Background:

Meheryar Rivetna was born in Bombay in 1953, to a middle-class family. In India, he obtained a Bachelor’s Degree in Chemistry and Physics, as well as a Master’s Degree in Biochemistry. From a very young age, however, he had an insatiable desire to come to America. After attempting to immigrate through several avenues, he was finally able to move to the United States in 1977 to St. Louis, Missouri. Following an initial period of difficulty, Mr. Rivetna found employment at the Steak ‘n Shake, and eventually held a variety of occupational roles and professions before moving to his current place of residence in Houston in 2001.

Setting:

The interview focuses on Mr. Rivetna’s unique immigration experience, not immigrating to the U.S. as a student or as a professional, but as someone seeking employment. The interview was conducted at Meheryar Rivetna’s house in Spring, TX. During the interview, Mr. Rivetna’s wife, Zubeen Mehta, was present and occasionally referred to.

Interviewers:

Chris Johnson is a Junior at Rice University, majoring in Linguistics. Having the opportunity to work with the HAAA project and learn about the city’s lesser-known stories has been a particular source of interest for him.

Gabriel Wang is a rising Junior at Rice University originally from Seattle, Washington. He is one of the HAAA summer interns, and is majoring in Chemistry. He is also pre-pharmacy.

Interview Transcript:

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CJ: This is Chris Johnson.

GW: And this is Gabriel Wang.

CJ: And we’re here today on July 7, 2014, here to interview Mr. Meheryar Rivetna, uh, in the house of Mr. Rivetna for the Houston Asian American Archive. Um so, Mr. Rivetna, could you start off by telling us just a little bit about yourself, your childhood, where you grew up at?

MR: I was born in Bombay, India. And, uh…uh I mean, what particularly—what do you—what do you want to know? Is that it, can you share-

CJ: Um, your—what your house life was like, your neighborhood, what was that like when you were a child?

MR: We lived in a kind of, in an apartment, uh, it’s a building—It’s very uncommon for people to live in homes. People do, but it’s kind of not a, it’s not a common thing, it’s uh kind of a rarity. Cost, of course, is the number one thing. And then, land is very limited in a city like Bombay, so homes are not a common occurrence. Um, I had an older brother; he passed away a few years back. My parents both passed away. Um, I went to a school—a Catholic school called Don Bosco High School. Finished my high school and then went to go for my bachelor’s in Chemistry, Chemistry and Physics. And got my Master’s in Biochemistry. All from India.

GW: Can you tell us about your family background, had they always been in Bombay?

MR: Yes. Uh my parents are from Bombay, so, my brother was born there as well. So yeah. We’re all from Bombay, basically, yes.

CJ: So what was your neighborhood like?

MR: Uh, what was our neighborhood like. Surrounded by other apartment buildings. Uh there was a school not far from about, not even a stone’s throw from where I lived. It’s not the school that I went to. But there was a school, there was a market, you could call it a bazaar, close by, um,

GW: And what was your schooling before college like? Maybe what school you went to, your experience at school? Before you went to university.

MR: When you say experience... it was a typical school—I was a typical school kid. I mean, didn’t do anything—I played cricket, which is the, uh, but not professional or anything like that, just kinda with your friends and, you know, friends in the neighborhood, basically. Stuff like that. I wasn’t a very serious student. I wouldn’t say I was academically, very, um, on—on top of the class or anything like that. I was average, about average student. Believed in hard work.

But since this is an immigration thing, um from the age of 7, I wanted to come to America. It was something I wanted desperately. And, um, I have relatives, cousins, who are much older than I am, and they came there, in the early ‘60s. My first—the first Rivetna, in fact, to come was in 1960. And the stories that they brought back uh influenced me a lot, I mean, my desire to come to America. Movies were a tremendous, tremendous influence. American movies, I mainly watched American movies. And growing up, I—my thing was, everything American was good, everything not American was second rate. Um comic books were a big influence. You probably— guys are probably too young to remember Dennis the Menace, or Sad Sack, and— Dennis the Menace you may remember from the TV show, but we had comic books of Dennis the Menace, and watching him eat three scoops of ice cream, chocolate, vanilla, strawberry, it was something ‘Oh, wow, this is something I want too.’

I didn’t grow up in a very wealthy family, so, and ice cream, some things like that are...they’re luxury things over there. At least when I was growing up, things have changed now, but when I was growing up, they were not easily accessible for people who were not financially in the upper echelons, so to speak. So, things like that, materially, it was more of a material thing than anything else. The quality of life was very, very attractive. I did not have the quality of life that a typical, average American kid my age would be—would be enjoying over here. And he didn’t have to be rich, he could be middle class, and he could still have, his family have a—could have a car, and a telephone, and a, a stereo, and all—all that kind of stuff, the things that a young boy wants. So, that was what really, at that age, it was more material things that attracted me to America.

GW: And, what languages did you speak growing up?

MR: Growing up? Uh, well, I speak English, of course. English was the medium of instruction, so even with my friends and everything, we spoke English. Gujarati was the language I spoke at home. It was the language that almost all Zoroastrians speak, and I, I don’t wanna go into the history of Zoroastrianism, but we picked up the language when we came to India from—and that’s going back to the sixth century, A.D. So, Gujarati was the language we spoke at home with fa—with family, elders, some friends. Hindi, we had to learn Hindi as a national language, it was mandatory, you had to learn the language at school. And then you had to have a second language.
You could either choose Latin, French, or Sanskrit. I chose French. So, in school, I had s—I had four languages: English, French, Hindi, and Gujarati.

CJ: Um, I guess stepping back a little bit, you mentioned that the first Rivetna came to the U.S. in the ‘60s?


CJ: And, so, what brought them over here?

RW: Uh, opportunities, qua—quality of life. Basically, I mean, from the circle that I grew up in, it was the quality of life mainly that was the attractive feature in the West. And I’m a Zoroastrian, as you all know. And Zoroastrians, even back then, for the most part, they’re—they’re more Westernized. Their leanings are more towards the West. My wife, for example, she grew up in England. Her parents sent her there at a very young age. And again, it’s that Western education is definitely better compared to what we had in India.

Going back and thinking about it, actually, education it is not that bad, my education was not bad, because when I co—when I came over here, and so, what kids in school studied, they did not study half the things or know half the things that we knew g—growing up. We studied a variety of things. Like I said, four languages. How many kids in America study four languages before they finish high school? Very few, unless you’re making an active choice, or actively, you’re choosing to study languages. But the average American kid does not have four languages in—under his belt before he finishes high school. Uh geography, history, I mean, American kids are relatively, for lack of a better word, ignorant, about all those things that we learned in school. So, but edu—higher education definitely is better. Sciences, and the arts, and philosophy, and that other stuff is definitely better in the U.S. than—than back in India. Although, I think things have changed now, but back then, again, I’m going back 50 years. [laughs]

GW: So, do you know if your family in the ‘60s came over as students, or as after education?

