

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

Interviewee: JIMMY KUMANA

Interviewers: RACHEL WONG (rising fifth year); CAROLINE ZHU (rising Senior)

Date/Time of Interview: JULY 7, 2014, at 10:00 a.m.

Transcribed by: CAROLINE ZHU; RACHEL WONG

Edited by: PRISCILLA LI (5/26/2017)

Audio Track Time: 1:46:55

Background:

Mr. Kumana was born in Bombay, India in 1949 and attended college at IIT before completing his Master's degree at University of Cincinnati. As a self-employed consultant, Mr. Kumana commuted between Houston and Florida for several years before moving here permanently. Mr. Kumana is a founding member of the Zoroastrian Center, and enjoys being active in the community. He has three children, two sons and a daughter, and sees his children often. At the time that this interview was conducted, Mr. Kumana was expecting his first grandchild from his eldest son.

Setting:

The interview was conducted at Jimmy Kumana's home in Missouri City, Texas and lasted for nearly an hour and fifty minutes. Mr. Kumana described his childhood in a wealthy Indian family, his opinions about changes he saw in India, and his opinions on the United States.

Interviewers:

Caroline Zhu is a rising Senior at Rice University originally from Beijing, China. She is one of the HAAA summer interns, and is majoring in chemical engineering. She is also a pre medical student.

Rachel Wong is a Senior at Rice University, majoring in Cognitive Sciences with a concentration in Neuroscience. Raised in the Metropolitan Washington D.C. area, she looks forward to returning west to her birth state of California.

Interview Transcript

Key

RW	Rachel Wong
CZ	Caroline Zhu
JK	Jimmy Kumana
...	Speech trails off; pause
Italics	Emphasis
(?)	Preceding word may not be accurate
Brackets	Actions (laughs, sighs, etc.)

RW: We're here on July 7th, 2014 with Mr. Jimmy Kumana at 10 o'clock in the morning. This is an interview being conducted by Rachel Wong—

CZ: And Caroline Zhu.

RW: —for the Houston Asian American Archive in the Chao Center for Asian Studies at Rice University. Mr. Kumana, could you begin by telling us a little bit about how you grew up, and your childhood?

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JK: Mm-hm. Uh, well, I had a somewhat unusual childhood, because I was uh, uh essentially after my, my, my father had left the country on a job assignment before I was born, or shortly after I was born. Actually before. And uh, at that time people didn't travel by air, they travel by ship. So he was going from Bombay, India, to London, where he had his job assignment. And uh, my mother was pregnant at the time, and uh, she got very seasick. So he continued and went on to England, and she came back, and I was born in India. Otherwise I might have been born in England. [laughs]

RW: [laughs] Wow that's amazing.

JK: Yeah. And then about the age of six months, uh, or there about uh, my mother then felt that I was okay, so she went on to join my father in England. And I was raised by my grandparents for the first uh, five or six years of my life.

RW: So you remained in Bombay.

JK: I remained in Bombay.

RW: Um...when you were young...

JK: Mm-hm.

RW: It was right after the partition, right?

JK: Yes, almost immediately after. Yes.

RW: What was it like?

JK: Well I don't remember. I mean, I was too... I was a baby.

RW: And...

JK: [laughs]

RW: Did you feel that the partition affected how you grew up in any way?

JK: I have no way of knowing. But I don't think so. I think if, if at all anything, I would say, it's either neutral or positive. Okay?

RW: Mm.

JK: But anyway, so that's the beginning. So then my parents returned from England when my father's travel assignment was over. At the age of six, I went to live with them. Uh initially for the first couple of years I didn't recognize them, and I continued to live with my grandparents. Both sides, by the way. And, who lived close to each other. And uh it was about a year and a half, or two before I went to live with my biological parents. Before that they used to just come to visit me over the weekends. So I mean, but it was great, because both my father and mother were the eldest in their families, relatively large families in those days. Six and seven, uh, brother and sisters. [clear throat]. So a number of my aunts and uncles were not much older than me. [laughs] Okay? In fact, I'm closer in age to some of them than they are to my parents. [laughs]

RW: [laughs] Sure.

JK: So uh I had a wonderful childhood, I have to say. And I was the only grandchild 'til I was about six years old when my brother was born, and he was the second grandchild, and then the third grandchild didn't come for another four, five years, so then there was a whole bunch of them within one year of each other. Okay? But uh, I have a... Some uh watering of the eye, so I'm gonna get a napkin. [leaves for napkin]. I have some tissues here. [returns]. Okay. So I had, I would say, a very privileged, and happy childhood. And uh, went to one of the best schools in Bombay. When I graduated, I went to one of the best universities in the country, the top five. I have a good life.

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RW: Can you tell us any fond memories, stories that you have?

JK: Uh, well uh I mean uh... I was, as I say, quite privileged that uh my maternal grandfather particularly, was a very wealthy man. And we lived in a—uh, the house doesn't exist anymore—but uh, it was kind of a mansion. He made his money in the textile trade. He was actually a medical doctor. But uh, at that time, people in... But he, he wanted to serve the poor [laughs], but there's no way you can make a living by serving the poor, so he couldn't make any money. So one of his friends got him into the textile business. He joined that. And I don't know exactly what he did, but uh, he used to convince me that, uh, I was with him in Europe. And he wa—I remember him telling me that uh, he and I went, uh boating at night on Lake Garda. I don't even know where it is. I just remember that. He convinced me that I was there and that we used to drink that water. He did this and that. And I, I would say yes, and he got a great kick out of asking me—people who would come as say 'Jimmy, tell them what we did during Europe, and I tell them this fantasy that he had put into my head. [All laugh]. Everybody was very amused, 'cause I weren't even born; he wasn't even married at that time. [laughs]

RW: Mhm. [laughs]

JK: My grandfather was not even married. And he said I was with him, you see? So there's that power of persuasion. [laughs]

RW: It was gre—

JK: That's uh, that's just you use—there's lots of good memories, but this is one that is kind of striking.

RW: Mhm.

CZ: So what language did you speak at home, when you were growing up?

JK: Well, um, I—well. The first few years, of course, I didn't know any English. Okay? And we spoke a language called Gujarati. You know how to spell it?

CZ: Mhm.

JK: Okay. So that was the language that I grew up in. And one of my aunts used to tutor me. And uh, in, in the language, and reading and writing and all that. And uh, then, when my, my, my, my uh maternal grandparents were somewhat of a nationalists, you know, they didn't wan— they had just got rid of—my grandmother even spent time in jail. So [laughs], for protesting against the occupation by the British. Okay? Uh in fact that's how she met my grandfather because he had come back from [laughs], Europe, and she was going around telling people uh that they should not wear foreign manufactured clothes, because they used to take cottons and so from India, and they go make textiles, and then export them back to India and make money. That way. And uh, textile mills and manufacturing of—by Indians in India was forbidden. Okay, that's how the British got rich. [clears throat] So uh, but, but they made uh, what is called *khadi*, which is a home spun fabric, it's very coarse, but it's uh done with a handloom, okay? So my grandmother, when she was a, teenager I guess, was going around, telling people to—she was collecting clothes from people all their UK manufactured clothing, so that they could burn it. And everybody should've only wear Indian made fabrics [laughs]. So that's how she met my grandfather, so [laughs] he said okay, but now I have nothing to wear. [laughs] Okay. Because all his clothes were from Europe. [laughs] So [laughs]. Okay, anyway, but [laughs] that's just a little family story. Uh, you asked about languages, so then my parents decided that no uh, against opposition from the grandparents, they decided that I should go to an English mediated school. Uh that's how I began to learn English. And of course in India, you may not know this, but uh, India is uh, equivalent of Europe in terms of culture, diversity, language, and religion, and all that. Every area has uh a different language, different cuisine, different culture, different form of dress, etc.

You know? So when India became independent, they chose Hindi became the national language, but only about 30% of the people, it was a m—plurality, not a majority. So about 30% of the people spoke Hindi, or variations thereof. And uh, other people didn't want to accept Hindi because it was completely different to them, so—and they almost, because of the British, almost everybody knew some English. So they started doing business in English. And it has in fact become the de facto national language, not officially, but in practice it has become the national language. Because all government business is done in two languages. And one of them is always

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English, and the other one is whatever the local language happens to be. So that's how, when I went to school, there were people from all different backgrounds, and they all spoke different languages, and the only common language we had to communicate was English. That's how English actually became my first language.

