijay’s this much, and I’m this much. So, Kevin and I get along very well, uh, every, every year on my birthday or his birthday, he’ll put something up on Facebook and say, “My mom always has had my back”, which is true. I’ve always kind of saved him from Vijay and Sapphira. [laughs] So, so anyway, so, we take Kevin home, and, um, I’m going to tell you a few short funny stories about Kevin.

So, he was about five, and I’m driving him to his Montessori school, and we turn a corner and the door flies wide open, and I slam on the brakes, and I scream, “Kevin, why did you do that?” And so, he sits like this and he looks at me as though he’s a grownup, and he says, “Let me tell you something, Mother dear, I really don’t like the way you keep asking ‘why, why, why’. If I knew why I do the things I do, I wouldn’t do them.” [all laugh] So, that’s become a favorite of ours. If anybody does something, we say that.

And then, um, Kevin, he was a mixture of Dennis the Menace, angel, and I don’t know what else. But he was a mixture of all these things. He was very funny, everybody loved him, he would, um, I don’t know how he had this sense of humor at such a little age, but I used to teach them not to say, um, mean words to each other, or not to yell at each other, and so one day he comes running in, his face all perturbed, and I said, “What’s the matter, Kevin?” He said, “Mom, sometimes you mean to say something, and something else comes out of your mouth, right?” I said, “It happens sometimes, what did you say?” He said, “I meant to say, ‘I love you’ to Sapphira, what came out was ‘Shut up, Sapphira’.” [all laugh] Now, how do you explain one, right?
And then, Kevin, in school, he was popular, very popular with teachers, with students, with whatever, but he wasn’t good at studying at all. So, when he came home with the first, um, report card, he came running to me, he was so excited, and he handed it over to me, and then he watched my face, like, literally fall, and my face looked perturbed. And he said, “Mom, I thought you’d be so happy. Sapphira brought you only alphabet, A. I brought you one of every alphabet, A, B, C, D, and F.” [laughs]

Yes, so anyway, so fast-forward – oh, then I got to tell you one more incident, because he was the cutest ever. So, we were building our house, and, like I said, Vijay was travelling, and so by this time, when Vijay had come home, I was so exhausted, I literally threw my keys on the floor, and I said, “I’ve had it, I’m leaving” and I walked out of the house. And Vijay and Sapphira were both reading, and they both said, “Bye, have a good time”. And Kevin came behind me, he was really concerned, and he puts his arm around me, and he sits me down, and he said, “Mom! Remember, this is only a house. You have a family that loves you. If you give in, if you get upset, the builder wins. If you don’t get upset, we win.” And I’m looking at him, and I’m saying, “How did he get to know to say something like that to me?” So, I said, “How did you get to be so smart?” He said, “Mom, you think we don’t listen to you, but we do.” [laughs]

And then, Kevin went onto school, college. In college, he turned a complete 180 degrees. Um, he wasn’t at all concerned about learning while he was in school, he was more of an athlete, and he came – he got involved in – he could do basketball, he could do, you know, everything very well. And, um, I-I guess that was his gift. [DN: Mm-hm] When he went to college, he started reading, and he read like crazy. He became vegetarian, which he wasn’t at home, he was one of those hamburger people all the time, and he started doing, uh, raising money. He raised enough money to buy a cow for a village in Africa, and he did that twice. And we were so stunned because when he was at home, he didn’t really care about money, or he didn’t really care that much to do something spe – you know, he did what the school told them, go build a house and he’d do that, or go do this, he’d do that, but nothing by himself. And so, he-he turned completely around. Now, when he talks to us, he’s read more things than we have, he’s explaining things to us, before we explained it to him.

And then, when he came home, he wanted to build a climbing gym. And he, of course, wanted Vijay to help him, and Vijay refused to because Vijay started his business by himself, and I guess he felt, “If I could do it, he should be able to do it too.” And poor Kevin, he never handled money, whatever he wanted I would give him, I had totally spoiled him. [laughs] And-and he had to learn from scratch, and his, um, landlord was terrible. The landlord first gave him one place, and then suddenly at the last moment said, “No, I can’t give you this place”, and gave him a much bigger place, so now he had to go to the bank and get a loan to-to build this place. And, um, Vijay was really not helpful, not a coach at all, and then, Vijay said, “Why don’t you go and talk to my brother?” and the brother was even worse than Vijay. So, Kevin said, “I’m not talking to anybody. I’m doing it myself.” And the poor fellow did it. He built the gym, and two days before he was opening – and it was a huge gym, he had a place for children, he had a place for people that climb, and he had a place for professionals, and then, upstairs, he had a pla – you know, like a WeWork place, you know what that is? Where each one gets a table and they can do their own work, they can come – instead of having an office? So, he built that as well, then he built a little gym where people could go on a treadmill or do weights and stuff. So, he had all that
in his gym. And then, two days before, the landlord tells him, “Oh, I forgot to get the fire department’s whatever you had to get from them.” And so, he couldn’t open it two days later. So, he called me, and then I remembered that some relative of Vijay’s in Austin knew the mayor, so he called the mayor, the mayor sent the firemen there, and so they – and Kevin had to move everything out of the gym while the firemen were there, and then put everything back. And he still did it, and the gym opened on time.

So, that’s Kevin’s story. Sapphira’s story, I already told you, right? [DN: Mm-hm] Sapphira is now travelling all over, giving talks. She talks about her different non-profits, and – she doesn’t do raising the money, we do raising the money. But, yeah.

DN: Does she live in Houston?

MG: She lives in D.C.

DN: Oh, D.C.? And [MG: And…] Kevin’s in Austin?

MG: Kevin’s in Austin. So, if Sapphira wants to move anywhere, she wants to move to Austin because we have a lot of family there as well. Yes.

DN: Okay.