Interviewee: Nano Daroowala
Interviewers: Aban Rustomji & Tenaz Sunavala
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Background:

Setting:
The interview took place at the Zarathushti Heritage & Cultural Center, 8787 W Airport Blvd, Houston, TX 77071 at the Zoroastrian Association of Houston (ZAH). The interview is part of a project spearheaded by the ZAH Library to document and record oral history of Zarathushtis who have settled in the USA from India or Iran.

Interview Transcript:

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AR: Good morning, Nano, we are really excited to have you here and I want to start off by asking you to tell me a little bit about yourself, tell me your name and tell me your childhood and give me a little background, please.

ND: OK, my name is Nano Daroowala. Originally, my name was given as Nanabhai, but I changed it to Nano when I became a citizen of the United States and that was in 1974. I was born on October 13, 1934, in a place called Secunderabad in India, in KEM Hospital. KEM Hospital stands for “King Edward Memorial” Hospital; presently it is known as Gandhi Hospital. I was the eighth of the nine children born to my parents. My father came from Surat and my mother was born in Bharuch. My father had a business in Jalgaon, in the petrol business, and then he found out that something went wrong with his uncle, his mama [mother’s brother], and he saw an advertisement for an
opportunity in Secunderabad, and he got a call from somebody and he got into the liquor business. So he migrated to Secunderabad in 1926 and started his liquor business, and that is how we are known as Daroowalas – daroo means liquor. My grandfather also had a liquor shop, and that is how we are Daroowalas. My grandfather – he died at a very early age, and he had kidney disease, which we have all inherited – all the Daroowalas. He expired in Surat. As I said, I am the eighth of the nine children, all the brothers are educated. My eldest brother was an Engineer, second brother was a pilot, third was a businessman, I am the fourth one, who is an Engineer in the United States, and the fifth was a doctor – an ophthalmologist; unfortunately he died in a plane crash with his wife. That was 15-20 years ago. We were rather an ordinary family, a modest family. My father did not have too much money. In the family, hand-me-downs were very common; like you would see a younger brother wearing the same shirt or pants which the elder brother had worn. It went with a fuse also, sometimes. It was a full-time job for my mother, who used stitch clothes and things like that, and we had a sewing machine, a Singer sewing machine and it was a hand-operated one. So, it was like a full-time job for my mother, cooking for nine children, making the tortillas or chapaties for nine children – that was a big, big chore. My father was very orthodox, very oriented towards the Zoroastrian religion. He was not very religious per se, he would just pray Ashem Vohu and Yatha Ahu Vairyo, but he was orthodox. He wanted everybody to be in the Parsi religion.

(04:36)

AR: Did you live in a Zoroastrian neighbourhood in Secunderabad?

ND: It was not a Zoroastrian neighbourhood. There was a Zoroastrian neighbourhood in Secunderabad called “Cheli” or something like that, but we were not staying there; we lived in a different place. When my dad went to Secunderabad, he started called “Union Jack Bar & Restaurant” – because it was ruled by Britishers, it was called Union Jack. He had that business, he had a taxi business and he had the daru business, which was the liquor business. We lived in a different neighborhood, but there were Parsis all around our place, and I believe there were around 3000 Parsis in Secunderabad and Hyderabad. That was a pretty good number at that time. In Secunderabad, we had two fire-temples or agiaries, and one in Hyderabad. We had two dakhmas, towers of silence. We had agiaries – one was “Chinoys Agiary” and one was known as “Old Agiary”. I remember when I was growing up – I may be 10-15 years old, there was the centenary of the Old Agiary, and I remember our scholars coming there – Dr. Taraporevala, Dr. Mirza; they had all been there to attend the ceremony, which was a nice big function. I need to mention here that Minocherhomji, a very well-known priest, was a priest of the Secunderabad Agiary once upon a time; then he moved to Bombay.

AR: So what made you come to the US?