CZ: So uh you mentioned that your grandmother was a nationalist.

JK: Mhmm.

CZ: So did you receive any influence from her when you grew up?

JK: Well, she was not a rabid uh nationalist.

CZ: Okay.

JK: Okay? I mean she... It's not something that happened in your daily life. And uh, we had become independent, she had achieved her objectives, and... So everything was cool, so nobody really talked about it. I mean, some of what I'm telling you, I learned later. I didn't know any of that at that time.

CZ: So how many siblings do you have in total?

JK: I have one younger brother.

CZ: One younger brother, okay.

RW: And so, what did you—each of your parents—do for a living, once they returned?

JK: Well, uh, well actually they worked together from grade school onwards. Okay? They were like... I, I don't know. Whether it was kindergarten or the second grade, or whatever it was, but they worked together for a long time. They went to the same college; they both got the same degree, which was in law. They were both trained lawyers. Uh my mother practiced law for a couple of years. And then she quit and uh, became a housewife, and social worker, that's what she did. Volunteers—social worker. She didn't do anything for pay. And uh my father, uh, stopped—he never practiced law in a court, which my mother did. Okay? He was a, uh, taken up, and given a job in a company, a shipping company. Both passenger and freight, uh that cargo, which was uh, not owned but... One of my mother's uncles had an interest in uh... Exactly, I don't know what exactly it was, maybe he was the friend of the owner of something, so they wanted educated people, there were not very many at that time, so you know my father's degree was in... He had a BA and then he had an LLB, which was the Bachelor of Laws [clears throat]. They took him in. And that's one of the reasons he got posted to—to uh, London. So we had a lot of family people in that company, you know, from both sides. From my father's side and my mother's side. It was almost like a family business, even though it was uh [laughs] officially a public company. It's called Sindia Steam Ships, but it's uh, no longer, it doesn't, it's not uh, in business anymore. It was nationalized by the Indian Government, and then uh, became defunct... So that's what my father did, and after a few years, he had been there for about 10 or 12 years, I think it was in 1957, so about 10 years later, he, he left, and joined a different company, and uh, that was his second job, and his last job. So he ultimately became president of that company, and he retired as the president.

RW: You mentioned that you went to a very prestigious grade school, and then—

JK: Well, I wouldn't say it was a prestigious grade school I went to... In, in India you don't have the system that we have here in the U.S. So uh all schools are K through 12. Okay? All of them. And they are called... 'grade school' they only go up to the 6th grade, and then they are called, uh, or they are called kindergarten, they only have kindergarten, and then grade school, and then they have high school. High school it doesn't mean it's only high school. It means up to high school. Okay? But they all start from the beginning. So, I was in a Montessori uh, uh kindergarten at, at, at the time that I was living with my grandparents, and uh then uh, I got transferred to this other school, uh, it's called Bombay Scottish, and, and it was run by Scottish missionaries, and uh, I have to say that the quality of the education was very good, I have to say that.

RW: Did you enjoy any particular subjects?

JK: Yeah, I was kind of interested in everything. I—the only thing I didn't like was languages [laughs]. But I

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was good at math. I was—physics, chemistry, geography, history, English literature, art, all of that. And I, I did well in all of that. We also had sports. So I used to play table tennis, I play badminton; I was pretty good at badminton. But uh, not so good at soccer or cricket, although I played a lot of cricket, but I was not that good at it.

CZ: So um. So where did you go to college?

JK: Well it's uh, about twenty miles, or twenty-five miles from Bombay. And it was a different city at that time. But now it has been absorbed. Bombay has become uh, megalopolis. It's uh, like hundred kilometers in all directions. You know it is gigantic. You cannot leave Bombay almost. You sit in a train for three hours, and you are still in Bombay [laughs]. Okay, uh but it, it was a place called Powai, P-O-W-A-I. And it was built as a stand-alone college campus. It was just forest, and they, they built it at the side of a lake. It was beautiful. I have some photographs of that if you are interested in looking it up, I've got a, uh, hung up on one of the walls in my bedroom.

RW: That would be great yeah.

JK: You want to see it?

CZ: Uh, maybe later after this recording.

JK: Okay.

CZ: Yeah. So what did you major in college?

JK: I majored in uh, chemical engineering.

CZ: Chemical engineering, okay. And uh, why did you want to major in chemical engineering?

JK: Well, uh, actually I did not want to go into engineering at all. I uh, had a great interest in drawing and art and posters, and things like that. So I wanted to go into commercial art and advertising. But my, uh, but one of my aunts, my father's sister said... She took a great interest in me. She was a spinster at that time... I shouldn't say she was a spinster. She was... [laughs] unmarried at that time. [laughs]. She got married later, okay? But she got married a little bit late in life. Probably in her—I don't know exactly when, but I would say late thirties. [clears throat]. So she took... And, and remember that, she was relatively close in age to me, also. So she kind of took me under her wing, and I was like her son, and she spent a lot of time in uh keeping track of my academic progress and uh, everything else, much more so than my own parents. You know, my father would show some interests, oh, what I agree, then he look at that and he says 'oh very good.' But he didn't care about that, he was an avid sportsman and a very good one, I mean national level in multiple sports.

So he was a boxer, uh at university level. And uh, he played badminton at a state, and national level. And uh he also played cricket, and he was also a track and, uh, a track and field star. You know, in the sprint. So he did a lot of different things. And so he, all he wanted was for me to be a jock. But uh, he was very disappointed [laughs]. So he takes me out on the weekends. 'Come on, we're gonna do this, we're gonna do that.' But he would be very disappointed, because I was quite frail as a child. And uh, I didn't have the... I had good quick reflexes, but I didn't have strength or stamina. Anyway, so my aunt was taking interest in my academic uh, progress. She had a PhD in biochemistry in fact, and was a professor at, uh Bombay University. [clears throat] So—anyway, so she got me tutored in this and that, and said 'no, you have to go into engineering. That's the future. That's what the country needs you to be doing well,' and all that. And I was good at it, so you know, what the heck. That's what happened.

CZ: Okay.

RW: What did you do for recreation during college?

JK: Oh uh, my college years were brutal. I say it was a prestigious university, but it was super tough. And I just uh, kind of scraped through. And it was also very competitive. At the time there was an entrance exam; it was pure merit. There was no question of uh, ability, and all that issue didn't... And it was virtually free. It was almost nothing, you know? I think the tuition was 25 rupees, uh, per month. And uh rupee at that time was 3

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and uh, 3 and a half rupees per dollar. So it was, seven dollars a month, okay? Your travel fare to go back and forth was more than that. You know, to... If you were living at home, and you were... I, I was—it was all—it was compulsory residential. You could be living two miles away, but you still had to live in the dorm. Okay. 'Cause that was the idea. And we had 35 class hours a week for 5 years.

RW: Oh my gosh.

JK: And this doesn't count homework or anything like that. So there was not much time for anything else. [laughs]

RW: So you spent 35 hours in a classroom—

JK: Correct.

RW: Per week.

JK: Per week.

RW: That's rigorous.

JK: Rigorous is right. Seven hours a day, five days a week. So in the end, we had to do army because India got involved in a war with Pakistan in the middle of this. So I was drafted, and I had to do my military service while doing college.

RW: You didn't leave college during...

JK: [laughs]

CZ: So what was the military—

JK: No no. But it was, it was, it was a special uh, unit, uh, I wouldn't call it a regiment, but it was a, uh I can't remember exactly what it was, but all these guys, they were all in one place. So they didn't have to worry about it. This is, okay, we're going to create this, uh, I think in terms of numbers, they had about 600 people. Because they only look at a certain age group, and I happen to fall in that age group. Okay. So it was for two years, and uh, after classes, we reported for training. Uh, it was not every day, it was about uh, three, two or three evenings a week. And then on Saturdays. [laughs] So that's what we did. So there was no time for anything else.

RW: And what years of college was that?

