

Houston Asian American Archive
Chao Center for Asian Studies, Rice University

Interviewee: Lakshmy Parameswaran

Interviewers: Asiya Kazi and Brittney Xu

Date/ Time of Interview: June 15, 2011 at 10:30 AM

Transcribed by: Asiya Kazi and Brittney Xu

Edited by: Priscilla Li (6/5/2017)

Audio Track Time: 1:28:56

Background:

Lakshmy Parameswaran was born in 1948 in Kumbakonam, Tamil Nadu, India. Tamil is her first language. She came to the U.S. in 1973 with her husband, first living in Detroit, Michigan; Flint, Michigan from '74 to '77, then Sandusky, Michigan from '77 to '81. Lakshmy moved to Houston in 1981, and has been living here for thirty years. She moved to Houston because of the oil boom, warm weather, cultural diversity, and the stellar reputation of the Texas Medical Center. She earned her Master's degree in Family Therapy at the University of Houston—Clear Lake. Her first job was as a preschool teacher at Beth Israel Pre-School, which she began at age twenty-six. Today, she is a self-employed counselor, specializing in domestic violence and sexual assault. She works part time and is also a community volunteer. Lakshmy founded Daya, Inc., which serves South Asian victims of family violence. She is also a board member for Houston Association for Marriage and Family Therapy (HAMFT). She has held gender-based violence workshops, and published work in the *Houston Chronicle* and *Texas Psychologist*. She has also appeared on ABC TV programs to speaking about domestic violence. Lakshmy has two children.

Setting:

HAAA interviews use the ideas of labor and capital as a basis for examining Asian-American immigration and production. Ms. Parameswaran recounted childhood experiences in India, her move to the United States, and current community activities. She was the former president and founder of DAYA, a Houston-based crisis help line and outreach center that works primarily with South Asian women. Her family's movement through the US, as well as her involvement in DAYA, were of particular interest.

The interview was conducted in Ms. Parameswaran's home, in Missouri City. The interview was approximately an hour and thirty minutes. She provided us with not just information regarding her experience as a first generation Indian-American, but also insight into her organization's impact on family health in Houston.

Interview Transcript:

Key:

AK	Asiya Kazi
BX	Brittney Xu
LP	Lakshmy Parameswaran
...	Speech trails off; pause
Italics	Emphasis
(?)	Preceding word may not be accurate

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Bracket !	
s	Actions (laughs, sighs, etc.)

AK: Okay, so this is Asiya Kazi. !

BX: And Brittney Xu. !

AK: And we're from Rice University with the Houston Asian American Archive Project and we're here !
today in the home of Ms. Lakshmy Parameswaran. Did I say that correctly? !

LP: Yeah. !

AK: Okay. Um so, can you just begin by telling us a bit about your childhood? How you grew up in India and !
what that was like. !

LP: I grew up in India, in, in, in the south. In a state called Kerala, the language there was Malayalam. And we !
are not really Tamil speaking at home. I mean, you know, I mean the histories is that we have migrated from the
north from the Tamil states into Kerala because Kerala was found, became a separate state sometime in the '50s
I think, before that the Tamil Nadu and Kerala and several parts of south India, they are one. One region, it was
not states, it was all Tamil and then I think at some point, we migrated to the Kerala side and so I spoke Tamil
at home and learned Malayalam at school. I grew up there, I think I um I moved there about seven or eight years !
old, because that's when the states, the Kerala state came about, a different state. So until then, it was all one
and I was supposed to have been born in Tamil Nadu and then my father warned us because he wanted to be in
Tamil Nadu, that was his native place. I was educated there so I had the good fortune of learning both Tamil !
and Malayalam so up to second standard or something I had to learn Tamil and even though it was only up to !
second standard, I could read and write and speak. And we were speaking at home anyway. And then I learned, !
one fine day, I went from Tamil to Malayalam you know, so just like that. [laughs] !

So you know, things were a little different in those days, nobody thought of psychological trauma this and that, !
you know, my father had a teacher come at home and teach us from like, you know, like learning from like a b
c d, even though it was you know—and then they moved me from second or third to fifth standard. Something
like that, I skipped a grade in between somehow so, so I was doing fifth standard work and then doing pretty !
much you know cat, apple, ball kind of thing in Malayalam at home. And then everything was in Malayalam. It !
was not an English medium. Everything was taught in Malayalam. Like science, social studies, geography, !
whatever. So. Anyways [inaudible 2+ words], you know, so finished my college in Kerala and then I moved to !
Madras. Today it's called Chennai, after I got married. And then I was there for three years or so, three or four
years. Then I moved to the United States. !

BX: Oh okay. Could we go back to your childhood for a minute? !

LP: Sure. !

BX: Um, I'm curious—how did you perceive your family's—uh like economic um take on pay. Um like
were you well off, were you poor? !

LP: We were not poor, but we were middle class. We were not well off—no—by no means. My father was a !
college professor. And he had six children. My mother was a homemaker so we were middle class, and you !
know, we were definitely not in the rich category, but when you look back, you feel blessed. I feel blessed, we
had everything we needed but everything was what you call that. I mean everything would come at the right !
time. It's not like you want something today, you'll get it tomorrow. No, never. So everything was good, you !
know, even if I got a new skirt or a new blouse or something for my hair or, or a piece of jewelry, it was such a
big thing. It was a joyful thing, you know, so everything we received had a special place in our mind you know? !

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Because it's not something that I could go today and take my money and buy. So. And we were a close-knit family. My father believed in education. So he wanted to make sure that—we had 4 boys and 2 girls, so that was his priority, that he wanted us to get a good education, so. So he always insisted on that so. It was normal household, you know, just mom and dad and kids, and that kind of thing.

BX: Okay, um in the 1950s a lot was happening in India, politically. Did any of this come up? Did it affect your childhood at all?

LP: No I don't remember the '50s. I was, I was a child in the '50s. I was born late '40s, so um in the '50s like I said I was five, six years old when the states became separate.

Um by the time I was born, India was already independent so I had only heard stories about the independence struggle. My father and mother you know would tell us about that. And um a lot of things were happening in the north you know, if you have studied the history of India. So many things were happening in the north. The south was a little bit protected. The south is the south and by the time the things trickled down, you know the northern people had experienced it already, you know like the, you know the Hindu-Muslim riots, you know whatever you take it, it was happening all over, but the brunt of it was mostly in the north. But then a lot of people in the south... were part of it, they were—for example, my mother told me when mahatma Gandhi told everyone to wear homespun cotton, and not to wear anything—the British fabric, my mother wore that. You know, she said for a long time, she wore cotton. She didn't wear anything else. Not that, I mean there are some small times, I don't know how many important things they got, but still you know those kinds of things I had heard from my mom. But there were no particular political things happening that you know, probably make an impact on me that much. Independent India and you know people were struggling just like they are today.

AK: So what was the neighborhood like that you grew up um—when you moved to, you said you moved after you um finished your high school?

LP: I finished my college, and then I got married.

AK: Right. Okay, so you stayed in the same place until college.

LP: Yes.

AK: Okay, and what was that neighborhood like?

LP: [inaudible sentence] We lived in—when I was little—now we are going back to my childhood, we lived in a town called Paldam in Kerala. Um you know all religions are represented in India as you know. And Kerala too, we have a lot of Muslims, Christians, Hindus. And among Hindus, as you know, there are a lot of different castes. Um we lived in a predominantly Brahman area. Um it's called *graman*, which means 'a village' pretty much, uh so there would be like a row of houses on either side and every, every, you know every gramman which is a village, is not big, it's just a street or two streets. That's what they call a village, it's not like a big area. So the village we lived in, typical Brahman village. It had, you know, like I said, two rows of homes facing each other, and then it's kind of like a, like a big u or something like a horseshoe. And in the end here, there will be a temple. Either a Shiva temple or a um Vishnu temple or whatever in the row. And then there were a lot of [inaudible 1 word] temples. So each village was kind of—the focal point was the temple, right in the center. And then on either side, there were homes, so that's the kind of village that I grew up in.

AK: And did you go to the temple frequently?

