Interviewee: RU.S.TOM B ENGINEER
Interviewers: CHRIS JOHNSON; CAROLINE ZHU
Date/Time of Interview: June 16, 2014, at 1:30 PM
Transcribed by: CHRIS JOHNSON; CAROLINE ZHU
Edited by: PRISCILLA LI (5/21/2017)
Audio Track Time: 1:56:28

Background:
Rustom Engineer was born in Bombay, India in 1947. After completing his and undergraduate education at Bangalore University, Mr. Engineer came to the U.S. to attend graduate school at Utah State University, earning his Master’s degree in Mechanical Engineering and Manufacturing. Following graduate school, Mr. Engineer worked in several different states across the U.S. before settling down with his family in their current place of residence in Sugar Land. He is currently retired, and is an active member of the Zoroastrian community in Houston.

Setting:
The interview was conducted in the living room of Mr. Engineer’s house in Sugar Land, and spanned around two hours. Much of the interview focuses on Mr. Engineer’s time in graduate school, as well as the various occupational roles he has held over the course of his lifetime.

Interviewers:
Chris Johnson is a rising Junior at Rice University, studying Linguistics. He is from Houston, and is one of the 2014 HAAA summer interns.

Caroline Zhu is a rising Senior at Rice University, studying Chemical Engineering. She is originally from China, and is one of the 2014 HAAA summer interns.

Interview Transcript:
Key:

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<tr>
<th>CJ</th>
<th>Chris Johnson</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CZ</td>
<td>Caroline Zhu</td>
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<td>RE</td>
<td>Rustom Engineer</td>
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CJ: This is Chris Johnson.

CZ: This is Caroline Zhu.
CJ: And we’re here on June 16th, 2014, um, in the home of Mr. Rustom Engineer, here to interview Mr. Engineer for the Houston Asian American Archive. Um, so, Mr. Engineer, can you start about just telling a little bit briefly about your childhood, maybe where you grew up?

RE: Uh well, I grew up in India. Uh I was born in 1947, that was the year India split into two countries - India and Pakistan. And I lived in my parents’—I’ve always lived in Bombay, India - it’s a pretty big city on the West Coast along the Arabian Sea, facing the West. [laughs] What we call the West from India is like, facing England, that’s how it’s looked at, Europe.

Uh I was born in a middle-class family, my father was a CPA, uh he worked for a group of companies. Uh my mother came from a smaller village, there was actually almost 13 years age difference between both of them, and that was not unusual in India, in those days, to have a, have a bride much younger than you. And, uh, uh we lived in a, a Zoroastrian colony type of setup. And I don’t know how much you guys know about Zoroastrians, but uh Zoroastrians are the people who came from Persia about 13 years—hundred years ago, one thousand, three hundred years ago from Iran, and settled in India, and they were known as Parsis because they came from Persia and Parse area of Iran. And uh that was to wipe religious persecution uh from the Arabs who invaded Iran, uh so for first few centuries, there were more like a agricultural community, um, because they had just arrived 1300 years, means, y’know, way back then - that was in the, almost the 6th century, a, so 6th or 7th century. And um there was Hindu king, but they were admitted, and they were saying ‘Okay, we’ll take you in, but you have to not to influence uh our people, here, ‘cause we already have a very well settled religious and social setup here, you don’t want to interfere with that, but you’re welcome to settle down here.

So same way, eh Parsis - Zoroastrians, until today had continued to follow their promise that they did not - they would not marry outside, they would not interfere with anybody - in fact, Parsis are very well known for being very friendly with all the communities. India is very cosmopolitan, uh unlike you may what otherwise hear, uh there is a majority of course are Hindus, but there’s a large population of Muslims. In fact, second largest Muslim population in the world is in India, because India has such a huge population to begin with. And uh even though it may be just 14 or 15 percent of the population is Muslim, but there are Christians - there are some of the oldest Christian churches in India, in southern India. And, and even some Jews, uh and they are very much Indian to look at, but, but they are Jews, you know, and they lived in India, from - and there are synagogues, there are churches, there are uh mosques, there are lots of Hindu temples.

And, uh, there are Parsi fire temples, the Zoroastrian temples are called ‘fire temples’, where there is always a perpetually burning fire, and it’s symbolically used just like Christians use a cross as part of their symbolism. Same way, the Zoroastrians have fire, fire to give energy and keep everything clean and this and that. So that way, uh that’s what Zoroastrians are, I belong to that community.

CZ: That’s very interesting. Um, so, you mentioned that you grew up in this very diverse community-

RE: Mm-hmm.

CZ: Can you, um, tell us some of your childhood memories?

RE: Uh, yeah, I went to a school not far from my- and now, unlike, the United States, there aren’t that many public schools. You know, like, where you have everybody gets set a portion to study and all, free, that’s not the way it is in India. It’s beginning to come slowly, now, after fifty (?) years that I’ve been away, but, so, everybody went to the closest private school more or less around your house. And, uh, my school was very close by, uh I grew up with uh a lot of Hindu and Muslim population. Unlike other Parsi boys, I didn’t go to a Parsi school—uh it was typical for all Parsi guys, but for some reason, ‘cause mine was close by - and my
parents were quite open-minded from the beginning. And, uh, I have very good memories - my parents, of course, education was always emphasized, it was very important, to all of us, traditionally, my mother’s father—my maternal grandfather was an attorney, and he was born in probably eighteen hundred and thirty or something in that time [laughs]. Which was very difficult because there was British - India was ruled by the British for 150 years, and uh there were just very few colleges, which were run by the Jesuit fathers, the professors and all, in those days. And, and so, he became - he had a commerce degree, commerce, BCom, what they call a bachelor’s in commerce.

Um and uh and then he did, and there was nothing like a CPA to begin with as a specialization in 18, 1900, so, later on, when the American Society of Charter Accountants came into existence in India, uh they conferred degrees to people who were already, practicing the trade. So that's how he became a uh CPA, and in fact, I've got some pictures you may want to use, if you'd like to. Um, uh and of course, I’ll tell you why our name became Engineer [laughs] - that’s another, it’s nothing new, really, in India, to do, but that’s another story altogether.

[gestures to picture] And, uh so, this is my - this is my mother’s uh uh father, that is, my maternal grandfather. And you see the typical Parsi dress, such as, got a little, like a Neru (?) jacket type of thing, pants, and uh [points to clothing on head] it was like a hard, uh what do you call, turban -like, but it’s not exactly turban, it’s hard, just take it out type of thing, you don’t tie anything.

And this is a picture of my paternal uh grandfather. Now the interesting thing, why, I certainly (?) noticed that, as I said, he was certified by the board of something, of city or something, to be uh a person who would certify uh boilers. Because boilers in those days was a prime mover for all the manufacturing facilities, not only just engines, railway engines, but all different type of engines that were used in the ships, in the manufacturing uh plants, in power generation, everything used steam, and steam means there was a boiler, and boiler is the most, uh what do you call, risky part of the thing—it can explode. It’s running many horsepowers of generating that. So the government needed to control that, and so he was certified, as, according to this, and I found it, I was very happy I could find that, that um he had the authority to basically certify (?) the safety of it. And what really brought me up is that how names change. Now this is the first time I’ve come across it actually in writing. His name was, his firstname was Rustomji. ‘ji’ is always added after your name as a -like a, what do you call, for respect. So ‘Rustomji’, his last, his father’s name was Bergorji (sp), and his last name was Sherdiwalla. Now, ‘walla’ means somebody who owns, it’s like you can be ‘Canteenwalla’ if you own a canteen. Or something, y’know, [laughs] a type of ‘walla’ was very common, among Parsis.

So, the ‘Sherdi’ was sugarcane, so they, they had, they were all basically agricultural people. So they had sugarcane plantations, and, so, he was call—his last name was Sherdiwalla, but because he was practicing as an engineer, look at how he has signed his name. ‘Rustom’- this is his signature - ‘Rustom’, I mean, ‘Rustomji Bergorji Sherdiwalla Engineer’. And that’s how the last name ‘Engineer’ started! Even though my father was not an engineer, he was, he was a CPA, he continued to use, and that was very common.

And, in fact, I came across, just to prove the point - I came across a picture of my, of a paternal side uncle. Now, what he’s wearing, of course, he’s wearing a European dress, but what he’s wearing, the (?) apron, it was like, in those days they had Mas- you had your, heard about Freemasons and organizations that were Irish or Scottish, I think, uh organizations that, they met, and they were sort of, we always laughed about it, because they’re sort of a secret organization, always men met, and I don’t know what they discussed, but that was like a club, but not for general public in those days. So he must have been a Mason.

So, they all, in there, they had a little, uh how, we have Masons here also, correct? We see all those parades
and all that stuff, people wearing those uh caps, and it was something of the same exactly, basically, a sister organization that way. So this is the - but the point that I’m trying to make is his name was, first name was Jangil, ‘J’, so he signed ‘J’. And Rustomji was his, because his father and my grandfather - the same people, so he’s a maternal uncle, but his last name he used was merchant! [laughs] You see? So he was a merchant! He traded - uh I don’t know what he traded in, but whatever he traded, he was a merchant. So, so his name, ultimately, his family thereon, adopted the name ‘Merchant’. And it’s very common, I have an aunt, her last name is ‘Banker’. And there are relatives with last name ‘Driver’, ‘Lawyer’, there is one, I don’t - it’s not related to my, but there is one in Houston, his last name is ‘Doctor’ - and he’s a doctor himself! [All: [laughs]] ‘Dr. Doctor!’

So, the tradition of- and this didn’t start in my generation, this started at least two generations because, uh because—before that. And I think what happened was because there were British ruling there for 150 years, and the British wanted to, of course, they couldn’t bring everybody from England, y’know, it’s a small island, England is—so, to run a big country off so many million (?) people, uh, was not easy. So, they had to have some capability of the local people. So they had to have trained people in schools, colleges, engineering, medicine, everything. And uh and they were not very, they were not willing to accept difficult names to come [laughs]. So, it’s like you [gestures to Caroline] come here, and they say, ‘What’s your name?’ and you might give your Chinese name, and they say, ‘No, no, no, but, give me your name I can remember!’ So you say ‘Caroline’, correct? Something like that.

And, and, and when I went to - came to America, my name is Rustom, and everybody had a problem - ‘Rustom? What’s that? Is it ‘Russ-tom’, what is it?’ So, I would say, ‘Call me Rus.’ Okay? Make it easy, type of thing. Because—and especially if I tell them, ‘Engineer’, they’ll say, ‘Yeah, I know you’re Engineer, but what’s your last name?’ [laughs] So I had to tell them - but I couldn’t change the last name, I wasn’t going to do that [laughs]. But that’s how the name started. So it’s something very unique that I saw documented in their signatures. Both of them. So, you’re welcome to take this if you like.

CZ: Thank you.

RE: And, of course, here, my maternal grandfather’s picture that I’m showing you here. His last name was ‘Pardiwalla’—‘Pardi’ was the name of a village and ‘Walla’ is again, you’re either from them, or it belongs to you, or something, y’know, it’s connection, that’s how people will remember it.