JK: Well I went from '64 to '69. Mid-year to mid-year, okay, June to uh June to April, or July, I mean, I don't remember the exact months. But uh, that was the school year. And uh, we started this in '66 I think, so '66, '67, and half of '68. It so happened that during my time, the... It was supposed to be for two years, but then at the end of two years, they said no we're gonna make it two and a half. So we were the only people who did two years and a half, and after two years and a half, they went back and said 'no it's two years.' So we did two and a half.

So uh, during the breaks. Then we would be out, uh, on, uh, what do they call it? It was essentially a forced—forced march. There was, there's a certain name for it. So we all bring tents, we carry our tents. We have to live on the lands, and we have to go from this place to that place, and that uh, you know, we have to do it without any money. Because the uh... It was, it was the National Cadet Corp., that's what it was, NCC, National Cadet Corp. And we were not the frontline troops. We were not even the second line. We were the third, okay? So the way the Indian military was organized at that time I don't know what it is now, we had a frontline troops, and then you have what is called the territory army, which was like—comparable to the national guard. So each state had a territory army, who were, uh, not off duty, but... They, they had regular day jobs, and then they were also in the army, and it was like the National Guard. So if the frontline collapsed, then they got the next line [laughs], [clears throat], and then, if they collapse, then us. [laughs]

CZ: Okay so um, when did you come to the U.S.?

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JK: [clears throat]. I came in '69.

CZ: So it was after—

JK: September of 1969. August, or September.

CZ: Okay. And uh what motivated you to come here?

JK: Well again. It was partly my aunt, who by then had got married, but uh, she didn't have children, so she continued to be interested in [laughs], me. Much more so than all the others, I mean, none of the rest, but I was like her, like her kid. And she said, uh, you know you should go and get an advanced degree and then gain some experience and come back. So that's what my plan was. But uh, it's at a very vulnerable age, you know, when young men on their twenties. Uh, they get married to, whoever happens to be around [laughs]. Not exactly, but uh, something like that, so that's what happened.

CZ: So...

JK: My first wife was uh an American. And then we, of course, we stayed here. We had children and all that, ultimately we got divorced, but you know, we were married for 22 years.

CZ: So what year did you get married?

JK: In Cincinnati, Ohio.

CZ: Okay. And uh, when was it?

JK: When?

CZ: Yeah, when.

JK: On July 2—uh, 1972.

CZ: 1972, okay.

RW: And this was while you were getting your Master's degree?

JK: No, no. I had already got my Master's degree. I mean I was dating my, now ex-wife. But uh, we didn't get married till after I got—I graduated. But she was an undergraduate, she had not yet graduated, so she had two more years to go. And, so she finished college while we were married, and after she finished college, then she worked for oh 6 months or so, and then she got pregnant, and then we... Then became a full time housewife, and mother.

CZ: So you were in the same school, in the same university?

JK: We went to the same university. The University of Cincinnati, yes. I was in grad school—she was an undergraduate.

CZ: Okay.

RW: What was it like to adjust to life in Cincinnati?

JK: Other than the weather, no adjustment. I spoke the language. I knew the material. Uh, it was a cakewalk, because we only had what, 12 or 15 hours something like that, of class. And I already knew all the stuff. So I was taking 18 hours and things like that, because uh, I mean that's what I mean is that, you know, what's taught in graduate school here I mean, okay, there will be a little bit here and there. It was more a consolidation and refresher rather than learning new material, for me.

RW: Mhmm.

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CZ: Um and at that time was it a common thing for college students to go abroad, like study abroad?

JK: Well we had 75 people in my graduating class in undergraduate, and 10 of us came to the U.S. So it's not unheard of, depends on what you called 'common'. Uh...

CZ: And uh were you financially supported by your parents?

JK: I was. Uh, I mean my father was ready to do that. And we had got the funding approval to transfer the money, because we had exported currency control at that time, but uh it was approved. However, uh after I got here, very soon after I got here, I uh did uh get a scholarship. So uh it was not, it was just a tuition waiver, it was not a... And then I didn't really want to be uh, dependent on my parents. It was, it was nice to have the, the cushion there in case something went wrong. But I began to work at McDonald's. Because it was easy, I mean, the classwork was easy, so I had all this time, so I worked at McDonald's, I flipped burgers, and did shakes, and did the cash register and all that. And they loved me because uh, you know, I [laughs], was able to handle the cash register with no problem, whereas the, most of the people, you know would struggle with it.

RW: Was it arithmetic?

JK: Yeah. I mean they placed their order, and I already knew what the total was before I would punch it in. And uh, if it didn't match what was in my head, then I knew I punched something wrong [laughs]. Okay.

RW: So did they ever promote you?

JK: Nah, I wasn't interested in promotion. This was... But at that time, I was earning a dollar ten per hour. And uh, that was good money. You know, it's like getting 15 or 20 dollars purchasing power uh, today.

RW: Was that above minimum wage?

JK: No that was minimum wage. Who's that, is that Frankie? [a grey haired cat enters]. That's my grandson. He originally [cat meows] was rescued by my one of my sons, who lives here in Houston. And uh, then he didn't want to continue to take care of him, so he—I inherited him. [cat meows] [laughs]

CZ: That's a very cute cat.

JK: [laughs] He, he speaks, you know. He, he's learned a few things. So when he wants to eat, he makes a sound like [mimicking cat's meows] 'want food, want food', which means 'want food, want food'. [Frankie: [Meows]]. 'Want food'. That, that—did you hear that. That's him. He heard me say it, so... [laughs].

CZ: It's cute.

JK: [laughs]. And that's because he would uh come in and meow at me. I would say 'what do you want, what do you want'. You want to be petted, and I pet him, and he would continue, so I said 'what, you want food? You want food?' And then he said 'want! Food!', and so then I feed him. So now he's learned how to... He says 'want food' when he wants food. [laughs] But he's a fat cat, he's overweight, he's, he's been eating too much.

CZ: Um yeah so let's go back to your college life. Um so why did you choose that specific school? [cat meows]

JK: Well, uh. We went to various different places okay? And it's a very tough school to get into, first of all, and it was reputed, it had... it's the like, Harvard and MIT in one. And I didn't know if I would get in or not. So I enrolled at, two other colleges. In India the system is a bit different. You have the university and within the university [cat meows] you have colleges, which are all privately owned. Not all of them are private, but many of them are private. Some are government owned. But the university is run by the state. So this is Bombay University, so all the colleges belong to Bombay University. At certain colleges, their students do very well. At certain colleges, their students don't do very well, and certain colleges they don't do very well.

Okay? So Elphinstone was the one that my father and mother both went to. So I applied there. And in fact I began attending there until I was informed that IIT had accepted me. And then there was, St. Xavier's was

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another missionary school, uh college, run by missionaries. And they were reputed to... They had good results. Sorted Elphinstone. They were two competing top colleges in, in the city from Bombay University. But uh, Xavier's was supposed to be the place school where you went to have a good time with uh the opposite sex. And uh, Elphinstone was more uh, bookish. But uh... So I got admitted to both of them, and I actually attended both of them for a short time, 'cause I paid fees at both, you know, I didn't know which one I would like. So I went to Elphinstone. One of the two, I can't remember. And uh, it was very dark. I couldn't see the blackboard, we had blackboards in those days, and they wrote with chalk. And so, I couldn't read anything. So uh it was no good, it was very dark. I didn't like it. And then I went to Xavier's, and after about a week or so, I went to Xavier's, I started attending there. And uh then I was called for an interview by IIT, and they gave me admission, so I left Xavier's and moved back to, to IIT.

CZ: Okay. Uh what about University of Cincinnati?

JK: Well there again. I applied to a range of schools because I didn't know what level I would-. I didn't know what my level would be, so I applied to MIT, I applied to uh Berkeley. Uh I applied... Those are the more prestigious ones. Uh I also, then I said okay, I will go for mid-level. So I applied to uh University of Cincinnati, and uh Oklahoma State, because for chemical engineering, those are really good. I mean the others are prestigious, but they are more research paper, and things like that. Okay? Whereas Cincinnati, when you look at the graduates from Cincinnati, they actually earn more when get out of the college than the guys from MIT. Now I'm not talking about... I'm talking engineering, okay? I'm not talking about law or finance... So... [the cat sits on CZ's lap]. Oh he likes you! Okay.

