

Interviewee: Jehanbux Mehta

Interviewers: Linda Heeyoung Park (Rising Sophomore), Dillon Chai (Rising Sophomore)

Date/ Time of Interview: July 16, 2014, at 10:40 AM

Transcribed by: Linda Heeyoung Park, Dillon Chai

Audio Track Time: **1:06:30**

Background:

Jehanbux Mehta was born in Karachi, Pakistan in 1937. His father was from Pakistan and his mother was originally from Bombai. Karachi is a city with a small Parsi community of 6,500 people, which meant that Mr. Mehta grew up closely interacting with the Muslim community. He attended St. Patrick's high school, a Catholic school where he learned English. He then went to college, obtained a Bachelor's degree of commerce, and became a certified accountant. From there, he went on to run his own company in Karachi. In the meantime, he and his wife raised their two sons until they went off to study abroad and settle in the United States. Mr. Mehta decided to immigrate to America to be closer to his family, who by then had largely dispersed across North America. He is currently retired and lives in Missouri City, a suburb of Houston, along with his wife.

Setting:

The interview's primary focus was on labor and capital, Zoroastrian community in Houston, and Mr. Mehta's view of Houston as a good retirement place.

The interview ran about an hour long. The interviewers were 40 minutes late due to the wrong address, but Mr. Mehta did not have any appointments till 2:30 p.m., so the interview was conducted without any time constraints in his house. He brought up bread and coffee that his son made before the interview, and offered to the interviewers. He drank the coffee throughout the interview. He pointed at his wife multiple times, who was talking on the phone upstairs in the house. He later showed the interviewers his old photographs with his wife.

Interviewers:

Linda Heeyoung Park

Linda is an international student from Korea, majoring in Sociology and minoring in Poverty, Justice, and Human Capabilities at Rice University. She spends her sophomore summer interning for HAAA to compare Asian Americans and immigrants in the US. In addition to this goal, she also aims to learn more about social issues that Asian immigrants have had to face in Houston.

Dillon Chai

Dillon is a rising sophomore at Rice University. He was born in Houston and lived there until moving to Shanghai at age 5, where he completed the rest of his education at Shanghai American School. His parents were first generation immigrants to the United States and residents of Houston, which is what sparked his interest in the Houston American Asian Archive.

Interview Transcript:

Key:

... Speech trails off; pause
- Short break / pause
[] Actions (Laughs, sighs, etc.)
JM Jehanbux Mehta
DC Dillon Chai
LHP Linda Heeyoung Park

LHP: Hello, this is Linda Park.

DC: And this is Dillon Chai.

LHP: And we're at 5926 Preserve Lane in Missouri City to interview Mr. Jehanbux Mehta.

JM: Jehanbux Mehta, or call me Jimmy.

LHP: Mr. Mehta, can you tell us a little bit about your upbringing? Where you grew up, and what was your childhood like?

JM: I grew up in Karachi, at the time it was India, in 1937. Our family, at that time, the Zoroastrian community in Karachi, which is the- was once the capital in Pakistan until it moved to Islamabad, and it's the largest city. At that time the Zoroastrian community, at the turn of the 19th century, twenty hundred- sorry- nineteen hundred and two three four, I'm told was about 1500 or 2000. The Mehta's were part of that. So we've been there 170 years or so, and there are two three other such families that have been there for that long. Then mid 20th century, around 1920's 30's, there was an influx of Zoroastrians, Parsis as we were called, from Bombai area [inaudible], various other places, because- the country was ruled by the British, and there was a lot of opportunity, business opportunity. So the first new settlers, my family was already into industry, and commerce. The first few settlers were all entrepreneurs, they had factories, this, that. And later on over the years as our community grew to about 6000, 6500, which is the highest number there in Karachi. Mind you in Bombai it was over- nearly 200,000. So we are talking of a small community in Karachi. People started working, service. And we were well respected, because the community was known to be an honest community. So the banks would try and get people from our community, for top positions, particularly in the cash department. Other companies also will try for their finance division to get from our community. So I've been there, my family's been there for 170 years. I was born in Karachi, my mother is from Bombai, which is now in India, and my father was naturally from Karachi. I did my early schooling, pre-kindergarten, and high school in one school. Although we had our own community school, I studied at the St. Patrick's high school, which was run by the Catholic priests. I'm very glad I did study there, because what we learnt was not just geography or history or mathematics. They taught us discipline. Discipline. Which now I find at places to be lacking. And that has instilled in us and has enabled us to go forth in the world. So I finished my schooling, it was called matriculation. And at the age of 16, 1953, the class of 1953, and then I went to college, what is

known here as business college- it was the college of economics. 4 years there, I graduated with a degree of BCOM, which is a Bachelor's of Commerce. Not satisfied with that, I decided to go for a professional degree, in accountancy. In accountancy there's no college like for chartered accountancy, like what you have here CPA. We have chartered accountancy, which was affiliated with the British system. For three years you had to work with a firm of chartered accountants as an article clerk.

