Background:
Shaheen was born in Khadki near Pune, India to a Zarathushti Irani family. She had four siblings. At age 13, moved and went to school in Pune. While still in 11th. grade, fell in love and got married at 17 after overcoming some resistance from her family. Later went back to school to finish 12th. grade. She then had two daughters. In June 1991 at age 31, came to America with the two daughters in search of a better future for all of them. Later she lost her husband in a car accident in India. It was a struggle to raise two children all by herself. With hard work and persistence, she kept moving up in rank at a telecommunication business and currently serves as a VP and looks after hundreds of stores owned by the company.

Setting:
The interview was conducted in Rustom Engineer’s home in Sugar Land, and spanned just over an hour. The interview focuses on Shaheen’s tenacity and perseverance and how she fought against all odds to provide a better future for her two daughters and finally won! It is an inspiring story for many immigrants who come to this land of opportunity in search of a better life.

Interviewers:
Rustom Engineer, born in Mumbai, India came to USA in 1971 for higher education in Mechanical and Manufacturing Engineering. After receiving a master’s degree from the Utah State University, he worked for the automotive industry in mid-west for about 20 years before moving to Sugar Land, Texas. Later, he founded and operated some small businesses. He is currently retired and is an active member of the Zoroastrian Association of Houston (ZAH), the past Global VP and current Global director of the World Zoroastrian Chamber of Commerce (WZCC).

Yezdi Engineer, was born in Mumbai, India. After completing his bachelor’s degree in Engineering, he came to USA in 1967 and earned a MS degree in Industrial Engineering from the Illinois Institute of Technology and a MBA from the Northwestern University, both from Chicago. After working for AT&T for 32 years in Chicago and Little Rock, Arkansas, Yezdi retired and moved to Sugar Land, Texas with his family. He is an active member of ZAH and enjoys helping his friends with big and small home projects.
My name is Rustom Engineer and I am Yezdi Engineer - we are here on March 28 2016, 7:55 p.m. We are gathered here at my place - Rustom Engineer's place in Sugar Land, Texas we are going to start by interviewing Ms. Shaheen Rustom and she is going to start by telling us all about her life and coming to the United States.

(Rustom): I would like to start with asking Shaheen - so tell us something about your childhood –

S: So Rustom and Yezdi thank you so much for taking the time today, and so going back to my childhood aaaaa I grew up in a very very humble family. My dad worked for an ammunition Factory so we lived in a place called Kirky now it's Khadki but I am the youngest of 5 and grew up with 4 other siblings aaaaa in a hard-working family, very very simple lifestyle, Tuesdays and Thursdays were movies at the club which was where my dad worked and perhaps that was the only form of entertainment. Went to St. Joseph's School Parshan which is the Convent school there all my life I’m the king from kindergarten.

R: All this is in Poona so Khadki is close to Poona?

S: Yes, it is a suburb in Pune- my whole schooling was in St. Joseph's Parshan and then in 1973 my dad retired and we came to camp, which was now proper Poona. As you can say we I grew up in a big bungalow with a lot of vacant land hhmmm which was like a farm, but came when dad retired we had to move into this little kind of flat as they call this in Pune and it was not only five of us, mom and dad and 3 dogs. (Laughter)

R: OHOHOH

S: In my 9th and 10th grade I had to do from camp as we call it- it's like the downtown of Poona. Was very Lively and very unusual from where I grew up and came from quiet town do something that was so fascinating because if anything went on the road we thought that they were coming to our house in Khidky you would know if somebody was coming to our house because anything that went down the road we thought that everybody were coming to our house. Then I finished my 9th and 10th there and then got to college and by the time couple of my siblings got married so there was more place in the house and now what can I say.

R: So, what did you do to have fun?

S: The only kind of fun we really had, was to be with friends, so you know movies because resources were limited movies maybe once in a fortnight, with my siblings where we could spare maybe once a year we could go out for dinner on Navroz; that was pretty much but just hanging out with friends would be that would be it.

R: When you say siblings, you had brother sisters?

S: Yes, I had, I have, 2 elder brothers and two elder sisters, and I am the fifth.

R: You are the youngest?

Y: What were the economic conditions of your parents?
S: They like I said, they had limited resources that was the only earning member - mom would take an occasional job of aaa because there were 5 of to take care of because when we lived in Khadki it was difficult to get a job, because all the jobs were in Camp but Mom did a lot of Social Service where dad worked and so very often I would see her, because I think it was more therapeutic for her because taking care of 5 kids was kind of challenging, so she would go and do a lot of social work for the poor workers of the factory because that was the largest employer.