RW: Uh, some came as students, but my cousin, uh, all my cousins basically came as students, and I want to, since you’re interviewing me, I want to focus on my, my coming over here. So, let me, let me take you back to my first cous—cousin, my cousin who came here in the ‘60—1960 actually. And he now lives in Arizona. Um, and I remember my mother had sent my brother and me to his place. And he had already left. He was, he was already coming to America. And, had, served as a message or something, my mother had sent me and my brother to go to his—my aunt’s house and deliver that message. And when we were there, the mailman came, and the mailman brought two postcards and a letter from him. And the postcards were, postcards were the Queen Elizabeth, that was what he was—the ship. He was going from Southampton, in England, to New York, by sea. And in those days, air travel was not that common. People do— did fly, but, uh, sea travel was more common than air travel.

So, anyway, going back. So, he had sent this postcard, now, seven years old, I still remember, I was seven years old, I distinctly remember the day. I can—it’s still uh fresh in my mind. And, um, I looked at the, uh, cards and, you know, my aunt was saying, you know, ‘Feroze,’ that’s his name,
my cousin’s name, ‘He’s going to America.’ And then, you know, so I said to myself, ‘Someday, even I’m going to do that’. So at seven years old, at seven years of age, I had made up my mind that that was something, something that I wanted. Uh, so, okay, seven years old, growing up, America had become a kind of a firmament in my mind, it was something that I had to achieve, so I had to accomplish. So I finished school, and then went to college, got my bachelor’s. And, then I—Now, most immigrants, and you’ve interviewed quite a few, most immigrants that you’ve probably interviewed, they came as students. The vast—the vast majority, they come here as students, and then they seek a job, they get sponsored by their employer, and they con—stay on. Or sometimes, people come and get married to U.S. citizens or people who’ve been—already been here. The way I came was the most difficult, and, uh, you’ll—I’ll tell you more about it as we go on.

MR: Anyway, so, uh, finished college. I got my bachelor’s and then I, I wanted to come here, so the easiest way to come was as a student. So I applied for, um, a student visa, for app—admission to universities. And um I got admitted at the University of Wisconsin. But, unfortunately, as I said, I did not have—my parents were not wealthy, so there was no question of them financing me. Um, in—in India, uh to get scholarships, scholarships are available, but to be eligible for scholarships and to come to America, or anywhere, anywhere overseas, anywhere abroad, you had to have a certain grade. And I did not have that grade. As I said, I was not academically, you know, the brightest uh kid in the world. So I kinda fell short of the um requirements to get a scholarship. And American universities would not finance me because this was, I’m talking about, this is ’74, and this was when the Vietnam War was coming to an end, and all the GIs were coming back from Vietnam, and all the—the uh funding was being pumped for their welfare, and for their schooling, and what have you. So, understandable, but, you know, when you’re so desperate, and you—you—you, I had the, this admission in my—letter in my hand, I can’t do anything about it. Very, very despondent, very dejected.

Uh, okay, so then I said, ‘Okay, I’ll continue and get my Master’s’, which I did, got my Master’s in Biochemistry. And again, the same story, I did not make the grade to be eligible for scholarships. Now, at that time, I had started applying, as I said, applied to universities, and uh I applied to the University of Florida, in Gainesville. And in their admission package, the application form, and all that kinda stuff, they sent me a research article, which said that there was a manpower shortage for pathologists in the United States. Okay, now I— I knew that as a student, there’s no hope for me to come here, come to the United States as a student, so I—I said, ‘Okay, I’m going to come as a, uh, as an immigrant’. Now, coming as an immigrant, I don’t know how much you know about immigration policies and how immigration works, I don’t know how familiar you are with that, but to give you an idea, the way it works is you apply for immigration status at the consulate in the city of your, where you are living. In my case, Bombay. And then, once you file a petition, uh the—the U.S. consulate in that city, or your home city, sends it to the Immigration and Nationalization Service in the city that you intend to reside. And, then they forward it to the Labor Department.

Now I, on my petition, I had chosen St. Louis, Missouri. That’s where I wanted to—to reside. Why St. Louis? That’s the obvious question. One reason is that when people come, want to come to America from overseas, anywhere, it—they’re, it’s New York, it’s Chicago, or Los Angeles,
some of these—these metro—metropolises, and everybody wants to—wants to come there. And so, it becomes harder for immigrants to get—get acceptance. Get—a rubber stamp, if you will, from the U.S. government. I had an American pen pal. Uh, her name was Joan Madden, she was from New York, and we corresponded for a long time. And uh I had talked to her about wanting to come to America, and this and that, and she—she was a New Yorker, but she had gone to school in Chicago, in some small school over there. And she said, ‘If you ever want to come to America, you must come to the Midwest, because the people are nicer, on the—the coastal, the life is very fast-paced, and this and that.’ So, that kinda stuck in my mind, that okay, if I ever want to go to America, I'll—I'll choose the Midwest.

So, I chose St. Louis. Why St. Louis, again? Because St. Louis is a big city, it’s the 11th largest, no, something—whatever it is, that’s not important. It’s a large city with a lot of opportunities. Big companies, Monsanto, Anheuser-Busch, Mallinckrodt, big universities, Washington University, you know, lot of opportunities from that—that angle. So, that’s why I picked St. Louis. The other reason was that I wanted to do this all on my own. I was not willing to really accept any, uh, help or, kinda, handouts from anybody. Because, uh I felt that I would not get the kind of help that I really wanted. So, I’m gonna do it on my own. Not the smartest thing to do. And I was—I was 23 years of age at the time.

Okay, so going back to the procedure, so I filed my petition with the—Now, okay, I don’t know, there are about seven preferences when you want to come over there as an immigrant, you can—The first preference is, and I won’t go into detail, the first preference is for sons and daughters of U.S. citizens. Second is for spouses or something like that, and—Oh, first is spouses, and—Third preference is, you come under the th—um, if you have some exception skills, quali—qualifications, if you’re the top-notch scientist, doctor, or you know, the, something that you’ll not, that—that’s short supply in the U.S..

Back in the ‘60s, a lot of doctors, nurses, pharmacists, came to the U.S. because there was an acute shortage of that category of um, you know, people. Now, me, 23-year-old, Master’s in Biochemistry, there are a dime a dozen biochemists in American streets. Who’s gonna pay attention to me? So, anyway, I said, ‘I’m gonna apply’, and I applied. And, uh, what happened was, uh, went through the process, and the labor department rejected my petition. And I knew that would happen. I knew that would happen. After all, I was very practical, and I was only 23 years old. Who’s gonna give me, you know?