(0:04:51)

They would send you for auditing here, there, different places. Do income tax returns and whatnot. You have to go through that drill for three years to get that experience. And during those three years, the second year, you could give exams, for the chartered accountancy exams. The exams were very tough, very few people ever passed, on their first attempt. And they would divide it into two parts, you could do one and then six months later, another part. And if you didn't succeed in the first part, you could do it again. You were allowed to do it for three times, four times. If you didn't succeed then, then they'd say, "Okay guy, you're not fit for it, you're out!" Well I managed to do it on my first try, in this- by the second year of my articleship I qualified. But I had to complete that one more year of articleship, so although I was a supposedly highly qualified accountant, I couldn't take up a job anywhere. So I completed that one year also of- with the same firm of chartered accountants, and then I started my work.

LHP: Um, is there a particular reason why you wanted to pursue business and economics?

JM: [pause] I felt there was a good opportunity at that time, there were not many chartered accountants around. And they were priced, because at the time you became a chartered accountant, a job was secure. Anyway, as the controller of the company or the finance director of the company, in the top position. Now of course over the years there are many many chartered accountants, so you start off in a nice position, but not necessarily an executive position. In those days, an executive position was more or less guaranteed. So when I qualified at the age of, twenty two, I was one of those lucky people at the right time. Industries were coming up, people were needed to run them. And I was hired first by an insurance company, a local insurance company run by a very well known Muslim family, quite large, Eastern Federal Union Insurance Company, as their internal auditor. I worked there for eight to nine months, didn't somehow like it, I was not in charge of anything, I wanted to make things happen. I could not, not as an internal auditor. Most that I could do was find out some fault at the branch and say "Hey, you've been a naughty boy, you should be improving all then." But no, I couldn't on my own, do anything. Fortune plays its part. I was visiting the firm with which I was articled as I mentioned, the gentleman taken me as- treated me like a son. He was very fond of me. So I was at his desk, seated, and I saw a prospectus about a company that was about to come up in Pakistan, in Karachi. So I [inaudible], it was an industrial company, and I wanted to go into industry more than to practice. I didn't want to do income tax practice or auditing or anything like that. So I saw this, asked, is this company coming up here? "Yes." "Do you want to apply? They're asking us to get an accountant, a chief accountant" for the company which had not yet started. So I said yes. So I put in an application. I was interviewed not only by my, this gentleman with whom I had been, but an American came over and interviewed me two, three times. At the final interview there were several candidates. He said, "okay, you've got the job. But I'll give you the job if

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within thirty seconds you give me a name that I can pronounce." See? You had difficulty pronouncing my name. [Laughs]. So I said, wow thirty seconds. I didn't want to be a Joe or a John, it had to be with a J. So I said Jimmy. "Okay, Jimmy, you're hired." So in the business world, I've always been known as Jimmy. My family and my friends call me Jehanbux. And coming to Houston, I don't know why, and being on the committee and the chairman, I got to be known as JR. And do you know who JR was? He was a very famous fictitious character in one of these soap operas, Dennis Steele or something like that. Cowboy, in Dallas, and he was known as JR. Likable rascal [laughs]. So that's an oxymoron statement, but so I sign my things as JR because Jehanbux is pretty long, but not for my official work.

(0:10:42)

LHP: Um, could you clarify on where your first job was? What location?

JM: In Karachi, it was an insurance company, a fairly large insurance company that had branches all over Pakistan.

LHP: And the job, the new job, where was that?

JM: After the insurance company? That was also in Karachi, because they were constructing a manufacturing plant there. So that was also in Karachi.

DC: Um, what did your parents do?

JM: Parents?

DC: Yeah.

JM: In Karachi. My mother comes from Bombai, my father was always from Karachi.

DC: No, I meant for a living.

JM: Oh, okay. My mother was a housewife, in those days, in our community the ladies rarely, rarely worked. Now it's very common and has become even a necessity to bring in more income, things have changed a lot. My father, as I said, our family had a very large, literally an empire of business. They had factories, all sorts of things, not steel factories or anything large, but many things. They were importers, and because they started when the British were ruling, they got to know them very well and the British would buy the things from our company. Liquor, for one. In our family, rarely anybody drank. But they were in the liquor business, because they were supplies to the- they also had dining cars on the national railway, it's one of their activities. But my father decided he didn't want to go into all that, because maybe the- his father, who was the main guy running it along with the brother, must have been dominating, I don't know. So he started on his own, and he really struggled to do small small little things. A letter business, making wallets, things like that, purses, what not. And when there were cricket matches in Bombai he'd make brochures. So he really struggled to you know, do something, but he did it alright. But he was straightforward, if he didn't like what you were doing, he'd tell you that. And

that is what I learned from him, that you don't have to pander to everybody, there's a way of telling people, of course. Okay, I would try and tell you in a very different way, "Okay look, this is not right, this is how it is." But if finally, I think, "hey, this is getting out of hand," I speak up. I speak up, and that's what, in Karachi when I was there, working also, I was the CEO of the company, American company, that's based here in America. So I had that power, you may say, to tell a person off, and then in the community I was in lots of committees, but there I had to be reconciliatory. Learnt a lot working with people.

LHP: So did you learn all of your three languages from preschool? From elementary school?

JM: Well, I don't speak many languages. Our mother tongue was Gujarati, which was what we spoke in home, and we uh, speak here also but not that much. English, because of school, St. Patrick's, which was an English speaking school. And, yes in the school we had to learn the national language, which was Urdu. You know like the Arabic script, Urdu. So that's about it.