And then there was the artificial limb center then there was another hospital, and there was another hospital which was for the Armed Forces Medical College. So Mom will take an additional job I guess when resources are a little tight, and very... very... contented but we had food was not exotic and there was plenty of food but not but not fruits..

R: I thought you were close to the farms

S: But not really, fruits were a privilege, bananas yes but not any other

R: Did you have any childhood memories?

S: I do. I do. I have a lot of memories I clearly remember that I used to stand just at the bus stop for the bus to come and if you recall the war in 1971, like my dad was working for them in the ammunition factory; so we had to have all our windows painted black, because there was curfew and I was just ten or eleven years old. Our house our bungalow had a big veranda and inside there was one room into the other it connects and there was a passage in the middle like a corridor and the moment it became dark we had to spend time in that corridor. Because that was the only place we could light a candle. So that happened in the evening but one day I was standing on the bus stop and the siren went off I could see my sister's coming running and saying Shaheen get on the floor, sleep on the floor get on the floor just sleep on the floor. It had rained the previous night and there were puddles everywhere and I said I'm not sleeping on the floor. And she said ...not sleep on the floor. She shouted and I was like oh my God I was all this chikal.. was there I didn't sleep on the floor she yanked me and took me home because it was dangerous to be out there. The other good memories were; there were thirteen bungalows actually, and each one of us, that was like the family. Those were our friends that was everything. So, on Saturday we used to play hide and seek it was a joke because whoever started and whoever was the person giving the den was giving the den all night, because nobody would ever get caught

R: There was no place to hide ...Hahahaha

S: And it was dark and everybody was outside, so some of those memories were really, really good.

R: So how old were you all this time?

S: I was there till I was 12 and then I was at the latter part just when I turned twelve and that is when dad retired and my 13th birthday....
R: Then you moved to the big city.

S: was and then I'm off to the big city.

R: And this was the Pakistan War am I right? 71 War!

S: Yes, this was the 1971 War.

R: You are the cantonment area? So, you were the big target?

S: Yes the factory was ..because the ammunition was being prepared where all the bombs were being made.

R: Wow.

Y: Before you came to USA did you finish your college? Whatever did you do?

S: Right, so I finished my 10th grade and then I went to college. When I was in my 11th grade I fell in love and got married, I was just 17 when my father-in-law came with a proposal; my mom said no because I was too young and my other two sisters were not married yet. N, one sister was married I was not and so she said no she's too young and she needs to go to college and then my mom went to Bombay to meet her father who was sick and my grandfather asked how is Senaz coming along, that was my sister and my mom blurted out saying can you believe it there's a proposal for Shaheen. So my grandfather asked who's the boy. So my mom said who it who was and he asked was the family good? So, she said I think the family is good because they're very prominent so my grandfather said let's get her married because may not have long to see it. So she comes back after 2 days and she says guess what: do you really want to get married? I was naive and Young and I said yeah that would be nice thing.

R: So, at that point you were already familiar with him?

S: Yes, actually, it was....

R: You had not met?

S: So actually, were dating.

R: Ahh! so actually you were dating and then the proposal.

S: Yes, yes

R: So, this was not a typical Indian thing. Ha ha .. That was a sort of a love. And you were expecting something of the sort.

S: Yea, so it was kind of whirl wind it was more curiosity than.. yes

Y: Than you had to kids?
S: So then after a year-and-a-half I had my elder daughter (Afrin), and then there was a little bit of a void I really didn't know what to do and so then I went and studied at which point I did my I did my studies and I was in college and I got pregnant again so then I dropped out and raised both the girls, and I was 21 when I had my younger daughter and by that time I had developed a lot of friends who were much older than me so studying was not all that exciting.

Y: So, when did you come to USA?

S: So, I came in June of 1991

Y: So, you must be twenty...?...

S: I was 29... I was 31 I'm sorry.

Y: So, kids were younger?

S: Afrin was 11 and Z was 8.

Y: What did you come for?

S: So, when I was growing up I want to go to America and for some reason I had Elvis on my mind, I always thought I would go and see Elvis. I think by the time I came he died: hahaha hahaha

R: It was too late

S: That was stuck in my head and I think it was more of the movies’ influence that I could think I could drive on the streets of New York; and I could but you know there was a lot of fixation about coming to America. As the girls were born I wanted them to get an American education and I would read up on stuff and everybody thought about going and sending their kids to college and so some of that didn't come to resonate with me and I said if I was in India and if my kids have to go to college suppose if they didn't feel up to it how come back? I mean if they would be there, if I was there they would at least would have to at least they would have to come home, but if I was not there that would be tough so I thought the only way to do is if I am there.