CZ: Cute.

JK: Are you a cat person? You have cats?

CZ: No I don't. [laughs]

JK: Okay.

CZ: I never had pets.

JK: Okay. Anyways, so where were we. Oh so uh, you know I uh, the first place that accepts me... And I also applied to University of Florida, because I was told that's a fun place to go to. And uh, so I said, okay five, that's enough. You know I should find something over there and basically, the deal is... I mean, Cincinnati accepted me almost immediately, so I, I said 'well hell, I'll just take it'. You know, I don't want to wait, and, maybe they will withdraw the acceptance or something like that. And you are supposed to—once you're accepted—you have to tell other people your acceptance, so that was it. I did get a letter from I think it was Berkeley. University of California, saying, 'send us some more information or do an essay' or some such thing I forgot what they were, and I just sent them I already accepted so... You know. They forget it. So that's how I came to Cincinnati.

RW: And how do you spell Elphinstone?

JK: E-L-P-H-I-N-S-T-O-N-E... You would pronounce it as ElphinSTONE, but it's... That's phonetic, but it's actually 'Elphinston', is how it's pronounced.

CZ: So what did you do in your free time, when you were getting your Master's degree?

JK: Chase woman...[laughs]

CZ: That was how you met your wife?

JK: Yeah. [laughs]

CZ: Or ex-wife, sorry.

JK: Yeah.

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CZ: Okay, so... [All: [laughs]] Would you mind sharing the story... How you met her?

JK: Anyway, whatever it is, that's what men and women do, when they are single and they are in that age group.

RW: So did you...were you interested in participating in any extracurriculars provided by the university?

JK: Uh. Well. I actually, be... Well of course, I play tennis. So I did that. But I mean, that was not my main activity. The main activity was running after girls. Okay? Uh but when I wasn't doing that [laughs], I was either working at my side job. I mean that—McDonald's was the first job that I subsequently got. Another one which was a little better paying, and it was more technical; I was a lab technician, uh for a company called M&M Metals. Uh and so you know I was pretty self-sufficient. And uh from that, I was, I made enough money to be able to buy a car. And that's how I was able to begin dating. 'Cause without a car in the U.S., you cannot date. [laughs]

RW: Yeah.

JK: That was the main adjustment. [laughs] It would be fine (?) if the adjustment was that tech—I don't have a car, I can't date anybody.

RW: So, at that age. Um drinking age was 18?

JK: Well I was well over 18 by that. I was 21 when I came.

RW: But the younger women, the—

JK: I have no idea.

RW: [laughs]

JK: I don't know what the drinking age was.

RW: So what did you do when pursuing women? Where did you do to take them—

JK: Oh I didn't go to pubs. That was never me. [clears throat]. Okay? No I go to meet them at other social events at parties, at friends' places, uh there was party time, you know, every week. There would be a party somewhere or other, we'd be going out on picnics and uh, you know in groups, so it was more like group dating where you kind of got to know people. Um movies, I was active in the Indian association, from almost the beginning. We used to organize, uh, Indian movies, uh, once a month, I think it was, at the University, we use the University's facilities for that. We created a directory. We were the first ones to do all these things by the way, you know, anywhere in the U.S. Because there was only very few people at that time, so we pioneered some of these things, and we had the first directory of Indian students, uh, and local community was put out by the University of Cincinnati, Indian Association. I mean, others may have done it, I mean other groups. But among the Indian community, we were the first in the U.S. to do it. And uh, then we were not, I mean, I was acti—that was actually my main other activity. And I was a member of the International Students Association, which was a venue for meeting Americans and getting to know the local people. But the university had a system of host families as well. So each foreign student, not just Indians, all foreign students would be assigned a host family, with the, the idea that the host family would integr—help the individual integrate into American society. But uh after the second meeting, I remember my host family, uh Charles and Judy Spear, that was their name. And they said they would be telling me 'okay, this is this, and this is this', and showing me all these stuff, and saying, yeah okay and they say, uh, they were, uh, I forget exactly what they say, he says uh 'you don't seem to be too interested, or interest, or whatever it is', and I said 'well, I'm not because that's how it is in India too, I mean, you know. [laughs] I knew all these things'. So he says 'well, then hell, you're already Americanized, I don't need to Americanize you'. [laughs]

RW: [laughs]

JK: [laughs] And, and the music. While I was in college, [clears throat] one of my good college friends introduced me to jazz, and I loved it, I, I, I never really liked Indian music, okay, I was never into that, so uh, that's the music I like, and I still like it today. I have a collection of about a thousand CDs here. Okay, if you are

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interested in Jazz, by the way. Okay? After the interview is over.

So, so that's what he said. So I would go to their house for Thanksgivings, and you know, and I got to know their children and uh, I saw the seedier side of American life through them by the way. Because of their children, who were, they were good people, I would say, almost upper middle class today, they would be, you might say, middle class, okay, but, they lived quite well, and uh, [clears throat], but their children were a mess.

RW: Do you mind elaborating?

JK: Well it's not my story, I don't think I should tell you about someone else's but...uh, let's just say that uh, they were in need of rehab.

RW: Did it affect you, in any way?

JK: Well it just opened my eyes. That's the only thing. And it made me feel sorry for them, that here are people, who are well-off, their children have all the privileges that life can afford, and yet they are throwing away their lives.

RW: Did you ever miss home?

JK: Um, well, I—not really, because uh, I was in frequent contacts with my parents. Uh and to be honest, uh, India has got much worse steadily. Steadily worse, at different rates, but always on a downtrend. It may be going down slowly, maybe going down fast, and slows, and it's always going down, in terms of quality of life. And uh, I have no intention of desires to go and live there, it's a horrible place. It's horrible because the people are corrupt. They are morally bankrupt. It was not like that. When I was growing up, it was a different place. But in the 60s, by the time I'd entered college, we could see an... You know my family were all actually quite uh, what should I say, uh, they were part of the ruling class. Let's say, I don't want it to sound boastful, because I don't intend that, but my, one of my mother's uncles, the guy who was uh, in—the Sindia Shipping guy, he was extremely wealthy. And uh, but he used it to support other people more than you know, live ostentatiously. And uh, when uh, India became independent, uh he had been invited to join the cabinet, because he was a very prominent personality, okay, and he fought the Brits, and uh, not build weapons, but commercially, legally, and you know, we have to start this company. That's I think how he got involved in that, because he fought for the right of uh India to start its own shipping company, etcetera. So he had done that kind of thing, so it was very well known, and highly respected. He was always travelling abroad, going to conferences, Japan, here, there, and bring back toys for me and things like that. [clears throat] So um, what did we start off? What did you ask me? I was giving you a background.

RW: Background for if you ever missed home. [JK: To answer your question.]

JK: Oh miss home, oh yeah. So, so we lived very well, okay? So we were not, we didn't lead the life that you see on television, let's say. We lived the life that you see in the Bollywood moves, if you [laughs]. So it was not that... In fact, to me, my life today, is worse than it was when I was a child. Okay? I have come down in the world. But I was saying that India has gone down. So we were—there was always all these politicians, and ministers, and you know cabinet members and all that, who were at the house. And they would be talking about all these things. Okay. And they would be bemoaning the fact that uh, oh things are going down, look at, the business in the 60s. Okay? So, so at that time, things were already, started to go bad. And I remember my aunt, who's, not my aunt, my mother's aunt saying 'I don't think India would last—we're gonna have a revolution within ten years, this cannot continue' and things like that. But it has continued, there's been no revolution. Okay? But it's been, so, so. So it's so bad that it's actually really uh traumatic for me to go back, and see how things are today. Even among the affluent people, my extended family, who, you know, led a very good life. Look at what happened to them now.

RW: Did any of your family follow you?

JK: My brother did. And uh some of my cousins have, yes. But many years later, they didn't actually follow me. But the fact that I was here, and already established—I'm like 20 years older than some of them. Okay? The fact that I was here, and was established, gave them the confidence, hey. So one of my aunts would say 'okay, my son is coming, or my daughter is coming, take care of her, you know, or that kind of stuff'. So even though they were not in the same town. The fact that I was in the country, and keeping tabs on them and all that, you

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know. They felt that, okay there's somebody here to look after them [laughs].