CZ: Okay.

RE: Okay. So that was my background. [laughs]

CZ: [laughs] Yeah, so just to clarify, so, basically anyone can add part of their occupation

RE: Could, in those days, it was common practice among Parsis, now remember-

CZ: Only Parsis—

RE: —different world around us at that time. The Parsis were, were always, Parsis - were uh a small community. They wanted to communicate well with the ruling class. That was their way of surviving in a foreign land. And the ruling class were the British. So the Parsis very, uh, quickly adopted the English culture and language, and even in clothing, and if I show you some pictures, you’ll be just amazed, I said ‘Oh, is that Parsis in 1800 and something? Why are they wearing this bowtie and all this stuff?’ Y’know? But that—it was their way of getting along. And some Parsis uh uh did very well, because they were born, also, they started out
from villi—from uh agricultural people, they started out initially from what I read, becoming translators. Because the British had to communicate. And then from translators, they became closer to the British and they became more, uh um you know adoptable to that culture. Other religions that were there in India like Hindus and Muslims were very strict in keeping their people within - ‘You can’t eat this’ or ‘You can’t wear this’ or ‘You can’t show your hair’ or whatever you know customs were there at that time. And, so they were very strict in keeping people within guidelines. Parsis were very open. Parsis said, ‘Hey’ [laughs] Y’know, ‘You’re to adopt anything that is today’s normal by the rest of the world.’ And so they learned English, and some of them, in fact, some Parsis did extremely well during the British time. Because during the British time, uh they became, some of them were shipbuilders. In fact, there is a ship in Baltimore area that was built in India. That was, the East India Company was uh uh using them for trading. And China, and uh uh Japan, and all those other mysterious places where everybody—and even India - was very attractive to the Europeans, because that’s where uh gold and spices and silk and all these things that they needed for luxury goods and luxury lifestyles. Uh so they always traded them, and Asia was well known for gold.

In out of some last thousand years or something, only the last two centuries, India is not the richest country in the world. Most people don’t know that. Only two year—two hundred years ago when the British came, and started using—excuse me using the word!—everything. If you go to London and look at the crown jewels of uh England, most of them came from India. Starting from big coin (?) or diamond to gold, and everything, they’ll tell you, it’s written there. Y’know. So, so the whole idea, and that was typical of the Portuguese, the Spanish, they all came, they fought for rights to trade with China. [gestures to Caroline] You know the history. And the Macao, today, still Portuguese, it was until recently, and Hong Kong was still a hundred years at least (?) a few years ago, became independent and part of China now, mainland.

So, uh that’s how it was, it was a big trade war, people wanted to, and uh so India lost all this culture and well—during the last 200 years, but when they became independent, they became, so I was born at the cusp of this time when India became independent. And the Parsis were all this British -oriented, now suddenly realized they were not being very careful about - not happily looked upon, because they were the reminder of the British Raj that existed for the last 150 years. So, slowly Parsis started immigrating, there are a lot of Parsis that moved to Canada, India, the first immigration went to Brit—Britain. Because they were already British subjects in that sense, some way. But then, later on, Canada in 1960, John F. Kennedy uh passed immigration laws that allowed many other minorities to come to this country. And uh Parsis started settling down. And there are only less than 45,000 in the United States, in North America, but that is in Canada and United States.

And, so, now we have a new world that we lived in, we adopted to it. We feel very comfortable coming to a new world, here, uh because we were always adaptable in the sense that we were accepting and looking, sort of, with big eyes to the British [laughs] ruling class, so when we came to America, it was just another world, it was even better than England in many ways, because there was freedom, there was equality that was granted to you that Britain was still struggling with. Uh y’know, or, is still struggling with. So that’s what America made it very, very good place for all communities like Zoroastrians to settle down in. And there is another set of Zoroastrians that come from Iran to escape the last revolution, the Mullahs took over Iran. A lot of these Pers—, Zoroastrians uh who were friends with the Shah of Iran was very westernized. In fact, that was the very reason the Mullahs kicked them out, because they didn’t like the Westernization that he was bringing. And he was trying to uh follow the Zoroastrian calendar. And he realized these roots were Zoroastrian. All the Iranian’s roots are basically Zoroastrian. Even, a lot of the Iranians will tell you that if they were not forced they would any day convert to Zoroastrian, but Zoroastrians don’t accept conversion. So they are in a dilemma. They don’t want what they are, and they can’t become what they were, back to it.

So, uh there are a lot of Iranians in California today who are, who call themselves Zoroastrians, but they are not
Parsis. Parsi is the ethnic—because they came to India and developed their own culture, the religion was Zoroastrianism. But the others who came, stayed in Iran, bared the persecution, flourished during the Shah’s time, and then they moved outside. They had a different culture. But they’re also Zoroastrian. So we’re trying to build bridges in this country, y’know. That is, ‘Okay, let’s get together, you people lived in India for 1300 years, we didn’t go anywhere, we suffered the persecution from the Arabs, Muslim persecution for religious reasons, and then, when the Shah came, they became liberalized, and when Shah revolution fell, we escaped, and came to different parts, and went to different parts of the world.’ So, they’re still Zoroastrians, so there are Zoroastrians with different backgrounds in this country.

CZ: Very interesting.

RE: Sorry for the long history! [All: [laughs]]

CZ: It’s very interesting-

RE: [laughs] -I’m supposed to talk about my story, not-

CZ: Yeah, so, I guess let’s get back to your story again—

RE: Uh-huh.

CZ: -So, um, so what motivated you to come to the U.S. in the first place?

RE: Uh, y’know, living in a big city like India, Bombay, you always watch a lot of Western movies. Now when I say ‘Western’, I don’t mean cowboy movies, I meant American movies, the Hollywood movies and all that. And also, the British. Um and so culturally, we always read a lot in English, because the schools taught in English. Up to 6 standard, I was taught in Gujarati, the native language. And then, after 6 standard, we were all, everything was English medium. And English was still considered, supposed to be good, y’know, if you knew English you could go places, y’know. And that was always there. Because British had just left a few years ago, y’know. I mean I was in school, I was born at the time of partition, just a few years ago.

So, um there was always this desire to go to the world, the West, see the world, see the, the, what was considered the epicenter of civilization, the Europe. Y’know, initially, I never thought that I would come to America, it was all, I always thought it was England. And when I was in high school, I went and I said ‘I have to get my passport’, and my parents said ‘Where are you going? What do you want a passport- you’re not going any...’ I said, ‘No, no, I want to go somewhere, later on, some day.’

So, I was always from the beginning, I always wanted to explore, go out. Never thought I would live and settle somewhere. That was never an intention. But when it came time after I went to college in w, India, which is about 1000 miles south of Bombay. And Bangalore today, you might have heard the name, because Bangalore is considered a very, like a, Bangalore has every research center from every IT company from United States, and it’s a hub of uh IT, business there. And very good engineering schools, and uh uh pretty Westernized, and South always had more British influence because they spoke in English. They don’t want to adopt to the Hindi language. Uh South - there are fourteen languages in India, but there was no local language down there, but besides the local language, they never, the Southern India never wanted to accept the Northern political power that was enforcing Hindi language.

So the best option was to adopt to English. Even a beggar would say, ‘Sir, can you give me a Rupee?’ And I’d say ‘Ooh, you speak English, I should!’ [laughs] That type of thing, you know.
Uh uh so, all that, so there’s always the desire to come. I, when time came after I finished my bachelor’s degree in Mechanical Engineering from Bangalore University, uh, I had already applied - started applying. And I first applied to England, and I couldn’t find really a, anything really attractive to go to as a technical engineering school, uh in England. Though, I’m sure there are very good schools there, but I didn’t know anything about them. So, the next thing - and I couldn’t go to Germany, Germany was all education, everything was in German. So, you had to first learn German before you could go to college, so for six months, whatever, you had to learn German. And I couldn’t imagine suddenly switching off to another language, and listening to a professor talking fast in German [snaps fingers rapidly, laughs], y’know.

So, anyway, America sounded very good, we were very familiar with it, we had seen lots of movies, knew all about - I think you heard my other interview, so you probably know what I already told you - I was all fascinated by uh Hollywood. And knew all about Elvis Presley, and you name it, and y’know ‘Gone With the Wind’, and ‘My Fair Lady’, and ‘Sound of Music’, and everything seen umpteen times, and there was many hote—theatres in Bombay. Now, [looks to Caroline] you come from China, you come to a much newer generation, so you’re probably very familiar with all this British - English speaking things in many ways in big cities.

And, same way, we were very, very much, it was very much glamorized, so that, that glamor said I have to come here, and a good way to come here there is a student. So, I shouldn’t say it, but [laughs] one of those hidden motives was to explore the world besides go there as a student. So I started applying, and in those days, there was a very strict foreign exchange control. You couldn’t send even $15 or $20 of application fee, if you’re applying to five colleges, to send everybody $25 or something. And the Indian government - you had to go to Brisol (sp) Bank of India, and apply for this paper, that paper. I was in Bangalore, and all this government stuff was in Bombay, and all that. And I was still studying.

So, about two years before I was about to finish, I started applying, and I would write to them, and I, many - I mean, I was a decent, good student, we had a First Class, Second Class, Third Class. We didn’t have the, uh like you have A, B, C? I was an A student, I did pretty well. So, uh they, schools were interested, and I also had to see how, how expensive they are, I couldn’t go to a very expensive school on the, one of those Ivy League thing, and I don’t even, I didn’t even apply, I don’t even think I would have got the admission, perhaps, perhaps not. I never knew. But I started applying to second grade universities. I applied in Florida, I applied in, to, uh uh what was it…Missouri, because those are Engineering schools. They’re, Missouri’s a very good - and uh mining school, mechanical. And uh Utah, I just applied to Utah State. And I had a friend who was doing Agriculture Engineering, he said ‘Oh, they sent you admission, I-20 form from Utah State?! This is Number 1! It’s good!’ I said, ‘Really? Never heard of that before, y’know!’ [laughs] And, and, and the reason is he was right also, because he was Agriculture Engineering student, and agriculture, just like we call Aggies here, Utah was called Aggies also, because they were agricultural university, and Mechanical Engineering.

So, his, his uh assessment of the university, sitting there in Bangalore was right! And he was going to go there, he said, ‘Oh, if I had gotten in, I would’ve gone there’, this, that. Anyway. I looked at - it was very funny, the way that I choose Utah university all the way from there, over some of the other similar great universities. Was that, all you have, remember, you’re living thousands of, 15, 12, 15,000 miles away uh away from another continent, and your little map of the United States, and you see Utah, you see San Francisco, you see Los Angeles, you see Las Vegas - ‘Ooh!’ I said, ‘Right down the middle, smack dab around these things I have always seen on uh on all these screens, y’know, on silver screens, everything’s glamorized, [laughing] Hollywood, convertible Impala, Chevrolet, Bel Air’ You know, those big cars, with big fins and all that stuff in those days, in ’60s. I said, ‘Oh, my God, I’m, I can’t wait!’ [laughs]
So I decided to, I accepted there, they say, Utah said, ‘Don’t worry, you come here and pay your $25 registration fee, we’ll accept at that time!’ So I was all set and ready. So, while, after, I went to my, I was in Bangalore for 5 years for Engineering, finished in 1971, Summer. Uh in June, I finished in Summer of 1971, and in September, I was on the plane, coming to United States for this. Uh um the, the story I always tell my friends about it, is how I came to this country. I had a fantastic experience, and as I said, I wanted to see the world, and the cheapest way as a student I could see is, in those days, if you’re coming from Bombay to United States, there was no Bombay -New York nonstop flight, because it’s about 18 to 20 hours flying time. And those 707s didn’t fly that long. They were longer range, but not that long. They could only go to Europe and on.