Y: You mean in America?

S: To be with them

R: You mean to be with them?

S: So it was a driving force to come to America.

R: How about your husband did he agree with that?

S: He did not agree the first time, and then it really was a challenge to get a Visa in the first place it was very very trying I was rejected 3 times, he got his and then I didn't get it then his Visa expired and I went for mine – ha ha and I got it so it was difficult, and at one point there was a little bit of rejection at night
and then when I got my Visa he was excited. The whole position was why don't you go and see it because chances are everybody said life was very difficult here. So he did not think we want to stay.

R: So, was it a tourist visa or an immigration visa?

S: No, we applied for a tourist visa

R: So, in the back of your mind maybe you wanted to check out the place? Hahaha

S: So, when I got my.... I mean the intent was not to return but I didn't think I would get it any other way besides going for a tourist visa so then I remember getting my tourist visa at the embassy because it was a struggle because it got rejected and I created the fuss there and I said you guys have not done your homework so when I got it and when I went to pay the Visa free I thought to myself I'm never coming back. Ha ha ha ha.

R: So, you don't think there is anything special back there to go back? Hahaha.

S: You know I was leaving and I wouldn't to go back I did not foresee.. I did not.. I never thought of going back I did not foresee how difficult it would be if I wanted to how complicated the whole system is here all I wanted was to come here.

R: but did you know people here? I mean why did you not go to Britain, or Australia, or New Zealand or someplace like that?

S: So we tried Canada but it did not work our - it got rejected there - we didn't know anyone in Australia or London. My husband's sister was in Dallas she had come was had come and was like in touch with like .. Come on over... come on over: she had come just before I had come.

Y: So, you first came to Dallas?

S: Yes I first arrived in Dallas 1991 June 3rd.

R: So what made you when you come to Houston?

S: So, when I came to Dallas and after a week of being there I didn't know how to drive I had no way to get a job, and I really didn't like or what I saw because it was a huge shock compared to what one really thinks America is. So now I'm saying, I'm here with two kids I really, don't see an end game, where I could work I couldn't see how I could; who is going to teach me to drive. I don't know how to drive. I started getting more and more serious worried about how is all this going to work out. And my sister-in-law kept saying everything is going to be good don't worry, It will all figure out: you know it's too, you are just too intimidated now and it's too overwhelming but I knew in my mind that I was really, really betting against the odds of thinking everything is going to be ok. It wasn't and I did not have a lot of money when I came and then she comes to me and said that somebody is looking for some help looking after an old woman and the government will pay you money. I said how is the government going to pay me money but I went and took care of this old woman and so it was six weeks or something
like that, so a little money and I could get out of the house so but I still don't know how to drive. And then I got another job to take care of a video place, video store where they would repair the video players. And they were a Sikh family.

Y: Sikh?

S: Sikh, yes and there were four brothers and they taught me really everything, they taught me how to drive, they bought me my first car, I banged the first day I was driving, I hit a Lexus, they said don’t worry; about insurance will take care of it’

R: Cool

S: Years later I realized that they were not insured, and you know so (hahahahaha) by that time I had to say I have decided to take care of my own so I had a little one bedroom there is no furniture, I had a TV and a video player because I worked they gave it to me for free. (Hahaha) because in the business.

S: Yeah they pretty much taught me everything, then after about 6 months they decided you can handle the shop now we are going to India for a visit, and I said you got’ta be kidding me, and you cannot just leave me here. They said no, no, you've been managing really well, and so they took off for India. That was I think my first Venture of managing something on my own om my own terms. No, no official like what to do and all but in that six weeks they went a generated a lot of income for them because I would pre-check work. They told me that these things were really not expensive I would assess and I would ask the customer would it be okay if I charge 100 bucks and I would repair it, and they would say yeah yeah! eah! So I had amassed a whole lot of money, there are five or seven or eight coming everyday’

R: Recorders for repair?

S:You know something would get jammed or something some small thing which would take the technician 5 minutes, but I had earned a hundred bucks a just doing it.

Y: The technicians we’re still there working?

S: No there was a Russian guy coming and it was one of their friends coming do everything in half an hour and go off and I would manage the store make a lot of money like twenty thousand bucks for those 6 weeks. (Umh..umhh) so they said .. I think we should just stay in India...(Hahahaha all)

R: And you will get cover here.

