

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

Interviewee: Denka Wangdi

Interviewers: Anna Ta and Kelly Dong

Date/Time of Interview: November 1, 2017; 2:26 PM

Transcribed by: Anna Ta and Kelly Dong

Edited by: Daniel Ngo

Audio Track time: 1:09:13

Background:

Denka Wangdi is the daughter of Tibetan-Indian diplomats. Her father worked in embassies around the world, in the process meeting important figures such as Mother Theresa and the Dalai Lama. She was born in Denmark, and lived in the Philippines, London, Hong Kong, India, Cambodia, and Zambia. As a result, she has had a lot of experience with culture shock.

She now lives in Houston with her husband and son, where she received a bachelor's degree from University of Houston and a master's in international finance from University of St. Thomas. She works for General Electric and writes screenplays.

Setting:

The interview was conducted on the fifth floor of Fondren Library, in Dr. Anne Chao's office.

Interview Transcript:

Key:

DW: Denka Wangdi

AT: Anna Ta

KD: Kelly Dong

—: Speech cuts off; abrupt stop

...: Speech trails off; pause

Italics: Emphasis

(?): Preceding word may not be accurate

Brackets: Actions [laughs, sighs, etc.]

AT: So, the date is November 1st at 2:26 PM. My name is Anna Ta, I'm here with Kelly Dong, as well as, um - [gestures to Denka]

DW: Denka Wangdi, ah, yes.

AT: And we're conducting the interview for the Hous-Houston Asian American Archives, uh, with the Chao Center at Rice University. Um, could you say your name one more time for the record?

DW: Yeah sure! Denka Wangdi.

AT: So, when and where were you born?

DW: So, I was born, uh, May 31st, '79 in Copenhagen, Denmark.

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AT: Okay. Uh, could you tell us more about your childhood in Denmark?

DW: Yeah sure; so, I - my parents were diplomats, so, um, I was born in Denmark, my siblings before in other countries, and we stayed in Denmark probably for about a year after I was born and then we migrated to, um, the Philippines where my dad did his next posting.

AT: And how long were you in the Philippines?

DW: For about three years.

AT: Do you have any memories of either Copenhagen or the Philippines?

DW: I do for the Philippines. Um, Copenhagen, just, I mean, being, you know, one and a half, no, but around four, five I have some you know, striking memories. So, just very, very, um, humid, like any kind of tropical country, and we were based in Manila, so, I just have memories of you know, being in the backyard and things of that nature. But—but nothing concrete.

AT: Yeah. Um, and after the Philippines -

DW: Yeah.

AT: You moved...

DW: Yeah, after the Philippines, we moved back to India. My parents and family are originally from-from New Delhi. And um, so my dad was stationed - he did a two and a half year assignment back in the home country, so we moved back to Delhi, and, um, after that we went to Hong Kong.

AT: Okay. So, what exactly, um, what exact position did your parents hold?

DW: Yeah sure. So, my dad, he served in, uh, um, in a government role called the, uh, Indian Foreign Service. And if you do the foreign service, it basically enables you to be a diplomat, either internally, in the country, or externally, so, um, my dad started off as secretary, then first secretary, and then he climbed uh-he-he continued on and then eventually he, um, he-he was ambassador for India for other countries and then, um, he served in foreign posts back-back in India after he retired.

AT: Mm-hmm. Um, just to complete the timeline. After Hong Kong -

DW: Yes.

AT: You moved...

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DW: We - after Hong Kong, we moved to - my dad moved to Cambodia, or Kampuchea at the time, uh, Phnom Penh as the capital, and we moved back to India. So, we did literally like, Delhi for two and a half years, we did Hong Kong, and then back to Delhi and then we moved to London.

AT: Mm-hmm.

DW: For about... London was for about three years and then m-oh, I did my high school in country called Zambia.

AT: Mm-hmm.

DW: In Lusaka and then I graduated from-from IB.

AT: From where?

DW: Uh the international baccalaureate. I did the IB and graduated from Zambia.

AT: Oh. Oh, okay. Um, so you lived in a lot of places.

DW: Yeah [laughs].

AT: Um, which one did you spend the most time in, or which one do you have the most memories of?