DC: How do you spell that?

JM: U-R-D-U. Urdu.

DC: Oh okay.

JM: It's the national language of Pakistan.

(0:14:46)

LHP: Did your parents enforce Zoroastrianism in you when you were growing up?

JM: Enforce? No, no, not at all. In fact, they never sort of told me I should be doing this, or that. But somehow, there were so many of my friends, so many aunties, uncles, we grew up in that atmosphere. So the religion came to us naturally. And being a small community, of course it had grown as I said to 6000, and now we are back to 1500, because of natural attrition, old age, immigration. It came to me naturally, I sort of enjoyed it. I never studied it, I'm not a religious person. The fire temple, we had two fire temples in Karachi, Bombai has many. One was very very close to my house, I would step out, walk a hundred yards, and it was there. So I would go there, and I liked the peacefulness that was there. Going there, just sitting, praying. And my prayers I would read the Gujarati script, although in the St. Patrick's high school we had never learnt Gujarati, at home we learn Gujarati. A Hindu master used to come and teach me in the Gujarati script and tables and all that. So it came to us naturally, and then what I liked about Zoroastrianism was inculcated into us by a high priest, Dr. Dashtul Dallah. His thinking was many a priest that we've encountered, with due respect to them, after all they had gone through all the rituals and become priests, do not educate us the way we learnt from this wise man. And this high priest was- in this favor with many other Zoroastrians, because he had an open mind. Like, when we used to go our temple we would wear a cap, at home when we pray, we wear a cap. I once asked him, we were at a seaside, that "Can I pray here? I don't have a cap." So he looked at me, he had that look- as if he had a halo over him, that aura that was there. The man that I would respect and love, his books I keep. He says, "You are communicating with God.

What do you need a cap for? But, when you go to the temple, out of respect..." because we pray before a fire, we don't worship a fire. Fire is a symbol just as the cross is a symbol, you don't worship the cross, right? So it's a symbol, or statue of Buddha. That's a symbol that you look to. " So out of respect because the other priests are there, your other community members are there, we wear a cap. When you go to a funeral or any public place where the other Zoroastrians are there and prayers are being recited, wear a cap. On your own? Whether you wear or not. And my parents never insisted I should, it just came automatically. So I'm not at all conversant very into the religion, but I have that deep faith in it. I know that the few prayers I know are powerful, but I will not tell you they are more powerful than your prayers. You have them, you should cherish that. Because your prayers are what you have learnt as your communication with God.

LHP: So going back, far back to where your name came up. Can you please tell us again what your name means, where it originated?

JM: Well, my name as given to me, and not my nickname or what do you call it here, not nickname.

LHP: Preferred names? English Names?

(0:19:37)

JM: No, it's certainly not my preferred name, Jimmy is not my preferred name. [laughs] My name is Jehanbux. I spell it J-E-H-A-N-B-U-X. One word, Jehanbux. It's a Persian word, must have originated thousands of years ago, when the Zoroastrians were very much into Persia. And it has a Persian meaning. Jehan means world, and bux means to give, to bestow to the world. So I'm supposed to bestow to the world, so Jehanbux. That was the name given by my parents to me and as it appears on my birth certificate.

LHP: Do you think you're living up to your name?

JM: I confess not. I try to be as useful as possible, but it's a tough task. [laughs]

DC: I have a question going back to your childhood...

JM: Childhood?

DC: Not necessarily childhood, but your education, and uh I guess your college days. Were your friends like, mainly Zoroastrians, like your social circles?

JM: No, no. Mind you, I started off saying the Zoroastrian community at the turn of the previous century was only about 1500 in Karachi and grew to about 6500 in the 1930's. Then again, it started dwindling, many people started emigrating. I grew up around mainly Muslims, although I went to a Catholic school that was run by the Catholic priests, and our teachers were yes, all of them were Catholics. None of them tried to persuade us to change our religion, that was one thing good. I'm a Zoroastrian. Abdul was a Muslim next to me. So and so is somebody else. So mainly in Karachi, and largely in Pakistan, 95% of the population is Muslim. So I lived among

Muslims. Our house was in the center of town, literally, and it was surrounded by Muslims. Our fire temple was surrounded by Muslims. And we'd never felt endangered by them. After I finished working with my American company, I was the CEO of [inaudible two words] in Pakistan and Indonesia, I was for a few years in Indonesia, that was how I got to like Singapore and those areas. I went back to Pakistan, and even before going to Pakistan when I went to Indonesia a friend of mine, senior to me in age, had said "Jimmy, when you come back, if you ever want to work here, look me up." And he was the head of a family, the Habib family-

LHP: Could you spell that?