RW: Mhmm. Were there any Parsis in your Indian Student Association?

JK: In Cincinnati? Uh yes there were. Um...I'm thinking. I think uh, one, two, three, there were five of us, yeah. So, one of them refused to be a member. And uh, the other three and myself were associates.

RW: Did you ever function as a subset of students?

JK: Yes, we did. Because uh...yeah I mean the Indian Student Association had maybe uh a hundred and fifty members altogether, but that included students and nonstudents, okay? Former graduates, or even non-graduates at Cincinnati were allowed to be members. I gotta keep track of the time because at about 12:30 I have to leave to go somewhere for a meeting, okay? Um anyway. Uh it's only 11 o'clock so we are in good shape. Uh but for the Parsis, yeah we used to have them over to our house, uh, of course I was uh... I continued this after I had graduated. Remember that was only for two years okay? So I continued to be active in it as a board member, and to you know, advise and fill in, and then we set up a house for incoming students who didn't have a place to stay. So they would stay at this place. And once they found their own place then... So for the first month, they didn't have to pay their rent, and then if they want to continue staying after that, they had to pay rent in the house, because of course the association had to pay for it, okay? And then at the end of the year, they had to leave, and make room for the next batch. [laughs] So that we set up the system. Mhmm.

CZ: So um what did you do after graduation?

JK: Hmm well I had a job offer. I had actually three job offers; I had one in California, which I was kind of tempted to take. And I had two in Cincinnati. One was in environmental, and one was actually in the field that I wanted to be in, which is process design. Uh the other two jobs paid more, uh, but California was out because my wife was attending school, and I didn't want her to start all over, so it had to be Cincinnati. And uh, the uh, I took the job that I thought I would enjoy. I took the job that I thought I would enjoy over the one that I...that paid more, which I thought, probably, that I wouldn't enjoy and I think that was a good decision because within 6 months of joining that company, they said, you know, here's a raise for you and I was already at the end of my first year, making more than what I would have had I joined the other company [laughs] got a huge bonus, of about fifty percent. [laughs]

RW: So how long did you stay there?

JK: I stayed there for seven years.

RW: And, during that time, you—did you begin your family?

JK: Yes.

RW: So your first child...

JK: First two children were born while I was in Cincinnati, then my daughter was born in Florida after I left. I moved to Florida after Cincinnati; I worked for 7 years, I was actually in Cincinnati for 10 years... after, uh, uh finishing my...master's, I took a job—I was actually working on my doctorate, so I continued to work on the doctorate while I was...while I had a full-time job, but then it became...too much, so I passed all the comprehensive exams, what they call them—the stuff, did my dissertation and all that and so, I'd go to work during the day, then go home and have dinner, then I'd go to uh...the university and sit in the computer room and run the punch card programs and do all that stuff, and come back at like, 2 o'clock then go back to work at 8 [laughs] [coughs]. What?

RW: So this was okay with your family?

JK: Uh well it really wasn't, but...what can I say, you know. It wasn't for that long; it was only for about a year. I—I finished my coursework first, yeah—first year—first year I didn't do dissertation, I did only coursework so I would go from uh—from work id' go to my evening classes, because I'd already taken a lot of third courses, I didn't have very much more to do, okay? So I could take evening classes, 2 or 3 per week, and that was...you know, as I said, it was fairly easy, so I just had to attend, and uh by that time I already knew most of the

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professors, so as long as I passed the exam, it was okay with them. [laughs] And...then, the dissertation began after the 3rd year, after I had passed the—the qualifying exams for the doctorate—and that's when the night stuff began, and that was not okay...and then I ultimately; I ended up giving it up.

RW: How did you end up in Florida?

JK: Well...um, the place that I worked was called Rafiyer Katz and Associates, if you want to write it down, if not that's okay too, the company still exists. [clears throat] And it was really an extremely well managed company, and I was very fortunate to have had that as my first experience, but I didn't know that other companies are poorly managed—I thought this is how it is. And uh, it ran itself—the company ran itself, and the reason is that uh everybody had a stake in it—and the way it was designed was, you got a base salary, which was a little bit less than the market rate, okay? But you never got fired unless you did something bad, okay? Because, I mean, unless you didn't perform or you did something unethical—so in lean years, you still got your base, you didn't get fired—and when things were good, there was a profit pool, which was divided into two pieces. One is for the shareholders, it was a partnership for the partners in proportion to the partnership interest, and one for the nonpartners, and it was 50/50. So it was, I'm not sure it was 50/50, I think it was, and I think—all the people that worked in the company, including the secretaries, and the cleaning staff, and everybody, shared in that other pool, okay? So I think it was 50/50, I'm not sure exactly it was, but if it was not 50/50, it was close to it. And so, whatever profits were made, were then divided among all the people, generally in proportion to their base salary, but not always. Some people who did an extra good job would get a little extra. Okay. So...we were all collaborating, because if it's good—it's not good for me unless it's also good for you, you know? We have to work together, so we were competing with people outside the company, but we were collaborating in the company. So, that's how it was. [laughs]

RW: That's a good organization.

JK: Superb! Brilliant...brilliant. And if the U.S. adopted that system, generally, we wouldn't have all these economic downturns and shit like that.

RW: So what led you here?

JK: Well, so I moved first from Katz & Associates... that was—I was getting stale, I was doing the same thing again and again and I wanted to have a broader experience—and I got a job offer from an engineering company that was good, and I wanted to have a different experience and I actually had two jobs—I had one in Brazil and one in Florida. My wife didn't want to move to Brazil- I really wanted to go there, and experience that. But she didn't want to do it, so we said, all right, we've got two little babies, so let's go to Florida. So we went to Florida and I did very well there and became Vice President of the company, but there was some—I was there for five years—'79 to '84, yeah—[clears throat] and uh there was some shenanigans going on financially, and uh it couldn't happen without my knowledge because of the position I had, so a couple of the other guys including my bo—not my boss, but he sent somebody who was at my level to so—this was a very large company, okay, with about 1,400 people, so...I was not a Vice President, I was an Assistant Vice President, so my boss was the Vice President, and then over that is an Executive Vice President and the corporate level and the President and the Chairman and all of that, okay? So...one of the other guys who was at my level, comes to me and says, look we are working so hard and, we're making all this money for the company, do you think we are getting a fair share? So I said well, I'm pretty happy, I mean I'm okay. So he said, well, we've got this project and it's a very rich— there's a lot of money in it, and you know he basically was saying, making a pitch to siphon some money away. And I said, no, that's going to compromise the performance of the plant, we're building the plant, we're gonna get a lawsuit—we can't buy cheap equipment when we've specified more expensive stuff, you know, so we had the budget and he said, well we'll just buy this and nobody's going to know. And I said, no. So...they continued to do this—I was not in charge of the construction, I was in engineering and this guy was the construction manager. So I had a bit of a uh fit, and in a foolish moment, I called the Executive VP, who was the boss of my boss, and I said hey, this is what's going on and da-da-da-da...and the next thing I know is, I got fired. So I realized that the Executive VP must have been in on it, too. So then, I was in business for myself, for a short time that was pretty brutal because I had a bad habit of spending everything because I was moving up and everything looked good and I knew the chairman and the principal stockholder whose name is on the company, you know? [clears throat] And we were on good terms, so I felt secure, but... it was not secure.

So I ended up raking people's yards and doing all that for a few months [laughs] okay? Just to...to cut back on

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the spending and whatnot, but ultimately I started—restarted a consulting business—I mean I, I, I some of the uh—what happened is that the company folded, okay, after I left, within 6 months their business, just went down and they closed down the office and everybody got fired. Uh well, a couple of people got transferred somewhere else but basically it closed down so I picked up some of the smaller clients, because I couldn't do the big work, I didn't have that kind of staff, but whatever small consulting projects there were, and I hired a couple of people and we were working out of our house, and then that business wasn't doing very well because we were specialized in a field that was uh getting mature, [clears throat] so I moved to something else, which was process optimization, I got into that, but basically since then I've been self-employed, essentially self-employed, most of the time. There've been gaps when a particular client would say, we would like you to work for us full--time, and I have done that, but I've always maintained—okay as long as I'm not competing with you I want to continue to do the consulting to keep my hand in it. And I would write articles and uh present papers at conferences and all that, and maintain a network of contacts. So that's what I've been doing since 1984. So I'm self-employed, that's why I have time to sit with you today.