So, I had drafted—already drafted a letter, it was a four page letter to the Labor Department. Now, where did I get that information? Growing up, I spent a lot of time, a lot of hours at what was back then called USIS, United States Information Service. There were generally libraries, but they also had a lot of information on the U.S. And I spent, and it was my second home. I, like I said, everything—America was very, very dear to me. It was something I had to accomplish under any circumstances, I couldn’t care less what ha—this was one thing that I had to achieve.
Just going back, sidetrack, when I was 18, this was an 18-year-old dumb kid thinking. I wanted to join the Navy, the merchant navy, not the mil—uh, the military, but the merchant navy. And my thinking was, I’ll join this—join the Navy, and as soon as my ship touches an American port, I’ll jump ship. I mean, idiotic thinking, but it is—I wanted to—the bottom of I’m trying to convey is the intensity, the desperation, the you know, the energy, and that’s what I wanted to convey. What’s—what was a stupid idea—stupid thinking, but I wanted to impart the, uh, the desire, the intense desire that I had. Anyway. That didn’t happen, didn’t get into the Navy. I had crossed the age limit. Always, almost there, but not there, if you know what I mean. [laughs]

Alright, so now I apply for the immigration, and I get rejected. My petition is rejected. So, I had draft—draft—drafted a four page letter to the—and then four pages, that was a little too much. And, oh, and the reason I had mentioned the USIS was, I got the information, got the name of the Labor Department, uh, Regional Director. Assistant Regional Director for Manpower, and this is, I think you guys wanted something to take with you, this is for you. [hands CJ and GW a document]

CJ: Thank you.

RW: This is a copy. And I wrote what I, why I wanted to come to America. And, um, I won’t go through the whole thing. You can read it on your own later on. But I made, two—two points I really made. One was that I was a Zoroastrian. And Zoroastrians have made immense contributions wherever they’ve gone in the world. You’ve—you’ve talked to a few. And 99 percent of Zoroastrians, 99.5 percent of Zoroastrians in the U.S. are very successful, they’re very well placed, they’re, you know, in society, good positions, well-known. I don’t know if you know Zubin Mehta. Zubin Mehta is the—was—was the director of the New York Philharmonic. He’s one of the most famous Zoroastrians uh in the world, I would say. [to ZM] Wouldn’t you? Yeah. So anyway, so I wrote what that—that I come from the community that this guy comes from.

And one thing I wrote was, [reads from document] ‘To me, America means more than an opportunity to make money. It means a chance at the real destiny of men. It means an opportunity for learning, experience, achievement, comfort, and freedom. An opportunity to make the world a better place to live in. What America needs now is new immigrants to love and cherish it.’ A little corny, but, uh again, this is a 23-year-old kid writing, again, it’s—it’s that, again, I want to really convey to you the, the intense desire that I had, and nothing—nothing was gonna stop me.

Um, so this was my last hope. And it worked. Within a few days, I got the labor certification approved, and, um, now, now what? Now what—now what? What do you do next, now? What do you—what do. I have, uh, a distant uncle who is in Los Angeles, my mother’s uh sister-in-law’s brother. He’s now in his late, mid-'80s probably. But at that time, he was visiting. So, and we looked at this, my mother looked at it, and you know, okay, what does it mean? So, we went to see him, and my mother said, ‘Okay, he’s here, maybe he can tell us what needs to be done, what—what, what this means’. So we get in a cab, and we go and see him, so, and mom said, you know, ‘This has come, and can you help us, what—what does it mean?’
So, the guy starts looking at it, and it was a—one-page thing. It was actually, actually [brings out another document] this very page, this is the certification that, it's—it's—it's the most difficult thing to obtain in the world. People would tell me, ‘You’ll get to the moon before you get to America! This is—this is never gonna happen.’ Everybody—I talked to in India, ‘Are you kidding, are you kidding? Are you out of your mind?! Are you stupid? Are you, you know.’ And the other thing was, if—if this got rejected, I could never enter the United States, because now I’m an intending immigrant. And uh U.S. policies, I don’t know if they’ve changed now, but back then, if you’re intending immigrant, you could—I couldn’t even come as a visitor. Because the American consulate would see, ‘Okay, this guy has already intending—he’s an intending—intending immigrant, he’s gonna go there, and he’s gonna do something crazy, and he’s going to, you know, settle in.’

So, anyway, so I go to this uncle of mine, this distant uncle of mine, and this is—we take, this is what—we had. This is also a copy, I kept the original. Um so, he said [flips paper front and back], ‘How did you get this?’ His first, first question, ‘How did you get this? This is not, this is not, it can’t be.’ He was, total disbelief. Total disbelief. Like I said, this is the most important—uh, most difficult thing to get. For someone sitting ten thousand miles away, don’t forget that, and, you know, what creden—credentials that I have, a Master’s in Biochemistry from the University of Bombay? Who gives a darn, y’know?

Anyway, so, he said, ‘Well I, the best thing for you to do is to go to the American consulate and see what they have to say.’ Anyway, so I go to the American consulate, and they say, ‘Yeah, the petition’s approved, now we’ll get the process moving. And uh you know, we’ll get you your visa.’ Even at the consulate, they were in total disbelief. Total disbelief, ‘How the heck did this happen, this is—this is impossible!’ This is really an—[stutters] and I can say, ‘til today, I can say this a significant achievement in my life. This is something that, uh, [to GW] I don’t, uh, I don’t know if your parents came over here, or how, you know, they must’ve had the encounter, and from the same difficulty, I don’t know how they came, but probably they must have also had same, uh, issues when they came over here. So, anyway. Alright, so, I get my—did I give you this?

CJ: Oh, thank you.

RW: I get my visa—where’s the other page?

GW: It’s-

MR: Oh, sorry. Uh, I get my, I get my visa, and again, and I was gonna go to St. Louis, right? I had—I had picked—chosen St. Louis as the place that I want—wanted to live. So now, when you leave India for good, the government of India allows you only eight dollars. Eight dollars. This is ’77, 1977, still, okay, it’s 36 years ago, but still, eight dollars back then also, nothing—you couldn’t buy a cup of coffee. Okay, I’m exaggerating, but, maybe a sandwich was the most you could buy with eight dollars. And they—and they do it, [coughs] excuse me, and they do it to discourage people from living—leaving. Who leaves? It’s the educated people who leave the
country and want to, you know, move abroad. So it’s a way of discouraging people. So eight dollars, and like I said, my parents were not wealthy, there was no question of, uh. So when I got on the plane uh in Bombay, I had eight dollars in my pocket. I did not have a job anywhere in the U.S. I did not uh have a place to stay. I did not know a soul in St. Louis, okay, I did not know anybody.