S: But it gave me a lot of confidence because I would go up into the shop Ross Perot’s office was right across from where I work, one day he came to the shop it was his 60th or 65th birthday and I didn’t know what kind of an important guy he was but his assistant I still remember her name was Sharon, she took me out for lunch and that evening she was on TV. I said I went to lunch with (Hahahaha all)

R: Really.
S: Now I know who she is and it was Ross Perot, and the following day he walks into my shop and said I want two hundred copies of this, something of his company and so I would do all that, figure it all out and keep it ready for them. So it was really good learning experience.

R: So you were smart enough to adapt to all these new things otherwise not everybody can do this, right? Coming from India and you had never handled even a video player. (Hahahaha)

S: Well I had always had an opportunity like not like as a choice, like I know people have jobs and really know, this is not what I like to do; I would say I'll do the job I'll make myself like it, because I didn't because of the limited resources, I would fit into anything that I got

R: Everything was a challenge but you want to conquer and succeed at it

S: Right. Kind of that way.

R: Wonderful. So how did you come to Houston then that was in Dallas correct?

S: Right that was in Dallas and then I went for a job about someone opening an office in a law firm law Office in in Dallas.

R: What year was it?

S: That was 1992, a year later. So, I go for this interview, they were opening, it was a Houston Law Firm wanting to open a branch in Dallas. So I go for the interview and when I went for the interview the person said I think you should move to Houston. I said the position in Dallas was, $ 900 a month, so I said what would be the incentive for me and she said I would give you three hundred bucks more. So, I did math and I said three hundred bucks that is $ 3600 for the year I think I'll go for it. So I said yes and now I didn't know what I was getting into. But it was pretty easy because I didn't have any furniture I had the TV and two children. (Hahaha all). I put all my clothes in a garbage bag.

Y: And you worked went to school all this time.

S: Yes. They were in the school from the first week. So, on Jan 1st of 1993 I had a friend who drove a U-Haul and I was driving in my little Chevy Spectrum I had at that time, and we drove to Houston.

R: Now all this time you were on tourist visa?

S: I was out of status.

R: You were out of status; so that was another hat hanging on your head all the time.

S: yes. I was out of status I was very, very worried all the time because I didn’t know and people here will tell you stories on one side they say Oh not to worry because half of them are illegal, but you’re not used to it ever feeling that you are safe.

R: So, you are already for two years in United States. 91 to 93.
S: I came in June of 91 so it was a year and a half.

R: So, by that time you feel confident enough to move to another city very well you didn't know anyone.

S: Weather show the three hundred bucks was the driving force

R: Hahaha

Y: So you just found an apartment and stayed?

S: So, I came two weeks before that to see the office here because I was coming here but I didn't know where I was going to work and so the receptionist off the office said that I live in this complex and the apartments are really nice so I said okay I will go there and maybe I'll check another apartment there so that's what I did I mean. Kind of cereal because... because everything moves so fast I really did not look at the area I never ben drowned I just said okay this is somebody who I know and I will at work with and she's living here it's good so I would live there and she was a Catholic lady she was quite helpful and so I took it because it was not a big deal and I had garbage bags and 1 mattress and 2 kids. 25:47

R: So how did you find Houston compared to Dallas.

S: So, I hated it first. Dallas was very pretty and very clean, Houston it was a struggle because I really, could not, it was a contrast compared to where I was in Dallas, even though I lived in a simple place but I didn't kind of, I was getting used to the whole situation and then by the time I could figure out one road going to work, there was a tragedy so that was the difficult part.

R: So, I'm sorry.

S: Nozer passed away.

Y, R: So, your husband passed away!

S: It was head on collision. Car accident.

S: It was car accident by a drunk driver.

R: So, the whole world came to a sudden screech for a while.

S: So, I was in a new place, new job – this is what has happened. It was a combination of things and I had nobody here that I knew. 27.05

R: So, you were truly on your own now.

S: Now I was truly on my own.

Y: Was he ready to come to the US?

S Yeah he was going to come in the next 6 months.
S: So that was challenging

R: So, did you face any discrimination? In Houston?

S: Not really, because, I worked the background where my first job was South Asian so I didn’t face any discrimination. The discrimination I ever faced was 15 to 20 years later. I decided I must do Social Service, one day I decided, so that particular year, I decided I’m going to do 50 hours of Social Service. 50 hour for the full year yahoo

R: In a month?