LP: No, I mean the temple was part of the thing. So we didn't make a point of going to the temple. We would go on occasions, or where there would be some big functions, or, or sometimes out of curiosity if something was going on. Sometimes you get free food there. So there were all kinds of reasons. [laughs] Sometimes we would go to look at who's wearing what if it's a big function, you know. Or sometimes, our parents would tell us 'today we gotta go to the temple, it's your birthday' whatever, you know. Um so it was not like a—you know

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like a thing where you felt so spiritual inside that you wanted to go to the temple. It never happened, you know. But it was part of our lives. So we would go whenever. And even when you walked to school, and this and that, you pass the temple, you know, you see the lamp, so it was not something that you had to make an effort, it was just there, so it became part of our lives, that's all, yeah.

BX: We're going to stop for a minute to check the recording and make sure that it's still working, so.

LP: You know I really didn't think much about it until my brother came to Canada. Uh, I told you we were 6 and I'm the fourth so my brother is quite a bit older than me. Um he came to do his PhD uh somewhere in Canada. And that was probably in the early '60s and um and he would send us pictures of the snow and so many things. So that's when I started forming some kind of a thing about the western countries. Until then um I was whatever I'd studied in school about different countries, United States was part of that. But other than that I didn't really have you know have any reason to think about it anymore than I would think about some other country. You know. But then my brother came and we would see the pictures and given that Canada is north of the United States and people would ask us 'Oh where is your brother, what does he do, you know, when does he get the snow, is there any summer, is there a sky?' So people would ask us—that's when I started thinking about it and I would you know tell them 'oh of course there is a sky' (laughs).

AK: Right, so did you ever have um—sometimes people have a certain mindset about the United States and then they actually move here and they find something different or maybe the same. Um, when you actually moved, how, how did your expectations compare to the actual—the reality of it?

LP: You know even though I knew a little bit about Canada because of my brother and then you know he had returned by the time I left. He returned after his PhD and um and, you know of course we would get some gifts occasionally and when he came he brought some things and at that age you're like so thrilled with those little necklaces and whatever else. Um I still didn't really think about the United States in any significant way or you know, try to compare Canada to the United States and you know, find out how it is different, how it is alike. I never did any of that so I didn't have any particular image in my mind. Probably because we never thought of migrating to the United States. By the time I'd gotten married, my husband is a physician and usually for physicians in India they look to London or Australia for higher trainings, you know like the whatever they [inaudible 2+ words] and all that. Those are the degrees you get in London and Australia. Also there are significant programs for physicians. So that's, for my husband, that was his interest, if at all, we go out, it would be to Australia or London so that's where, where his mind was. He never really thought of the United States in any way you know. So uh so, when I came here, I didn't have any image in my mind to compare, or.

BX: So how did you and your husband end up in America, you said he didn't plan to be here? So...

LP: that's right, he didn't plan to be here and it was them the '70s by then, it was the early '70s, um; he was looking to go and get some training like I said between Australia. In fact he was very serious about going to Australia and he had already applied and you know, all that and we were kind of thinking that—pretty much, you know people usually don't believe my story of how we ended up coming here. But now I that by that time there was a big shortage of professionals in the United States. Especially doctors and engineers you know and there are also in the late '60s opened up, you probably know this, opened up the immigration from the Asian countries with the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1960 or something. So then, until then, it was a quarter system for Asian people you know. They couldn't just come, um there was limits, so that had been lifted and then there was the shortage. Probably the shortage is the reason why they lifted that, you know that quota system and that opened up the immigration. And at that time they were obviously looking for doctors and engineers, I don't know. Um but the way it happened is my husband naturally has a lot of friends who are physicians and some of them had gone to London and some of them had already come here also, and one such friend was visiting madras, Chennai, um and my husband was having a casual conversation with him. I think he gave him a ride on a rainy evening and so that's how it started. He gave him a ride somewhere and then they were talking and he said 'Oh, I'm in Detroit and I'm doing this and this and this and there is a lot of need' and my husband must have told him about his plans to go to Australia whatever. So he said 'Oh, would you be interested in coming to the United States and you know, I think he said 'yeah sure why not' that kind of thing.

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And then, and then one day he gets a telegram from Wayne State University offering him a research position for ! which he had never applied and we didn't even know there was a Wayne State University in Detroit that was in ! existence. So that's how it happened, he got a telegram because this friend of his had to talk to his boss who ! was in charge of whatever research they were doing and he sent him a telegram at his word. So then all of ! sudden, it's like, 'hm is that something that we should look into?' So that's how we ended up coming to, to ! Detroit. !

BX: Oh, how much was the plane ticket here? Do you remember? !

LP: His father paid for it. (laughs) you know, I think it was uh you know it was around \$500 or something like ! that. It's a lot of money for it still. So he came first because the program started in January and we knew that Detroit would be snow filled in January, so he came first and three months in April. I came with the guys— ! with my two little boys. !

AK: So at this point how long had you been married? !

LP: ...we had married '68, '75, 4 years, four and a half years. !

AK: And going a little bit back before we um talk about your experience in America, how did you and your ! husband meet? !

LP: Well, it was uh you know my uncle knew his dad so, so they both talked and came, formed an initiative and ! then the families met and then we met. So arranged through the families. !

AK: So, um, did you—when you found out you were moving to the United States, did you feel nervous? !

LP: No.

AK: No?

LP: You know when you are young and you have no idea where you are going, ignorance is bliss. Definitely. I had no fear. I mean, we were young, and we thought okay, good. Yeah, I mean we were thinking about Australia already, so we thought, oh we can go and see what this place is like, stay for a little while and then come back. So it was not intimidating. I don't know if it was foolish or smart. Uh maybe at that age, you know, you were able to swallow such things and you know. Think about it as an adventure or a change. So I don't, I don't remember feeling intimidated at all, scared or anything. If I had known what I know now, that I would be here for so many years, and that you know I wouldn't be with my family, if I had known all that, I don't know how I would have felt. But our thinking was that we would go for three, four years and it would be fun. And then we would come back with a lot of stories to tell, nice things, Cornish dishes, and some money. So it was like something—sounded like oh sure, why not.

AK: An adventure?

LP: Eh kind of an adventure, and to get some experience, and buy some nice things from there, and throw nice dinner parties when we come back because my brother had come back from Canada by that time so I had seen some of the things that he'd brought and said oh, I can go and buy the same things and it'd be nice to put it out on the table and invite people and those kinds of things, you know, so, silly, but it was no more that.

BX: Oh, did you speak English well by this point?

LP: Yeah, I had finished my college and in India, people speak English you know anyway at workplaces and things like that and we had friends with whom we would speak because for example, I knew only these two languages: Tamil and Malayalam and when I got married I came to Chennai, Madras. In those days it was Madras, not it is Chennai, um my husband had a lot of friends who didn't speak any of these languages so you

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speak in English. So English, I probably wasn't as fluent but could manage. Yeah.

AK: And what did you study in college?

LP: I did English literature, for my college—see in college, see, until then I was studying in the medium Malayalam, the everything was taught in Malayalam except English of course. English was the second language. Then when I came to college, everything was in English so the whole curriculum was taught in English. So that was another switch so you go from studying everything in Malayalam to learning everything in English. But I think in those days, we all did that, I'm not sure how we got used to it but that's how it was. Very few people went to English medium. I mean if you wanted to send somebody to an English medium school, they would pick a convent. So they would say 'oh, I'm convent educated' so it was like a, you know, a thing. I didn't go to a regular school; I went to an English medium or a convent or something like that where everything was taught like here, in English. That's where some special people, most people, went to. Whatever schools were available there, they'd, they would go.

AK: And what made you decide to study English literature?

LP: I always had an interest in the English language you know. My father, I told you, was a professor and he had um you know he had um I don't know he had a liking for languages especially English language. And he would talk to us about the, you know, about the pithiness of the language with twenty-six alphabets. He would tell me 'god, they can you know write warranties.' I mean things like that warranties you know, or uh probably was not the right example. But you know, how they could convey everything and, and the typewriter is so small whereas in Tamil and Malayalam, they have like you know, the typewriters in those days had to be, seven rows of things, if there was a typewriter I don't know. So, he would talk about how wonderful the language is and how you can express it you know with so many little alphabets. He would read Life Magazine in those days and you know he would try to translate things for us, from there. Translate—he would tell us what he read and try to tell us about the article you know about the article, or about the event or something. And then the newspapers were in English, he always got the English language newspaper and then he would show us some interesting news, and you know, he would read it to us, or he would tell me to read out loud. So there was always that interaction in our house, so, so I had developed some kind of a liking to the language, so it was a natural choice for me. It was my first choice.