Anyway, so I got on the plane, eight dollars in my pocket, and I stopped in London. I have an uncle, and my mom’s brother was in London at the time. I stopped in London to see him, and he gave me $1000. Even $1000 is not a whole lot, even back in ’77. You’re growing—you’re going abroad, overseas, I mean, you’re gonna start a life. With $1000, think about, would you go to uh London with $1000 to start a life? And you don’t know anybody over there—you have no idea what you’re going to do. Think about it. So how, uh—anyway, so my uncle gave me $1000, and I came to America. I—I spent some time in New Jersey, and Connecticut, with some friends from, people I knew back from Bombay, my neighbors, actually, and, uh, spent a few days with them, and then I got on the plane to St. Louis. This is December. December of 1977. And, uh, I was told that, that—those—that year, ’77–’78 winters were the worst in U.S. history. That’s what I was told. How far it’s true, I—I don’t know. I’m gonna take people’s word that it was the worst year for—for winter, for winter. Anyway. So now, I land in St. Louis. All of a sudden, panic hits. Where am I gonna go? What do I—I don’t know a soul in St. Louis, I have no idea where I’m going to stay, What am I gonna do?

So, I’m standing there at the airport, with my bags in my hand, a shoulder—a slingbag on my shoulder, and two—two suitcases. ‘Oh my god.’ That, I had that when I left India, I was going to the land of milk and honey, and the land of plenty, and the streets—the streets are paved with gold, and yeah. I—all of a sudden, all that, you know, just disappeared. All that, that, uh, arrogance, if you will, just, you know, went [whistles] ‘whew’. Evaporated. So, and now, I’m in St. Louis airport, where am I gonna go. So, I saw a policeman at the airport. So I went up to him, and I said, ‘Officer, I’ve just arrived in St. Louis, and, uh, can you tell me where I can find a place to, uh, go and stay?’

So, he, in his Missouri drawl, he goes, [exaggerated, indistinguishable Southern accent noise]. That’s, you know, it—I don’t know if you guys know, you may be too young to know this, but at—at some airports, at one time, they had kind of a, I can’t think of the, it’s not a kiosk, but kind of a, it’s on a wall, and there are hotels, okay, the Marriott, and Breckenridge, and the Radisson, and all—all those. And you pick up the phone, and you’re connected directly to the hotel, and then the shuttle comes and picks you up. But those hotels were $100, $200, a night. And I had—I had, you know, $1000. In five days, [claps]. I said, ‘Oh my god, what am I gonna do?’

So I said, okay. So, I went out, got into the parking area, and I saw a limousine. And, people had told me that, ‘Don’t take a taxi, taxis are expensive, take a limousine,’ because limousines were cheaper. So I go up to the driver and say, ‘Hey, listen, I just got to St. Louis, and I wanna go to a cheap motel.’ Now, the English that we speak—speak is English English. It’s, in America, cheap means ‘sleazy.’ In English English, cheap means ‘inexpensive.’ The guy looked at me, gave me
a strange look, he thought I was looking for a brothel or something. Um, so, which, and I—once
I had really—he gave me a look, I could tell at once that he, when I said ‘cheap mo—motel,’ he
thought, he thought ‘What are you—,’ you know? [laughs] So, ‘I, oh, I mean, inexpensive.
Inexpensive motel.’ ‘Okay, alright.’

So I got in the—got into the limousine, he took me downtown, and, uh, he got me to a motel, $7
a night. That I can, [laughs] I can deal with. So $7 a night, stayed there for, um, three days.
And—and then found an apartment. And, um, I had no money for food or anything. I didn’t
have proper, I had a—I had a light jacket, and I had a little coat, heavy coat. But I didn’t have
proper shoes, no snow shoes. I had never seen snow in my life. And it was like, it was snowing,
there was snow on the ground. You know, ‘cause, it—it was bitterly cold. Um, and I would,
[referring to ZM] she laughs, but my—uh, meal—I got a—a $1.25 bag of corn chips, that was
my meal. I would eat corn chips. And it got bitterly cold. There was kind of a small coffee shop.
I’d go in there and have a hot choc—have hot chocolate. So, that was my food, my meals for the
first three or four days.

If I had to go for interviews, this was—this is December, early December. We’re coming on to
Christmas. No one is interested in talking to you. Any—any potential employer, ‘Come after
Christmas, you know, we’re in a—we’re a holiday, holiday mood right—right now, and we’re
not even interested in talking to you.’ You’re under—but I gotta eat! [laughs] Okay? [laughs]
Christmas or no Christmas! I—I gotta, you know, fill the sack over here! And so, to go for
interviews, I’d walk to save money on—there were buses, there were public transportation, but
that still cost money. So, bitter cold, cold weather, I used to walk, and I got so—so many stories
to tell, it would take up too much time.

But the long and short of it is that the, that—Oh, I forgot, I gotta—gotta tell you this. Uh, when
I, so when I landed in um New Jersey, to stay with my friend, and my—my parents had said,
‘When you get to America, make sure that you just send us a telegram that you’ve arrived,
arrived safely.’ So, my telegram to them, I did send them a telegram. I didn’t say, ‘I arrived
safely.’ My telegram was two words: ‘Wish Fulfilled.’ [laughs] So it’s a—it’s a kind of a—it’s a
very personal story, and I—it’s something that really, it’s—in my, for me, it is an achievement,
it’s an—it’s an accomplishment that—

Yeah, sure enough, if you, you know, your grandparents, great grandparents, there are other
people who, other Americans who’ve been here for, you know, a long time, yeah, they came
through Ellis Island, and maybe they came from Eastern Europe, or they didn’t speak the
language, or they came from far east—from the far east and they didn’t speak the language,
they had to learn the language, they—they had probably had other difficulties. Yeah, I mean, I
spoke the language, I was educated, and I had a little money. But this is again, we’re not talking
1920, we’re talking about 1977. You know, it’s still a big difference. So, it’s only 36—36 years
ago. So that, in a kind of a, it’s a big nutshell, [laughs] is my story of coming to America as an
immigrant. Questions.

CJ: Um, so I guess stepping back a little bit-
MR: Yeah.

CJ: So, the neighborhood that you lived in, the apartment that you lived in at first in St. Louis, can you describe that for us a little bit? What was the demographics of it, or?

MR: [Overlapping, laughs] Okay, yeah, yeah, oh, it was a studio apartment, okay. It was near-Have you been to St. Louis, have you? No? Okay. It was, it’s near Washington University Medical School. And it was considered a ‘bad neighborhood.’ I had no idea, ‘What do you mean, ‘bad neighborhood,’ this is America, what do you mean ‘bad neighborhood,’ there’s no such thing as a bad neighborhood in America.’ But, I didn’t know that ‘til much later, I was merely walking the streets—So I had, it was a studio apartment, there was a couch, there was one bed—no utensils, nothing. So like I said, corn chips were still my [laughs] staple diet.