ND: Let me finish a few more things. In Secunderabad, our first education was in a Parsi school. There was a school for Parsis by the Chinoys, and the name of the school was “Ratanbhai Jahangirji Chinoy Parsi School”. That was meant only for Parsis and
we went to that school. As a matter of fact, all my brothers and sisters were there. The education was strict education; everything in English, and Gujarati, and then our second language was Urdu – Urdu because we were in a Muslim state. Hyderabad was ruled by a king or a prince called “Nizam of Hyderabad”. Nizam of Hyderabad was considered as the richest person in the world at that time. He was known as “HEH Nizam of Hyderabad”. HEH stood for His Exalted Highness. This was the title given by Britishers to the Nizam. We went to this Parsi school, and we had boys and girls, and we had to wear a cap – a Parsi cap. Boys wore a black Parsi cap, and the girls wore a Parsi cap with beads in the cap, and they had a garter to keep it on the head. Most of the teachers were Parsis. Most of them lived there. We had to learn Urdu; so there was a Muslim teacher and a Gujarati teacher. The way we started – early in the morning was a drill class, and the second class was prayer. There was a hall which we all stood in – there were squares in the stone floor for each person. A teacher or principal would stand facing us, and we would start with the prayers. The prayers would be Havan Geh, Atash Niyash, and Tan Darosti – this was a daily ritual. So we would first have drill class, then prayer class for about an hour or so, and then a devotional song. These devotional songs were written by our principal – his name was HH Hirji Khurshed. He had written a lot of books and had produced songs for each day of the month, like Hormuzd, Bahman, ArdiBesht [Zoroastrian days of the month] – he had one song each; we used to sing that song at the end of our prayers. The devotional songs went like this: [song]

(11:24)

So this was for one of the rojs [days]; another song went like: [song]; another song went like: [song]. This is just a sample of our devotional songs. Then we started our classes. The education was not that easy. I remember, in Urdu, one mistake and they beat your hand, “Hey, you made a mistake.” That is what my early education was.

After the primary school – the Parsi school was only up to Primary level, I went to another school and I finally graduated from Osmania University in 1954, and I got inter from there. After that, I went to technical college and I did my Civil Engineering. I graduated with a diploma in 1957. After I got a diploma, I got a job. I got a job as a Soil Conservation Supervisor in the Agriculture Department. For this job, I had to go 30-40 miles in the fields, do some surveying, put some little bunds, like little dykes in the fields, so that there is no erosion of soil there. I used to do that on a little motorbike – Royal Enfield 1.5hp. Later on, I had a scooter, and I used to go 30-40 miles. The roads were bad. Sometimes your backbone would act as a shock absorber. That is how I went there, took elevations and did the work. Everytime we went in a different direction, we would hear a different dialect because it’s not the same language – you went 30 miles north, it would be one language; 30 miles south would be different. You get used to it – you understand a little bit of everything.

(15:02)
That was my first job. Then, I got a transfer to a small town. I had never lived outside my house; I got a little panicky. I kept thinking what I should do now, and I said to myself, when I am going out, why don’t I go to a better place, and that was the United States, and that is how I started thinking about coming to the United States. For a couple of years, I was wavering whether to go or not. One of the reasons was money – I had very little, and I did not know where to go, what to do. Finally after two years, I got enough courage. I got admission to Kansas State University.

AR: About how old were you at this point?

ND: 27. I was 27. I got admission in Kansas State University, and I got a passport. I had enough money to travel, so I decided to come to the United States. In those days, money was always a problem. My father had passed away in 1956, and when he died, he left about 3000 rupees (nowadays I don’t know how much that would be) for my education and my younger brother’s education. Most of the money I had collected when I was working as an Engineer. Later I worked in the same college where I had graduated from where I had the diploma. I went to the college, I worked for a couple of years to refresh my memory.

When I got the passport, I got to travel to the United States. In those days, the airfare was very high; the cheapest way of traveling was by ship. I got a ticket by ship – that was like Rs2000, which was like $400 at that time, in 1962. I left Bombay in August of 1962 by ship called Stratheter – SS Stratheter. “SS” stands for steam ship. It was a British ship. Now, remember, we were all students, not exposed to different atmosphere, and it took us from Bombay to London. In London, I changed to an American ship called the “SS United States”. From there, I landed in New York – took about 21-22 days, with the stop and all. When we started from Bombay, we stopped in Alexandria, where I saw Egypt, the ruins and all that. Then it stopped at Naples in Italy, and then Marseilles in France, and then London. In London, we stopped for a couple of days and then I changed to the “SS United States”, which was a very big ship, and it took us about 5 days to reach New York.

Going back to the Stratheter, it was a British ship. The British did not like to serve Indians – they ruled India for more than 200 years, so that was a little problem. The problem was also with the number of students – the ship had a lot of students and they were not used to the American or British system, and they would come in night dress to the dining room, and the head-waiter would come to them and say, “We expect you to dress decently when you come to the dining room.”