BX: Oh okay, so after you moved to the United States, did you find like a community to belong to in Detroit? Were there other Indian Americans there?

LP: There were, um but they had just begun the migration process, so I think people had started coming in the late '60s, early '70s, so that's when they were coming in. So there was, of course, some people there. Definitely doctors because we lived in a, in an apartment arranged for us, by then, you know, the university where all the doctors and nurses stayed. Um so, we met a lot of doctors like us in the building so that was our community. Um we didn't know many people beyond that, uh but there was a small community, that's what I'm saying. Most of them were like us, some of them were younger, some of them are older, but most of them, you know they had come just before us or about the same time that we came. And many people came after us too so, so we were part of that group. And luckily there were some people that my husband knew from his medical school, so there were a few people that we knew already from his college days so that helped.

AK: So what were your first couple of years like in the United States? Um was there kind of a shift between one lifestyle to another?

LP: You know, again, you know, being young and, and new to the country, I came in April, it was pretty cold even then, I remember um I remember looking down at the escalator and thinking 'hm, how am I going to go down this with a baby sleeping on my shoulders, my little baby, my second son.' You know uh so I was trying to you know how do I step, do I let go of him, do I let go of me, where do I hold. (laughs) But I made it, that's thing again, took me but a split second and then was going down the escalator. Nobody had to hold my hand, nobody had to tell me, thinking back, I'm you know I'm thinking jeez, it's just you know these are events you

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don't even think of. Now when somebody comes, I tell them hold on, and make sure you lift up your sari, if they are wearing a sari because it can get caught in the groove. Um it has happened to one of my friends. Right when I realized, I thought, I was foolish to hold on to my baby while wearing a sari, go on the escalator without holding on to the railing or lifting up my sari a little bit. Something could have happened, but you know I came through. Just a small example of you know of, um you know, just some of the things that you know I did. Um, I was busy, I had these few friends and uh everybody came to educate me.

The first thing, my friends took me shopping and they brought me you know western clothes, immediately within a week. They told me you have to buy some slacks and shirts, you have to buy some clothes for the home, and some nightgowns and whatever, some shoes. Because I was wearing the open things from India. You know I had one closed shoe because someone told me in April, it'll be cold. But then I hated it because it was it was pinching me the whole time I was wearing it on the plane. God (laughs). So I was thinking you know I will never, ever wear closed shoes in my lifetime. But my friends told me no, you have to buy some comfortable covered shoes and socks. And so the first week, it was me shopping for my kids, you know for them too, it was same thing, warm clothes, and proper shoes and things like that, so that's the kind of thing that happened. And um we didn't have a car, so our friends would come every other weekend and we would go with them to different places, mainly shopping, I remember spending a lot of time in K-Mart, Kresge, and Woolworth, those were the stores there in Detroit area. Um, I don't feel, you know feeling traumatized or lonely, or anything, um it would hit me sometimes once my husband started working, I mean he was already working but then, you know, for a few days, we were paying attention to the things that we needed, but then he would go off to work and all my friends would only come on Friday, Saturday, Sunday. So Monday to Thursday, Monday to Friday, I'm dealing with these two little boys and myself. And uh so in one way it was good, I didn't have time to feel homesick and things like that. Because I was again busy, I would go down, because we were in a building like a thirteen, fourteen-story building. I would take them down to the, the lobby area, there is this people in the front, you know the security person, the lady in the front and they would run around in the hallways and they would talk to me. And I would have to think about, you know, what are they asking me because it was very difficult for me to understand them, I thought they had an accent, you know, and they thought I had an accent. I mean I thought jeez what kind of English are they speaking, you know? (laughs)

So I, I would write home saying everybody here has an accent. You know. Their words are so mumbled and jumbled and it's hard to understand. And I told my husband I don't want to call them on the phone if something goes wrong in the apartment. For example, you know I would go down and my husband would tell me you can pick up the phone and call the super-supervisor or whatever. I said no, it's better in person because she doesn't understand me, you know she has an accent and it's not clear enough for me. And obviously she is not understanding me either, so I would go down and talk to them. And, and you know those kinds of things happened so I had to take some time to place myself, how to communicate because I was the one who was communicating with them most of the time. So all that took my time and then I would go for a walk outside the apartment and the kids and go to the playground, meet people. So that's how the first few months were and then I would walk to the ANP, but some groceries and stuff and in downtown Detroit, I was doing that in those days with my long hair and two little kids so.

BX: Um, in—

LP: I hope I'm answering your question, please stop me if you want me to—ask anything specific.

BX: Um, I had a question in an article you write, "Voices of the Pioneers", you wrote about how um women should have skills and independence to survive like without their husbands all the time. Did you feel like you had the independence necessary to like I don't know, take care of your children and your...?

LP: You mean at the time?

BX: Mm-hm.

LP: I don't think I had at the time, but I never thought about it because again at that age it never occurred to me

that something could have happened to either one of us, and then what do we do with the kids. It never crossed my mind. You know, and again it probably has to do with the youth and thinking that 'okay we're here for a temporary stay'. Two, three years and we'll go back, and you know. You know, so I didn't think of those things because I was a visitor here, you know I was not someone who's going to stay here for long. You know, but later I started thinking about it because I started living here and then you know I started interacting with people and then I found out what would happen because even amongst ourselves in this small group that were my friends in the '70s, the people in the building, you know, we became friends because we were in the same building, or we were doing the same profession, so that's how we became friends. Um, so it's not like friends you seek out, it's just we were friends by default in a sense. You know, um so some of them had trouble even then.

I remember one lady who would come and sit in my apartment all the time. You know, she was in another floor, I don't remember, 13th floor or 14th floor. But every day she would sit in my apartment, play with my kids and we would talk. And she didn't have any children at the time and she wouldn't go home until 8 or 9 o'clock at night. And it's just upstairs right, so I would think hey why isn't she going home, her husband should be home by now and you know, and sometimes she would say you know he's on call, he's not going to come home all night. He would only come tomorrow. So some days she would give an explanation, some days she would just sit and even after my husband came home, you know, see that's another thing, we never felt that somebody was intruding or anything, we would just—we would take it whichever way it is, you know, she would stay, to dinner time and she would eat with us, whatever I made. She would play with my kids like I said or help me in the kitchen you know. It was not someone that I went and made friends, she became friends like that because she knew I was at home with two kids and she'd knock on the door, say 'hi', it's like a neighborly thing to do, and then it kind of slowly turns into a friendship whether you want it or not.

And in those days, I never felt why is she here, you know, do I even want to be her friend, you know? I didn't think like that, it was fine with me, anybody who would come like that. We would feed them and we would sit and talk. So she, to finish her story, she would come, like that, many days a week, she would come and stay long and go until nine or ten, when we were ready to go to bed, you know, because we were in a small one bedroom apartment and then she would come again in the morning and after some time, she probably felt that how long would we believe that every time she's staying late, her husband is on call and every—we knew, we were working in the same profession, at least one night a week you would be off or one weekend, you would get off right. Um so then one day, she broke down and told me that, that, that there was no marriage, because he was having an affair with a nurse and many nights she didn't go home, because he would be there with her. And it was so difficult for her to confront him, they were young, too, they had just migrated; she didn't know where to go, what to do. At the same time, you know, she felt staying in my house as long as possible was her answer. You know, and she tried to, not to disclose it for a long time, and...but after some time, you know, when she thought that we friends, or I don't know, maybe she couldn't hold it in anymore whatever she said this is what's happening, I don't know what to do, you know, when I talk to him about it, he says 'if you don't like it, you can leave', and where do I go, you know? So, so, so those kinds of things we started hearing even then, you know so probably those things were subconsciously in my mind, at some point I wanted to do something to empower our woman and talk about independence and what you do when the worst thing happens. So...

AK: Did your husband have any expectations for you, did he want you to work, or did he want to stay at home?