CZ: So you started your own consulting company in Houston?

JK: No I started in Florida

CZ: In Florida. And then you moved to Houston.

JK: Yes.

CZ: Okay.

RW: What brought you here?

JK: Well it was one of the clients, they said we'd like you to help us start up an office, first in California, so I went to California and helped them start up their office from '89 to '90, then I came back to Florida, then in 1991 they wanted to start an office here in Houston—that one became—after one year that was self-supporting, so that was fine, then, so that was fine—then, the guy who was running it was a friend of mine, anyway, and uh I didn't want to live in California—can't afford to live like a rat, in a shack, you know, to live there...and so...[laughs]

RW: Uh, so you moved, so you moved to Houston—

JK: So then, no, I moved back to Florida and then they said, well we'd like you to go to Houston, so I moved to Houston and when I was here my wife divorced me. That's how I got divorced. [clears throat] Because I was commuting, I wasn't actually living here, I was in an apartment but I was spending a lot of time and I would go back for—every two weeks I would go back for four days and I'd take a—I'd work through the weekend, one weekend and I'd take two days off the next weekend, additional, so I did that for about a year, but then she decided that...she didn't want to...you know, remain married to me, and that's what happened. So then I just stayed here. But now she wants to get married again—but now I don't want to.

RW: Did you raise your children...Zoroastrian?

JK: [clears throat] Uh, two of them, yes.

RW: The youngest, no?

JK: Well, no, the older and the youngest. The—actually, by the time—at the time of the divorce which happened in '94 uh my—uh, [clears throat] my older one had his initiation and the second one had not and my daughter was too young, anyway, so we didn't do that and then...I think he fell under his mother's influence, and so he never wanted to be Zoroastrian, but my daughter changed her mind—she was also under her mother's influence, and—but then she realized the— she kind of opened her eyes after some time and so, she became a Zoroastrian.

RW: So two the oldest and youngest had *novjotes*?

JK: The oldest and youngest have had their *novjotes*, yes. You know about *novjotes*?

RW: Very little.

JK: Okay—it's the initiation, it's where the child says, yes, and it can be any age—you could be 85 and you could have a *novjote*, okay, but usually it's done when you are about—somewhere between 8 and 12. [clears throat]

RW: So is that ceremony required to become Zoroastrian?

JK: It's more of a tradition than a requirement of the tradition [clears throat].

CZ: Did you ever speak Gujrati to them?

JK: A few words here and there, yeah. I mean, they understand some things...they can pick up the gist of a conversation but I don't really speak to them in Gujrati, they know a few words.

RW: Did...sorry.

CZ: It's okay. Go ahead

RW: Did you ever travel with your family to return to India?

JK: Oh yeah...yeah. They've all been there, and not just for ten days, I mean they've lived there for about a month or so—they know all the family and they sometimes go on their own to visit them, also. [clears throat] My older son just went to India with his wife uh in January. You know, and they went there for about three or four weeks, they—I mean they know everybody, I mean, they are—they are integrated.

CZ: And how have you seen India changing?

JK: How do I see it changing?

CZ: Yeah, do you see changes?

JK: Of course I do. They're all bad. [laughs] mostly bad, the bad overwhelms the good.

RW: What aspects?

JK: Everything, everything. It all stems from the same thing. You see, one of the basic tenets of Zoroastrianism is good thoughts, good words, good deeds—in that order. You cannot do good deeds unless you speak good words; you cannot speak good words unless you have good thoughts, so everything starts with good thoughts—your morality, your values, and if you lose that, [clears throat] not lose that, but imbibe—or accept evil values, then you will do evil things. If you think it's okay to lie under cert—under certain circumstances, then you'll find more and more circumstances where it's appropriate for you to lie, and to cheat and to kill and do all that, you know? You'll think that yeah, it's okay, it's allowed and people go on that path, even if they are born into this religion they do that. Not everybody's good just because they claim to be Zoroastrian. Did I answer your question? I don't think so.

RW: I think...I ha—I had a question going back a little bit-

JK: Uh-huh.

RW: Which was—you intermarried...

JK: Yes.

RW: ...as intermarriage was new, or newly being accepted, even in the United States.

JK: Intermarriage has always been part of human history, always, okay? Not 1,000 years, not 2,000, but

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100,000 since the begi—since before recorded history. Okay. If you look at the genetic history of Parsis—and this is something you know, I'm a—as being a sort of scientist, engineer—I make my decisions and come to conclusions based on evidence and logic not on emotion, and you know, propaganda. [clears throat] So the Parsis of India today like to claim that they are pure and all this stuff—they are not, okay. If you look at their mitochondria and you look at their genetic makeup, they are closer to Gujaratis than they are Iranis today. Did you know that? Would you like some literature on that? [laughs]

RW: That's—

JK: Okay. Anyway, it's a fact, okay? There have been studies, there's no such thing as purity. There's no racial purity...at all. Period. [clears throat] and uh so...I mean, my father married— my mother was not born a Parsi, okay? Intermarriage has been a fact of life, particularly in India, despite what all the—it's just that most of the people are Hindu, 80% of the people are Hindu, so mostly they marry each other. But all the minorities—the incidence of intermarriage in minorities is far greater because there's fewer of them so they interact more with the Hindus, you know what I'm saying? If I were suddenly transported into China I would probably marry a Chinese girl if I were at the right age. You might have been dating me if I were fifty years younger, not fifty, but you know, whatever [laughs].

RW: Because I was wondering, you said that your family had traveled to India many times—

JK: Yeah.

RW: —but eh from my understanding, your wife would not have been able to enter the fire temple—

JK: That is true, that is true...

RW: —but your children, yes?

JK: Yes. And that's changing—you know the fire temples that we are establishing here in the U.S., we are doing away with these restrictions.

RW: The first one in the U.S. is going to be here?

JK: Yes. [laughs]

RW: ...so...

JK: I'm, I'm...one of the....there's a founding group; I was one of the founders of the Zoroastrian Center here. If you go there, you will see my name on the plaque there, one of them—not the main one, but still. And similarly, for all the other activities, the significant things—I mean, I don't do the day-to-day stuff, I do more of the long term vision kind of stuff.

RW: So you're very supportive of an open temple here?

JK: Absolutely. Because that's not—Parsis are an ethnic group. Zoroastrian is a religion. They're two different things. Parsi is like saying Chinese or Belgian or, you know, Iranian or whatever. Zoroastrian is like saying Christian or Jewish or Muslim. [clears throat] And—and, you know, there's been intermarriage in my family on both sides—the Hindu side as well as the, uh, Parsi side. One of my cousin's sisters is married to a Bengali. And so there's many such uh, instances, so there's someone married—one of my cousins is married to a Muslim, okay? Parsi guy, married to a Muslim. Parsi girl married to a Bengali Hindu, I was married to a Christian, and then to a Parsi lady subsequently—they said, oh, you know, look, your American wife divorced you, it was a mistake, get married to a good Parsi girl and all that and I did that and she turned out to be absolutely horrible. She was very materialistic, very selfish, and exactly the kind of person—and—and very manipulative, and uh, then what? If, if I really made a big mistake in my life, it was marrying her. [laughs] Okay? So I'm divorced from her also, now, but at high cost.

RW: What accomplishments in your life are you most proud of?

JK: Accomplishments, right?

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RW: Mhm.

JK: I would say my—the thing I'm most satisfied by, that I feel good about, is that my children have done (?) well. That's the number one thing. They are happy, they are successful—not necessarily rich, they are successful in the sense that they have...found what they want in life and they are doing it, okay? So, that's what I'm most proud of, and I'm fortunate that I've been able to, uh, you know, acquire enough uh wealth—I hate to say this, but—to look after them if I'm not around, [clears throat] okay? I mean, there's enough— they—all of them have a cushion—so they can go out and do crazy things—it gives them the freedom to do something and know that there's a safety net underneath and that's what I've done and I'm very proud of that. It's not in my control, you know what I mean? It's in their name but it's in a legal system where they cannot uh spend it unless—under certain circumstances, okay? So it just accumulates and you know by the time they get access to it at the age of 60, then of course, you don't want—then, you might as well spend it, you know? [laughs] they will be—well off. They don't have to rely on Social Security.