(20:25)

AR: How many Zoroastrians were on the ship?

ND: I would say there a few, I don’t remember how many – maybe 5 or 10. But there were a lot of Hindus and other Indian students; we made friends with each other. When we reached New York, we all separated and that was a shock for everyone – we were
leaning on each other at that time. The SS United States was a good ship, but in those days the ships did not have an equalizer. The equalizer is what keeps the ship stable, and sometimes we used to get sea-sick. Sea-sickness was a very bad feeling - vomiting, you don't like to eat anything, and you just want to jump overboard and kill yourself – the feeling is very bad.

AR: So then you can stay in your nighty, right?

ND: Then you can stay in your nighty!

AR: So you landed in New York…

ND: We landed in New York. In the British ship, a lot of the cabin crew was from Goa – goanese cabin crew. On both the ships, we had very good food, and I remember we had specially-made menu cards – everyday a different menu card, with artistic flowers and things like that, and people collected them and took them home as a collection.

Now as I said I paid $400 – that was right from Bombay to Kansas State. In New York, I stayed for a day or two in a hotel. In New York, we were all lost as to what to do. There were some university students who came to the ship and guided us – what to do, where to go, how to spend money, where to eat and things like that. From New Yirk, I took a bus called Trailways – it was not Greyhound, but Trailways, and Trailways took us another two or three days to reach Manhattan, Kansas. The Trailways bus went from state to state, and I had two big bags, and what I did not know was that each time I transferred to another bus, I had to carry my luggage to the other bus and put it in the other bus. I was just sitting there changing the bus, and I thought the luggage would just come by itself. When I reached Manhattan, Kansas, I had no luggage. I had a handbag and only the clothes which were on me. I had a big beard; I had not shaved for three days. Luckily on the last bus, there were some students going from Summer jobs to the university, and I made friends with some Gujarati friends there, and they found out that I had no luggage and I did not know where to go. So they took me to their place, and gave me their pajamas and other clothes, and that is how I lived for the next 2-3 days, before I got my luggage. So that was my first adventure in the United States. It was interesting.

(24:53)

In the beginning in the United States, everything was a challenge – different kind of living, different kind of food spices, different kind if climate (chilly, cold, a lot of snow), different accents, different way of education compared to the British system. Every item was expensive – every time we ate a hamburger or whatever, we used to change it into rupees and say, “Oh my god, this is so expensive.” One dollar at that time was Rs 4.75. One thing I forgot to mention was that when I started from Bombay, I took a loan from the Sethna Trust in Bombay. They were giving loans to students who went abroad for education. I took about Rs 6000 from the Sethna Trust. After I graduated and started working, I returned the money to them. They didn’t charge me any interest – they said,
“Whatever you’ve given is fine.” Luckily by the time I had to return the money, the rate was 1 dollar was Rs 10; so I only had to return half the money; so that was good for me. Kansas State University was a recognized university – it was a state university, and at that time, they considered us as foreign students and we used to pay $184-186 per semester, and we could take as many credits as we liked. So that was a good help for me.

The first semester was very bad for me. I flunked almost all the courses, because of the difference in education, but in the final semester, I was on the dean’s honor list. When I was in high school, I was the first among Parsis to get a gold medal – whoever was first matriculation got a gold medal, and I passed that gold medal on to my daughter, Navaz. Coming back to Kansas State University, the education was good, but we were always short of money there. In Summer, I used to go to different places to make money, just like everybody else, except for a very few.

One Summer, I went to Chicago. I was working delivering telephone directories. For a second job I was working in a restaurant, called “Kontiki Ports”. I was working as a dishwasher there. In three months, I worked there and went back to Kansas – that money was good for a year. In the second Summer, I hitched a ride with some of the people who were going to Lake Tahoe – they had a car, so I said “Let me come”. I worked in a place called “Calineva Lodge” – California Nevada Lodge. The lodge was on the border between California and Nevada. As a matter of fact, in the building, they had put in a line – one side California, one side Nevada. In Nevada, there was gambling, and in California there was no gambling. So I worked in a gambling house, just to make money. They used to give me a room and food, and they used to pay me $1.25 an hour. I used to work two shifts, which was 16 hours, because I had nothing else to do there and my main purpose was to make money.

(30:06)

I used to work as a change boy, cleaning floors, and I made enough money for the next year for education. So there was absolutely no shame in that. We could see the other Indian or Pakistani or foreign students working in the same way.