Um, and it would, being winter, it used to get dark very early. About 3:00, 3:30, it was dark. And I—I didn’t want to walk around in the dark. Nothing was—I didn’t even think about ‘good neighborhood,’ ‘bad neighborhood,’ but there was nothing to do, where do I go, you know? And it’s cold! The sun sets, you know, it just turns cold! So, I used to come—come to the apartment, and I had no hesitation in saying this, I used to sit and cry. ‘Why the hell did I come here? Why the hell did I come here?’ Of course, as time things got better, I have no regrets that I came over here, but back then, you know, when you’re sitting in the apartment, at 3:00 you’re sitting in—in the afternoon, no television, no radio, no books, nothing, and I’m sitting there from 3 to 8, 9, 10 when I go—went to bed. Does that answer your question?

GW: So where did you first find work?

MR: Oh! Okay. Oh, okay! [laughs] Right, thank you, thank you for asking! Okay so, like I said, this was the first—first week of December, and I started looking for—for work. And no one was, it (?) wasn’t talking to me, the companies that I wanted to work, Monsanto and Mallinckrodt, you know, Anheuser-Busch, even small companies, small, you know, universities, [trails off, makes noise of disgust]. So I said, okay, I’ve got to eat, this is—they’re not gonna—I can’t wait until January 2nd, 3rd, 4th before I get a job, and I’m—I’ll run out of money, and I won’t have any-

Oh, the other thing was, when I—when I got the apartment, see, that—there was a, a bad thing. When I got the apartment, the uh landlord, um, I don’t think he was a landlord, but who was manager or whoever he was, he took a month’s deposit, which is typical for—for an apartment. Then the month’s—current month’s rent, okay. And I’d assumed it was $140, the rent. And since I didn’t have a job, he took an extra month’s deposit. So 140 times 3, that’s $420, uh, am I—is my math right? Yeah, $420 out of the $1000, out, gone! So now I only have $500 left, oh my gosh.

So I, um, so—okay, I—I gotta find something. So I would go and work as a—work as a waiter. And I would go to these, you know, these steakhouses, you know, like, uh, what was that place, I forget the name of the steakhouse. But something like Texas Roadhouse, or one of those, not—not fancy steakhouses, but, uh, Longhorn, whatever, Longhorns, I don’t know. Whatever, small
steakhouse. And the—when I filled out the application, I was being honest, okay, I’ve got high
school, Don Bosco High School, BS in—uh, chemistry—chemistry physics, MS in
biochemistry. They’d look at it, right, ‘What does a guy with a master’s in biochemistry want to
work as a waiter?’ So of course, the uh, the, my application would end up in the dustbin.

And I—so, then I—then I said I also got to meet people. So I opened the phone—St. Louis
phonebook. Now, I’m Zoroastrian and we have typical names, so you—you can’t—you can’t go
wrong with those names. So I started looking for some typical names that we have. And I found
a couple of people. So I called them up and say, ‘Listen, I’ve just come, I’m a, you know, fellow
Zoroastrian, Zoro Par—we call ourselves Parsis, I’m a fellow Parsi. And can you, you know, I’d
like to meet you.’ And, uh, and they were, probably—it was a dentist, there was a—a scientist at
Monsanto, there was an engineer at, uh, uh, what’s the, air—aircraft, aircraft company, uh,
forget—starts with the name… Mc—McDonnell Douglas! He was an engineer at McDonnell
Douglas, so, maybe these guys can maybe do something for me. Uh, no such luck.

Um, but anyway, I got to—I got to know them, and then when I told them that I’m looking
for jobs, and they said, ‘What are you doing when you—when you fill out the application?’ I mean,
I told them about my background, I had the Master’s and this and that, and yeah, but—And I
said, I’m [they’re] like, ‘Don’t do that. Because when they see your application as—as a
Master’s, they’re just, you know, pitching it!’ So I went to Steak ‘n Shake. Have you guys heard
of Steak ‘n Shake? It’s a—there’s one—there’s one actually on 1960, very new, it’s a, very
recent. But Steak ‘n Shake is a—it’s a hamburger place, but very sit-down, unlike McDonald’s
where you stand, and you—and you get served. There are waiters and waitresses and you get
served hamburgers. So I went to, uh, Steak ‘n Shake. Um, and I just put high school, Don Bosco
High School, and I got the job. [laughs] So I would work weekends, Saturdays and Sundays, and
I would take a day off in the middle of the week so I could go for mo—real
interviews, you
know, the kind of jobs I wanted. So I worked there for about ten days, I think.

And as a—as a kind of sideline… as a sidebar, when I first—got my first paycheck, I wanted to be
an American, right? Very much American. What do you think was the first thing I bought? I went to
a department store and bought a pair of Levi’s jeans. [laughs] Now I’m an American!
[everyone laughs] Now I’m an American! Levi’s jeans is, you know, it’s as—like McDonald’s,
I’d say, you can’t be any more American than that! So that was my first thing.

Anyway, so, um, worked for ten days at Steak ‘n Shake, and then I got a job at St. Louis
University in the research—in the chemistry labs, as a research assistant. So that was my first
real job, my—and that job, you know how much it paid? It paid eight dollars an hour. This is
still ‘77, don’t forget that, it’s still seventy—okay, you may say, it’s ‘77, but still, eight dollars
an hour wasn’t much. So I had to make do, so I have my pay, my take-home pay monthly was
about, if I recall correctly, $450, $460 a month. So I had to really live on that. So to—to answer
your question about my first job, that’s how I—and then, of course, from that point on, of
course, I went to other companies, I went to Monsanto, I did get a job at Monsanto eventually.
And, uh, moved on.
CJ: Um so after that, how did you end up in Houston? What was the process between that point and…

MR: Okay. Um, to make a long story short, from St. Louis University I went to a company called Sigma Chemical Company in St. Louis, then I got to go to Monsanto, from Monsanto I came to Merck in New Jersey, uh in—in Raleigh. From New Jersey I went to Philadelphia, moved to Philadelphia—uh, [pause] yeah, New Jersey to Philadelphia—Philadelphia. And the comp—it’s Merck, you’ve heard of Merck right? Pharmaceutical company, it’s a big pharmaceutical…

CJ: I think so.

MR: It’s a—it’s a big pharmaceutical company. So uh I was at Merck in Philadelphia, and they went through some reorganization, and they said, ‘We’re eliminate—eliminating some jobs, and if you want to ki—stay with the company, you’ll have to move outside of Philadelphia.’ And one of the options was Houston, so that’s what brought—brought me to Houston.

CJ: And what year was that?


GW: So, which neighborhood did you move to when you first moved to Houston?

MR: This.

GW: This one?

MR: I’ve been here since 2001, it’s—in this house, yeah.

GW: And what sort of factors made you choose this neighborhood versus other areas?

MR: Uh, close to my work. I’m in sales, so my—my job, my territory is in the area, so that was the reason. So job—job, uh, demands.

CJ: Um what was your first impression of Houston?