CZ: So what do your children do now?

JK: My oldest son is a—he is still—he's still with the U.S. Navy; he's a Commander but he's not active duty, he's sort of in the reserves and he's uh assigned to the Nuclear Regulatory Commission as a Safety Inspector for Nuclear Power Plants.

RW: And your other children?

JK: He lives in the Dallas area, he just moved there. My second son—he's uh, single—my first son is married, I'm going to have a grandson—or grandchild soon, I should say. [clears throat] Uh second one is single, he's a chemical engineer by degree, uh but a disc jockey by interest. He does it—uh he's interested in all this uh...avant-garde music, which I don't...his uh house is full of electronic gear—and his clothes are on the floor. [laughs] You can't walk into his place, okay, because you have to step in between all the soiled clothes, but anyway, that's what he likes to do, so he's happy. [laughs] He does have a day job as a chemical engineer, he works for Siemens Oil, Gas and Marine, and he's a smart guy and he's good at what he does, he just doesn't enjoy it. But he enjoys the DJ stuff, and he's a composer and does all this kind of stuff, so he's happy...okay? My daughter, she is—she has a B.A. in Fine Arts and Photography, actually, [clears throat] and she worked for several years in New York with uh Christie's, you may have heard of them, they are an auction house. Have you heard of them?

RW: I don't think so.

JK: Have you heard of Sotheby's?

RW: Yes.

JK: Okay, they are—Sotheby's is British and Christie's is uh American. They're the—basically the same thing—they're the two leading auction houses in the world. So she worked there, and then uh after a while she, for a variety of reasons, she decided to move to Houston, and she lived with me until about six months ago. And that was great, I loved it. But you know, it's time for her to have her own life; it's too comfortable, you know, staying at home.

RW: So you kicked her out?

JK: I didn't kicked—kick her out. I encouraged her to move out when she found the right situation. I said, when you find this situation, then you're ready to move out. And she did. [laughs] She's uh, uh actually—I wouldn't say officially engaged, but uh at least unofficially engaged to a guy from—who happens to be a chemical engineer, like her brother and her father, and her—one of her uncles, the Bengali guy who's married to my cousin—they're all chemical engineers for some reason. Anyway, and uh—so they have a set-up home and uh—he was living in an apartment and he realized that uh he needs to get a house to get—[laughs] to move in with him, so they're a little bit spoiled, my children. So that's what happened. So that was kind of an indication of commitment, that yes, he's willing to do this for her, so that sounds good, so she's with him right now. He's from South Africa, by the way—so we'll be having intermarriage on top of intermarriage. Generations—every gen is intermarried, my son is married to a Peruvian girl who herself is half Chinese, half Peruvian. [laughs]

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RW: Wow, that's amazing. So you mentioned you did a lot of traveling?

JK: Yes, mostly for my work. But I also have family uh in the UK, mostly, some in Canada, and of course, the rest in India. [clears throat] But that's not where I did all my traveling. I've been to something like 45 different countries.

RW: Do you have any favorites?

JK: Yes, I do. I—I... it depends on what—favorite for what? Favorite for enjoying the life, for vacation is England, but that's because I have so many family members there and we—I just enjoy. The best place for living is actually Saudi Arabia. The one that gets all the bad press here in our uh deviant press. I have to agree our press is full of propaganda. It's completely misportraying the rest of the world. And the U.S., by the way. I don't know if you felt that, but... part of the brainwashing that goes on.

RW: Well, technically speaking, the U.S. and Saudi Arabia are political allies. Without all the press. Disregarding the press.

JK: Yes. Right. Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah. And military allies. Okay. But, life there is very—better than the U.S. That's why you don't see Saudis immigrating here. You see people from India, you see people from Guatemala and from Mexico and even Europe. Do you see any Saudis immigrating? No.

RW: I'm not really privy to...

JK: No, no—I mean, look around. The students that come from Saudi Arabia, they all go back. Nobody stays here. You don't have immigrants from Saudi Arabia coming to live in the U.S. You have immigrants trying to get into—people, westerners who live in Saudi Arabia, don't want to leave and they want to continue living there, but unfortunately they have this rule that you can't be a Saudi citizen unless you are Muslim. So some of them convert.

RW: Interesting. Um...

JK: Okay, so you have the answer. I think China's a fantastic place to live too. Not in the major cities but it's—I think it's uh I like, I love China.

RW: Can you tell us...do you have any memories?

JK: Oh yeah, recently—I've been going back and forth until last year. I—I have consulting projects there, so I go there. I think the people are very dynamic, they are friendly, they are open-minded. I mean I really can't think of any bad things to say about it. I love the food. [laughs] I was welcomed uh by my professional colleagues, I made friends there. I mean what can I say? It was good. I rode around on my bicycle, I lived in [inaudible] you know where that is? Are you Chinese?

RW: I'm only part Chinese but I never lived in China. [to CZ] Do you...do you know where this is?

CZ: I—

JK: It's in the north...northwest corner. On the border with Kazakhstan and uh, and uh...Soviet Union.

RW: Oh! Way out.

CZ: Mhm, yeah.

JK: Yes, it's directly north of India, actually. Same time zone. [laughs] in fact [inaudible] shares a border with India.

RW: Wow, that's amazing. Would China be among one of your most memorable travel...?

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JK: I would say so, yeah, 'cause it's very different in many ways. You know, lot of history, culture uh...eye-opening experience, really. And to me, that's the most important thing in travel. I don't want to—some people want to go to a 5-star hotel and sit by the pool and do that—I mean I can do that at home, okay, I don't have to go to China to do that. I want to go there to experience the local culture and the lifestyle and the cuisine, and the way of thinking and all that. So yeah, that was definitely very memorable.

RW: What do you hope that—

JK: If you haven't been to China, you should. Go with an open mind—great country. Yes, admittedly the politicians manipulate this and that, but do they not do that in the U.S.? of course they do. And it's much worse here. Well, at least the Chinese rulers—the one thing that they have paramount—they get rich and all that, fine. But taking care of the average person is their highest priority. Delivering an ever improving quality of life, and they're doing that! 'Cause a lot of my friend—all this talk about repression and all that, I saw no sign of it at all. No sign. Everybody speaks freely. More freely than in the U.S., okay? And they openly criticize, oh they're doing this and that, and I found myself defending the Government, I mean, I'm an outsider and they're saying, oh they're doing all this and that, and I said, listen, you know, Ming Yao, you know—uh is your life better than it was 5 years ago? Yes, it is. Is it better—was five years ago, was it better than ten years ago? Yes. Was it better ten years ago was it better than twenty years ago? Yes. Was it better twenty years ago than your parents' life? Yes. What the hell are you crying about then? Why are you complaining? [laughs] You know? We cannot say that in India. Everyone's life is worse than before.

CZ: Um can you give us an example of that?

JK: Of which one?

CZ: Like, life in India—

JK: Life in India?

CZ: —life changing.

JK: Pollution, congestion, crime, corruption. Lack of sanitation, food, I mean uh...no electrical supply, I mean, what do you want to know? [laughs] Every—everything. Roads are potholed, public transit doesn't work, you take your life in your hands if you take a public train because you can't get in, the infrastructure has not been updated since 1927 which is the last time the Brits did something good in India. I mean, what are we talking about?

RW: It's...

JK: It's just...everything is bad. Everything is bad. Except for a very select few, okay? Not even 1% the point one—point zero one percent. They have a good life. Everyone else is worse off. And they're the guys who are stealing their country blind, they have Swiss bank accounts, they travel around and they commandeer the—the situation the natio—the [inaudible] was the national carrier, but it was a private company. They nationalized and then they made rules that you have to have X number of seats allocated to...members of the Government. So the plane would have 200 seats but 40 seats are assigned to the Government so they can't sell them. So the plane is flying empty, that was in one year the Government doesn't pay for it. This is the kind of thing that happens in India. Going to buy a train ticket in first class air conditioned, the most expensive part, you go to the counter, say, 'I'd like to go from Bombay to Puna,' for a day trip, it's not very far, or even two days, whatever it is. 'Sorry, got sold out.' 'I want a ticket for six months from today.' 'Sorry, got sold out.' 'I want a ticket for five years from today.' 'Sorry, we are sold out.' It's bullshit, okay? What they want is a bribe. You can't get anything—your mail will not be delivered to your house unless you pay a bribe to the guy. This is life in India.