LP: No, he wanted me to do whatever I wanted, but he always encouraged me to go out and do something and to develop myself and, you know, whichever way I wanted to develop. Uh but he was extremely busy, that couldn't be changed, [laughs] so and then, yeah, he, he, he would have been fine with it, but the thing is I have to solve all the equations by myself, what do I do with my kids, you know what to I do, where do I go, when is a good time. All that was on my shoulders because he was not in any position to help me because he was in a program where he had to work, and if he was off, yes I could rely on him, but then I couldn't rely on him on a, on a regular basis where we could work out a deal, that okay I'm off this day, and we could do something. It was never like that and during that time, he was also studying for his licensing exam because you know you have to pass this exam before you practice as a physician because he was doing research, he came as a researcher, you know, so, so many things were going on, so it was on my shoulders for me taking care of these

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two kids, it was all I could do at the time, and you know finding preschool for them and all, but even then I made connections with the outside community.

There was this uh I don't remember how we met them—there was this uh some...wives, international wives in Detroit, someone told me about it and you know, I, you know would go into those meeting and you meet all kinds of women there, not just you know Indian women. It's called International. And uh there was another British lady somewhere and she told me about it, and she would pick me up and you could go there with your kids, there was babysitting, and they would have a program, somebody there would be a speaker. They would talk about different things, and they would have a potluck lunch and that would happen once a month or something. So I would find ways where I could go and learn something about the community you know, and with some of these people like that, I would go, there would be trip to the zoo, picnic somewhere; so I did some of those things, but I couldn't do anything, you know, significant with my life until a few years later when I went back to college. I think it was when—after we moved from Detroit to Flint where my husband started his residency, I started going to college in the evening.

AK: So can you tell us a little bit about moving away from Detroit—Detroit? You said your husband started a residency um—was that his original plan?

LP: No, it was not his original plan, again, like I said you know, we came to this job and, you know, um he had a boss in Wayne State, he also happened to be—he was the head of uh the surgical department—he happened to be from Goa, married to a, to a white woman and he'd been there obviously some years because he was the chief. To get to that level, you know, you know it takes years to get there. Um and he was a very wonderful man and he obviously helped a lot of new immigrants and he told my husband to look for a residency program and to get the training you know at least whether—even if he wanted to abroad, he said to do that, you know. Because he said if you want to come back, you will have to do the residency anyway, so now that you're here, it's better to finish and then he also you know, in those days it was easy. He also suggested that we apply for a green card and—through Wayne State. So we applied for a green card, we got it so quickly you know. So those were the two reasons, why we got the green card within a year or something, I don't remember. But it was not like now.

He did those things. In one sense it was good, in one sense if it hadn't happened, we would have gone back, uh so then he did he residency, and we moved to Flint. So now you could have know that you are here for at least three, four years because surgical residency takes that long, you know. So my kids were in preschool and I wanted to do something, so I did Early Childhood Education from night school in a community college. And then I was thinking we would still go back, so I wanted to do early childhood education, because it was an upcoming field in India. You know people were doing you know um—the two income families were you know becoming more of you know acceptable—so people were looking for daycare and evening care for their kids so the daycare centers, they called them crutch or something, they were coming out. Until then, you never hear of daycare and after school and all that, you know. Either the parents take care of them or the grandmother or somebody if you have something to do, some family members will take care of your child or you leave them with a neighbor or somebody, you know you didn't have a structured day care, in those days in India. So it was coming out, so I thought 'oh early childhood education would be good', so when I go back, then I could do something in that field. So I did that, even then I had that in my mind, in the back of my mind. Uh so I did early childhood education. And we would buy things only that would fit in a suitcase. My son would pick a big ball, say 'Mom, I want this ball', I would tell him 'No that won't go in a suitcase, you have to pick a small ball because we are going back'. You know, so that's how the thinking was even then, for several years.

BX: Is that why you accepted the job—you said it had very low pay in your survey, um did you accept the job despite the low pay because you were hoping to get trained when you go back to India?

LP: Yeah, you know mine was in a Jewish preschool. Isn't that what I said, I think I...?

BX: Yeah.

LP: Yeah, I did that and I was doing the early childhood thing anyway, so that fit in and I would get some

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experience. And you know it also fit in, another reason is that—it, it was helpful to me that I would be home by the time my children would get home. So that was important because I couldn't take up a full time job because again, like I said, I couldn't use my husband to you know back me up that way because his hours were erratic, you know, even on days he said he would come home early, he never came home early because something would happen at the hospital. And he would call and say sorry, I cannot come home so I couldn't rely on him, so I had to do something that was within my framework where I knew what time I would come home. So, that's why I took that job, and you know actually in daycare the pay is not that much. And I didn't have any of the skills to get—I could have worked in department stores and things like that but you know it wouldn't work with my lifestyle so I...

AK: And what was it like being Indian and then working in a Jewish school?

LP: You know, I cannot think of any problem per se, you know. I was qualified and uh and the lady—the head of the center was uh was a, you know, Jewish woman. I don't know why, she was very kind to me, um there are the two other people working there and they would tell me it because—they wouldn't know this—it's because she's a doctor's wife, you're a doctor's wife, she says you how she sees herself in her younger days. They would tell me that, I didn't know, they must have felt something, you know, the way that she treated me. And probably she saw me as an upcoming person who could take over or something, I don't know what it was. Uh also the, the surroundings was good for me. I worked hard, and you know, I learned everything, and I learned to make Jewish dishes, because that's what the children would do; they would celebrate Hanukkah and this and that. And so you know, you make latke and apple sauce and whatever you know dishes. Um you know. So, so I took part in everything; it was a learning experience for me, and after that, then it's strange because afterwards, I would hear a lot of Indian people tell 'oh our cultures are very similar with the Jewish people', you know, because of course the culture of the Jewish people again, you know, poorly mobile, very focused on education, very strict family structure, the mother has a very you know important you know—the mother has a very strong role. All that I related, but at that time I didn't know, it just happened to be there.

BX: Um, do you have any more questions about Michigan in general?

AK: Um, you also lived in one other city in Michigan?

LP: Yes, so I then after my husband finished his, his uh residency program, uh you know, for practice we moved to a small town: Sandusky, Michigan. A lot of people don't even know that. They all think of Sandusky, Ohio because that's a bigger town and they have this Cedar Point, this big amusement park. So they say oh you live in Sandusky, fun fun! Because they think [laughs] of Cedar Point. So between Michigan and Ohio. You know, the summertime. But this is Sandusky, Michigan, in the thumb area, so it's a small town, you know again, shortage of doctors. They sought him out. Those uh board, from the hospital board, uh people came; two or three people came to talk to him. I don't know how—probably they get the list of people who are finishing up their residencies from different hospitals. I don't know how they found out who's eligible. They must have a system you know, um and then they enroll these people who are finished up their residencies and looking for a place to practice. They must have contacted them and he was one of them, I don't know, I'm just guessing this you know. Um oh, one of the reasons is that there was another resident. He was from Iran, and he was again married to a, to a nurse, an American, white nurse. His—her parents were in Sandusky, Michigan, and they were on the board. Her father was on the board. Yeah that's another reason why—so this Iranian co-resident told my husband about, you know 'my, my father in law is no the board of this hospital in Sandusky and he's looking for you know, for a practitioner,' so the idea may have come through that channel, also, probably both. So they, then my husband talked to them and they came to see us and we went to visit them and then they didn't have any surgeon, the surgeon was coming from twenty, thirty miles away from another town. There were a lot of little towns like Bad Axe, there was town called Bad Axe, and you know, funny names, like you know. Um so Sandusky didn't have its own surgeon, but it had a hospital. So we thought we would go to a place where there is a need. We were the first brown people to enter this—to enter the town. You know it's a very pure white place, they didn't even have African Americans there, so we were like the new show in town or something (laughs).

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AK: Other people were nice to you, or?

LP: Very nice, extremely nice. Small town people, that's one thing, you know. And of course they needed a doctor too, you know, so they were very nice and uh like I said, these people from the board came to talk to us and you know we were wondering about children's education at the time, and you know, about them having other outlets. Like whatever they wanted to do: tennis or piano, or whatever you think of, baseball, whatever for your kids. And they were saying we have all that. You know, your children can try everything and they were trying to impress us with all the facilities in their little town, we have a tennis court and we have a golf course and we have good piano teachers. And we have good schools um and then you know we were vegetarians right. So they said we have restaurants, even in Flint and Detroit, in those days it was hard to find vegetarian food you know, to eat, other than salad. Ah hm. (laughs) So they, when they took us, they took us—when we went to visit them, you know, they were showing us the town, and then they took us to dinner to a little country club there, there was a little golf course and country club and all that. And they arranged for a dinner there for us, and, and, they were telling us, you'll find something vegetarian in our town, no problem. The whole time, she was, you know, this, this husband and wife were taking us to the country club in their car, you know, the car, I was smelling something. You know, but I was telling them, 'God, it smells so nice here.' 'So it's the air, you know, that you're seeing.' Sure enough, they had made us a spinach quiche, without any meat or anything. It was so nice. You know, we had a nice dinner.