So, it was customary for you to change planes. And I told my travel agent that ‘Make as many stops as possible, because - and put me on different airlines!’ So, so what she figured out is, and if you don’t have a flight leaving ‘til next day, then they put you up in a hotel. So I got a free overnight stay in hotel. So, I flew from, in September 13th, Friday - [laughs], of 1971, I left Bombay and went to Beirut on British Airways that time. British Airways would fly to Beirut - Beirut to London. But I wasn’t going on British Airways to London, I was just going to Beirut, so then connect. So, it took me to Beirut. Uh and Beirut was considered Paris of East, in those days. Right now, what you hear is a war-torn place, but it’s very fancy, very sophisticated. It was on the side of Europe and Asia, this way, and that’s the first time I saw this stretch limo, and people, there was a place called Casino de Laban (sp?), in those days, and people in such glamor and style, and I said ‘Oh my God, I already arrived here - why not?’ But it was not right, I mean it was just an evening that I happened to see by bus, you know, it’s public transportation.

And, uh so, from Beirut I went to Rome. Next flight, I had to go on All Italia from Beirut to Rome. Again, Rome, land there in the afternoon, take this local public transportation and went around the city, found a route that took me everywhere, and I would stop a couple of places. Like, as I told you already, I went to the Vatican Walls and looked at it, took some ‘Click, click’ pictures -I still have those pictures, you know. On my eight-dollar camera I had just bought from Beirut. And uh then from Beirut, I mean, from Rome, went to London. And that’s where I spent [a] little money - of my own, and I stayed in a YMCA. I’d heard that there was a YMCA, and it was on Fitzgerald Street in London. There is a British - there is an Indian YMCA, there are two YMCAs in Britain. The British always are very smart; they want to keep other people separate, you know, from their own.

So, they had an Indian YMCA, very nice actually, it’s not even bad. So, I stayed there for about 6-7 days. And London is very similar to Bombay in many ways. Double decker buses, red color, same thing that we have, like Hong Kong has, y’know. Anyway. So, I could travel around, I could see, go back to, y’know, all this, and then my flight was not to America, but I had to go to Paris. That was very strategically planned, so that I can get a free night in Paris at the Olay (sp?) Hilton! So, I went to the, the Paris, and I just got an evening, barely got a glance of the big Eiffel Tower. And next morning, I was off to New York, on Transwell Airlines, TWA, that was a big airline America had. They even had a separate terminal on JFK airport. Because that was the biggest, strongest airline America had, which is different now, unfortunately. Uh and then connected to, uh this one, uh, to Salt Lake City. Same evening, didn’t do anything in New York, didn’t have free lunch there. So, I just came straight there [laughs].

But there’s an interesting uh anecdote that a friend of mine told me about what happens to people who come to a foreign country, especially in those days. Now, we are so educated, no matter where you come from, you’ve seen everything, you watch TV, you see the same program. I go to Bombay, uh people tell me, they’ll say, ‘Oh, did you see what was on Jay Leno, this or that?’, I said ‘Oh, really, you watch that?’ Oh, yeah, they know everything! My cousin sends me things about what happened in a small town in Texas, some jokes about it.
You’re sitting in Bombay, how do you understand all this? [laughs] You know? The lingo, the little intricacies of our, y’know, Texan thing? Y’know? How do you know, how do you understand? To them, it’s nothing. World has shrunk, really, that is mind-boggling, over the time that I have come here, you know.

When I came, everything was different. When I went to the grocery store, I didn’t know what label to look at, I didn’t know what to buy. Because I didn’t recognize any label, I didn’t know food came in packages. [laughs] In those days, and remember, that was 50 years ago, India was very different. Today, India is very, very advanced, in cities at least. And uh but that time, it was very different thing, you know. If I had to call India, I would pay 3 to 4 dollars a minute, uh to my parents. So it was not that easy to pick up a phone and and call.

So, anyway, I came to Salt Lake City, spent the night in a small bed and breakfast room somewhere. And the last page on my ticket, uh, it says, Logan, Utah, Key Airlines. So, I go early morning, with all this worry, that I am almost to - let’s see where I am going to be next two years of graduate school. So, I go there, the whole airport is almost dead in the morning, it was a Sunday morning, summer, uh vacation was still on, September, it was. So, I walk up and down, there’s no Key Airways there, and then suddenly, I see a little booth, like, you know, how they sell Coca-Cola or something, somebody’s standing, selling cold drinks, you know? And I see Key Airways, and there’s a man behind it, and he said, yeah, go and sit there, we’ll announce. So, he didn’t, nothing formal there. I sat down, nobody in the whole corridor, no passengers for anything, nothing.

Then, suddenly, he said, ‘Okay, you ready?’ after about half an hour, and I said ‘I’m ready!’ He said, ‘Okay’, so he locks his little booth, or whatever it is, takes my bags, and he said, ‘Okay, let’s go!’ and so I’m, I’m still trying to, after coming from this TWA and British Airways and All Italia, and all those airlines, I said, ‘Ooh, I’m in for a surprise, let’s see!’ So we walk with my two suitcases that I brought all my books and all the things that I was going to throw away next Monday, something that I didn’t need anymore, but I had carried all the way here, and uh then we go to the single engine, Key Airlines, Cessna(sp?) 172, with two seats in front, two seats in back. I was the only passenger, and he was the pilot who was carrying my bag. And so we flew, and my travel agent obviously didn’t know that it was so close - I could’ve gone by bus, from Salt Lake City to the campus. But, anyway, she gave me an airline ticket, uh we, we stayed a whole night, stayed in hotel there, so trying to land, and he’s asking me, ‘Do you want to stop somewhere for coffee?’ I said, ‘Wait a minute, I don’t - I wanna just go there!’ [laughs]

And the worst experience I had was, when I landed, Logan was a small, small town - village in my opinion, by Indian comparison. Because very few people, in India, everywhere, there are so many people, here you find very—and we landed there, and there was a small building that looked like a little gas station, and he opened the - and then he said ‘Okay, there’s a telephone, call whoever you want to call. I’m going to the restroom, I’m going to lock the airport and go.’ I said, ‘Wait a minute, I just landed in America, I don’t know, I don’t have American currency, ’cause I had not even, used something, whatever I had, a little bit. Who do I call?’ So, I’m still struggling, I’m starting to look at the telephone, how to call, uh what to put, where to put money, don’t know what to listen to, should I listen to a tune before I put the money, or first put the money and then listen? No idea, public telephone.

So finally, he comes out, and said, ‘Hey, you haven’t called anybody?’ I said, ‘No, I only got one number in this whole number in the whole world that will work, and that is my foreign student advisor’s number.’ So he said, ‘Give me the number.’ So, he dialed, he said, ‘Oh, you can’t call this number. The school is closed, this is summer vacation, and everything went through in those days, went through a central computer system - not computer, telephone system, on the campus. He said, ‘They are closed! There’s nobody there!’ The foreign student - that’s the only telephone number I had in the whole of the world that’s outside India, and I’m 12,000 miles away, doesn’t work on a Sunday morning.
So, uh he said, ‘I’ll call police.’ So he, he, called the police, and he said ‘Listen, there is a student here from India, and come and fetch him.’ So they said, ‘Okay, I’m coming’, he said ‘Okay, goodbye’. [laughs] So he turned off, locked the airport, gets into his Cessna 172, and takes off, and I’m sitting there on my two bags, out in the sun, looking at him disappearing behind those mountains, and I said, ‘What do I do, I don’t see anyone around here!’ It’s just totally still, quiet place, you know. And that was my ‘Coming to America’ welcome [laughs]. And that was not easy, I tell you.

The police came, took me to the campus, Found me the Bullen (sp?) Hall where I was supposed to stay, it was locked, there was nobody there. There was not a soul around on the campus, and I didn’t know the campus was so big that you had to, took half an hour to go from one end of the campus to the other, never seen anything like that. India always had colleges, different part - and there was nothing like a central campus when I came. So, anyway, I found some soul who was a custodian of a big high-rise dormitory, so, he opened my dorm, and he said ‘Okay, here it is, you can stay here, in four, five days people will be here, don’t worry.’ So, I go, there is nothing to eat, there was no cafeteria open, nothing, I literally starved. I opened the refrigerator, there was a big piece of meat, frozen in the freezer. And I wasn’t used to exactly looking at big pieces of meat. I came to this country, I was not rich but not used to all that. Like, in America people eat a lot of meat, and in India, you eat small things, you know, don’t cut big cows there. So, anyway, I, I must’ve somehow got some change, and ate some crackers and cookies and all for three, four days, I would walk down, try to go to this town - Logan, and it would be so far, and I was wearing those Indian, fancy, thin, leather shoes, which would be all worn out, and I was hurting all over, and I would come back, and I said ‘I am not gonna reach that town by walking.’ So, anyway, I survived three, four days, literally starving, my, I didn’t know how to shave, I had nothing to shave with, I looked like a hermit, but then people started coming, and got used to the campus, and made friends and, my life began in America after that. But that was my ‘Coming to America’ experience. I always enjoy that. [laughs]

**CZ:** So, um, did you come, um or, did you um go to Utah for your Master’s degree?

**RE:** Yeah, I did my Master’s in Mechanical Engineering and Manufacturing.

**CZ:** Manufacturing, cool. So, were you financially supported by your parents?

**RE:** Uh, yes. It was- I was supported by my parents. Uh they were, not that they were that rich, but they were quite well off in an average sense. You know. And, and they always value education. And, they thought it was worthwhile for me to, you know, do that.

**CZ:** Okay.

**CJ:** Um, and you said that you lived in a dorm in graduate school, is that right?

**RE:** Yeah, I did- lived, not just one dorm, I would change every quarter, I would change a dorm. I was there to enjoy, enjoying this and that, and I wanted to experience more than enjoy. Because it was heavy doing Master’s in Engineering, it was not easy. And one of the subjects that my foreign student advisor was like, uh, Statistical Thermodynamics. And I’d never heard of Statistical- I’ve heard of Statistics and I’ve heard of Thermodynamics, but I didn’t know the statistical angle to the Thermodynamics. Anyway. And, and there were six students in the class, which his unusal for an Indian guy to sit in a class with six students. We always had 50 or 100 students in a class. And it was six, and everybody other than me were PhD students, and I’d just arrived. You know, last week. So it was tough, some of the courses, very tough. Actually if I don’t- if I remember, I dropped that class later on. I said, ‘Wait a minute, I don’t need it, I’m, y’know, I don’t know how I
got this class’ but I worked hard I did well, enjoyed, uh, always wanted to, while I was studying, and uh got my degree, per schedule (?), fortunately, I didn’t have to waste time (?).