CZ: So all those situations that you mentioned are worse now than before?

JK: Oh yeah—

CZ: Okay.

JK: A lot of that used to happen, a lot of that. You cannot escape participating in the corruption of society,

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because if you try to do that, you will starve to death and you'll die on the street. I can't live like that.

RW: When—

JK: You—you either live—your body lives, or your heart lives. They can't both live. [laughs]

RW: What do you hope that your children will remember that you taught them?

JK: Mmm...concern for um, the family [inaudible]. And the past, they have to look after their kids. That's what I hope they learned.

CZ: So, um do you feel there are anything very important that we missed?

JK: I don't know what you are looking for?

CZ: Just basically, all the stories in your life.

JK: Well, I mean there's a—thousands of stories, okay? So, you want me to just tell you some things or is that—

RW: Whatever you'd like to share.

JK: Well, first of all, I feel a strong affinity to the Zoroastrian community, and I say Zoroastrian as opposed to Parsi, okay. Of course, I'm half Parsi, but who knows what my dad had in him, before, okay. I only know a little bit, and so as far as I know they're all Parsis, but there could have been an Englishman or an Englishwoman somewhere in the middle there, who knows. Okay—because he was very fair, and uh—not at all Indian looking. Okay, he looked more 'Mediterranean,' like an Italian or a Greek, okay? And...so...as I said, the Parsis are not pure so I—I've given up that id—thought even when I tell everybody, that you shouldn't be thinking about that at all, you know, it's a false idea. And think about perpetuating the values of the Zoroastrian faith, because I think that those are very good values. And I believe in them and I live my life according to them, either way. It—it's not an easy thing to do by the way, okay, because you see corruption all around you, but in the United States most of the corruption occurs at the very top, it's the ruling class families, you know? They are the ones who are corrupt. They are the ones who create all these financial, uh...disasters. And what I see happening that really disturbs me is that the—instead of lifting the poor into the middle class, and the middle class moving forward, it's going down. Instead of other countries copying the ideas of the United States—the stated ideals of equality and equal opportunity and no racism and all that—the United States is becoming like those countries—the U.S. is becoming like India, I see it happening, okay. It's like India has begun to—you know the moral rot has—not just set in but it has taken firm root, and it's going to destroy this country. Because my kids' life already, is not as good as my life was—that's horrible. That's horrible—absolutely horrible. You know what I mean?

You have to struggle. I didn't have to struggle. I had a few blips here and there, but not really struggle. So I think that's going to get worse and what's happening is that the—it's being siphoned off by the people at the very top, and to what purpose? They already have more they—than they can possibly already spend. Why do they continue to do this? If you can imagine a society of only a hundred people, a country with hundred people, okay? And ten of them are doing manufacturing and one of them owns the stuff and the rest of them are just working as employees, but the other ones who create demand for what they—what is being manufactured—'cause they need a house, they need car, they need this, that, oil, etcetera, etcetera. So they create demand for that. If I get very greedy, I'm one of the hun— one out of the hundred, the one percent, when I say, 'I—I don't want him to earn ten dollars, I'm going to take his ten dollars and leave him with only five.' He now no longer has the capacity to buy the things that my factories are making.

I own the factories—and now my factories cannot sell anything because that guy doesn't have the capacity to buy anything. So my business goes down, so I fire a few more people. That's what's happening in the U.S....do you understand? That's one of the things in—in logic—if you—the problem is too big you can't understand it so you have to simplify it and create a society of ten people or a hundred people and think what would happen if people did what they are doing here. It's not sustainable. You have to increase the minimum wage. You have to push money down to the people who can—who need it and can spend it to improve their lives, because that's the only way to have a sustainable society. And we're not doing that, we're doing the opposite of that. [laughs]

RW: Is there anything that you would like to add?

JK: To that? Well I can talk about lots of things. Uh I think that we have a disease of individualism, which was appropriate when there was no government, where you had people going out, 200, 300 years ago going out to the west and settling and killing all the Native Americans and—with disease or whatever it is that they did, okay? Maybe not intentionally, but uh then they took over the land, and uh I think that that was the time when you had to have people who were totally self-sufficient and individualistic, and you couldn't have rules. But now we're living in close proximity. You cannot do that—you have to have rules of the road. What if everybody on the road could drive as they wished? There were no traffic lights and all that; it would be total chaos. So there has to be some order that is imposed on society when you're living in close quarters.

RW: Do you think that—

JK: —and—

RW: —the Zoroastrian community here has embraced, kind of like, that—the progress?

JK: Um, I'm not quite sure I know what you're talking about.

RW: So, in terms of—in terms of soc—

JK: No, what I'm telling you now has nothing to do with Zoroastrianism. It's just my observation of what's happening in society, okay? So people—one of the defects and that— what will kill the Zoroastrian co—and the Parsi community particularly, is that the—the Parsi fathers tend to be besotted by their daughters. Whatever their daughter wants, is okay, you know? And they raise them to believe they are princesses, not necessarily because they—they are aware of it—they may not even be aware of it—I wasn't aware of it until I realized that later, okay? Because my boys would complain that, 'you are favoring your daughter—um, my—the sister', she's—you know, and I would say, 'oh, she's the youngest, she's the weakest' whatever the reason was, I would find some reason to do that, and I would deny that I favored her, but then I asked some friends of mine, I said, 'in—in daily interactions, do you think I favor her?' They said, 'of course, it's very obvious.' I said, 'really? What?' [laughs] So they grow up thinking that they are the, [coughs] you know, the—the—the, the greatest person in the world, okay? And that is not helpful to them, that's actually not good for them. Okay, they have to understand that they are part of society, that nobody will love them and treat them the way their father did. They have to understand that I was different. They need that, but they have to understand that that's not something that you can get— that's what my daughter said, that's why she is 33 and yet not ma—how old is— 198—no, so yeah—and not yet married, and so... she said, 'I'm looking for somebody like you.' And I said, 'you're never gonna find somebody like me! Because I'm your father! [laughs] And nobody can be like me, to you!' You know what I mean? [laughs] And that was like, 'what? You mean I've got—' I said, 'No. You have your husband. That's a different relationship. You cannot have that same kind of thing with your husband as you do with your father.'

RW: Well.

JK: So that's a problem—therefore we have a lot of divorce among the Parsis.

RW: Mm-hmm.

JK: And that's—that's a bad thing.

RW: But it sounds like the community here—

JK: Mm-hmm.

RW: —is moving to accept intermarriage—

JK: Mm-hmm.

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RW: —and more stable and happier relationships.

JK: Yes, well there are some of that who are pushing for that, there's uh of course, there's a reactionary group who uh, are opposed to that, who still believe in all this stuff. And what I did was I challenged one of the guys who said all this stuff, I said, okay, why don't we do this? I'll pay for a DNA test for you, you say you're all that pure, and if there's even one 32nd —that's the definition, by the way, in the United States of your racial identity, okay— one 32nd—if you are one 32nd black you are still black, if you're one 64th then you are whatever else you are, Japanese or Hispanic, or whatever it is. Did you know that?

RW: Mm-hmm.

JK: Okay. So—so I said, 'if you are even one 32nd something else, then you're not pure. Will you accept that? We'll do a DNA test.' He refused. I said, if—if—if that—I'll take the risk—if that's the case, I will pay your living expenses for the rest of your life. And if you lose, you have to shut up and go tell everybody that you are not pure Parsi, or Persian. That's, that's the deal. You have to eat crow. And he refused. [laughs] So...because he knows not to challenge me, gen—generally I don't make such bets if I—unless I'm sure.

RW: Mm-hmm Thank you so much.

JK: Okay, you're welcome.

RW: This has been great.

JK: Alright?

CZ: Okay, thank you so much for this interview.

JK: Mhm.

[interview ends, recorder is turned off.]