Um, and then we decided to go there, and we had fun, the people were really nice. Even if I invite other people from Detroit, my old friends, my neighbor would bring me a dish and say 'I know you are having a party, here is a dish, so you don't have to work so hard and take it. Have fun!' You know, this is [inaudible 1 word] they didn't say, you are not inviting me, I am not, why should I—it was not like that. They'll say, oh, have fun with your friends, you know, enjoy the whatever casserole, or bread, or something they had baked and brought to us. It was very, very nice, and we were there for 2 years, and we were in the newspaper all the time, the new doctor family has moved in. And then I was part of the bridge club, and I should've learned bridge, it was so difficult for me. (laughs) You know, all of that. And then after about two, two and a half years, we just decided to move to a bigger, bigger city. And that's why we moved to Texas. That's another story—and, and they gave us a party when we were going to leave. Um, and then, then she told me that she made the casserole from home. And she had it in the car! (laughs) And she then, you know, the country club, because they had so much influence, allowed them to bring a dish and serve it! Just for our table! (laughs) So, so that's how they tried to impress us.

AK: So, why did you um want to leave the small town and go to a bigger city?

LP: It was really a bittersweet kind of decision. You know we were part of the community, and ...I was getting involved in the school system and things like that. Um (clears throat) but we felt that the children needed a little bit more exposure. There was only—for example—one school, there was only one elementary school, one middle school, one high school. And there probably were small private schools, I don't remember, but if it was, it was like a Catholic school or something, you know. Uh um. Not that I didn't really want to send them to a private school, but we wanted some options. So we thought it would be good to move, that's the reason.

BX: You said on your survey that you moved here because it was diverse, and also because of the oil boom.

(**LP:** Yeah.) Were those things still true, like, once you started living here, did you find more diverse neighborhoods?

LP: It is more diverse, of course, Houston is you know, Houston is fourth largest or whatever, and the diversity is definitely there. But I don't know, the boom became a bust (**BX:** yeah). If you were, if you know the history of Texas, when we bought this house, the interest rate was like fifteen, sixteen percent, at the time. That's how it was (laughs). And we refinanced it several times after that and got I don't know, six or seven percent, something like that. You know how the real estate market is, it never went back to that that level.

But so... That's why we were actually thinking of going back to Detroit, because we have a lot of friends there, and we didn't think of leaving Michigan. But then it some of those Michigan friends who told us, you know, Michigan was not doing well, with the auto industry, you know, all those things that were happening here, the

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gas prices were going up and people were clambering for small cars, you know. Detroit was making these big, ! big Cadillacs, you know, um. So some of our friends said, if you want to go, why don't you pick up a place that is, enough diversity, and enough growth, and you know...so that was a good advice to think of long-term, you ! know. (BX: Yeah) So that's how we ended up coming here. And that time, Texas was booming. But then, we ! should've waited a couple of years and then we could've bought a house much cheaper. So... !

AK: So did you buy this house—um this was the first house you bought? !

LP: Yes, we bought this house in 1981. We were renting a house for some time. We came and you know we ! rented a house you know, (clears throat) and then this is the first house we bought. !

BX: It's lovely! !

LP: (laughs) It is a lovely house, yeah, but (laughs) this is, this is not a house where, after thirty years, you can ! expect to make some money out of this. We've been here almost thirty years now. !

AK: And do you remember how much it cost when you bought it? !

LP: Yeah, it was in the, it was in the ... Little less than 200,000 at the time? It was just being built at the time. It ! was not already built, because the neighborhood was all, you know, developing, so this was the house that was, ! you know, the structure was up. So we, we were, you know, going around with the realtor, and then we looked ! through you know, the, the glass door in the front, we kind of like it, we could see the creek in the back, and, ! you know, so we liked that, you know, the creek, and the feel of the place, you know the golf courses and stuff. ! So, so then we made an appointment to see it—so we did a lot of the things inside the house. But, already the ! plan was by the builder, you know. And we liked it, and he made some other changes that he wanted, that we wanted for our, you know, our needs. So it's like half our thing and half already—so we didn't build it from ! scratch, but we could do lots of things in—interior. Decoration. !

AK: And was there a particular reason you moved to Missouri City? !

LP: Again, you know, we came we, we, we visited Houston from Michigan twice, (clears throat) before we ! thought of moving here, um, and mainly we were thinking where, where are the good schools? That was our ! thing, and, and, some of our friends were already here, in Fort Bend, and we understood that Fort Bend schools ! were good schools. So we were—that was the only thing we were looking at, because my husband could develop ! a practice in any number of places, out west, or in Clear Lake, Fort Bend, in Spring—you know. Um, but a lot of ! aliens here in Houston, in West Houston, Memorial, Meyerland, all those places were good options for him. Uh, ! but we didn't know about the school system, no. So, we thought, okay, Fort Bend schools are good, we'll start ! there, because the children were already in elementary school, so... !

BX: Speaking of your children, how do you incorporate your culture when you're teaching your kids? Or when ! you were raising your kids? Did you expose them to your influences from home, or teach them the language...? !

LP: One mistake we made was not teaching them the language, but the pitfall of the first generation. First- ! generation, I mean people like us who came, you know, as adults. Because when I first came to this country, ! everybody was in the same boat. All of us—there was nobody above me—they may have come two, three ! years before me, but it was not like they were the experts who had been here, and who have raised their family. ! They didn't know much more than we did. And maybe people told me to start talking to them in English—my ! chil— my son was talking in Tamil, quite a bit, because he was couple of years old when he came. Um so he ! was—he didn't really—you know, Tamil was fluent. You know, and he, you know, he remembered the ! language, he was speaking the language. And if I had left it at that, he would've been good at it and still learned ! English from school. I don't think it would have been you know—you know, it would have affected him in any ! way. His English you know, proficiency or anything. !

A lot of people told me, oh, if (?) has to go to preschool, and you have to leave him with the babysitter some !

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time, if he doesn't know any English, you know it would be very difficult to start talking to him in—I mean, if you didn't—you start talking to him in English at home, and and, to do that. And back home, my father had done that with us. That's different you know, and, and I didn't know at that time. Because we were already—we were in a place where I was learning my language and my father would say once a week we are speaking in English. 'Today everything is in English, you cannot talk to me in Tamil or Malayalam.' And that's how he kind of made us comfortable in speaking in English. You know? So I had that. You know, one day, if I went to go tell him something in Tamil he would say 'No, I won't answer you, you have to ask me that in English' you know? So I, I thought, okay, maybe I should train them in English, and I started talking to them in English, with the result that the two-year-old, he forgot! You know, the Tamil, because—because—and there were not too many people who spoke Tamil—we are Indian people, but you know there are Gujaratis, and Marathis, and Punjabis and Keralites. Many of them are not speaking Tamil, so I didn't have the community there. If I didn't speak somebody else will be speaking; in India, you know, you have that. You know. So, so, with the result, that they lost their native ability to speak in their native language, and that's the mistake we made. And now that the generations are all coming later on, like my niece, who is here, you know, she came many years after me, and her daughter is graduating now, this year she is graduating from high school, um, my niece's daughter. She, she is fluent in Tamil. You know, and she was born here; probably you speak your language, I don't know, you know, (AK: I do) and you see? So for the later generations it was a no brainer, but for us, we didn't know. But we tried to inculcate them our cultural things. But again, they paid the, the price for it, being the children of the first generation.

Uh we didn't have any support system here, whatever we wanted, we had to start. For example, we had to start a school ehh—you know if they if we wanted them to learn about our religion, our culture, we had to start something, on a Sunday school basis, where you teach them about your culture, you know, um, mythologies, and really just mythologies, and even the language, you know? Now, there are full-fledged schools, you know whether you want to learn any language, India has all fourteen major languages and several dialects, and you can learn any of them! Here, along with the—with the help of a Sunday school. There are structure schools now. If you want to go to a religious school, yes you can learn any number of things. You know? But it wasn't there, and we had to start it, and because we were starting it, there were a lot of pitfalls, and the children were very few.