JM: H-A-B-I-B. Habib family. Large industries, very large, and he was the number one. And I used to play billiards with him before I went to Jakarta. Elder to me by a few years. And, uh, my company, the American company, wanted to move me from Jakarta to Nigeria, Lagos. Didn't want to go there, and I'm glad I didn't. At that time also- then they said "Okay, we could move you to the States. But at our head office, you'll be a small fish at a very large pond, Jimmy. And if your immediate boss doesn't like the color of your eyes..." And I wouldn't be having that responsibility and creativity which I did as CEO of my company naturally in Pakistan and Indonesia. I had hundreds of people under me through levels, directors below them. There you are, a big fish in a small pond. And then I phoned my son, who by this time had come to the States. "Okay look the company is thinking of-" he used to study at the University of Southern California, elder son. He said "Dad, knowing you, you are spoiled." Because we had all the facilities, even in Karachi, not as an expatriate. Everybody had staff, I don't like to use the word "servants" because that's sort of a lowly word. Everybody had staff, in our house we had one person who came sweeping, there was a cook, there was this, you were pampered. There was an ayah to look after the children. In Indonesia we had the same facilities. A house was given by the company, with a swimming pool and all those cars.

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We were allowed to travel back to Karachi once every year, and twice a year wherever we wanted for rest and recreation as they called it. So my son wisely said, "Okay, you're going to lose all that-" and my company director also "You'll lose all that, you'll be just another paid employee. One of the many that we had." It was a huge company, which is now known as Pfizer, making let it all, and God knows how many other products, Listerine you must have- I was selling Listerine. So, we went back and some of my good friends and my employers, my first employers, Eastern Federal, they were Muslims. My last employers, before I retired 20 years ago, they were Muslims, they treated me like a family member. And I never forget that. I wasn't an outsider to them. I was Zoroastrian, they were Muslims, but...

LHP: So where was the headquarters?

JM: There? Habib's?

LHP: No, here in the States?

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JM: Bogg Davis headquarters initially was in Detroit. So I used to go to Detroit for meetings. Then when Bogg Davis was merged with Warner Lambert, it was in Morristown, New Jersey.

DC: So while you were living in Karachi, you've already come in contact- you've already visited America a number of times.

JM: From the company, yes! Yes, yes. Yes.

LHP: Where have you been?

JM: In America? All over. [laughs] Traveling has been a passion with us. Just now because of age and my knees, I don't like to travel that much. But we've taken our sons with us all over Europe. The system was good. We didn't have much money in our pocket. I was the CEO, but in those days, CEO's didn't get paid the way they get paid now, in the millions. So we bought a URail ticket for two months, my company would allow me to take leave every two years for two months, so that we could travel. And we traveled by rail, you could get off wherever you want, climb wherever you want. And we stayed in, not hotels, what are called "pensions." P-E-N-S-I-O-N, that's a French word, pension, which means a bed and breakfast. So in France, we traveled a lot in France, Germany, all over Europe. We would look up from [inaudible] book five dollars a day. And from the railway station, see if the room was available, go there, stay. And uh, we saw a lot of things, we encouraged our children to see things. We went to the museums, and parks, and other famous places. Eating, was secondary. I love eating. Good food, and all types of food. Eastern food fascinates me, I've got a hundred cookbooks in my study upstairs. From which I don't cook, but I just like to go [pretends to eat]. So we would bring things from the store supermarket into our hotel room. We had a Swiss army knife, we would open it up, heat it up in the warm water, and the four of us would share that. And the kids must have also liked it, and our younger son, who's here, who makes these things. He studied for four years in Switzerland, hotel management. But decided to do the same thing as what his mother was doing in Karachi, specialty cakes, gourmet cakes. Of course he has branched out into all these also. So when he was in Switzerland we would go visit, I used to go visit him sometimes, Sherian would also come. He said "Dad, why don't we do the way we used to do when we used to travel as kids." I said "what?" "Let's bring things and eat in the hotel room." He didn't want to go to a big restaurant or this or that, of course at that time we could afford to do that also. So that simplicity with which we grew, is also in our children, and that we were enjoying it. Had we been spoilt from the beginning, that no I must have a car- I didn't have a car until I started working. After two or three years of work, the company gave me a car. So, I still have a little motorcycle, and the two of us would go on the motorcycle.

(0:30:12)

LHP: So, you've told us that your older son studied in California and your younger son studied in Switzerland.

JM: In Switzerland.

LHP: And how did you decide to let them study abroad?

JM: Their own wish. They've got to make a mark in the world. When my older son said he wants to go into engineering, fine go ahead. My company, uh, personnel relations director, he gave me a book of which universities to apply. So he applied to a number and he got in University of Southern California, which is one of the finest in that, and he studied there, did his, eventually also the Master's. After the Bachelor's, the master's also. And he's now an executive in Metronics, which is a very large company manufacturing medical devices, electronic devices, which today would probably buy an Irish company for 45 billion dollars. So the younger one said "I want to do what mommy is doing, so I want to go into hotel management." Okay, but when we left Jakarta, he had not completed his schooling. And when he completed his schooling, he was not admitted into the college they're in, because he was still young, so he had to wait an year. Then he spent 4 years in total management, he worked with a U.S. hotel here, Ramada. Oh no, first in Connecticut, with certain friends who had a hotel, then here in Ramada. Then he decided to do on his own. So there you are. So we never influenced our children. I was never influenced that I should take up accountancy, no. If I had wanted to be a lawyer, I could have been a lawyer, if I wanted to be a doctor, I could have gone for that. I decided to go in for accountancy, and I'm glad I did, I don't look back at it at all. So our parents never influenced us into what we should be doing, no you've got to do this. We didn't influence our children. Let them do what they want to.