There was one summer I went and worked uh- and in those days, foreign students, there was a lot of unemployment started there. Aerospace industry, Boeing had gone down, and Vietnam War was getting over, all the people are coming back at that time. Funny experience is, I used to see some students in wintertime, as I stayed a few months there. In September, I arrived, and by September and - suddenly, I see this flurry of snow coming down, and I’d never seen snow in my life! I took out my camera, and I took pictures, pictures of the flurry, close, big, this and that, and then went to sleep and the next morning, I come, and everything is white! I said [laughing] ‘Wait a minute, I shouldn’t have wasted my film on those flurries, you know!’ And then, of course, snow was nothing new in Utah, there was snow every day. It was just seven, eight miles away from a ski resort, the campus was. So, I would see all these people with broken legs and all those things, and I thought ‘Oh, wow, Vietnam war is over, all these guys are coming back, this, that.’ And I asked one of the guys, said, ‘How was the war?’ He said, ‘What war, I was on the ski slope, I broke my leg!’ [laughs] How you perceive, y’know…

CZ: So, how did you get along with your classmates in Utah State?

RE: First, of course, when you come from abroad, you look for people who you can communicate easily with, which is, like, your own country. Very few uh uh from India. And, uh basically, when I had I…there were so few, that I knew four or five who, who were there on the campus, every now and then, if I see some face in a car that looked like Indian, I would actually write to my mother: ‘Guess what, I saw a new Indian face today! But I don’t know who, where he’s from because he went in the car, I didn’t see I didn’t talk to him’, type of thing. So it was that intense. But, we made friends, they were very - Utah, of course, you know, is very Mormon. And this was a state school. So they realized that you - it was not like Brigham Young University, where they make you sign that you will not have coffee in your room, y’know. Or tea. Or you will not drink uh Coca Cola because it has caffeine in it. And things like that. They actually made you sign things like that in those days, in dorms. So, in fact, [laughs] that brings to - people from Brigham Young, and University of Utah from other places, that are, they will come to our, because ours was a state school, we didn’t have any restrictions. They’d come to have coffee! [All: laughs] So, it was, okay, no coffee thing—y’know and there was a Norman--- what was it? Norman center, something from Catholic, or something, and the Norman Centers would have beer on Fridays, Saturdays, everybody would go there, and someone would bring a guitar, and it was all the beautiful mountains around, and it was a very good experience for me.

Did make some friends. I had local uh Mormon friends, who were very good friends that became - I went with them skiing, which I had never experienced in my life. I did have a ski with me, but there was some foreign student from Iran had brought his wooden skis, which was strictly, would have gone in the museum as a museum piece. [laughs] But I didn’t know anything better, it didn’t come out -you click it and you either break your ankle or it comes out [laughs]. There’s nothing - no mechanism to [click noise] them out! If you do this - so, anyway, I went skiing a few times with them, uh, uh had a good time, we used to go out from dorms, and since I was always out to make friends, and all those things, we met a lot of other people from other dorms over a period of time, plus I had very good friends from India, too. And we would uh find - there was a Mormon boy, and he was only one in the first semester who had a car, so our deal was - with him was that ‘You bring your car, you drive, we’ll pay for the gas, we’ll pay for your food, when you stay with us wherever we go, and take us around.’ So, we would go to Los Angeles, and Las Vegas was eight hour - nine hours away, and no speed limit. So you just close your eyes, and just press the accelerator and go to sleep whole night, and you are there next morning.
And one of the guys had become uh well, he was a PhD student, he graduated by then, and he became an assistant principal of some school or something, so we called him and I said ‘Hey, we’re gonna be in Las Vegas,’ he was in Las Vegas school, so I said, ‘Hey, can you find us a place to stay overnight somewhere.’ He said, ‘Don’t worry, I got a big gym here, I’ll leave the keys under the gym door!’ Something, doormat or something, so he’d leave the key there, we’d go to the gym in the high school gym somewhere in Las Vegas, and there’s all these 50 showers and 500 mattresses, you know, for wrestling this, that, you know, air mattress for exercise, and all that. So we would stay in Las Vegas overnight, and we came, in those days, 99 cents breakfast in Las Vegas everywhere, you know, and it was cheap. Didn’t have money to gamble, obviously, but it was fun to be there. And Vegas was very different than what it is today. So, that was our cultural exposure.

Then uh one summer, I worked in Omaha, Nebraska. And, in Omaha, Nebraska, we didn’t know - first of all, no, before that, before, it was the summer, it was coming so, ‘We have to make money, we are here, we have to pay our fees, after all, you know, we can’t let our parents pay all this’. So, we were feeling guilty about, and so, we said, ‘We have to -let’s find a job that pays the most.’ So we found that Utah had all these mines, there are miners working underground, oil mines. So we said, at that time, we said, ‘We can do anything’, correct? When you are young! [laughs] So we worked in a mine, doesn’t matter how hard it is, we’ll go. So, we, five, six of us went, God knows what, some godforsaken place in the middle of nowhere - literally. The copper, it was Sunnyville Copper Mine or some place. We went there looking for a job for the summer that was in the next few months coming. And they were all grim and quiet, and said, ‘What’s going on?’ They said, ‘You guys wanna work in mines?’ And they were sorta - they said ‘Do you know last week, this mine collapsed, and some ten people are still inside, or something like that?’ [laughs] We said, ‘I don’t think we are going to get a job - we want to work here.’

So we came back, so we went from a guy from Nebraska, he said, ‘I’m going to Nebra—Omaha, come with me in Summer’ So we drove, we followed him. We went with Omaha for Summer. The only job we could find, and even though we were engineers, unfortunately, as there was so much, what do you call, employment just beginning to start, and they would not let foreign students work. That was very bad, ‘cause when I—there were many times these people would come as I was graduating, I’m running a little ahead of my time—but this is, summertime I worked in the - as a furniture moving. I worked for a trucking company, and they had a storage. So, we would go to people who are moving, pick up the furniture, put it on the truck, and put it in the storage. So, that was hard work, and, you’re coming from India - not exactly done that, you know and the first day I was given a broom, said ‘Clean the floor’ and I said ‘Ooh. I haven’t done that’ [laughs] But anyway, we all learn as we come here that, you know, there is no shame in hard work, and labor. And that’s something very different from what our Asian cultures teach us, correct?

So, uh anyway, so, that was it, and then, when I was about to graduate, uh there were companies coming for interviews. Interviews lined up, the sheets, where you signed your name. And you come for the interview, somebody had scratched it off— ‘You can’t work, you cannot interview’. So there was one professor who said ‘No, no, foreign students are not allowed’- even though we were allowed for training, for 18 months training they were giving after your student visa expired, um they wouldn’t let us work. So, we were the only people from India, and other countries, very few from other countries -that would not be—we wouldn’t have a job when we came out. So, it was something a lot of people found it quite distressing, y’know because we had a Master’s degree in engineering, though I’m sure there were places where you could have been in those days, not too many people went, at least in Utah, not too many people went to college, they said, ‘Ooh, you’re in college!’ Big thing, you know! I mean, the things have changed here, now people recognize that you have to have a college degree, or something to have a minimum starting point, in any company. So, even with a Master’s degree, people, uh we were frustrated. And, I had a car by that time, I had bought a $225 Impala with
40,000 miles on it, so that was a big achievement for me. And, I worked in a lab for a few months before graduating, that we were making some rain machine, uh of some sort. And, they were paying, and that going rate minimum wage in those days was $1.80 an hour. So, that was the big $1.80 was like multiplied by seven - and a half, was like, big bucks for a guy from India. Y’know, because converting, and conversion, Rupees, it was a lot of. So, it was happy, and, um, I said, ‘Okay, I wanna see the country.’ I wasn’t ready - I never thought of staying here permanently, the whole thing was to just delay and see the country, and I’d not seen enough of it anyway. So the first thing as soon as I graduated, I went to Los Angeles, I had a friend there, and, but, I couldn’t find a place, or didn’t have that much money or anything like that I said, ‘Wait a minute, I don’t think I want to live in Los Angeles, I better find-’ So, I found a friend in uh Denver, so, I called him, hey, and in those days, it was very common, you make friends on campus and say ‘Hey, where are you after this?’ They say, ‘Oh, I’m in Denver’ Or, ‘I’m in LA, I’m in Kansas City’ or something.

So, this guy said, ‘I’m in Denver!’ I said, ‘Okay, I’m coming this weekend, you have a place for me?’ He said, ‘Yeah, come on over, we can share.’ You know. So I went there, and I worked for about three months in a small company that made, uh, clamps for automotive use. You know, little clamps around the hose. So, I designed that, and all that stuff, and I said, ‘Well, this is not exactly what I had in mind in my life, to be designing clamps for rubber hoses, and all that’. So, while I was still sort of looking around, I was enjoying the friend with whom I was staying, he worked for Bush uh Brewery or something, and he didn’t have a car, so at the end of the day, I would go there to pick him up, and worked with this free tour of the brewery, and you’d get this big beer, [laughs] so while I’m waiting for him, have a nice cold beer and drive back! [laughs] So, that was good.

But, then, um while I was there, I had a friend from India, he had come to Chicago, and he said ‘Hey,’ he tracked me down somehow, and he said, ‘Hey, why don’t you come down to Chicago, we’ll find something, it’s a big city.’ So, I went to, uh so, I told my employer - it was Thursday, I said, ‘Tomorrow is my last day’. [laughs] So, they said ‘Okay’, and gave me my last paycheck. And of course, I lost my uh deposit for apartment that I had, but, I had to do that. So, I drove to, and came to, uh, Chicago - at that time. [takes drink of water] But, I had, I really wanted to travel, um what I had was, I had all this pillows, and clothes, and everything in the, this thing, in my car. Y’know, when I was driving alone, and I’d just taking, and I was just enjoying like I was, just enjoying, you know, while I’m traveling. And, uh, uh then, I came to the, the— Chicago, and uh, we looked, and every time we - and then, while we were looking for a job in my engineering and uh thing, and suddenly, I got uh some place, I, uh, took a what we call um—what is it called? On telephone, you know, selling something, uh this, what is it called? Um air conditioning, what is it, thing, mechanical - so it took it that on the side, and I was looking, and I suddenly found that Peoria, which is only about 180 miles from, uh, Chicago. Uh, there are some people who are working for the, working for, um, some of these uh companies, so, I just decided one day that I’ll just move there. I went there, I found a job, uh, an engineering consulting company. And they were consulting, um, with uh pre- what is it called? ...Uh the Caterpillar has his headquarters there. I found this, what we call, um, uh the companies that uh usual send their—there’s a consultant, so I used to go to Caterpillar, and everybody and I are permanently working there, so people thought I worked for Caterpillar, but I actually worked for a consultant—they didn’t know that.