S: No in a full year. So I go to this church where they have this they have a , help the homeless they have a little Bakery where people come and put all ,it’s like a canteen, and so I was put so I was put in the separating clothes section. Because they were generating an income, like this church and so I was doing it so fast that the head of the department came and, I was the only brown face amongst all this whites who are working. And for some reason she thought I was doing to either gain something or I was trying to manipulate people there, and suddenly they said no we don’t want you to come here and help people at all. I said and why; they just didn't have an answer as to why they want me around. Much... much.... later after having lived here for many years

R: After many years... H ummmm

S: I just wanted to help.

R: Because you were different you were different from them.

S: These were like white people who wear hard-working but we're doing things out of monotony and like I was there to say listen if you do it this way... have a system there.

R Y: You are trying to organize them... getting them organized.

S: Because of that we got, cleared the backlog; you know people like get bags that you get at Goodwill and I was sorting it all out labeling it and you know and I was doing that I think I did it for about maybe five Saturdays. And then they said no we don't want your help anymore.

Y: You got canned 4 for doing a good job.

R: And obviously, you couldn't figure out why hahahahahaha, or at least you know why but you rationalize it.

S: There was no way for me to convince them but there was no ulterior motive.

R: But when you came to Houston and now you think Houston has changed? In some ways - or?

S: Right now, Houston is my home so I love it. I think that is a lot of potential, tremendous amount of opportunities. And because of its diversity the opportunity is so immense.
Y: Did you do any additional studies or education, and the kid’s education?

S: Right so when I first took the job from Dallas to Houston.

Y: Legal service

S: Oh! yeah in the law firm. Then I had, it's amazing but there was a lady who came to work there, a Parsee lady, and I would teach her to do research and stuff. So she just asked me if you know anything about this; and I said no and I said no I had just learned. She said what if She must have spoken to her husband, so she comes the next day and she says what if we were to pay for your education let you go and be a paralegal. And I said are you sure, and she said I yeah I spoke to my husband and I think we should give you the money and you can return it to us any time before we get to retired. So I took that opportunity.

R: Wow

S: So, I enrolled in Southwestern Paralegal Institute.

Y: Which year?

S: 95

Y: 5 years later. Hmmmm

S: Right. And now you have to give your transcripts and you have to have certain amount of credit hours and I knew I didn't have time for that, and I did not have the money for those extra classes. And I told the principal I told the principal that I come from a third world country and they don't have records, don't keep records and she fell for it. So then she said how would you, you convinced me that you can study? I said you know if you go in a master’s program they ask you to write all these essays and Dada dadada and maybe I should do the same. So, I wrote an assay. And they accepted it.


S: Because you have to remember. I was out of status. I could not show I couldn't show them that I had been here and the. Are you going to deprive me of learning and she fell for it! You have to remember that I was out of status. Now I knew I had to finish up really fast because it was a three-year course...

R: 3 years? Evening course.

S: Yeah yeah it was two years, I think was two years, with additional credit, I think it was two years. And so it was from 6 to 10 every night...

R: Every day of the week? Go two little kids, how old were your kids that time?
S: So, Afrin was 15 and Z was 13. So for every hour of school you have an hour of homework. So that was really, really challenging, because this was to be the routine. I would wake up I would go. Suppose I went to work at 9, not take any lunch and work till 5, because I had to leave at 5 to go to class at 6. 6 to 10; by the time I came home it was 10:30 ...10:45. Kids would be waiting, I would have a little bite put them to bed, I would wake up at 3 in the morning and study till 7, then wake them up at 7 and back in the routine of putting them through school and then getting ready and going to work and this went on day in and day out for 9 months....

R: First 9 months of the 3-year program?

S: Two-year program. And I knew if I had to do this more because I was sleeping 3 hours a day - because of all that homework you have to go to the University Library to do all this research the brief as they say. So, after a while I knew I was not going to be able to do it.

R: So, all through-out you are working for the law firm.

S: Yes

R: So, it was sort of complimentary to your work at that time?

S: Yes. But it was very different because what I did was personal injury, some immigration and some business. This is everything else, probate and contracts and I mean it's just some more intense, because it is really concrete law.

R: Much wider.

Y:,What was your degree in?

S: It was a paralegal degree which covers all forms of practice.

Y: Paralegal degree.

R: So how did you meet the Zoroastrian community in Houston?

S: So, I will tell you. When I first came in 1993, I don't know who first introduced me but I remember Arnavaz Sethna calling me and taking my details for the newsletter; Manashni, so in the newsletter it was funny, not quite so funny she was introducing me moving to and a few paragraphs down she is condoling me for the loss in my family. So, then I got introduced to Sunday school and community has just been amazing.
R: Did you make new friends then?

S: Yeah I did.

Y: So you went to Sunday School?