DC: How did you meet your wife? And uhh-

JM: [laughs] That's always a pleasure to talk about. I was into, even in college I was into community work. And there was an association of college students Zoroastrian. I was treasurer or something, I think I was the treasurer, yeah. And her sister, elder sister, was the secretary. So we had to do some, at times get together to do some work. So she said, come over to the house, and we will discuss this. So I went over to the house. She was there. But at that time, it wasn't love at first sight. I often tease her, because she was biiig. [laughs] And my first impression was, wow, and I turned to my, her sister, "Who's that?" and said, "quiet, that's my sister!" Then over the years, I was working in various committees, and we have, like we have our Zoroastrians Associations there, we have what is called the Karachi Parsi Institute. We're- from- immediately after matriculating, you could become a member, because we have facilities like tennis, I love tennis, swimming, table tennis, ping pong, badminton, and a nice garden where you could sit and chat. You get to know a lot of people. So I got to know her, liked the way her thinking was, maybe she liked the way I was. So it was- at that- institute, ah, the Parsi Institute, and the institute is not like a college or something, but an association. Or what in our part of the world is called gymkhana.

LHP: Could you spell that please?

(0:34:57)

JM: G-Y-M, G-Y-M-K-H-A-N-A. So from the British days, there were lots of gymkhanas. The Muslim gymkhana. The Parsi gymkhana. The English gymkhana. So we used to all day play games, and that's where I proposed to her. And she said yes. [laughs] And we've been married for more than 50 years.

LHP: Wow.

JM: I'll show you some pictures of us.

LHP: Um, so where did you first permanently settle in the US? Could you tell me what year was that?

JM: Yeah. [puts down his coffee cup] I retired about 20 years ago, because there were things that were happening, country was getting a little corrupt. I didn't want to get involved. And, by the grace of god, we were doing all right. So we stayed in Karachi for a long time. And at that time, it was a very peaceful, nice city. My father's cousin, first cousin, uncle of mine, was the first elected mayor of Karachi. In 1945 or 47, something like that. Because of his way of governing, Karachi was known as the cleanest city in the East. East. Right from China, Japan, whatever, and that was all his work. He was very well known. His name is Jamshed Nusserwanjee Mehta. He, he never married. It was his father who allowed my grandfather started this business empire of theirs, and when their, last son, because I never went into it... I was working with an American company. My uncle did not distribute the wealth among family members. He very wisely created a trust to help the needy people. The needy, not just our community members, any others. So right now, if you were in Karachi and you ask for ask for, "do you know the Mehta trust?" They would say, yes, because we've helped out many hospitals, and every year, we help out. By the grace of god, we have invested well. So his money is being put to good use. Instead of being spent by his heirs and all that, I would've been happy [laughs], but I'm glad. I am the chairman there. Of our trust. We've got two [inaudible word] education fund and hosp- We build hospitals, our family builds hospitals. Maternity home. In those days, there were house buggies, trusts for feeding the horses, water in various place in the city. So we were one of the premier families that brought Karachi up. There were also for other community, but our community did very very well for the other. That's why Zoroastrians are known by the term: charity is thy name. So if you say "Oh, you are Parsi? Ahh, you must be doing a lot of charity". Yes we do a lot of charity.

LHP: Um, so, to clarify the question, so, when did you first permanently settle in the States?

JM: See, after retiring, my eldest son was in California. He had started a job, he was in San Diego, he was working. My youngest son had come here. So about... 15 years ago, or 12 years, I forget. We used to come twice a year. My wife and I to the States. Staying three months at a time. Two months here, one month in San Diego, California. This... over the years, then, my younger son here, he said, "dad, now your sister and your family stay in Toronto, her [points at his wife] sister, and her family stay in London, I've got a number of cousins stayed in Karachi, why don't you, instead of coming 6 months and twice a year, spending so much on air travel, why don't you come here?" So it was in- [pause] about 9 years ago that we actually- we have in the meantime applied for a green card. I think we have got a green card... 7, 8 years ago. So, 9 years ago we came here first. We stayed for some time with our son. But before deciding to settle here, we went around looking for a small house in Sugarland. Where the Sugarland airport is, close to that. Small and comfortable, good for the two of us. This is slightly larger than that. Then we moved over here, we got us a citizenship about 4,5 years ago. So we are Americans.

(0:41:16)

LHP: Um, so, I have a quick question. Why-

JM: [Pointing at the tea] Your tea must be getting cold. Shall I heat it up?

DC: Uh, no, it's- it's- fine.

JM: You sure?

LHP: So why- why did you visit Houston for the small vacations before you permanently settled here again?

JM: Why did I settle here?

LHP: No, um, why did you visit Houston in particular?

JM: Because my son was here. My younger son was doing this [points at bread on the table]. My elder son is in California.

LHP: Oh, okay.