You know my children would, we would drag them down, on a Sunday, and they would say 'We are the only two here, you said there would be eight kids, where are the other six of them?' You know? (laughs) They didn't try, because it was not interesting enough for them, you know? Um, because that they you know um, and because they come from a long distance—the community was not close enough. Somebody had to come from Spring, somebody had to come from Clear Lake, somebody had to come from some other place, and they didn't make it, or they may not make it, yeah. So now there are hundreds and hundreds of children. So if six of them are missing, it's no big deal. That time I remember there were only ten children, and if six are missing the others lose interest too. You know? So for the result that, that you know they didn't get as good of an education as they could've gotten, but then I wouldn't think they were worse off for it, they learned it on their own. They were curious, and if you are curious you read books and my children were into books. Because, and, and, they had friends, who are from other faiths, you know they had, they would go to, to you know—especially when we were in Sandusky, we would go to the church, they would invite us for you know Christmas service, or you know, whatever, you know, or what is that? Easter service and all that—and we would just go, we would just take our kids and go. We were open to, to you know, them to learning you know, whatever that community had to offer.

And so they had that, and then their you know, their children were from all, definitely from, most of their friends were American kids, you know. So that made them curious enough to learn about their, you know, their own culture, and religion. And, and uh *and* after some time after they went to public school here in Fort Bend, that's another thing. For high school we ended up sending them to private schools. Because Fort Bend had only Dallas High School, I think, at the time, and it was getting very crowded; now there are so many schools. You know, Fort Bend has grown. You said your mom went to Dallas School. And Dallas High School was, was very crowded school, and I was a little concerned about my children you know, fitting in, or getting overlooked, and things like that. Maybe it was a...you know, it was a concern that didn't have to be a concern, 'cause a lot of my

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friends' children went to Dallas school, and they all did well too. You know, maybe that would've been a good thing for them, to fight it out, and you know, go to that public school, but we were a little protective, and ended up sending both of them—one went to St. Thomas, one went to Strake. Both were religious schools, you know. Um, I mean, Christian schools. That also made them more aware of their own culture that they would read about, about you know, other religions: Hinduism, Islam, whatever. And they were able to do comparative little-little papers you know, in those days. You know, about, you know, what is it about my religion and culture that helps me, and you know, or versus you know where I am going to school. And they, they—I think they came off good, well-rounded individuals and they were also mingling with all kinds of people, not just from Indian community people. Because, again, it was limited, and they had to make friends outside of our communities.

Now I hear, I don't know, now you could tell me more about it, you went to school here, now I hear from my younger friends, who have children in school in Fort Bend that all the Chinese students sit at a table and eat their noodles, and the Indian kids sit there and eat their chapatis, and the Hispanic children sit in a table and have their you know, tortillas; and there is you know because—it is diverse, there are enough children from each community that they don't even have to mingle with each other. When my children were growing up I only gave them peanut butter sandwich for lunch, because they would say, 'Mom, we don't want to take anything that will stink up the place, and because my children you know my 'my friends would ask us questions''—sometimes I tell them: 'Take chapati today' or take some rice, whatever, you know, and then they say 'nahh, it will stink, and my, my friends will ask me, and sometimes they'll make fun'—they are conscious of that, you know. So they wanted to take things...that would be—and they were vegetarians, so it was always peanut butter sandwich every single day. (laugh) So...

BX: No jelly? (laughs)

LP: Yes, there's jelly! (laughs) Peanut butter and jelly (laughs), and cheese. And little fruits. Um, um, so I don't know, you know. It had its pros and cons.

AK: So you're saying how today, Chi—different ethnic groups sit with each other, did you find that your children mostly made friends with other Indians, or they, they were-

LP: They were all—they had friends from everywhere, you know, at school, you know, especially going to these private schools, the most of their friends were you know, from the American society. You know, Anglo, you know, mostly white, Americans. They might've been from other countries, I don't know, but you know, mostly, um, children from you know, who have been here many generations. Um, and then through their you know, their friends you know, uh, friends circle and all, and on weekends and things like that, they had friends from our communities, but still, it was limited, and they had a close group of friends, you know. In a way, you still go back to those close-knit groups, because we didn't have you know, hundreds of families. We were like maybe twenty, thirty families. It grew, over, over time. You know. But still in those days it was twenty, thirty families, we would get together for our own functions, you know Diwali, and what else we would celebrate, we would. So that, they had friends too. But in some sense, they, they, um, you know...you know they may have missed out, because your school friends are your closest friends, and they didn't have any you know, their own group of people in schools. You know, that had to happen out on the weekends, with their other friends. And that kind of friendship you know, you know, if it lasts it lasts, you know, otherwise, after you've outgrown it, you don't remember who these kids are. So...

BX: Did you ever revisit India?

LP: Yeah, we always visited India on a regular basis, every year, and we still do.

BX: Oh, okay. Um.

LP: And we have taken our children to India, for summer I would take them, at least part of the summer, you know, they are spending in India every year, so that also helped. I'm sure, in, you know. And making up for some other you know things that were missing. Now you don't even have to go to India, you can learn anything

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you want to learn here right here. That's what they say, I don't know.

AK: So um can you describe your entering into family therapy; you got your Master's degree?

LP: Yeah (clears throat) True. Um, I started that here, um, in Houston, um, and after doing my early childhood education I, you know, I worked in daycares and even in, you know, preschools. Even in Sandusky. But once I came here, then again I got caught up in, you know, you know, with going back to my duties as a wife, as a mother, because, again, we were back to square one in the sense that he was starting his career here as a practitioner, and you know, with the schools, and we bought this house, and um, my in-laws visited at the time, for the first time. You know, they hadn't come here at all. So um, um, um, so I was not paying attention to my career. I did substitute in Fort Bend schools. You know, I did that. On and off, I would do that, because I wanted to stay in touch with the, with the, with the education field, you know. So other than that, I didn't have a whole lot of time to do much.

And then after they came to high school, and started writing and stuff, that's when I thought oh okay, I want to go back to my teaching, and my intention was to get my teacher's certification and become a teacher. And then when I looked at it, you know, here in Texas, a couple of things came up that, uh, you know, I had passed the ten-year mark or something, I'm not sure. That if you haven't been teaching for ten years something you have to redo some of the things, I'm not sure. Some impediments came up. That I had to redo some of the courses. Before I could've taken my certification course. Which still would've taken me a couple of years, it's four-year thing, education, and I had only done two years. So, anyways, I, I somehow thought it would be more than what I wanted to do, then I started looking at other programs, and that's when I looked at the Master's family therapy program in Clear Lake. Then I thought if I have to go back to school, why not just do a Master's program. And all through the years I had you know, I had helped friends unofficially, I had faced a lot of problems, you know with ourselves, in navigating my own life, you know, with you know, with my children and my own family, and my friends' circle, we have talked—you know, we have seen several people having a lot of problems, and issues, and at that time it was our, you know, if you get some help unofficially with a good friend or somebody, it's fine, if not, there is no help, you know. You just you know take the brunt of it and try to deal with it. So we have seen that, and it was always on the back of my mind, that how we really need a forum to address some of these things, so I thought, psychology family therapy would be a good avenue for me. So, so, it really attracted me at that time in my life. I thought it was the right time. So I went into that, and at the same time, I started this organization, DAYA, but by the time I finished you know, we were talking about starting something for South Asian women, who are undergoing marital issues.

AK: So you started DAYA after your Master's?

LP: Yes, but by the time I finished, you know, this idea was brewing. I ah I think I started my schooling in 1990. You know, full-fledged. And it it's a three year program, you know, and by the time I finished it was '93 or something, '93, '94, we had already started talking about doing something, through the doctors, we are an Indian's doctor's club, at that time, because the doctors were having this working group, and where we would meet spouses, and so we had some spousal programs at the time, unofficially, and then somebody was talking about starting an auxiliary of the Indian doctors' club, um, so (clears throat) somehow I got pulled into that. Um. Because I was not attending any of these things because I was really busy with my, with my Master's program. Took up a lot of my time. That's when my husband understood. What it was like for me, the last few years, (laughs) because he has a little bit free, and you know the children have grown, and he was in a practice, and you know some weekends he won't be on call, and he would tell me, oh you want to do something this weekend, I'd tell him no, I have a big paper to write or I have a big project, I cannot go anywhere, why don't you go. (laughs) You know, so, he said, 'ohhh, this is how you [inaudible 1 word]' (laughs).