S: Yeah all the time. The only path, also to make sure they were grounded and to know they had direction. Because I had long working hours and so a lot of folks came to-gather, invited me to their homes for the week end. Because what would I do on the week end...so that is how developed friends.

R: How did you children take the routine, the grueling schedule that you were holding and they were on their own.

S: It was very difficult - extremely difficult. Ehth I was fortunate that they were girls and they would listen. Because I was worried that, anybody knocks you were not supposed to open the door - I would call them in my break when I was at school. They were extremely; they would listen. That helped a whole lot as I had no problems with that. So, it kind of helped me they were not trouble kids. So they were really good.

R: So, I mean how long you stayed with that firm?

S: So, I stayed until 1995-1996. Then I was laid off – and then I did not have a job, and a community member who had a sandwich place offered me a job. There I worked grueling hours for about 9 months. Then another law firm called me and I got picked up there. Where I stayed for about 5 years.

R: You had this, para-legal qualifications to back you up. Fora better next step up.

S: Correct...correct. So, that was very good. And by that time, I had pretty much given up any hopes so. Remember I have been out of status now – so seven years. And you, kind of get used to living in sin, you know. So now you say whatever needs to happen - happens.

R: Correct.

S: But I used to be worried because of the girls because I did not know what the future was: and then my employer was more concerned about me than I was. And one of his clients said I will sponsor you. And I thought it was unreal because no one is going to go out of their way to sponsor me.

R: A business man?

S: Yes. But he had a lot of compassion and he knew I was alone with two kids, so out of the blue he sponsored me.

Y: So, that was not the employer but the employer's friend.

S: So, it was one of his clients. I had seen him over the years. So, he sponsored me. And everything happened in 2 and half years. It just miraculously...
R: In two and a half years you and your children got status?

S: I got green card.

R: You got green card -- all three of you?

S: The reason why it happened is because there was a change in the immigration law. So we filed under that. And then one night in 1997 March I just could not sleep that night. So I go on the computer and I said let me check - because everything takes forever. And I saw that the priority date had regressed. And as of April 1, the date was going to go back. And I was never going to get my Green Card sooner; and I was not worried about that because I was in the system. But my daughter was becoming 21 now. And she would never be able to get the green card under my filing. So, I go to work the next day and tell my boss and said you are connected. There is going to be a problem because of this. I still remember it was March 22nd. When I had seen this on the computer and April 1, in seven days it was going to be a deciding factor. So, we pulled out all the stops because he was politically inclined and we reached out to a lot of senators and we found the file and ... because immigration had lost my file so we had to reconfirm reconstruct it. We had to take pictures, we had to take other. It was March 30th. It was 12 noon; internally they stamped.

R: So that was an approval.

S: That was an approval. And for 7 days I had not slept and it was just a nightmare.

R: So, what was the deadline then? It was March 30th?

S: April 1st. the priority date was going to go back 2 years. So by the time the date came back again 2 years, my daughter would have been 23 years old, and then she would have lost. She would have to independently file.

R: That would have been another challenge?

S: That would have been almost impossible.

R: So somebody was looking after you somewhere, from high up, besides your friends too.

R: And you know the acceleration of everything happening in two and a half years was just...and I kind of have a history. I lost both my parents in 1996.

R: So, you were already here.

S: I was here and my dad passed away and four months later my mother passed away. And I have a feeling that after they passed away- everything changed.

R: They sort of gave their blessings.

S: Correct; or they just accelerated and said that you got to get the girl out of this accelerated trouble.
Hahahaha...

R: Somebody was looking after you. Yeh... Have you. I know there have been 2 to 3 people in your life who have really played some important role starting from the first interview they brought in you here from Dallas. The secretary who gave you a place, not gave you but directed you to where you live and in many other ways directly helped you to, and this other gentleman who out of nowhere. So have you over the years sort of role they have played in your life, but have you made, but have you continued to keep that connection?

S: Yes, In fact the lady who gave me the money for my education I am still in touch with. So I am heavily indebted to her for that. And the person who went over and beyond to help me get my Green Card. I am still in touch with him. He is a philanthropist right now; so, he was not even a, he was not a Parsi, from a different community who had no idea of who I was and nothing.

R: And nothing to gain.

S: And nothing to gain just good heart. Aanddd. Yea I am in touch with them and constantly like you know I ask them if I can help them in any way because they are much older that me.. because they are just a very happy. Hahaha.

R: That is wonderful. Yeh... How about your children? Now that you have... tell me what’s happening now.