JM: He's now in Los Angeles. From San Diego, he moved to Los Angeles. Many many years ago. And the younger one... was settled here and used to come here and go to California also. And this- why did you settle in Houston, because... California is beautiful. Los Angeles, earlier, and San Diego was exceptionally beautiful. Loved it. Here I feel- we have a community, not very large. But fairly close-knit community. We are bonded through our association. Zoroastrian Association. Moreover, having been doing this community service for years, immediately after finishing school from college days, I also wanted to be a part of that. Want to help out in whatever little way I could. And I found a community here very vibrant. You know? It was doing things, it was wanting to go ahead. In 2010, there was a World Zoroastrian Congress. Sorry, 2000. In the year 2000. But we weren't settled here. We visited because our son was here. I wanted to attend the congress. And I took videos, and then I condensed it, and showed the very first video of our congress in Karachi to a large group of community members. I was impressed. Davier, was one of the leading persons in the congress. Subsequently also for the 2010 American Congress. At that time I was the president of our association, but, I didn't do any work. They did everything. But I enjoyed working with them. And our youth here is very active. Our youngsters here want to do things, and they are very active.

LHP: Um-

JM: And my grandchildren are here. Two of them, one of course is in California also. One is 14 years old.

LHP: So how was getting the green card? Was the process very difficult?

JM: Not at all. No, my son was a sponsor. We went through a firm that specializes in this, Kuang.

LHP: Could you spell that please?

JM: I forget the first name. He was a councilman of the city of Houston or something, or sort. He is very well known. And he did all the paperwork. And, uh, I worked with an American company, I visited America so many times over the 25 years I was with them. So we got it pretty fast.

LHP: Was it the same for citizenship?

JM: Yes, Yes. It came just as it would in natural. In fact, we didn't expect it to happen so fast. We had no problem whatsoever. The only problem was they couldn't get my fingerprints. [Linda laughs] So that's about it.

DC: Why did you decide to become an American citizen?

(0:45:01)

JM: Both my sons are here, my sister and family is in Toronto. Her [pointing at his wife] sister and family is in London. My closest relatives are my cousins, who are all getting aged now. Ahh, I was no longer working. So instead of coming here that often, and spending money, now my knee is not working, so I am not getting regular income, rather than my investments. This was the place to be in.

DC: Uhh, I was more like, uh, do you already identify yourself as an American citizen?

JM: Yes.

LHP: More so than Pakistani?

JM: I will never forget my Pakistan origin. If you miss already, you come from originally I'll probably say, Pakistan. America has now recognized that we can have two passports. Like British, you can get two passports. American, and Pakistan. When we visit Pakistan, once every two years, we used to do that every year. But now, as I said, I'm getting- I'm no longer that young, I don't like to travel long distances so much. We go every two years. As I- my trust is still there, family trust, plus I am the chairman there, so I got to show them my face every now and then. So we travel from here, I will show my American passport, they ask me whether I got a Pakistan visa, I show my Pakistan passport. When I enter Pakistan, I show my Pakistan passport. When leaving Pakistan, again my Pakistan passport, and they ask, do I have an American visa. And I show my American passport. So, I am proud to be an American. It's a great city, even though things are very very different, things have changed from what it was 15,20 years ago. It was different thing altogether. Now it's- values are changing. I'm still a little old-fashioned.

LHP: So you mentioned multiple times that Zoroastrian community in Houston is very active.

JM: Very active.

LHP: Do you think there's, like, a particular reason why it's very active?

JM: Yes, when you are in a community that's very large, you take it for granted. That, this is there. In Karachi, our community was reasonably large. Not that large. Thousands. I didn't go to any school to learn my religion. I just didn't. I valued the advice that, ah, high priest used to give. He's a family friend, both my uncle, the mayor, he was defined as a saint. And he was a saint. He was so noble. Values from them. I don't study my religion at all. I'm ashamed to say that. But I'm proud to be a Zoroastrian because the values that were ingrained in me by these leaders, are what true Zoroastrians should be.

LHP: What would you say those values are?

JM: To have a... clear mind. Like we have got good thoughts, good words, good deeds. Those are the three basic values in our religion. But those are there also in other religions. But the greatest thing in our religion that was stuck to our prophet and the prophet and passed it down to us, prophets of Zoroastrian, the right to choose. Good thoughts? Definitely should have good thoughts. Good words? Sweetness of tongue, as I call it. Yes. That ultimately leads to good deeds. Now that is there, everybody must be practicing it. But the right to choose in those days, couple of thousand years ago, thousand years ago. And that I hold as the biggest contribution that our prophet has made to... there's [inaudible word]. You decide whether this coffee [puts down the coffee] is good for you or not. Your parents may tell you something, but if your mind says something, question them. But question them with respect. Question them knowing that they are elders, that they are trying to instill you something good. But if they are teaching you something, then question them all the more. And say, "no, why?" Because then maybe certain parents might be like one of the, like the year of, you must have read books where the parents teach the child to steal things out of necessity or whatever. So those... But you decide if stealing is alright. Okay. But that may not be the right thing. But you've got to decide whether you should be doing this or not. So you choose. That's in our scriptures. One of the most valued things.

(0:50:39)

LHP: Um... Do you think Houston is a good retirement place?

JM: Yes... Why?

LHP: In what sense do you think it makes a good retirement place?