MR: Coming from Philadelphia, it—not too good. [laughs] Uh, because over—over here it’s guns, pickup trucks, and George Bush, uh something that kind of didn’t sit well with me. And the other reason was I was kinda forced to come to Houston, it wasn’t a choice that I would had made. I would have con—continued staying at Philadelphia if uh the company hadn’t gone through any struct—any changes. And because of the changes they went through I was kind of forced over here, it’s this, you know, to keep—I couldn’t just quit my job. I mean, I could have, but it didn’t make sense at that time. It’s a good company, I mean, it’s a big company, big company and lots of advantages to working with their company.
Uh so my first impressions, not all that great. I—to give you an example, uh we went to, probably— right over here, we went to uh a, a mechanic, oil change or something, we went to—for that. And we still have Pennsylvania license plates on the car. So the guy looks at Pennsylvania—Penn—[in a slightly nasal tone] ‘We don’t like anyone north of the Mason-Dixon line!’ Uh-oh. [everyone laughs] Okay, I’m staying here, whether you like it or not, I’m here! So, impressions? Not very positive.

Now, after thirteen years, twelve years, thirteen years, yeah. The good—one good thing that I like—really like about this place is the weather. I did not like the cold and the sn—shoveling the snow in Philadelphia and New Jersey, and, that wasn’t fun. I don’t know if you’ve lived up—[to GW] you live in Washington, so you know. [looks at CJ]

CJ: Virginia, but...

MR: Virginia. Hard—hardly, yeah. But uh St.—St. Louis was nasty, weather-wise. I mean, I love the city in every way, but weather I couldn’t take it; too much snow and cold, and blowing winds, and. So now—okay, yeah we have hurricanes and we have all that stuff, but uh it’s—I think it’s still better than, um, blizzards. [laughs]

CJ: Um so I guess from the—aside from the anti-Yankee sentiment, what did you find to be the hardest thing about moving to Houston?

MR: The hardest thing? [pause] I think the cul—culture, uh, kind of, very laid back. Uh, I also found that uh the typical Texan, uh, as—as you move west of Houston city—city of Houston, as you move from the more cosmopolitan Houston, uh the thinking is very narrow. It—it’s not, uh, and—and, they’re not really attuned to what’s happening around the world. Te—Texas is the beginning and the end of the world for them. Uh, from Amarillo to, uh, uh Huntsville, who… [laughs] after you—after you cross Huntsville and cross Conroe and come over here, okay alright, then it gets a little better.

But uh over there, the thinking’s… I—I—have—go to Cleveland, in Texas. And I was—have you been to Cleveland? Do you know? It’s right here, if you—about 45 minutes, an hour from here, hour—hour—a little over an hour from here. Small town, rinky-dink, a hundred — rundown town, you know. You—you could put one foot in—in the—in the entrance of the city and the other foot, you know, outside the city, it’s that small. I was exaggerating, but you get the idea. And as I talk to people, and there are people in Cleveland who have never been out of Cleveland, they have never gone to Houston! Oh my god, I can’t even ask them if they’ve been abroad, you’ve—you know, there’s no point in even asking if they’ve been overseas, they haven’t gone to Houston! Wow, okay. So, dis—disturbing and not very, oh my gosh, okay, never mind. [laughs]

GW: In the 13 years that you’ve been here, are—are there any ways in which you’ve seen Houston change?
MR: [laughs] Getting more congested. [laughs] Yeah, when we first moved over here, this was essentially barren, it was just fields. And now we have restaurants galore, not that they’re great restaurants, but eating houses, Panda—Panda Express and uh Starbucks and Chick-fil-A and all those things, there was nothing of the sort back then. So it’s, yeah, it’s grown and it’s um gotten more congested.

CJ: Um, and as someone who wasn’t originally from the U.S., did you ever feel like you experienced any difficulties in Houston, or any other city that is, any hostilities or anything along those lines?

MR: I’ve never—[laughs] knock on wood, never encountered any, um, overt preju—I have been, I—I, covertly, yes, I—I can, yeah, this person, you know, thinks of me differently than, you know, I’m a little darker than the average, the white American, if you will. And so there has been a, ‘What does this guy know?’ They tend to think—like I said, they tend to think they have all the answers, they’re—they’re Texan, ‘I’m a Texan, who can tell me, you know, what’s good and what’s not good?’ And when I talk to some of these people, you know, I’ve got two Master’s degrees, alright? You’ve barely finished high school. Shut up. [everyone laughs] And so, uh, hostilities? Overtly, no one has really—knock on wood—like I said, ever done anything to me. But yeah, uh, you—you do feel that you’re different. But, they don’t realize that they—I’m a different, physically I may be different, but uh emotionally, intellectually, more superior than you are. And that’s not arrogance or pride, it’s, you know, being factual.

[Pause]

CJ: Um, so, how did you meet your wife?

MR: [laughs] Oh, you really wanna know that? [clears throat] She’s my second wife. Uh, I was married before, and I was married before to an American woman. Wanted everything American, right? So even the wife had to be American. Um… didn’t work out. I’ve got two kids from the—from the previous marriage, no kids from this marriage. Uh, so after the—after the break-up, I was back in the ‘field’, if you will, back in the market. And, [coughs] I have a cousin in Chicago, and she helps, um, uh, Zoroastrians, she kinda, she’s not a matchmaker, but she kinda introduces, and we have a—a magazine, she kind of edits the magazine, called FEZANA, which is the Federation of Zoroastrian Associations of North America. And that magazine has matrimonial ads and things like that, so if you—if you’re interested you would, you know, put an ad in the, in that magazine and others would read it, and.

Anyway, so this co—cousin of mine knew uh her sister’s sister-in-law, who lives in New Jersey. So they met at some, some function, some, uh some kind of a act—activity that they had, and they met. And they got talking and say, ‘Hey, I’ve got a cousin in New-,’ at—at that time I was in New Jersey, ‘I have a cousin in New Jersey who’s looking for, you know, someone, sort of,’ and this girl I’m talking about, her sister’s sister-in-law also lives in New Jersey. So she said, uh, ‘Yeah, you know, my—my sister-in-law’s sister is also from, you know, kinda looking for somebody.’ And she—she lived in England, because she went, at a very young age, her parents uh sent her there
for studies, she went to boarding school and all that. And she went to Oxford, got to throw that in. [everyone laughs]

Uh, yeah, so the two of them just, my cousin and this girl got talking, so she contact—my cousin contacted me—no, she didn’t contact, no sorry, she didn’t contact me. Uh this—her sister’s sister-in-law wrote to her sister, called her sister up, ‘Hey listen, there’s this guy in New Jersey, if you want to call him here’s his phone number,’ da-da-da. And so I got a call from her sister, and she asked, ‘Listen, my—my sister is, you know, she’s a schoolteacher and educated and da-da-da. Would you be interested in, you know.’