S: So now I had worked in my second job, second law firm I worked and then I got my Green Card In 2001 then I got a little brave, and you know I did not have insurance. I was still working for a company that was cutting cost and that was not really getting my work and I also had fought for.

R: So you had to also look forward to your future.

S: Correct. And I did not have insurance. I did not have health insurance.

R: Medical.

S: So, I put my resume out there and I got a hit from a Dallas law firm. San Francisco law firm that was opening a huge office in Dallas, 350 attorneys, and I... they offered me the job as head para legal, that means I would have about 60 other paralegals under me, and I was kind of, sort of an unreal situation I was wondering today. Can I really do this? But, I went with the flow and they flew me to San Francisco to interview with them. So, I got the job and while I was doing this there was this one individual who had been pestering me to join his company for about five years and kept joking. He was in the retail business. Never kind of paid attention to that, but he knew that I was looking out and that I was, put my resume out. So he really badgered me and said for five years I have been asking you to just see my operation. At least come and look at it. So finally, I go out about three weeks and I look at everybody working on Excel spreadsheets. I said this is not me I cannot do this. Anyway, he walks in there and says what do you think, this is your new office. Hahaha all. I have not given a yea yet. By that time, I had also accepted my wage to be much higher. I had...was making very, very little money so. I was putting all
these unrealistic demands and I was. I had already been offered this big job. So I was comparing it to this. And he would not take no for an answer and I interviewed him three times: because I wanted to see, because I really had to make sure that I was, what he had in him that I would have to give something. I had no intention of giving anything, giving up that other position because it was really good. But he made it so good for me; that I really looked at it twice and I am a little bit of a risk taker and I took it and I have been with the same company for sixteen years now.

Y: So that’s the company you are with.

S: What I work for right now. And I joined as his assistant. And in three months he said maybe you can do more so I climbed up to where I am right now and I am right now vice president of the company. I take care of the real estate, do all the leasing. We have about 500 stores!

R: What is that, cell phones?

S: Yes it’s a retail AT&T company and we are the largest agent.

R: Wow.

S: So it grew from his assistant to something quite prominent.

R: Even before that it was, not much at all. Hahaha

S: Well yes.

R: So it was quite a steep climb. And well deserved and it recognized your talents.

S: Yes.. In the mean while the girls grew up. So even though the first 10 years were very, very trying and very, very difficult. I just had to hang in there because it was not gonna be forever. That I kept telling myself that.

R: It’s going to get better.

S: It’s going to get bigger, and I am still going to be young and better. It was difficult because nobody really knew how bad it was. The dollars were shorter and the hours were longer.  50:36

R: Single woman with two teen age daughters in a strange country with hardly any money....

S: And then to keep saying and to make sure everybody is saying

R: No.

S: Nos and nobody gets into trouble. That's the biggest thing and to keep them grounded and have their values intact.

R: Did the Zoroastrian community play any important role in your life in Houston?
S: You know they played a very... very... not only in my life but in my kid's life. Because as I said that was the direction, that was the path, because imagine if we did not have that. It would have been like we would have been nowhere to go, we would have no path to follow because we went to Sunday school we had all these friends because they went to Sunday School they learnt what is right is right, what is wrong is wrong.

R: More about the religion.

S: More about the religion. More about the way of life right because... then you see other like-minded kids and then you say, you know you... kind of live within your parameters and you... kind of realize that no, I can't do that because it's not done. There is no defiance.

R: How did they find the lack of father being there?

S: So, one thing I did was, I never hid anything from them. My girls. So, when their father passed away I didn't say. Because he was not here any ways. I could prolong it and say he can't make it and you know I never believe in hiding and keeping anything. Because that is the fastest way to get over it and so while they lost their dad. My mother would always explain this to me - she would always say compare things and she would say what about these people who go to war.

R: They lose their father...

S: They lose their spouses, they lose their parents, and so life is

R: And they have seen so much because they were in the army base. So they had seen these type of scenarios.

S: And so she said: so those people give up? They don't give up. If you have to find a way to make it OK and then I would know. Make them feel that this is what happens and there are other situations. I mean you could be separated and would be living alone. So, it was tough. It would be abnormal if wasn't - you we kind of pulled through and you know thank goodness for my sense of humor we would like you know. Hahahahaha - all. That played a very important role.

R: So, where are your children today......

S: So, both my girls are close here, they live in Sugar Land. I am a grandmother, and the younger one lives with me and the elder one lives down the road. So

R: How old are they both now?

S: Afrin is 35 - 36 and Zeeba is 33

R: You have a grand-child?