JM: uhuh, first of all, for us Zoroastrians, we are a relatively small community, and yet, not all that small. We've got an association where we can all gather, meet, uh, I think next Sunday, we are going to have games day. Ping Pong and everybody ordered lunch too. For whether you are a Zoroastrian or not, this is a relatively peaceful city. And it's a friendly city. I used to travel to America a lot, New Jersey, Detroit, and New York. I didn't find it that friendly. Here, I find

people are friendly. My neighbor is a Filipino. He's wonderful. [laughs] Wonderful. The neighbor here [points at one direction] is also-he's nice- but he's quiet. Opposite there is an Indian. He's a police officer, he's a cop. Oh nice. When there's Americans, when I water the garden, I sing to my plants. And I think they grow. [DC laughs] Those people walking with their dogs must have thought I'm cuckoo, but still they... And when I go to the stores, I like to ask questions to be friendly, I start chatting. People chat. And in New York, they don't. In Detroit, they didn't. In Detroit, I couldn't walk in the city. I was told to stay in the hotel when I was visiting. Here, not so. It's friendly. Roads, unless we go downtown, I drive, but I don't drive at night now, because of the eyes. I find it safe. In Los Angeles when I go to visiting my son, except for Valley Say which is in the San Fernando Valley, I don't mind driving around there, which is a large valley. I don't like to go on the freeways. I'm scared. Here also you come across a certain- but here, no matter where I go on, quite comfortable. Whether it is here, Bellaire, or Pearland, I'm comfortable.

LHP: Do you think this area is a better retirement place than Sugarland?

JM: No, I can't compare the two. I was in Sugarland also. Sugarland- is growing up very fast, and doing very well. It has got amenities which Missouri City does not have. I like to go down to Sugarland Town Square on weekends, in the summers, they've got concerts, and things for children. Sugarland is a great city. It's been run very well. Missouri City is also a great city. But you can't compare it with Sugarland, which is on a higher plane. At the same time, Sienna Plantation, which is a part of Missouri City, is coming up as a... Because it's- it's still- not fully developed. As I said, there are bios, creeks, you may find alligators there, you can go on track walking, 6 miles away, and in the same Sienna Plantation, you can drive a green beautifully done. So I'm glad. We moved very well. That was a smaller house, but, uh, here, we like it.

DC: So when do you- when you raise your kids, did you- was it like a Pakistani household? And... okay, what about now when they raise their kids?

JM: When we raised our kids, we were in Karachi. I used to travel a lot, because of my work, within the country and overseas also. The system in Karachi, as it is all over India and Pakistan, still is, we have our helpers. So we had an ayah who would look after the kids. Bathe them, dress them, and then my driver take them to school in the car, bring them back. Then we moved to Jakarta, Indonesia. They were all grown up, they were going to American school final year, so they didn't need an ayah, but then also we had helper staff to clean this and that. Comfortable.

(0:55:35)

Here, they've settled here, we have settled here. We enjoy doing our own thing. Even now when I go to Karachi, I feel a little out of place because the Ferero come- "yes sir, can I get you your coffee?" "Yes." So I sit out on the porch drinking my coffee. He would make the breakfast. Here we do it ourselves, and I enjoyed it. She's a great cook [points at his wife], so we got more opportunities to do the things that we want to, and, uh, Houston has grown so fast in these 8 years that we've been here. The roads have become fanta- I've seen these freeways, you know the intersections? Right in front of my eyes being connected, wondering whether they will meet starting from there, you could move on very easily. We don't go to downtown much, except

when we used to go to symphonies, ballets, opera. Because they get over late, and I don't like traveling at night. But if it is with friends, then in Houston, you've got the finest museums. I love museums and art galleries, something that we didn't have in Karachi. Very good artists, but we didn't have it on display. When we used to travel- once when we went on a vacation, my wife and I for two months, as [inaudible two words], it was specifically to see nice operas. And in Karachi, there are no symphony orchestras, no opera, no ballet, sometime maybe a visiting team might come, yes, they have Broadway shows that the locals put up. Excellent. Very well done. But that- that cultural life- local cultural things, I was never very much into that. So here- I found, ah, I'm getting the things I have been missing- we used to go to Europe and spend money to enjoy these things. Now it is here. And it is not that expensive. Not as expensive- You go to London, now, ooh, I can't go to a theater. Going on the subway there, on the run, ooh, expensive. When I used to go as a kid, it was a few pennies, whole day I could travel wherever I want. So Houston is it. Yes, this is the place where people want to retire, bring their kids here, our community will welcome them. Houston will welcome them.

LHP: Um, so, you said... before you didn't actively practice Zoroastrianism, and how did you get- so involved in Houston's Zoroastrian community?

JM: See it's just not the religion. Religion binds us together, yes, it is a strong force. Because of the common interest we have in there. But we Zoroastrians have always gone a little beyond religion. We be wanting to do things for others also. We are members of the Interfaith Ministry. That supplies meals to the needy or- [inaudible word]. She [points at wife] and I when we could, we could, once a year, carry all the meals from their thing, and go the seating, and talk to them. People in those homes, they want people to talk to them. The meals come to them everyday, somebody other but people to sit with them, they're lonely. So we were active in that and we want to encourage our youth. And because we are not in a large area, the smaller the number, the more people get interested in their religion. So, we want our children to recognize what the religion is all about. And grow with it.

DC: So your children were raised as a-

JM: Beg your pardon?

DC: So your children were raised as Zoroastrians?