So anyway, um—where was I? Yeah, so I was not getting involved in many other things. I actually—socially I was really cutting down, you know, at that time, when I was in college. But then the auxiliary somehow, uh you know, [inaudible 2 words] had a meeting(?), I don't know how, and then they were talking about doing a project with the auxiliary, I cannot, you know, I told them if, if it, if it can be a...social significance. Something of a community service type thing. I would participate—I don't want a social club. Just to meet and talk and learn

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[inaudible 1 word]. No, not that there's anything wrong with it—but, I said, I'm, you know I'm not in that you know, in that frame of mind, at the time. I had done it, already. So it might be fine for other people so I told them that if some others have to get involved, then that it's—there's something beyond ourselves. So then we started to look into what—what is it that we need to do, you know for our South Asians, or Indians, whatever. You know, at that time, we were thinking Indians. But you know, we were not—I mean, we were open to, you know, helping the communities too, because a lot of us were in the same boat. So when we looked at what cause that we could take up that would help our families and women especially, then we realized that family violence is an issue that hasn't been addressed at all. Uh we talked to some women centers in the area, they haven't heard from any South Asian, maybe occasionally once in, I don't know, once in a while, maybe a phone call or something, but there was no significant client or number they could give us, they said, 'oh we have served so many people from India, so many people from Pakistan.'

So, so that was a little bit surprising, because personally, every one of us knew some of our friends were going through it or some of our acquaintances were going through. And like I said, at that time, the more, you know the Indian population was increasing, like you said your father or your grandfather brought his families, brothers, and sisters. So like that many of us were bringing our own families, siblings and you know all that. And they were growing here. Their children will grow. So the population was increasing. You know, in many different ways, but then no issue was being addressed. It's like you know there was this—still this feeling of the first generation, the doctors, engineers, crème de la crème, you know cream of the crop, or crop or whatever, you know. This model minority, everybody's educated. In ten years, they'll make it, they get a good job, they become professors and they get good jobs with Exxon Mobil and you know Shell. Or they start a surgical practice and make it, you know. That's how the [inaudible 1 word] was and they didn't know that there were a lot of others, going into regular jobs, just getting a degree, just barely making it. Opening up gas stations, and you know, opening up stores, um there was that too. And they were going in many different ways, and not everybody was crème de la crème, you know. Um and, and the, naturally, you know whatever the mainstream community was facing, any of the issues was facing us too.

You know, when I first came here, in the '70s, it was all about the feminist issues. You know, and all, you know—but that's when I came in this country, looking back, you know, I would see, see them on TV and things like that. The women were fighting for their rights. You know, family violence and all of that were not an issue in this country in the '70s. You know, people were not hearing them. It was not a crime. And uh eh you know and uh many of the judges have [inaudible 2+ words], that you know, close the bedroom door and work it out. [inaudible 5+ words], you know. So it was like that in the '70s in this country, too. So you know uh [inaudible 2+ words] some of that. And you know, and I went into this course, you know we would have, you know, uh gender studies and all that—we would talk about some of these things. So that, that was already going on here, and you know and coming to [inaudible 2+ words]—after several years, said that it was wrong and all that, so. Then I knew that as immigrant, we were not anywhere in this picture. They were talking about white women. Why not African American women? You know every law applied to white women, and, and their experience of violence and their experience of family life was different from any other immigrant or even, even you know, African Americans, Hispanics, grew up in here, many more years than we have, you know.

And we, we looked into Chinese Community Center and Vietnamese Community Center—they have been here many years, too. Japanese you know immigrants have been here. And there are also some community center, I don't know what they're dealing with, but they have a center there—Jewish Community Center, for example, a representative example. Look at the Jewish people—they have a Jewish Community Center. You know, so um. So everybody has something there. You know, regardless of what they were [inaudible word] and, and they tried to, you know—people will tell us, 'oh go to the Chinese Community Center, because why start something new?' 'Why [inaudible word] in the real?' There are a lot of issues. And when you go there, there is a religious difference, there's a language difference, there's a food difference, there's an attire difference, there's a different in every other culture. Um so you, you cannot find what you need, and even though, yes, culturally there are a lot of compatible beliefs, you know.

Uh but then that was not enough. So that's when we thought we had to do something for South Asians. Um so we just started as a liaison(?) organization with the women centers. And we thought we could [inaudible word]

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with you—so if you get a call from a India—Indian, or Pakistani person, you call us, we undergo training. Ten or twelve of us. By the time, it was no longer the auxiliary, [inaudible word] anymore because we couldn't get twelve people to get trained from this group, from this Indian, whatever, doctor [inaudible word] group. We wanted twelve people to get trained because the women center said, 'If you can get a group, we will train you.' We need at least twelve people. And then we will look for—you know, sign-up sheets. Who all wants to sign up...we couldn't even get twelve people to sign it. So we thought, 'well you know it's not going to work' so four or five of us who wanted it, who started it, we said, 'okay, this cannot be an auxiliary thing,' you know, doctors are not the only population here. Family violence you know, is you know, is an issue that affects everybody. So we opened up that call to take training to anyone who wants to, from our community. So then people signed up. Anybody who wanted to, then we got twelve people to, to sign up and we go them into training, and, and uh...and we started it as a bridge between them and then for years got, some calls... Okay, this was in '93, '94 I think, you know. Um phone calls, and then there was this big incident of this, this Indian lady who shot and killed her husband and three kids and then she killed herself. It was major news. You know her last name was Katta and you can look up in the, in the newspaper—*Houston Chronicle*, front page.

AK: Can you spell it for us?

LP: K-A-T-T-A.

AK: Oh okay.

Yeah. It was in '93, or '94, I remember, you know I was coming back from India, I had read the news, and thought 'oh my God, it's Houston'. You know, so um—um so it's like even then, you know they did a big front page expose on a Sunday, you know, paper it came about this. It all had happened, you know like, how she was a working woman, she spoke English, she had friends, she had you know everything that...she [inaudible 1 word] out of this. She will listen to her neighbor's problems, but she never told her neighbor what is going on in her life. And this was major abuse going on for ten years or so. And she had three kids and this is how she decided to end it.

So when that happened, um being a liaison is not enough because it's not reaching....So we said, we thought we had to start an organization. Even though people thought, even after this major incident, many of the South Asian people thought, 'oh it's still been a long time incident, you're making a big deal about it,' 'why should *Houston Chronicle* run this story,' 'why aren't they running a story about our kids going to Harvard and Yale.' Why should it be a different page story, you know? [laughs] So where was this talk, about it, you know? But [inaudible 3+ words] incident, such things right? Um one leads to many. So we started the organization right after that. And we, you know, we started DAYA and we went on going with the help from people, of course.

CZ: So what are your goals for this organization in the future?

LP: Well, you know, um unfortunately this will be a [inaudible 1 word] organization. I think in—for the near future, at least or for the future that I can envision. For the next several years, maybe it will you know become obsolete, I hope it will, because I hope we can eradicate violence against women and children. That will be a wonderful thing. But we don't know, it's all up to new people to take it further. But right now, we have grown, we are a very grass roots organization—I was taking calls at my house, we had a phone line, but then weekends and evenings, on the phone line, they called me and, you know, I was the only trained counselor, maybe that was available at the time. Anyway, I was one of the few trained counselors. Um so most of the calls would come to me. Other people who took the training would take the calls and do it, but if there was an issue it would come to me, because I was the only one who had gone through the counseling program and stuff. Uh but I was also working at the Fort Bend County's Women Center, I got a job there, so it kinda fit in with my you know with my volunteer work and my job, everything kinda you know jelled together. So I would give my home number. At the time, we didn't have cell phones and stuff—people would call us at home and you know, some of us were free enough to give our home numbers you know, some of us didn't have the freedom because the husband didn't want them taking calls after 5 o'clock, when they were at home, and we never know when these women would call.