And then, and so I got a lot of nice experience, we had night—a nice, good engineering firm. I used to do analysis of how to find the natural vibrations in, uh, power streams, of those big and giant big, new machineries. And, sometimes, when you excite something of the natural frequency, it breaks, because of natural frequency, if you excite some link, link at a natural analy—analysis frequency, it breaks, even though it may be just vibrating, but if you, if you, if you vibrate something at their natural frequency, it can break. So, we would analyze that. The whole power train, I would design that, and all the stuff. So, it was enjoyable. Then starts uh do you want me to start the whole story, or do you want to ask me some questions? [laughs]
CZ: Sure, just go ahead.

RE: Okay. So, now, I was still single at that time, and then, suddenly I got a phone call from my family and they said, ‘Hey, listen, there’s a girl, uh Yasmine (sp?), coming to United States in Detroit’ And I was in Peoria, so, 180 miles south of Chicago, ‘And in Detroit area, near Flint, Michigan, there’s a Parsi girl coming -’ and those days, very important to marry your own people, okay, they didn’t want you to marry out. So, they said, ‘There’s a Yasmine girl coming to Michigan. She is a physician. She’s going to be here for residency, why don’t you guys get together?’ So, later on, I called Yasmine when she was on the plane, and we talked for about four or five months, we talked, our, ‘Hi, how are you, how are you?’ this that type of thing, she had just arrived, six months, she was already doing her residency, and actually, doing, yeah. First six months in Flint, she was doing uh residency.

And, then, six months later, we met, I went to—Michigan, I sort of surprised her. We met after six months, and uh realized that next year, she had to find another place to continue her residency. So in the meantime we met a few times. We went to Canada, we went to Chicago, we met halfway a couple of times. She had a car, I had a car, so it was easy to meet in between. And we said, ‘Okay, we should get married. Now in those days, you don’t flutter around too much. They don’t like that. [laughs]. You gotta get married. Enough is enough. So we said ‘Okay’, about a year later, we decide to get married. But uh she didn’t have a green card. She was just here as an exchange student. And I still didn’t have my green card in my hand. So we said okay. Before she moved to Peoria, where she found a residency in a hospital, for three-year residency. We had to get married. And in those days, you don’t just live with anybody, you know. You get married first, and then get married.

So we, we got married. My mother and father came to Peoria. Uh, her parents at that time couldn't make it. And I just know a few—about 40, 50 people - and she lived in Michigan. And in Michigan she had met some other Parsis. There were about 8, 10 of them, and they came to Peoria, from Michigan to Illinois. We found a priest from uh, Chicago, a Parsi Zoroastrian priest. And he performed a ceremony in our clubhouse, where I was staying. Those, uh, little clubhouse. And I invited people with whom uh, I had made friends. My department head from Caterpillar, and manager, and all those people, and his boss and all that stuff. Chief engineer and all that. A few people with whom I was friends. I invited them for our wedding. But the funniest experience I always remember is that, this priest was gonna come from Chicago, and we, and here when you invite people, you’re getting married at exact 4 o’clock ceremony. Everybody showed up 10 minutes ago, they came and sit down and... So here I am sitting in my—and in India they wear a garland. And, and the Parsis wear a little black cap, like the Jews wear for any kind of ceremony. And they keep uh a coconut in your hand, that's traditional. Because coconut is a sign for fertility. So, my wife Yasmine, and she was wearing a sari at that time, and not that she had any saris, she just bought for the wedding. And we were sitting there waiting for the priest. And it was very funny. You were sitting there for your wedding. You were all sitting, facing the audience sitting for your wedding. And all those people. Your people with whom you work, and their boss’s boss’s boss. Everybody’s sitting there, all, a few friends. And the priest is still not there. I said, ‘Now what then, what do I do?’ [laughs]. And he was late. No excuse, but he came late anyway. So that's how we still remember it. We didn’t know what to do now. Am I gonna get married today, or am I not? [laughs] [inaudible]

So anyway we got married. We stayed three more years in Peoria, Illinois. And then um Peoria we also made friends. But Peoria was small, and I knew that I needed a better job, and she also wanted to, she made friends in Michigan. And we knew there were some Parsis in Michigan. So there was a nice place for us in Farmington Hills and other suburbs of Chicago. The suburbs of Detroit are very pretty. Detroit as a city it was bad. But at that time it wasn't too bad. There were big skyscrapers, and GM and Ford and all had built so fancy. Buildings at that time. It is not what you see run down today. The suburbs are very, very pretty. Because remember that
this was traditionally a big manufacturing place, with all the headquarters of Chrysler, Ford, General Motors, and each one had a little town like. They're not small companies. They have Ford, General Motors, has a whole area, Chrysler. And it's like city after city, small suburbs all around Detroit.

So the Detroit suburb was very good. So we moved. I found a job in Ford Motor Company. And I told my wife, ‘Hey, if I apply here, it was exactly like what I was doing’. I was doing power trend analysis in Caterpillar, and I said, ‘If I apply are you ready to go to Detroit?’ She says, ‘Okay, I have good friends, so I'll go’. So I applied, and it was very quick. I, I remember I went there for an interview, and uh my bags—my clothes didn't come. And I said, ‘My God, I got an interview tomorrow and I'm gonna travel in clothes, how am I gonna go to Ford Motor company for interview. Uh, this thing. So in the morning I went to the airport to see if it comes by the next flight. Still hadn't come, so I remember even the stores in the airport were not open. So I had plead, and one of the salesclerk to give me at least the shirt - a clean shirt that I can wear. And I was not wearing some fancy shirt inside while I'm travelling. And I had a green color, dark green color, some sports shirt that I was travelling in. So I cannot go for interview in the green color thing. I had no choice. I just went there, bought a tie and a shirt, and put on, and went. I got the job anyway. I do explain to them, ‘I'm sorry. I'm not in the best of professional clothes.’ But this is what happened. [Laughs]

So anyway, I got hired, and I worked there for about thirteen years. We had two children while we were there. Once I got there, we had a son, uh Eric. And uh both of their names we made sure their names were more easy to -for Americans. They were gonna live in this country. My wife said, ‘I'm not going back. I have no plans to go. I didn't come here to go back. I came here to stay’. [laughs] And so my thoughts and needs were also different then I told my parents that I'm sorry I'm not coming back. They were disappointed initially but they said, ‘Okay. Whatever is good for you’. I'm the only son there. And I have a sister there. And uh surprisingly, none of my family members were living abroad. Um so everybody was still there, except me. I'm the black sheep who went away, sort of, you know. And uh so, they, they accepted it finally that I would, you know, whatever was good. They also came a couple of times, they realized, because India was not good at that time. India was not progressing, and just got independence, and there was no jobs there, and a friend of mine had offered me a job. And when I asked him what he was going to pay me, I realized that when I converted in dollars and rupees, in dollars, I said, ‘Hey, wait a minute, when I was a student I am making more money, and your pay scale is not really anywhere even close to what I'm making as a, as a new engineer’. So all that looking and then we got married. We just decided to stay with two kids. Son, and two years later then a daughter, Diana. Eric, of course, a very intelligent kid. He did his two degrees from, uh, Masters and Bachelors, I think two Bachelors and one Masters from Rice, in Computer Science and, and Management. And then he worked for Microsoft for four, five years, and then he wanted to get an MBA. He went to Harvard and got an MBA from Harvard. And now he lives in San Antonio, works for a start-up company, and he's doing fine. He's married. He just got, a month ago, he got a little baby boy. So we go there, now that we're both retired, uh. Um and my wife, they would join the Henry Ford Hospital while we were there for thirteen years in Michigan.

And my daughter, she is a doctor too. She finished her [study] from UT. Uh she is an endocrinologist now. She did it in San Antonio first, and then went to... So, she's also married, she's not married to a Zoroastrian. Uh of course, we're in a new world. We accept it. He's a very nice husband. He's also in gastroenterology, a doctor. They met in, uh, here, in uh, what is this, Baylor School of Medicine, here. They were moving back. He was in, uh, specializing in, Duke University. Now he's—they are both returning home uh next week. They bought a house in Bellaire. Now she's all there expecting a baby. So we're gonna have our second grandchild now. After so many years, you know. So, so that's our story. And when we moved, when I was in Ford, after we finished with Ford, um I wanted to... I always wanted to be in business, for some reason. I said, ‘I don't want to be a, I-' it was a nice company, but I knew that there were five hundred, or a thousand of engineers like me with the same degree, and same thing on top it, you're a foreigner. Though, I never really fashioned a use that because I
never really felt that I'm discriminated in that sense, because the Ford, fortunately was very international, uh, they have companies all over the world. So there were many times you would have meetings with people who could barely speak English. We got people from all countries; you know we got people from China. There are a lot of people never traveled abroad. Oh even Japanese who came, there were very—only guy might barely speak English. And they will always have a translator and all. So the, the culture in those multinational corporations was good in that sense. That they were willing to listen to what you were saying. And not how you are delivering your speech. You know, or how good you were at in English was not that judging criteria. Y’know, people knew that you had knowledge, y’know, you’re in engineering technical field, and that was a very interesting thing that I learned that not everywhere, when I was in other places in Utah, you were judged by how efficiently you could speak English.

My, I remember, it's a very interesting experience. We went to our first host family in Utah. They had met somebody from India before, they had a host student, I mean, uh foreign student, and they were their host family. And that was the first time they've met somebody from India. And this guy comes from a very, very small village in India somewhere. I don't know what he told them. But when I went to their house first time for dinner, there's a, ‘Oh there's a great surprise today after dinner’. I was wondering what the surprise was going to be in a farm house there in Utah. What is the surprise? Everything was a surprise anyway, so still... Then, suddenly they come with ice cream, and they say, ‘This is called ice cream. And this guy who was here before really loved it’. And I said, ‘That's nice’. But they thought that I’d never tasted ice cream in my life, because I come from India. And I didn't know what to say, because they had no clue what life was in India. I say, ‘I'm not even trying to change their perception about it!’ [laughs] You know, so, later on I told them I had plumbing, and they said - I said ‘I’m not going to educate, I’m not going to take up that’. Because everything they asked me was like, ‘Light—electricity, do you have electricity at home?’ Then, of course I have to say something like ‘In summer, we…’. Then, I said, now I have to—I shouldn’t let me bother with those things, otherwise I would go nuts if I ever tried to explain from the beginning. I said ‘Yeah, yeah. In summer, we have camels to go to school. And in winter, it's raining, so we use elephants to go to school’, and things like that, and some of them, you'll really heard, and you tell - people were willing to believe things like that. And I said,'Well, that's good. Maybe I should go to a big city, and people are more knowledgeable about India, and where I come from.’