And at that—at that time—at that point, I had seen or kind of, you know, been out, uh, socially, just to get to know somebody, for a long-term relationship, but uh nothing kinda, nothing appealed to me, for whatever reason, for variety of reasons. I said, ‘Okay, I’ve gotten this call, whatever it means, you know.’ It’s only a 56-cent stamp, or airman’s stamp. So she said, ‘If you write to her, if you don’t mind, if you write to her, if you’re interested.’ So okay, so I—I wrote to her, and she wrote back, and I wrote back, and she wrote back. And this was around January, February of ‘94. ‘94, yeah. So she wrote—now, she was a schoolteacher back in England, and in England around Easter time they get a long break, they get around three weeks, they call it, uh, not spring break, but [to ZM] what do you call it?

ZM: Well, it’s an Easter break.

MR: Easter—well, it’s an Easter break. So she said, ‘Listen, I’ve got this three-week break, and is it okay if I come and visit you?’ And we, in—in—in our correspondence we kinda found some commonality, some common features. Okay, it’s possible there could be something over here. Come on over. So she came over, so I mean, uh, we talked, spent some time together. Now, at that time I had another cousin in New Jersey, so she stayed with her, and she was, you know, and she was good enough, my cousin was good enough to put her up. So we’d spend the day together and at night she’d go and stay with her, and then the next morning I would pick her up, and we would go shopping or eating out or whatever. And in those, I think you stayed for the full three weeks, so yeah, for the full three weeks kind of we liked each other, and uh I uh popped the question. [laughs] She said, ‘I’ll think about it,’ she didn’t commit herself, she said, ‘I’ll think about it.’ She went back, I think she spoke to her parents. Her parents said, ‘Yeah, I guess, if you think it’s the right person,’ and a few days later she said yeah, and so, the rest is history. [laughs]

GW: And is your wife also Zoroastrian?

MR: Yes she is, yeah.

GW: So did you guys have a Zoroastrian wedding, or more of a traditional...?

MR: Uh, yes we did. We did—yeah, we did. Yes. Yeah.

[Pause]

CJ: So I guess, have you, have you ever gone back to India at any point in time?
MR: Oh yes, of course. Uh, after our wedding we went, and before—that, with my ex-wife I had been, and my kids were very young at that time. So—that was the first time, was after 11 years, my son was about a year and a half, year—year and a half, and my daughter was about three years, the first time. So I went, after 11 years of having come over here, that was, first time at that—at that point. And then after that, I did not go back ‘til I got married again. Yeah, I did not go back again ‘til I got married. And then a couple of times, her mother passed away, so we went there; my brother passed away, we went at that time; uh my mother passed away, so we went at that time. And there was one more time, we went to—I took my kids who—they were much older, they were 15, 16 at that time, and my mother wanted to see her grandchildren. So that was another time. So yeah, I have—I have gone back, a few times. [coughs] Excuse me.

CJ: Um, and you mentioned your children a few times just now. Uh you said that you spoke several languages grow—growing up, do they speak any languages other than English?

MR: Eng—besides English, no. No. And that was, that’s my fault. I—I’ll—I’ll take full responsibility, I should have taught them. But then, they were very young when we broke—their mother and I broke up, and so you’re emotionally wrapped up in all that garbage going on, so the children kind of, you know, get, unfortunately, reality being what it is, they get uh pushed aside.

GW: Besides language, are there any ways in which you tried to pass your culture down to your children?

MR: Yes, yeah. I’m quite involved in the uh association—Zoroastrian, Zoroastrian association here in Houston. And, um, we have a very good library of Zoroastrian literature, books on religion, culture. So I kind of tend to share that with them, uh periodically. Interestingly, we have a symbol, uh, a Zoroastrian symbol, I don’t know if you’ve seen it. It’s—it’s a—it’s a wing symbol. [shows CJ and GW his necklace with the symbol] Uh, yeah. And, you know, how it is... This is quite a—it’s a very Zoroastrian symbol. It’s a…okay.

GW: Mm-hmm.

MR: And, um, um my son just went to San Francisco yesterday for, he’s working, and so his job sent him—sent him there. And he was walking the streets of San Francisco and he came across this, uh, convenience store. And on the marquee they had this symbol. So he s—took a picture and sent it to—send it to me. So, they—they—they’re conscious of their culture and their heritage. They don’t practice it, and again, my fault, I did not really, uh, take the kind of interest level I should have. And my daughter also didn’t practice, but she talks about her faith to other people, to other, uh, yeah. So, not a whole lot, but they’re aware and they’re conscious of their heritage.

CJ: Um so you mentioned you’re pretty involved with the Zoroastrian Association here, um how did you first get involved with the organization?
MR: Um, I had a friend, now she’s back—she’s moved to India for personal reasons. I had a friend over here, she lived in Houston, and so I—you know, we got together one time, and then she said, ‘You know guys, you need to come and be at the-’. We were at least here for two years before we actually got into the association. So, we were married in about two years. So for the first couple years we were on our own. We had—she [my wife] had friends from her work, I had friends from my work, so we did nothing, not a whole lot with Zoroastrians. I have another friend also from India, he’s—he’s in Houston. So we’d do a few things with them, but not with the association as a whole. Excuse me. But this friend, she—she kind of pulled us into the association, that’s how we got involved.

CJ: Um, and so do you guys regularly attend any sort of like, religious service there or anything, or?

MR: Religious—not, not religious services per se, but, uh, um functions that we have. We—I’m in—I’m in the library committee, and as—as a member of the library committee what—one of the things we do is we invite scholars from around the world to speak to us. So I kind of coordinate that and I’m involved in the scholarship angle, I’m more interested in the learning of the religion, because Zoroastrians, I hate to say this, uh, openly, but Zoroastrians on the whole are very ignorant of their religion. Partly their fault, partly not their fault, again, it’s a long story, but I—I want to make sure I—I do my part in imparting as much as I can to my community. So that’s my—that’s my aim, to be a member of the association.

CJ: Um—[to GW] Oh, did you have a…

GW: Oh, you can go.

CJ: Okay, um, I was just gonna ask, so how do you uh see your faith influencing your daily life? Just any examples of how you…

MR: I don’t know how much you know about the religion, it’s—it’s a—it’s a very simple religion, it’s—it’s not at all complex, there are no, too many do’s or don’ts. The basic premise of the religion is righteousness for the sake of righteousness. You—you—you do—you lead—a righteous life, not for any, not for anticipation of any reward or fear of punishment in the hereafter. You do—you do it because it’s the thing to do. And uh I try to, I’m not saying I’m very successful, uh, I—I do make—I do deviate from that, but I try to do that as much as possible, in my work life, in my personal life, in my family life as far as possible, and make a conscious effort.