S: My grand child is 3, her name is Saloni and I think she takes priority now...Hahahaha all
R: Another pillar to hang on to.

S: That's right. Hahahaa....

Y: You had a story about a car you were driving, a very old car and the owner said, you were late at work or something and owner said he gave you

S: No. So my current employer, I used to go and drop my younger daughter at her work place and so she would do odd jobs for pocket money and so I would get her back in the night because she used to work at one of the shops at the Galleria. So one such evening he said can you do this.... can you run this errand? So, I said no I cannot run this errand, and he said why not and I said because I have to pick up my daughter. And he said why you have to pick up...seniors do not have an understanding. So, he said are you telling me that you have only one car and I said yes. So he says OK and then the next day he says. Why don't we go out for lunch? So, he took me to lunch and we drove into this Honda dealership and he gave me a brand-new car.

R: Oh, my God... Uhhh....

S: And that was the first brand new car. I mean there was zero miles. So, I couldn't believe it. And so I gave my car to Z, so she could commute back to work. So I had another car.

Y: Hmmmm hum hahahaha - all.

R: You had a fortune of a wonderful employer?

S: Ya. Continued to have.

R: I think it is a 2 way street... I am sure you gave your best to him. And that is why he would very much appreciate.

S: Right. And I think I was very lucky because all the jobs that I did I dealt directly with the CEO. So more than even working ....I learnt a lot. I learnt a lot and I still continue to do what I did first in my law firm and I still continue to do in my existing job, I am gate keeper there. I have not worked in a law firm for 16 years, but I still do what I did there because.

R: Legal side of your company you still do.

S: I take care of it. Yeah. I was fortunate enough that I worked for someone else who was not as well qualified, maybe I would not have learnt that much. But because I worked with people who knew what they were doing I learnt from them. They taught me, and taught me a lot and I picked up really fast. Ha ha ha.....

R: going back to your daughter who's married. How did your daughter meet her husband?

S: She met my son in law Sudhir on-line. And I think they communicated on-line and he is from, he is a Brahmin boy.
R: Hindu?

S: Yes, Hindu and this is email stage and they been, they married for seven years they were dating I think 5 to 7 years before. He had come to do his PhD here, at A & M and on-line they met, and they met in person and then they were dating for the longest time.

R: Did you have any soul searching when she told you she is marrying a non-Zoroastrian?

S: Yes, I did in fact because it was very difficult because. How .... I did not have a problem because he was from a different religion, the problem was how are you gonna fit culturally? This kid had come from India and my household is pretty open and liberal, but I did not know what she was getting into. I said you know you have these demons about because of her Green Card. You know all this stuff about, so it was very ..

R: Because he did not have a Green Card.

S: Yes, because he was on a student visa. So, she said to me quite blatantly that you meet him and you find something wrong with him then I won't date him.

R: That is fair enough. Hmm

S: Yeah she said like you tell me that I am your child he's somebody's child too. So, she got him home and I could not find anything wrong with him. He was intelligent, very respectful, ahh great potential and I could not find anything wrong with him so. So, I had to be honest and so if this is what you want then go for it. And you are old enough to make up your mind - I didn't find anything wrong with the guy.

R: Did you have any concerns about what will happen to the grand-children; whether they will stay in the religion or not stay?

S: Yeah. Sudhir is quite a remarkable son-in-law he is very progressive, though he comes from a very religious back ground. Afrin had explained to him that if she were to convert and if tomorrow I were to pass away the priest will not allow her to come for the funeral. So she made it clear that she was not going to convert.

R: That was the India custom but that is beside the point.

S: And even here 7 to 8 years ago. There was a lack of clarity.

R: Carrying over the old custom?

S: Correct. So, she had told him that she was not going to convert. And he said I don't want you to convert. So when they got married they did not do anything - they had a ceremony, or puja in the house, but beyond that there was nothing. In fact the Parsi wedding was a full wedding, but... and Hindus they do not wear white on auspicious days. And his parents did not like it that Afrin would wear a white Sari. But when she went to India for shopping she - he said it was your dream that they... girls imagine how
they want to get dressed when they want to get married. And white was what you thought about then you should go for it. And so, she was she wore a white sari. And he is very progressive.

R: How about the grand children? Any thought on that but

S: So she is. They both have spoken that in the Hindu community in their religion there is nothing for girls He is a Brahmin so he comes from a religious ceremony for what they do for boys. But there is really nothing for girls. So, he is very open to getting her Navjot done. But I do not interfere with that because this is their decision. But I think they have spoken about it and I think they are already talking about that at seven years they would like to do her Navjot and they have even spoken.