They see things, but they're not really… It's not full of jungles or something. They're big cities and they're fancy, really. I showed you the pictures. You always see on TV the poverty, and the poor people and, the cows, slayed cows here, and this and that. But when you go to big cities, they're fancy, and they have hotels, and theatres, and nightclubs, and everything is there, you know. But it depends on what you're looking for, or where you think, uh... So anyway, in those days, it was even worse, the perception, now people, because of TV and all those things, have a balanced view of other countries. And, but that was quite an experience; trying to educate everybody you met who have never met anybody from India. They always go ‘Oh, you might not have this or that’. ‘How, you speak very good English?’ I said, ‘Yeah, I just learned it on the way talking to the airhostess between Bombay and New York.’ or something like that. [laughs] You know, what can you say? Okay. Sorry. I go off track a lot.

All: [laughs]

CZ: Okay. So let's talk more about your experience in Houston. So when did you move to Houston?

RE: I moved after, like I said about thirteen years in Michigan. And about five, uh, sorry 1970, I’m sorry, 1990, we moved to Houston. Okay. So in 1990, uh we said uh let's move. My wife was also looking for a job, and I wanted to, she thought she had made—we have a, my wife's sister was already here. We used to send our children as they were growing up to Houston during the vacation, because we are both busy in Michigan, so we
didn't want to keep the holiday with babysitter for two kids. So we would send them. But they went to play. They were still young, you know. Those days you can go up to the seat, put them in their seat, and before the plane takes off, and somebody will come, and air hostess will take them out and all these stuff—unaccompanied children. So they used to go... They would come to Houston and spend the summer here. So we had been, we were quite familiar with - we had come to Houston, and weather in Houston is very much like, uh, India, where we came from, hot, [laughs] bright. And then the living standard is comparatively modest, you know, compared to expensive places like L.A, or similar sized cities, they are very expensive to live. So all considering, we said, ‘Let's move to Houston’. And my wife started looking for a job here. Then she suddenly realized that her reciprocity for practicing medicine, uh, license was only good for ten years after you get board certified. So if you got board certified ten years ago, your reciprocity, means recognition of your degrees and qualification expires after ten years when you move to certain states. And otherwise you go through all the foreign examinations that you have to for re-qualify to get the license. So we said, ‘Hey, in six months it's expiring, so let's decide. Are we gonna move now, or never gonna move out of Michigan?’ So we decide quickly that we're gonna move out.

So we came here. Um she went to Dallas, and then we interviewed there, this, that... And of course, you know, the profession is in good demand for OB/GYN physicians. So that was not a problem. Then we found a job in Houston. There was a group called McGregor Medical Group, and she interviewed there in the morning, and I was sitting with her. And they invited us, and gave us free ticket to come and all these things, gave us a nice chauffer driven limo, this that, take us around one day, just to get people in. And uh when she was interviewed at McGregor, I quickly saw in the magazine another place called something else, and finally we had two offers, and we finally picked one. And she worked for McGregor Medical Group for about ten years. And that group decided to liquidate and basically close the operation. So, um and then she joined Ken CC Board. It's a medical group here, with about 22 clinics. So, she worked for another 13 years with them. And last week she also retired. So now both of us are retired. [laughs]

CZ: So, um—

CJ: Oh, I was just gonna ask, so, when you first moved to Houston, I guess, what was your very initial impression of the city? When you first came here for the first time, since you said you visited here before.

RE: Yeah. We liked um Houston very much, really. Um though I had seen a lot of other places. I've been to most of the big cities in this country. Uh Houston we found more like home, for two reasons. One is uh weather. It was good from our point of view. And the other thing was that there was a good amount of community. There are a lot of Zoroastrians, Parsis here. There was about 3,400 of them, versus uh 50 or 60 we had in Michigan, you know. So we feel it would be good for our children to continue our culture and religion. It would be easy for them to grow up to be Zoroastrians. Um and can see that you're in a foreign world. So that was, uh, having a nice number of. So we used to have a little Sunday school in somebody's house, you know. Teaching children for—about the religion. And that. And those are the two reasons: weather and the community, brought us here.

CZ: Um so when you first moved to Houston, um did you just come to this house?

RE: Uh actually this is our first house. Yeah, right. We did. But what we did is, by the time we decided we're going to move in, it was really...uh uh My wife said 'We don't want to move into a uh rental place, and then move again, you know. This multiple moving with two children and all and school changing and all that thing it's not gonna be easy.' So we did what we can—we had to get first time only whatever we're going to stay. So we found a real estate agent, and, and, and we made very fast decision. Even today, on little things, that I have to go in this morning, and by evening I don't look back to see if I made the right decision or wrong. Just go
with it and stay with it. If you make - at that time those are the facts you had at hands available and based on that you make a decision. Then look back and see, oh I could've done this, I could've done that. Yes, that things could happen. But that time you only know so much. But anyway we wanted limited things. Like we don't want anybody on the back [of the house], face to face. That was one thing we didn't want. And Sugar Land was quite new at that time, there was not much built in Sugar Land, you know. This whole street, we were the only house, yeah, on it. And uh the recession in 80’s just got over. So the—it was not very easy. Our builders have just started—redeveloped starting their projects in Sugar Land. And people at her work told her, ‘Well stay close to the Medical Center’, where she was going to work, then somebody said ‘No, no, no, no, go there.’ So anyway, we ended up here. Even though her sister lives way up, you know, thirty miles north of us.

CZ: Um can you describe your neighborhood a little bit?

RE: Um our neighborhood is, uh, well I think now, we have a very small subdivision by comparison. This is the Sweet Briar, the subdivision that we live in, has about 40, 50 homes in this subdivision. There're only two streets in it. And um it was part of—supposed to be developed part of the sweet water, which is a little better subdivision than this. It's across the street on the Pond Royale side. Uh but they were developing here. And everybody was—there were very few, let's say, Indian people here. Most of them is, there’s a white population. And we made very good friends all around us. People are very quiet though. I don't see the neighbors like other places that we used to go. We used to—like in Michigan, I was to meet them everyday. My next door neighbors, of course they were old people from—a little older than us. In Michigan, we had such wonderful neighbors. We still go and to meet them. They're in Florida. They retired in Florida. Their daughters were my age. At that time, was younger, of course we were, at that time. And their families, and then - their family's just like our thing. They, they were born and raised in America, they’re a white family, with uh you know, originally from Mississippi. And they had moved to Michigan. They were working there, next door to us. They were very social people, and they had friends with the whole subdivision in Michigan. So because we were very close to them, we got to really, really made lots of friends in our subdivision. We had a wonderful experience living in Michigan. We had a total enough people from different faiths when you come as a foreign, you know, person settling down. You think that people will be biased, because you're different in culture, and talk, and food, and many things, but um we were really surprised. Even at work, we made very good friends. I had, in my former company, I had very good friends. I still communicate with them. They're still good, good friends. You know, they of course, retired. All of them. And uh in fact, one was from Nebraska. He never met an Indian before me, you know. And there's another guy from India. You know, a redhead guy. Uh and I remember in uh lunchtime, I said: ‘Let's go to—I’ll take you to a restaurant.’

So lunchtime, we went to a Sichuan Chinese restaurant. Even in Michigan, Sichuan Chinese was not that bad. I loved it, you know, because of the spices. And I didn't realize that this guy, in his whole life, he has never tasted anything other than black pepper in his life. So that's all the spices he had tasted in his life. And I took him to Sichuan, and he had all this Sichuan chicken and this and that. He was sweating in his - sweat, and he said: ‘Oh but, I like it’, but, but, but they are drinking cold water after the end. [laughs] Next morning, he comes to my office, and he said, ‘Rus, guess what. I took my wife to the same restaurant this evening.’ I said, ‘Really?’ And he’s, he’s converted basically. So the thing is that people who are willing to try new things. I don't know. American are really very open. You make friends with them. And they always, so that’s what I learned. They, once they know that we are all the same in many ways, you know. Once people realize that, you form such wonderful bonds with so many people. You know. And I really enjoyed that...

CZ: Yeah. So you have lived in Houston since 1990, right?

RE: Yeah. ‘90.
CZ: '90. Okay. So how have you seen Houston changed these years?

RE: How have I seen... Uh... In the suburban part. Uh uh think of things, uh, that was happening in—when I first arrived. When I first arrived, there was a huge recession. Almost, because oil price was going down in the early eighties or something. And it's going through uh tremendous recession. Houston was in the dumps, really. Real estate had no value. People have walked away. There were empty houses. There were uh there were malls were totally empty for lease. There was nothing—closed down, liquidation. You, you see—you don't have to be very intelligent to notice that we were in the pits, right, that time. Really. Everything was...because the price—I guess because the gas prices was going down. And, and Houston was all oil based. But then, Houston had the strength, come up not in, diversify, by not being totally dependent on oil alone. They developed other companies. They developed electrical plants. This, this. Retail businesses, they developed banking, financial, industries and things like that. So as a result, the dependence on oil became less. Now of course. Now we have the other cycle. Now we are fracking, and all these things. And even before oil price coming up and all these things. Uh Texas is booming. There's no better place in America today than to come to Texas. For jobs, and everything. If you, if you are looking for a job, I would say, just go to Texas and, and that's it. So I have seen a whole full cycle that Houston go through. Wherever you bought, like I said, houses. The houses in Sugar Land was literally, hardly built. Just beginning to be built. Now Sugar Land becomes very - there was no shopping malls, like we see here. There was no cultural thing. Now there was no place in Houston to build anything. I mean in Sugar Land, to build anything. So we come through a big boom cycle now. And a lot of immigrants move towards southwest part of Houston, which is Sugar Land. Sugar Land has become uh really a uh model community, where immigrants are in majority, and still considered one of the best places to live in the country. It's rate is the fastest growing county. And also, Fort Bend County. And also, most desirable. And the, the housing retail price has continued to go up. And are very pleasant surroundings. If you go to new subdivisions like Delfare (sp) other things. You'll just miss how nice it is. So the old concept, when immigrants move to a certain area, the local people go away. And, those who went away, sorry but now we still have a very nice place to live in Sugar Land. [laughs] Sugar Land is doing very well. You know, so things have changed. This is the change that I have seen. You know, that people recognize that uh that immigration is not all that bad. Of course you don't want your jobs to be taken over by immigrants. So that's uh, self-preservation in that respect. But uh you know different cultures always enrich the tapestry we have here, you know.

CZ: Okay so um so on your…so on the survey you filled out, um you indicated that you started your own business. So could you tell us more about that?