TS: At this point, were you missing your family back home? Were you thinking of going back?

ND: Oh no, never. At that time, never. I was homesick once in a while, I wthought I made a mistake, but I would carry in.

AR: How easy was it for you to adjust to do your own cooking, your own cleaning, because at that time you probably never did that in India?

ND: When I had the first apartment, for the first couple of months, I only knew how to fry eggs. That was it. So I lived on fried eggs and bread. But I remember, in Kansas State University, I had some Muslim friends – they were very good cooks, and I learned
cooking from them. For the first few months, it was rather difficult, also with the education; so adjustment was very difficult. As I said, conditions were completely different.

AR: Did you feel any kind of discrimination in Kansas, because you were right in the middle of a Midwest town, in the 60s?

ND: Yes, 1962. The discrimination was, what I felt, in one place. That was when we went to get the apartment after the Summer (in the Summer, we would vacate). When we went there, there were lots of private houses, and they wanted to rent out part of the house to make money – they would put out a sign saying “For Rent”. But when we went there, they would say, “It’s rented out already.”, but we would find out that they were waiting for some white Americans – they did not like foreigners, perhaps because of the way we were living – maybe they had a different way of living, a different way of cooking. That was the only discrimination I found.

During the college days, I remember the cost of living, 1962-1965. We used to pay $30 for a month – we were joining 3 or 4 students – most of them Muslims from Hyderabad, like me. In $60, we were living and that included ice cream, beer, everything. In those days, when we went out we never locked the doors; the doors were always open, and nothing was stolen there.

In those days, milk was delivered to the house. A guy would come in a truck, he would go in and put the milk in the refrigerator. Sometime we had laundry and the guy would go in and put the clothes on the hangar. That’s how it was in those days; now things might have changed.

The first time I experienced snow was in November – it was chilly cold and we had to walk from the apartment to the college, and from one hall to another hall.

AR: If you were on a budget, how did you buy winter clothes?

(35:16)

ND: We went to the army stores and army stores had these long blankets – I still remember, I think it was like $6 we paid. Somehow we managed. During ’62-’65, we had 7-8 Parsis; I was surprised there were so many Parsis. One was a guy called Mithuji – he was a professor from Poona. Another was called Sam Daruwala – he was in Electrical Engineering. Unfortunately he had some problems and he committed suicide.

AR: Yes, at Texas A&M.

ND: Texas A&M. He was an Electrical Engineer. In 1964, there were some other Parsis. I don’t even remember their names. There was a Parsi couple from Pakistan. I saw them in 1964 at the bus stop, and guess what – that was our present librarian,
Aban Rustomji! I received her and her husband, Purvez, at the bus stop, in 1964, and there were not expecting any Parsis there.

AR: To your credit, you were the one who taught me how to shop and clean, because I was a young bride and I didn’t know anything.

ND: That was a good dialog, and that was the only Parsi couple in Kansas.

AR: Your career went on, you were prosperous, tell us a little bit about your career. I remember your graduation very well.

ND: At my graduation, they had $5 for taking my picture, and I said, “$5, I can’t afford it – no picture.” Aban Rustomji took some pictures, and I still have them. Those are the only graduation pictures I have. I graduated in 1965 and I went to New York. Most of the people chose to go to Chicago, but I chose New York because I was a little homesick, and my brother who was a pilot, used to fly planes from London to New York for Air India. So I thought I would at least see my brother there. So I went to New York to settle there and get a job. When I went to New York, I got to see my brother – he used to fly to New York every week. I would go to his hotel and meet him. First I stayed with a friend, and then I found an apartment. I saw an advertisement in a paper for an apartment for rent. In those days, plenty of apartments were available. There was an old lady there, who passed away – they wanted to get rid of the apartment. So I got it. There was some furniture there; I asked them, “What are you going to do with the furniture?” They said, “If you want, you can have it for $100.” So I said “Fine.” So I took that apartment. The rent for that apartment was $95. It was a rent-controlled apartment; so they couldn’t increase the rent as long as I lived there.