As I get older, uh I am more mentally attuned to that. In the younger days I wasn’t, I knew it was the thing to do, it was essential, but I did not pay a whole lot of attention, or... When you’re young you’re ambitious, you want to get ahead in your company and your organization, you want to make money, and so you lose track of, you lose your, um, perspective. But as I great—get older, I make an effort to, as much as I can. And I think I’m doing a better job than I did say, thirty years ago. [laughs]
GW: So, you mentioned that you moved to Houston in 2001.

MR: Yes.

GW: So, that was, you know the year of the events of 9/11…

MR: Yes.

GW: So did that, did 9/11 impact your life in any way? Or did you see any changes?

MR: [Overlapping] I—I—I can’t s—no, not—not that, no. I don’t think, uh, except for what happened in New York, uh the rest of the country was not really impacted. I mean, emotionally, yes you are. I mean, somebody’s invaded your country. Uh but it didn’t really affect my day-to-day living, I wouldn’t say. [to ZM] Would you?

ZM: No.

MR: No, I don’t—I don’t think, you know…

GW: Yeah.

CJ: Um, so as far as how you identify, do you feel like you identify um as an Indian or as an American or both equally, or? Can you talk about that a little bit?

MR: [laughs] That’s a damn good question. [everyone laughs] Okay, if you asked me that question uh 30 years ago, I would have said American all the way through. See, I—keep in mind, I came to this country with a green card in my hand, alright, I guess, if you go back to my, I walked into this country legally, I did not come in any illegal way, I mean, as a student, I was a legitimate—uh, res—permanent resident, around (?) a citizen of that—that took five years to get his citizenship. And, uh, um so thir—thirty years back, you would have asked me, I would have said I’m all—all the way American.

Um, just to—I’ll come back to your question, but just to give you a little more, uh exactly on the fifth year that I finished my five years in the U.S., I went straight to the courthouse and filed my petition for citizenship. I did not wait a second, I mean, I was that—I had to be American through and through. Uh, today, um I still consider myself Americ—American. I’m Americ—an Americ— I’m an American citizen, I have an American passport, I don’t think I would trade that for anything else. But I do realize that India has something to offer which I’ve overlooked, which I have kind of missed. Uh, it’s not a place I would really go and live again, uh but may—I wouldn’t make a conscious choice, because this is home. I’ve got a—kids were born here, my kids were born in St. Louis—here in St. Louis—I mean, the U.S.. My friends are here, I’m kind of—when I—when I go back to India for visits, I feel different. ‘Cause the lifestyle is different, the—the—I’m used to—more attuned to the American culture. I still maintain my—my heritage, and I, you know, my religious feelings and beliefs, and, um, and, so—[coughs] I’m sorry.
And sometimes when people criticize India, I get on the defensive, because when they’re criticizing, they’re basing their criticism on what they see on PBS, which is—all—and all the PBS shows is slums. [laughs] And that’s not India. It’s like, uh, showing only, you know, a certain part of Houston, uh, and, that’s not Houston! Houston is much more than, you know, a small enclave or some, you know, ghetto. Not the case. So I get very defensive when—when people criticize India for the wrong reasons. So now—to your question, I kind of have mixed feelings, I do have some leanings again, as—I guess, as I’m getting older, I—I—is that the reason? I don’t know. But I—I do feel that as India does have things to offer that I’ve missed understanding and knowing.

[Pause, MR coughs]

CJ: Um, so what do you like to do in your free time?

MR: I enjoy reading, I like to read a lot. And, uh, what do I read? I—I read a lot of Zoroastrian literature, I get a little more involved, uh because like I said, growing up, didn’t know much about the religion. And most Zoroastrians, as I said earlier, are really not uh knowledgeable about their religion, what the religion has to offer. It’s a very deep—It’s a simple religion, but it gots—gots—gots some really good meanings, and it’s really uh a wondrous—wondrous religion. It has influenced Christianity, Islam, Judaism, uh the concept of heaven and hell, judgment day; these are all Zoroastrian concepts which have come into Christianity and Islam and even um Judaism.

So reading is one thing that I—and I enjoy photography. Not that I’m a pro, but I enjoy taking good pictures, and I have some good pictures. Reading, photography, cooking. I enjoy cooking, I love to cook. And again, nothing—not one—not any particular type of cuisine, anything and everything. So I have—something catches my fancy, [claps] I’m gonna try this!

CJ: So I guess just wrapping up a little bit, uh you may have already answered this before, but what do you consider to be one of you greatest accomplishments so far?

MR: In life?

CJ: Yes, sir.

MR: Coming to America.

CJ: Mm-hmm.

MR: Absolutely. I mean, I came the most difficult way. You—you will not find many people, unless they have doctor, engin—they’re top notch scientists and they’re, you know, very advanced in their field, uh yeah, then they can come. Or they’re really, really accomplished, I mean like the doctors and nurses, back in the ‘60s they could just walk into the country. Um for someone with my background to walk into the country the way I did, it’s almost impossible. And so I would say I achieved something impossible. And going b—there were people who could have
helped me, and they didn’t. For whatever reason, they didn’t. And to do it on your own, with almost no money, very little, if at all, I couldn’t say no money, but very, very little, uh, and to start a life, and to, you know, build up on to something and make something of yourself, I—I’m very proud of that.

GW: So what would you want the younger generation or the public to know about the immigration experience, from your viewpoint?

MR: The immigration experience. Uh, I would say don’t take America for granted. That’s the first thing I would tell people. Um, it has a lot of problems, it has—it is not perfect, it is—it’s got a lot of things it needs to, uh, change, but when you put—again, put things in a balance, nothing is perfect, we as humans are not perfect, we all have our good points and our bad points, but when the good outweighs the bad, that’s—that’s when. And so, so appreciate America for what it is. You know, try to improve, there are opportunities to improve and make things better, uh where—where things are not so good. And that’s something that is kind of really unique to America. If you really strive and you really work, and if you really apply yourself, uh, it takes a lot of effort. It’s not gonna happen like this, [claps] it’s not gonna happen overnight. I would—that’s what I would tell the young people. If you really are dedicated and committed, you can make things happen. That is not something that’s very easy elsewhere in the world. I don’t think it is, so…

CJ: [to GW] Did you have any other questions, or? [GW shakes head no] Alright, well was there anything else you would like to add to the archive?

MR: Um… I gave you the thing, right?

CJ: Yes, sir.

MR: This is—yeah. Um… [to ZM] Anything you think I missed? [ZM shakes head no] Yeah, I can’t think of any—I’m sure I could tell stories and stories, [CJ and GW laugh] but you’d be here—you’d be here for another two hours. [everyone laughs]

CJ: Alright, well then, thank you so much for your time.

GW: Yeah, thanks so much.

MR: No, thank you! Appreciate it, thanks for coming.

(1:03:55)
[The recorder is turned off, the interview ends]