RE: Yeah. When I first started, I, I didn't realize that I'm—soon I realized that my—all my experience in automotive industry—I worked for Caterpillar—I worked for Ford Motor Company. Everywhere, I have done for power train systems, and developing future concepts for different kind of four-wheel drive, all-wheel drive, all kinds of concepts for machines, for vehicles. And I realized that um Texas didn't have any automotive industry, uh so to speak. They had little offices here and there, but nothing manufacturing. Except for one, um military trucks or something, and Sealy (sp) had a contract to build a few thousand trucks, and then stop it, you know. Type of business. But that was nothing. So I realized that I need to do something different. And talking to somebody, uh and I always wanted to do a travel thing. So I had two travel agencies, called Travel Stop, was the name of my company. I had an office in Galleria area. And I had an office in Medical Center. And it was doing fine, only—we were sending a good number of uh tickets and things like that. But there was no—things were changing in travel industry. The airlines, and the shipping companies, they all wanted to get direct reservation. They didn't want travel agents, you know. So they would—in those days before the computer—they would advertise 800 numbers, big numbers, 800 all for American Airlines. 800 for Continental Airlines. So now if I was dialing, and going somewhere, why do I call travel agents if I can call 800 numbers, and book it you know? So the—and then they were cutting down commission for travel agents. So I was selling more
and more, but not making enough money. So I said we have to do something else. So when I got a good offer for the two locations, we sold that. And then, I bought franchise for Party City. Have you seen Party City stores? They have uh—there are very good sized, party supplies stuff. And they have quite good sizes. It was a franchise um based in Los Angel—in New Jersey. And everything under one roof, you know. If you have a party, you can, and, typically people celebrate, like kid’s first birthday, they invite people, they buy all the supplies. Typically, in those days, buy at least a hundred, two hundred dollars worth of disposable things. You know, you think it's a lot of money to throw away, but people do. They buy balloons, they buy plates, they buy forks, knives, games, decorations, uh everything.

And it was very good. It was—these are big stores between fifteen to twenty thousand square feet. And I had a store near uh north of 529 and Highway 6, in the Bear Creek area. It was a new mall. I was the first one to open before even they had a parking lot. And then now there's a huge mall there. And so I fortunately got into that area while it was growing. I kept it for a few years. And then came this, uh uh um, you know, in the real—in uh stock market, there was a big high tech boom is coming. I would go to my office there, and I would trade on my computer—I mean I had a little office inside, I didn't stay outside as much, but inside. And I was trading stock, and by 10 o'clock I had made enough money, and I said, ‘Wait a minute, why do I need this thirteen people working for me and all the headaches. I'd better find somebody who make the offer’ and I sold it. Of course the tech, the tech mobiles came down. So all these, that I’d given up. I sold my business, and now uh it was not even so for a while, it was a little difficult. You know, because, I've given up a good business of my own. But then I continued, since the market have improved, and I still trade, and now I'm sixty-seven, so I don't think I need to be too, you know, if I get my, I became a recipient of social security, slowly. That doesn't pay much, but you know, these things. So you, you feel comfortable to retire, at this time.

CZ: So out of all those jobs you've ever had um - so what is the most rewarding job that you think? Your favorite one?

RE: I think in retrospect, when I left um Ford Motor Company, I was doing very well in the company. I felt that, uh um though, the only thing that drove me, uh, a little bit scary that I couldn’t—I didn’t see myself moving up too high in the company. I felt that, they were paying well, you know, you don't have to be vice president only to get…They pay you well, they gave you a lot of nice benefits, and you have a cushy job in many ways. You work hard, but not kill yourself, you know. This big corporations, because you know, that you can only go this far. So you don't want to kill yourself.

Those, some of my friends over here have done well in it. But I did not feel personally—uh, another thing is, uh, because, my wife was a professional who was also very busy. A lot of child raising thing also came on me. And so one of us had to compromise a little bit. You know, if both of you are professionals, and both of you have to leave home at 7 in the morning. We're gonna look after a one year old, and a two year old, or three year old. So that was thing. So I've, I also found that, uh, one of us had to give up something, in it. So we had to have flexibility. If the babysitter called ‘I can't make it today,’ what do I do,I cancel my meeting at 7 at office? You know. I can't do that. If they tell me I have to go to New York or something for travelling. Do I say, ‘No, my kid is sick today. I can’t go?’ I can’t do that. She can’t cancel her patients? Someone is going to deliver tomorrow, you can’t say that I won’t be there. You know what I mean? Who—she’s been seeing you for nine months, you know. And things like that. So it was—it had to be compromised. So and we had to make some—that's why I wanted to be in business. That way, I would have flexibility. If I had my own business, I can say that ‘Yeah I’m gonna be leaving today at 11 o'clock. Don't expect me to be there. You know where the office is.’ And it's done. And my children went to St. John’s School here, and I had to take them, and I could use my flexibility. I would, I would—I used to sit in Galleria area. I used to drive them, drop them in the school. And go to home thing. And when they were finished, I would bring them to my office for a couple of hours they
wait. They would sit till five or six o'clock when I finish. They would come with me. So, so we had an arrangement that I could make. But if I was working for a company I couldn’t do that. So uh you know. Sometimes you have to compromise and it doesn't always have to be a woman to compromise.

CZ: Yeah. Okay, so let's go back a little bit.

RE: Yeah.

CZ: So what was the reason that you could only go so far in that company?

RE: Um as I said, again, I still I, I didn't think I could've put as much of extra effort into it because of my family. I have to be—yeah—now I have other friends—one friend, who doesn't have any children. Another thing was in those companies, one of the things you could do is when you're offered an opportunity to go abroad, and spend a couple of years there. The guy had the opportunity to go to Germany. And, and I couldn’t, I had to decline it, because I had—I had my—kids was no problem because we have English schools there, but um your spouse had work at that time. She’s a fully trained person, she’s not gonna sit and twiddle her thumb you know Germany. So opportunities like that come and they say ‘Hey, this guy is not going anyway. He's gonna be here only. He’s satisfied, but that doesn’t help them.’ So that was the thing in it. But there's a friend of mine here. He doesn't have any children. So he took up an opportunity to go to Brazil. He became number one guy in Brazil. Ford had plants there. And Brazil was a big automobile place where South American Ford. And then they, he was almost up to Vice President—he’s a friend now. Now we go walking everyday. He's also retired. But I can see that there's a difference. You give a little, you get something else in life. You know, you have balance and everything in life. You know, it's not just money.

CZ: Okay. So it's more about time commitment instead of… So there's no, like, actual limit that you can only go so far.

RE: No I didn't, No. I, I did not find discrimination.

CZ: Okay. That's good.

RE: I made good friends. That is something that I—and even the people with whom I—Though they say ‘Yeah, yeah, there's a subtle thing.’ Then, there's always be—when I was in India, people from South India, look different, talk different, eat different things. People from North India have a different custom. So a guy from South India, and he may be an intelligent guy. He moves to North India. He’s a fish out of water. And I tell him the same thing. In New Delhi, how many people from Madras come [laughs] to New Delhi, and are successful. No. So we all have subconsciously, a certain degree of bias towards people who are different to us. And so from that point of view, that was no different there. But once you knew people, and you communicated well with them, and they knew things are getting done, and you are as intelligent as any other human being in your category, you know. There was never discrimination. It's usually—it's in our mind. Once we start forgetting who we are, it's easy to [get] caught up in it. [Laughs].

CJ: Uh, so you mentioned that, family was a big part of why it was difficult for you to move up. You mentioned your children a few times that, um and so on a note, uh, you mentioned that you spoke several languages. Have you passed any of those languages to your children? Do they speak Gujarati, or Hindi, or...

RE: Uh no. They—unfortunately I think it's partly our fault—partly theirs, too, growing up. We, sometime, you know when you work outside, uh and you speak one language, like whole day from 9 o'clock to 6 in the evening you are speaking in English, okay? And your children go to English school. They come home, they
tend to speak English, you tend to speak English, and, and, and then you lose the language, you know, from that point of view. Now in fact, now we speak more Gujarati that we're being alone, and we're not working, somehow, it’s a cycle. It’s surprising how there’s like a, ‘the pigeon’s going home’. Have you heard that? You go back to your own roots, ultimately, as you grow old. And have you seen the American dream, you are done and everything. You've done this, you've done that. You had all the good things you came to this country for. Then what, then after that when you are on your own, you said ‘Hey, I like this that I used to do there, when I was young’. You know, and so you go back to your—And America is such a wonderful place that they accept everybody, with your differences. All your differences are acknowledged, and happily accepted, you know. And in that sense—some people they don't accept, and you don't feel confined to them.

There's a wide—big America, you don't have to go there. If they don't like you, it's fine, you know. You have a lot of choices. So uh what was your question. Sorry. I talked too much uh… Did you ask me, what question was that?

CZ: Uh it was Chris’ question.

CJ: Oh, about your children?

RE: Yeah. They, they speak English mostly, but they do understand Gujarati. Okay. They do complain now and then, ‘Why didn’t you teach us Gujarati?’ I said ‘Wait a minute, where do we begin now?’ [laughs] But uh… That's okay, yeah. My daughter was married to a Hindu, but who speaks a little bit more Gujarati than his family. But he also grew up here, born here, so he also speaks English like that, you know. I would like to retain our identity, of course.

CZ: So have you ever gone back to India at any point?

RE: I do. In fact, uh, my, I still have my mother, who's 97 years old. My father passed away a few years ago. He was 97 also when he passed away. And, I have a, except for the first couple of years when I didn't have my green card to travel and come back, as a student, I've gone to India every year. I go to India every year. I go around December, January time frame, when the weather is a little bit more tolerable in Bombay, where I come from. And I have all my school friends, I have all my cousins, everybody’s there, as I said, I'm the only one here. [Laughs]. So when I go there, I'm perfectly happy. I have a sister, my only sibling there. And her both children are also abroad. One lives in Dubai and the other one lives in Canada. So uh, she's also. You know, she still lives there, like all my cousins are there. My families, basically all my family’s there. And my wife's family, her sister, she has a sister who lives in Houston. So she came to Houston to help us with the little baby, her second child. And then she found another guy here, and she got married, so she stayed here. When we were in Michigan, she married here in Houston. So that's how, you know, how things developed.

CZ: Um so did any of your perspectives changed after you come to the U.S.? Especially compared to your family in India?

RE: Uh perspectives about family you mean? Or…

CZ: Just different things. Anything.

RE: Yeah. Of course, yeah. There's a lot of growth factor. Because India, in the time that I left India, India was um controlled by um a political system that is what they called a licensed Raj. Raj means ‘administration’ in Hindi. License in the sense, if you want to do some business, you have to have government permission. You—if you wanted to start an industry, however small. You said you want to make shirts, you can’t just buy it, you have to get government permission. Because government's already given permissions to people who have all
the influence in government, and all that, so India started all that system until about 1990, there's a new change—political view, things change and they said 'Wait a minute, we don't open up everything-', and as soon as that happened, India started flourishing. But it was a controlled economy. You couldn’t—only one big company that was allowed to build cars. And no imports are allowed. So when we grew up in India, no imports were allowed.

Which actually helped in a way to strengthen the local industry. But as a result, the products were not competitive. Not good. Prices were artificially controlled. It's high. And we had no exposure to outside. And they wouldn't have let you go out. They wouldn't give you permission to give you a passport to travel abroad. Things like that. That didn't help the country. Once the country—they were afraid that everybody go out, all the money will go out and all that stuff. But it’s not true, if you open up, then people do want to go in and relocate, really. People always want to live where they are comfortable. Um there are few people like me that want to go out and explore, but they all come back. Like now, the young people who come from India. They come abroad, they come back. They say 'No, no, I don't wanna live in America. I like my India,' you know, whatever it is. There might be some difficulty, something good something bad, you know. Cheap labor, so you get more household help, things like that, that we don't have here, you know.