(39:57)

I got all the furniture – it was a double bed, writing table with chair, two round tables with beautiful lamps, sofa set, and things like that. I still have that furniture in 2014 in my house here, and I am using it. I never paid that $100 – they said, “You can pay it whenever you want,” and we lost the contact, so that was all free for me. So that was all beautiful furniture, beautiful lamps; so that was a good experience for me. I lived in that apartment for a few years until I bought a house. One of my interests was to buy a house in the United States, and I bought it in 1974 or ’72. Looking for a job, it was not like the present day, where you pick up the phone and say “Do you have a job?” or go on the internet and find it. It wasn’t like that. I had to dress up in a tie and suit and take a briefcase, and start walking in Manhattan, NY, and I was going from place to place – each Engineering company, asking, “Hey do you have a job? I am an Engineer.” I must have walked many, many miles and many, many days before I ended up in a Jewish company called “John Castner & Co”. It was a Jewish company, which was specializing in storm and drainage. They hired me and it was a good start. I learned a lot of things – how things were done in the United States. I worked there for quite some time. After graduation, the rule was that after 18 months we had to return to our country, or you had to get permanent residency card. So I told the guys to sponsor me,
and they sponsored me. I got my green card, or permanent residency card within 3-4 months – in those days, it was very easy. In those days, it was the biggest achievement for us – not the graduation, but the green card, because then we knew no one could kick us out of the country. So that was a big achievement. Things were pretty cheap at that time – as I said, the rent was $95, and the other expenses like eating, drinking, was another $100, so $200. In the first months, my salary was $400 per month, and I saved $200 religiously every month.

I worked there for quite some time, and then I felt I should get married. At that time, I was around 32. I came here at 27; three years I spent in college, and then two years I worked. So I thought let me get married, but how do I get married? I thought let me find some girls here; I couldn’t find any Parsi girls here.

(44:42)

AR: Were you only looking for Zoroastrian girls?

ND: Yes, only Zoroastrian girls.

AR: Did you date, Nanobhai?

ND: In my life, I only went once on a date here, and that was it. I never dated, so I was bad in that. So I said what to do, and I wrote to my eldest sister Thrity, that I want to come and get married, and keep some girls ready for me. She advertised in a paper called “Jame Jamshed” in Bombay and she had lined up a number of girls. I did not know that she had advertised, and I thought she would show me one girl here or there. So, I went there. Luckily at that time, my brother, Maneck, was a pilot and he gave me a pass. He could give passes to his relatives. So that trip was free for me. So I took that pass and went to Bombay. In Bombay my other sister called Bapsy – we went to her house, and she said, “I’ve got a number of girls lined up for you,” so I said “Fine”. They would call each girl, and they would come to my house and we would interview them. We would go out to see.

Roshen (my wife) was the first girl I met, and somehow they said, “This Mulla – that family is good.” She did not know this was through an advertisement – her mother did not tell her, just that there is this guy coming from the United States. So we went out. I went with her. In those days, in my family, there were a few discrepancies between husband and wife. Like my Kaka [father’s brother] never got along with my Kaki [father’s brother’s wife] – that was a problem always. My mother used to say, “Astrologers said like that;” so in my mind, I said, “Since I am doing that, why not show the astrologer.” My sister said, “You are from the United States, you want to do that?” I said, “Yes.” So we went – my mother and my sister found an astrologer – his name was “Kali Maharaj”, a Maharashtrian guy in Grant Road, somewhere. But the guy was like a computer – he took my astrological chart and Roshen’s astrological chart, and he counted, and he said, “She is Mangal. It’s OK. It will work.”
Then I went out with other girls, a number of girls. Some of them didn’t like me. Some said, “He’s dancing at this hour! I’m not a dancer.” Some people said, “Do you have a maid in your house?” I said, “No, I don’t have a maid.” So they were all looking at the movies and thinking like that.

(49:15)

I liked another girl – that was a little prettier girl. So I told my sister, “I like this girl.” She said, “Let us go to the astrologer.” I said, “Fine.” He says, “No.” I said, “What do you mean no?” He said, “No, she’ll be bossing you.” I said, “That’s all right, I can handle that.” He said, “You are from United States?” I said, “Yes.” He said, “You want to know why I’m saying No.” I said, “Yes, I’d like to know. I like the girl.” He said, “What happened to that girl you’d come with?” I said, “She’s OK, but I like her better.” He said, “When I say No, it means No.” I said, “What do you mean?” He said, “If you marry her, she will become a widow within ten years.” I said, “Really?” He said, “Yes.” I said, “Apan chalia – I’m going away. How can you say that?” He said, “Look, if you take these two charts, and if you take the chart of a plane crash or a car accident, this is the same chart.” So, next day, I had a date with that girl and I had to tell her, “Very sorry.” Then, I went to Roshen and got married to her.