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You know, then they call on a Saturday morning, Sunday morning, so some of them said, you know 'I can only give my phone number between 9 and 5. I have to go, my husband is not going to be happy.' So even among us volunteers, there was this issue, you know. Some of us had freedom and you know I always tell my husband, 'you had a very busy career, you were never home because I did whatever I wanted to with my [laughs] with my time and gave my phone number to all I wanted to give it to.' You know, and it didn't bother me, it didn't bother a few others, either. Because of whatever was going on in their lives and their situation. So that's how we started taking calls from home, and helping them. We...you know, we approach Indo-American Charity Foundation for some funds and they gave us some few thousand dollars as a, you know, as a seed money. With that, we printed out some brochures and put out flyers outside. Uh and that's how it got started and we were maintained like that for several years—five, six years with, with volunteers taking calls.

Um and I know that looking back, I wish we had a full time person because the calls would all come in, which I... but at that time, we thought we would start slow, and we didn't have the money. We should have found the money, now that would be my advice to for other people who want to start something, you know. Just go for it, um you know and we were like that for five, six years and we realized we cannot go on like that. People are not calling and if people are not calling um—so we hired a full time person five, six years ago and, and we found an office space, rented(?) an office space. Uh and she was there, and trained. So she worked there, then the calls kinda and there is no difference went(?). You know many, you know, X number of times in [inaudible 2 words]. you know the call numbers. I can give you the statistics it's, it's with our office, you know of calls, so it went up. And it has been like that, it has been going you know going up and up in the last five, six years. Uh so I think last year, we received over 4,000 calls maybe about, around...close about 250. I can't give you the exact numbers—clients last year.

So we had... our goal that was one of our goals—to have a full time staff and a counselor and then we hired an outreach person to increase the awareness in the community. Because if you didn't do that, then there is no point in serving the clients because they go hand in hand. The community has to understand. You know, about this issue. And as long as there is awareness there, we will be able to get the women to call. And, and it's also another method, so if you want it to go down, then you have to let people know that this is wrong, this is against the law. So we hired a second person to look at community outreach um we have three full time staff right now—one to do the counseling, one is an outreach person, one is in education the third one is a transitional home coordinator. They started experimenting with a transitional home about three, four years ago. We rented a living town house and we wanted to provide, not emergency housing, but long time housing for up to six months.

So, once they take them out of the emergency situation, and if they want to make a better life and not go back to that same situation, we have to provide them something long term. 'Cause it takes more than three weeks in an emergency situation to, to fix your life and say, 'I'm not going back.' 'We won't go back, we won't go back.' You know, whether you are, you know, white American, black American, or an Asian American, it doesn't matter—statistics show, women won't go back mostly because of economic reasons. So we thought if we give them at least six months' time to work on their job skills, their immigration status, their driving and whatever other legal issues they have to work out, you know, they need a place to stay, and not have to worry about food and shelter. So we, we experimented with that for about two years and then we made a offer two years ago to purchase a home, which we accomplished last fall. [CZ: Oh really?] We bought a home, yes. We bought a home. We're on a capital campaign for that, to pay off the mortgage on the home so we are you know it's a four-bedroom house, three or four families can stay there, depending on the number of children. Um we provide, you know, all towards their goals of becoming independent and you know getting all the skills they need. Talk to the lawyers, talk to the you know um you know ESL classes if they need, you know, get their driver's license, whatever, you know, so. Do all of that and we help them with job placement and things like that. Provide for their counseling, counseling for their children, daycare, all of that, you know, it happens when they are there. So, that's something we have accomplished.

So, um now next goal is to expand our counseling program and to have preventive counseling for families because again, South Asian people you know population is fourth largest, I think in the United States, because

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Houston is the fourth largest city. Um so, so South Asian population is you know, in par with that. And we know that, they, you know, they are not seeking help and there are a lot of new immigrants, a lot of young people, young couples, and there are a lot of old children, like your generation, your mom's generation, um getting married, you know making families here and stuff. So all of them need the help if something goes wrong, so we want to expand our counseling program, pre-marital counseling, children's counseling, family counseling, couple counseling, so before it becomes an abuse issue, hopefully, they will be open to seeking help. So that's our next goal. So we plan to go, and hopefully have more staff and more counselors.

BX: Do you have any questions?

AK: Um...well I guess one quick question—you mentioned that a lot of um like the doctor that worked with your father, he married a Caucasian woman, and there was another also an Iranian um doctor who married a Caucasian woman. Did you find that a lot of people who migrated here from India and they were single, did they marry outside of you know Indian culture?

LP: Well you mean my husband's boss?

AK: Right.

LP: And the other Indian resident [**CZ:** Right, right.] Maybe you know I'm—it's just my guess, that time, when people came over, when my brother came, I told you, in Canada in the '60s he came in the mid '60s and we came. At the time, you know, um they may have looked to, to other women because there were not that many Indian women, for them to date and marry. So probably you know that was one of the things that they could do if they were lonely or they you know they found somebody attractive, or if someone found them attractive. And now it's happening now. I go to a lot of interracial marriages now—they come from the second generation. It's happening now too. You know, much more. But at the time, yes and that's probably because you know, it's fine, they were a whole lot of other immigrant groups. You know, at that time. And you know, if you are, if you are a student or if you are a doctor, you only meet people in a university setting or in the hospital setting, most of them would be nurses, or you know, secretaries, or whatever, other fellow students—most of them are you know, like you. You know, towards education, from upper, middle, white families. So that's probably the reason why they, they married, you know, within their group. Am I answering your question?

AK: Yes. And what about the parents back home what was their...

LP: It was a, it was a big deal. I don't know about this particular Iranian friend, he was like our colleague. And you know, they married and I think they lived probably you know—we are not in touch with them, we knew them for several years, and they were doing fine. I don't know about his family, but I remember, uh you know my brother's—a couple of my brother's friends, married at that time, and he came as a student. They came—they married Canadian women. And I remember one of them—it created a lot of furor back in the family and uh you know, my brother got involved somehow, because, well he was his friend. You know, and his family asked him to come back. They asked him to come back and change his mind, because they couldn't come here. Now they can come here, because travelling is easy and people have money to travel. But they asked him to come back and tried to change his mind and they—I remember his uncle, who was my father's friend, told my father that, 'I had taken him to all the temples, and made him promise the deity that he would only marry an Indian girl.' So now he felt good that, okay, he won't break his promise. He still came back and married that woman, but that was their tactic to stop [laughs].

You know, and then my other friend of my brother's, who was still in Canada. He married this Canadian woman, and, and he's doing very well. And he's a big, you know, community leader now. The reason I know is that my—another one of my nieces is in Canada, and she migrated recently to Canada a few years ago. And um she, she got in touch with him because my brother is in touch with him, so she had gotten the number you know from my brother. So she got in touch with him and she was telling me, my niece, how he's like a real uncle who comes home and you know really is like a father figure, helping them to go through with the marriage and all

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these things, giving them the encouragement they need. You know, so he's doing really well. So it's hard to tell, ! right? !

BX: So what are your children doing, or plan on doing? !

LP: Well, they are both working. Uh one, one is in investment, one is a lawyer, but he's a writer right now. ! His book is going to come out. !

BX: Really? What is it about? !

LP: It's a short fiction. He's a writer-writer. Real writer. The book of short fiction is coming out soon. Probably ! next year, and he's working on a second book. And uh you know they are living you know, like any other children here would live. Raised in the United States, probably like you are. You know, they are pursuing their dream, they didn't want to become doctors or engineers you know, they wanted to do what they want to do. ! And, and they want to get married one day. So that's where they are. But they are, you know I think they ! wanted kids and we have a good relationship and we go back and forth and talk to them. At least we can laugh ! and smile. It's good. [laughs] !

BX: Do you have any more questions? !

AK: I don't. !

LP: I hope I answered many of them and not really talked only—anything would probably be some of these ! things, right? !

BX: It was very interesting. Thank you so much [LP laughs] !

AK: Do you remember what your tuition was for your Master's degree? !

LP: I can go back and look, you know I was looking—you know I keep some of my bills. !

BX: Really? !

LP: Yeah it just makes you laugh [laughs]. !

BX: I mean, we can stop the recording. !

AK: Sure. !

BX: Um well we're just going to a... !

[Recording is stopped, interview ends] %