JM: Children were always raised as Zoroastrians, they are still Zoroastrians. And my grandchildren also. Yes. In fact, at 2:30 I got to pick them up, now that the school is over. And, uh, take them to the center. Our Zoroastrian center, where there is youth and huntsman-enrichment class, where during the holidays, they get to introduce artworks, this, or that.

LHP: Did they marry Zoroastrians?

(1:00:00)

JM: My children have married Zoroastrians. Zoroastrian partners. My younger son who is here. He [inaudible word] was last year. They got two children, 14 and 9, ah, but, ah, they are very

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friendly together. The couple. My elder son, he married rather late. And we were wondering when is he going to marry. But we didn't want to force him. We didn't want to say, "hey look, Zarina has a nice girl, hey, Zarina, nice looking kid, isn't she." No, he found this girl off Karachi. Look at the coincidence. She was visiting here, and she, I think, came to my younger son's house also. And the chemistry clicked. Now our grandchildren, as I said, our religion says, you have to choose. So, if they decide to marry somebody not of a Zoroastrian faith, we may not be very happy about it, but we will not discourage them. At least I hope their parents don't. As long as the girl or the boy comes from good family, then what does it matter? They should be a good family. And as long as they keep on respecting us. As their grandparents, and their parents... And many of our children have married outside, can't blame them, because when they go to school or college here, they get to mix more with non-Zoroastrians and Zoroastrians. In my son's-grandson's class, I don't think there are any Zoroastrians. Must be all non-Zoroastrians. So, that is the way of life.

LHP: [looks at DC] Do you have any additional questions?

DC: No

[Phone starts ringing]

LHP: Oh.

JM: She'll pick it up. [points at his wife]

LHP: Do you have any words you want to leave to the Houston Asian American Archive, or any additional words you want to add?

JM: No, I'm- I'm very happy to help in whatever little contribution I could make, and let me help people understand why we are settled in Houston.

DC: So I guess we can end with the question "what would you want to- if you were to summarize what you want to pass on to the next generation about your immigrant experience, what would it be?"

JM: [pauses] Difficult, because... Again, depends on what the generation wants to do. To the new generation, as in our center and having been on the committee, what I would like the most instilled is not whether they are highly educated, study, study hard as best as you can. Do your very best. I have friends, who in school or college who are not good at all. But in life, they've done so well. I studied and got a very high degree. I did well. But that guy is doing much better, oh, then good. So that can also happen, you know? Your aptitude can be somewhere not necessarily in the teaching institutions. But definitely, yes, to become something, not somebody, to become something you should have the backing of education. Education is much for our generation. And try and get higher education. Then if you feel out to say, doctors, Houston has the finest medical system in the world. Research. Studies. The- any other field, do whatever you want to do. Like my son is having to go in for this [points at pastries], fine. He's struggling, he's not- but he's happy. He's doing it. Second, children should respect others. That value in America

now is diminishing. The three of us come from Asian countries, where that value has been there. I don't know now, I don't travel. But I used to go to Singapore, or Philippine, you can see that children are respecting their parents. They may- they may disagree with them. By all means, disagree. That, I will encourage them. You don't agree with what I am saying? Disagree. But don't be disagreeable. Disagree in a nice way. So they should still have that respect. That discipline. I've seen kids referring to their parents as if they were... hey, wait a minute, that's your dad, right? What you're talking about? [imitates a kid's voice] Yeah, but he is... That's no way, fine, you may not subscribe to his views, to his values, but he's brought you up. Be thankful for what you have, is because of him, and your mother, the two of them. So education, instilling discipline, respect, that works much much better, because in professional life, when we started working also. We have to get along with people. If as a starter, I started fighting with my boss, or anybody, I would disagree with my boss very often. But they appreciated that, and I became the CEO.

LHP: Alright, thank you so much for participating in this interview.

JM: Not at all. And don't get lost when you get out.

LHP: [laughs] We'll try.

JM: Where are you going back? to the university?

LHP, DC: Yeah.

(1:06:30)

[Device is shut off]

Interview Questions:

Early Childhood

- Born in Pakistan, 1937
- How was Pakistan when you were growing up? Were you hugely influenced by that?
- what was it like growing up as a Zoroastrian during that time?
- What was home life like growing up?
 - What did your parents do for a living?
 - What was school like?
 - Any siblings? What were they like?
- How did you come about learning 3 languages?
 - How did you learn English?
 - Did you learn at school?
 - What language did you speak at home?
- Who were your friends? Multi-cultural?

Education/jobs

- Where did you go for college? What did you major in? Why?

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- Did you pursue a career that went along with your major?
- What was your job like?
- What was your favorite job?
- When did you retire?

Marriage/ Children

- Did you enforce Zoroastrianism to your children?
- Do they identify themselves as American or Pakistani?
- How has Houston influenced them?
- *Hopefully he will tell us about his divorce? He has two children but he's single.*
- Do you speak Gujarati at your home?

Migration

- What brought you to America?
- Where did you settle first?
- When did you move to Houston?
- Did you feel culture shock when you arrived in America?
- Have you nationalized?
- Do you keep touch and visit your family on a regular basis?

Community Involvement

- Did you seek out the Zoroastrian community when you first arrived in America?
- Are you an involved member of the Zoroastrian community?
- What do you like to do in your free time now that you're retired?