In those days, between ‘65-’70, it was very difficult to get Indian stuff, like spices, even in New York. There was one shop. We used to travel all the way from Queens to Manhattan to get some spices. He used to have dal and other spices, and he would say, “If you buy this, then you get this other thing.” I was thinking why some Indian wouldn’t open a shop in Queens, but in 4-5 years, there were a number of shops. But, it was very difficult to get Indian stuff at that time. In the United States when I came, what I missed was our Indian culture, especially Parsi functions, and prayers and Papeti and New Year and all those things; the people I grew up with, the surroundings and I missed the religion and the sandalwood fragrance, loban and all those things.

AR: But you liked quawalis, and you liked other things, too! Not just Zoroastrian things that you enjoyed.

ND: Oh I liked Zoroastrian things, and I liked poetry, sher-shahari and all those things. Why I liked that was that I grew up in a Muslim state. It was ruled by the Nizam; so the second language was Urdu. All the signs on the roads, shops were in Urdu, quawali and poetry, and even the beggars used to … I still remember when I was young, there was an old Muslim guy singing for alms:

Jab pas me hamara paisa that, dost hamare lakho tha; duniya hai sabe kisi ke koyi nahi.

[When I had money, I had lots of friends; the world does not belong to any body].

That’s how he used to go and ask for alms. It’s interesting to note that even Hindus there were very versed in Urdu, even the people who came to our daru [liquor] business were all Urdu-speaking.
Let me reiterate – when I was growing up, my father had a shop and before I was a teenager, I used to help in the shop – that is serving the people, cleaning the glasses and things like that. Because we had a shop, and there were Parsis working somewhere, they would stop bye and spend some time before going on. The Zoroastrians – when they turn on the light, they would salute each other, saying “Sahebji.” When they turn on the light, it would be a newer day. Every time people went to the bathroom, they did kusti – say their prayers. Even before eating the food, they used to do kusti. Not my dad, but lots of other Parsis.

I got married on 5th of March, 1967, and travelled back to United States with Roshen, my wife. While coming back, we again stopped in a number of places, saw Egypt and things like that. Reached New York and in New York, I had an apartment, and after that I bought a house and lived there for quite some time. I was in New York up to 1974, and then I came to Houston. I worked in a company in New York – Bechtel & Co., and then it closed down so that is how I came to Houston. I was hired by a company called “Foster Wheelan”. They moved me from New York to Houston. I worked there for ten years. That closed down and then I went to Kellogg Brown & Root, and worked there for 28 years. I am 79 now, I’ll be 80 in October, pretty good health. I’m glad to say that I have been working even after I retired, but part-time. I’m ready to retire now.

AR: Nano, tell us about your children. When were they born, and tell us a little bit about that.

ND: I have two children, Zubin and Navaz. Zubin was born February 9, 1968, Navaz was born April 18, 1969. Zubin was born in Chicago. Why Chicago – I was in New York. The first delivery, I was a little concerned and Roshen has a sister in Chicago – Dr. Roda Patel, who passed away; so I sent her there for the delivery. So that’s why Zubin was born there. When he was 20 days old, I brought them back to New York. Navaz was born in New York. Zubin graduated from Texas A&M and he’s working for Exxon. He met a girl in the same company called Suzanne, and he married Suzanne. When he got married, I was pretty stubborn; I said, “I won’t come to your wedding,” and things like that, and he said, “Dad, I’m going to get married anyway.” So I thought it over and thought I might lose my son, so I gave in, and now I feel they are the happiest couple. He has three sons. My daughter graduated from Stephen F. Austin, and she met a guy there she also got married in another society. But they are both very happy. She has two girls. Often we meet and get together and they are all happy; so happy to see them.

AR: I know that you are a close-knit family. Do you feel coming from a traditional family, and specially Roshen’s family which has been a priestly family, do you feel that your children marrying out has been hard for you?
ND: For the religious part of it, yes. Personally I did not like it in the beginning, but now I am a little-bit broad-minded and I feel that everything is changing. Roshen’s father was a priest, and he came and performed navjote for Zubin and Navaz. He was very broad-minded. Roshen’s brother, Soli – he’s in Chicago – he got married to an American girl, and he had no problems. So it was OK. But I always felt that they should be in our religion.