CZ: So um how did you um—so how do you get involved in the um Zoroastrian community?

RE: Um once we moved here—we used to have—and we all want to preserve our, our culture. Whatever we grew up with, okay. So when we were in Michigan, we used to have little Sunday school, like you know, teaching, everybody's children was this age at that time. We knew, because everybody came, most people are like us. Because until 1960s, only immigration laws changed. And that's why all foreigners, especially Asians started coming to this country. Um so majority of them—it's all immigration process started in the '64, '65, Kennedy's time. And um uh—so, uh then when we moved to Michigan, I mean, to Houston here, there was a community here, and our children will have more exposure to our community. So through the children, we also developed—we actually learned more about my culture [laughs] after coming to America. I like I always loved—I never used to watch Hindi movies, though, in India. Bollywood is very big. They make more movies than Hollywood unless you didn't know. Really, they make more, and some of them are very good, high tech movies. In fact the Sony and some of these studios in Hollywood is now bought by Indian reliants, and companies like that. We don't realize that Jaguar is made, owned by a Parsi, you know that? Jaguar and Land Rover? It's bought by Tatas, House of Tatas, yeah. And, so, there's a lot of underlying things. But um—so when you—when we came here with more communities uh here. We had about four, five hundred people. Um it was—you’re automatically gonna get more involved, because your children are involved in that sense. And not that our children got any this thing that, ‘Oh, they have to be in that community only’ and all that. They've got, they got lots of friends, and all the communities. They go to college, and this thing; they don't think as much about Zoroastrianism as I do, to my regret. But doesn't matter, they are their own, you know. But that's something we accept the growth. It's all personal growth that drives you. And what you feel comfortable and where you think you're going to be in the future, using that.

CZ: So do you and your family still participate in the Zoroastrian religious service here in Houston?

RE: Yeah we do. We have—uh, surprisingly. Zoroastrian, unlike other religions that you may be familiar with. Zoroastrian religion um is a non-directive religion. Non-directive means it doesn’t—there's nothing anywhere that says ‘You shall do this, this, this, this,’ or ‘You shall not do this, this, this, this’. There’s nothing like. It says the whole fundamental of Zoroastrian religion is God has given you a good mind. Use all your—always polish your mind in the sense, uh always keep your mind alert. Learn as much as you can in this world, and then make decision, that is right. Then, you will never have a question, what is right and what is wrong. If you have polished your mind, if your mind is bright, very few things will confuse you really. You will always know
what is right. You will always know what is wrong. But we still go against our good mind, because it feels
good, or it tastes good, or something like that, you know. So that's why the religion is to make the right choices.
And so if you do that, you are Zoroastrian in that sense, even though Zoroastrianism is not willing to convert
anybody from the outside.

But if you use the mind, and the first three words they always say is ‘good thoughts, good words, and good
deeds.’ There are three basic pillars of the religion. So if you think that way, um good words, and you speak the
right words, good words, you are bound to do good things. So it’s a, it’s a process that you follow, ‘good
thoughts, good words, good deeds.’ And that’s a very fundamental part of Zoroastrian religion. Zoroastrian
religion's very old. It doesn’t have—didn't have the time to develop these theological theories, just like any
newer religions, like Islam, or like, even Christianity, where Jesus Christ, I’m sure, only gave a very limited
knowledge at the time. Okay, but the people who followed, later on developed that idea, and wrote this Bible,
and this—in those days, he could not have written the way,—none of the prophets, not just particularly one, uh,
this thing. But that wisdom and all is always developed by the people. In Zoroastrian religion, that was all
destroyed. Whatever was written over the century, it was three thousand years, a thousand years before Christ.
It was already the religion of the area, in Middle East, and all. And when the Arabs took over, and, and
destroyed it, they systematically went and destroyed all the books, destroyed the entire religion, and converted
the entire countries by sword, that you have to become Muslim. And that's how Iraq, Iran, Mesopotamia,
[Audible] Azerbaijan, and some of the, southern part of Russia, all of the Communist, small countries. All of
them were Zoroastrian. But they all got converted into Islam later on.

CZ: So um back in a time, you mentioned that, when you um got married with your wife, um people don't
really want like want to have outsiders getting married into this community.

RE: Marrying, yeah. Parsis, I'm talking about the Parsis in India. Now here in fact, all my friends' children,
there's one marrying to Parsi, the others are all marrying outside. [laughs] It has, in one generation, in America,
it has, it has seen, it has... So I always tell our people in my church here, okay, we have to learn to accept and
welcome everybody. If you don't do it, we are the losers. So in India they, they are not willing to do that, in
India, but now we are in a new world, now we are in a free country. We're in a country that promotes your
good thoughts. You do what you think is right, as long as it doesn't hurt anybody. You should. And the right
thing for we, we should do as a community is to accept all these people who are married outside, and I
encouraged them to learn our religion, and pass on the message to them, and their children. And it’s happening
slowly here. This is why we're in a process of building a fire temple. The first fire temple—we have centers,
yeah, there are about eight centers, Zoroastrian centers in North America. The communities in pockets Los
Angeles, New York, Toronto… Toronto has about five to six thousand Zoroastrians, the biggest population
outside India. So um now we want to build an actual consecrated fire temple, you know they're just having
prayer rooms is one thing, but have a consecrated fire temple. So in Houston... and I'm quite active with uh our
community here. Uh and I was in fact chairman for several years, for about 8 years, for the executive
committee here. It's, like a, it’s not exactly—it’s a social as well as cultu—religious, both. We have just a small
prayer room, the rest is all big party halls. And a lot of parties [laughs] going on there. But we do have
religious things in it. And now we want a dedicated temple, yeah.

CZ: So, and, yeah—I guess go back a little, so you daughter is also married to...

RE: Yeah she's married to a Hindu—he’s not a Parsi.

CZ: Okay. And um so what do your family India think of her marriage? Do they accept it?

RE: Even, in India also this phenomenon is not unknown, anymore. Because we—there are only 70,000 Parsis
left in India. 70,000. And the population of India is 1.2 billion people. But if you go to Bombay, you think it belongs to Parsis. [laughs] Bombay is a big city. Maybe 4th, 5th largest city in the country, world, or something. Because the number, really in those—in the last 50, or 100 years, everything you've seen—in Bombay, you've seen hosp—roads, hospitals, um um airports, the port of Bombay. Uh this biggest hotel, Taj Mahal Hotel, they're all built by Parsis. You see statues of Parsis everywhere. Just 16,000 in a population of 20 million city. Think of that. And uh and there are colonies there, there are all kinds of things, so, they are very powerful, they were very charitable. A lot of them. [inaudible] Parsis, there were Zoroastrian traders, as I said, they work with, and I'm talking about the early part of the century, before 1947. They were very uh close to the British. And uh they traded with China. So um Parsis built ships. They traded with China, they—some of them immigrated to China. In fact, in Hong Kong, Mody Street, you know Mody Street in China? The main street in Hong Kong, through Kowloon, not near Kowloon, but in, in Hong Kong City. Mody Street—most of Mody are Zoroastrian, are Parsi. Yeah. There are fire temple in Hong Kong. Do you know the Jockey Club? In Hong Kong, Jockey Club. Because race horse in China—everybody likes them. Number game, and, and playing gambling, correct?

CZ: Yeah I think so, yeah.

RE: That Jockey Club was built by Parsi. There are only 70,000 Parsis in the world, think of that. And the population of China plus India is about half of the world's population. [laughs] And then, a lot of things. You know, the Star Ferry. Who started it? Started a Parsi. The Star Ferry that runs from Kowloon, Macau, Hong Kong. Not Kowloon, the Hong Kong, to—this thing, Star Ferry was started by Parsi.

CZ: [quietly] Oh.

RE: [Laughing] I know you don't know, but... There's a Parsi cemetery there. There's a Zoroas—, there's a whole building, with uh—I should show you the picture of what it looks like. But there’s a symbol of, of, of what they call an angel, that is very Zoroastrian, and it's right in Hong Kong building, and there, there's a Zoroastrian associated, only about 200 Parsis left in Hong Kong or something. You know, this, uh, you've heard of...what is those—what is those watches they make in Hong Kong, uh...what are they called? That's owned by Parsis. It's actually known pretty well. And uh, not Guess, what is the brand that is uh, watches, and leather goods that they make...? Fossil! Fossil watches. Fossil watches is made uh by Jal Shroff, he’s a friend of mine. And uh they make all these Burberry, they make Armani, all those, the gift items, and other things that they're made, promotional things, as well as these things, are made by Fossil. The, the, the license, they’re manufactured in Hong Kong. So Parsis are doing extremely well in those days. When independence came, everybody was out, you know, in it

CZ: So do you have other questions?

CJ: Um, I guess just like, what do you like to do in your free time, any hobbies that you have, or…?

RE: I'm uh I'm pretty active in the World Zoroastrian Chamber of Commerce. We have twenty-two chapters around the world. And I've last six to eight years, I was vice president. And we have different people. We have elections. We have our—a new general meeting around the world. Like last meeting was in Singapore. Before that we had it in Bombay. We had it in Dubai. Next one is again in Dubai this December. And I worked with a lot of people around the world, like I said, we are very small. We have only about a thousand members. But out of seventy thousand, a thousand business people is a, is a big number. And they are spread all over the world. And that keeps me busy. Plus my Zoroastrian Association of Houston here. I'm pretty active. And we keep having some more other projects like trying to build a temple here. And uh the existing center on West Airport Boulevard is so busy. We go there on a Saturday, Sunday, and it's always active. There are children, and they're growing. And, and before when I came here I got involved in the construction and fundraising, and rebuilt this
center. That kept me really very active and busy with the community. And um in my own way, I hate to say it, but I played a fairly good role in, in, in having the center that we have today. Yeah. That has kept the entire community together.

CZ: So I guess uh we just have one final question. It's like a wrap up. So what would you consider to be one of your biggest accomplishments in your life so far?

RE: I think my uh biggest accomplishment I can say is that, uh I managed to get out of India. Although India now beginning to do well, but at the time, when I was in India, opportunities were limited. So my thing is to, I have—I came here, and have my children here, who have done well. And, and, and I'm happy eh eh with myself. You know, that's very important, whether you achieved or not—achieved in life, you know. Uh I may not have become president of Ford Motor Company, or anything even close to it. But the thing that when you sit down like where I am today. I'm retired. And when I, when I look at it, I mean, yeah, I passed down some good things to my children, and their grandchildren, hopefully. And we are in a nice safe uh comfortable place in America. So, that's an achievement.

CZ: Yeah definitely. Okay, thank you so much for you time.

RE: Thank you.

CZ: Um so it is—what time is it? It is 3:18 pm.

RE: Wow [CZ: So.] it was long, isn't it? Did we start at 1?

CJ: 1:30.

RE: 1:30, yeah. Oh my God.

CJ: Yeah, thank you so much!

RE: Oh! [laughs]

[The recorder is turned off, the interview ends.]