AR: But for New Year’s and things like that, do you still carry on the customs? For Navroze and Papeti, do your children come home? Do they light the tili and get parikas?

ND: No, those customs – no parikas and things like that. They mostly follow Christian things, like Christmas and things like that. I wish we had given them a little more insight in that, but it’s up to them. One of the questions you had was personally I would consider myself a Zoroastrian from India – the question was whether you are Parsi first. I like Zoroastrian rituals and things like that, like sandalwood, loban, prayers; when the priests pray, I enjoy that. Our customs, like cuncun and sari; I know those customs were adopted by Parsis when they landed in Gujarat in India, and those were not our customs, like rice and things like that. We adopted them when we came to India and Jadiv Rana, the king who accepted us and he made promises, and that’s how we follow and that’s fine. But those are not the customs, I believe, in Iran.

(1:04:20)

AR: Nano, do you know the population in India and Pakistan, because of old age, and immigration is dwindling, because we are coming to the West. What future do you see for the young generation here, and what would you like to tell the young generation?

ND: The younger generation, I believe, not all of them follow our religion. Some of those who follow, they stick to that, and some of them make trips to India to get more insight and continue the tradition – that is what I would tell them. Like, my children, they like to go to India to see what it looks like, and where do I come from. But 50% of the time, I am scared to take them because one of the things, I feel, is that they get sick. One of the times, out of four weeks, I was sick two weeks, and that is no fun. But maybe we’ll take them. One of my son’s first son – his name is Zachary, when I say, “What do you want to become,” he says, “I want to help people. I want to become missionary or something.” So I say, “I’ve got a place to take you.” The place is: Roda – Roshen’s sister, has started that hospital.

AR: So you’ve had a wonderful like!

ND: I have had a wonderful life. I think I have been successful here in the United States. I don’t see any negative points. Only thing I feel is that my children married outside, but that is it. Otherwise, everything was fine. I came with two bags, now I have a house, comfortable living, now I am retiring, and live happily.
AR: So you are content with whatever you have got, with what you have achieved. What do you think is the underlying principle, or what do you think is the underlying factor is for you to succeed, because there were times when you weren't well-off and there were times you didn’t have what the next-door person had. What is the one factor that you had to do well?

ND: You always try to achieve certain things. You have to live your life. Either you can live in one country or another country. One of the things I thought was that at that time, just to go to the United States was one of the great achievements of your life. In this country, you have a lot of opportunities. One of the things I was thinking is that when I came here, and I used to help my dad in my liquor shop – I said, “All these years I was working there, I got nothing money-wise. If I had worked the same way here in the United States, I would have made a lot of money.” You are revenue-rated here. You can get something back for doing certain things. So that was the achievement with going ahead.

I would say to the younger people to remember their roots, remember where their forefathers came from, either Iran or India. Even if they are married to a different religion, always remember the Zoroastrian religion, honor the religion, even if they do not follow the religion – that’s what I would tell them.

AR: What do you think of living in Houston, and what do you think of the Zoroastrian community in Houston?

ND: I think it’s pretty good. When I came here in ’74 or ’75... Let me go back a bit. When I was in new York, there were no associations. We Parsis, like 4-50 Parsis, used to gather together on Navroze or Papeti or Jamshedi Navroze, and cook in a college or someplace, and that was it. When I came here, I don’t think there was a lot of people – 80-100 people or something like that. Now they’ve grown – more Parsis here. I’m seeing them grow up.

AR: Do you see the center being a focal point for us?

ND: Oh yes. Definitely so. We have all these buildings there and open land, so that is good. One of the things was legacy. I feel that if there was capsule what would I write – I would definitely write my roots – where I came from, my parents came from, my family history and ancestry, and my children and my grandchildren – what they are doing, where they are going – those are the things I would put in a time capsule. I would like to tell the younger generation that we would consider myself as a pioneer in the United States, I came in ’62 – there were people who came before that, in ’47, but ’62, still I think was a very early time. I would like to tell them that we had a much tougher time than what they have, because when they come now, there is always somebody to lean on – brother, sister, friends, but we had nothing. When I came to New York, I knew nobody. I tell some of my friends, when I reached New York, there was not a dog who would bark at me!
AR: And we just couldn’t afford to go back, we never even thought about it. After five years, seven years, we go back. Very fascinating, thank you very much.

(1:12:10)

[The recorder is turned off, the interview ends]