DW: Uh, I think the strongest connection, um, would probably be Zambia. I think it's just the, the basic growing up, um, and the country is very untouched. It's really beautiful and serene. There's only nine, nine to twelve million population type size for a country that's quite large. So, outside of the capital, I mean, you can be driving for miles, you won't see anyone. You can see an elephant crossing the road and that's not even a make up, we, we used to see that occasionally when we were out - going out of town. So, I think to me, yeah Zambia's probably where I left my heart behind, yeah.

AT: Mmm, yeah. Um, did you, for your education, how did that work shifting from place to place?

DW: That's an interesting question. Um, okay for me, it was tough. And it started getting difficult - in terms of learning, it wasn't difficult, but the adjusting every three years in a new country with new people, it's quite traumatic. Um, I would say around middle school, when I was in London, London was a tough post. Like it almost took me a year and a half to make friends, and adjust, um, just because the Indian system was so strict, the British system was almost kind of lenient. So, it was kind of a culture shock. But within a year and a half, I, I really fell in love with my friends and the school and then Zambia was easier. So, I think it's the older we get, we know who we are and it's easier to, to kind of establish your presence, but early on was - it was difficult, but we just didn't know any better. So, we adjusted to what was our normal—normal.

AT: Right. And you had one sibling - is that - or was it two?

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DW: I have two, that's right. Um, so my sister, she - actually she was kind of fortunate or not, um, the school that she went to in London was an all-girls school, it was a little bit protected. And there were other expats in that school. So, she, I felt, was more insulated from having to assimilate with the local people. Um, she enjoyed also, moving around. But she really loved doing her, her undergraduate. She graduated from high school and then studied in London. Um, my brother hated pretty much moving around, alright so, he - we're all in Houston now and, uh, yeah, he loves being based here, he doesn't want to relocate, he doesn't have that itch, yeah. [laughs]

AT: So, I guess you fell sort of in between the two attitudes of just kind of adjusting, but not necessarily loving having to move.

DW: That's right.

AT: Yeah, um, so, your parents are from New Delhi?

DW: No actually, so they, they resided, or we resided in New Delhi, but they're from a town - my dad's from Darjeeling and my mom is from a place called Kalimpong, and they're both smaller towns in the northeast of India.

AT: Oh, okay. So, is there a reason why every time you came back to India you stayed in New Delhi?

DW: Yeah um, if you're, just like, you know, if you're a government official, you have to be based in D.C.

AT: Mmhmm.

DW: And so, in India, everything happens in New Delhi f-for government purposes. It was just because of job, we were always based there, but we would visit like family members and I think you can imagine it's like the states. Everyone, once they land, just migrates everywhere. So, our cousins had come and moved also to, to Delhi or to the South of India. So, um, yeah, we were always based there just because of Dad's job.

AT: Mmhmm. And when he went to Cambodia or Kam-

DW: Yes, Cambodia that's - you're right. Or Kampuchea before.

AT: Yeah, uh, and you guys went to New Delhi - was there a reason why you didn't follow him back to Cambodia at the time?

DW: Yeah, so at the time there was, uh, the Khmer Rouge attacks that were happening and it was, uh, it was pretty unsafe. Um, it was - in the foreign service if you do an A posting, meaning a safe, Western country, then you do a C posting, then you do an A posting, and some people manage to do C plus postings their whole career. That's what they want, they don't want the merry go round. My dad wanted the merry go round. He - he wanted, sorry, he wanted the roller coaster of a career. So, he took a C minus,

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which was Cambodia, being very dangerous, politically unsettling, um, yeah. And then we got London after that. So, in Cambodia's case, when we arrived to visit my father - and we spent the summers with him - we - we had a van of army officials who would carry machine guns with us.

AT: Right.

DW: So, and they would escort us around town. Um, so there were no hotels at the time, there were no schools, all diplomats - I don't even think there were expats, I mean it was either journalists and some foreign officials, and they were all pretty much by themselves. Their families didn't want to move. Yeah.

AT: How old were you at this time?

DW: I was between eight to eleven. Yeah. So, we did the summer vacations or the winter vacations over there.

AT: Were there times where you would - like how would you feel um being escorted in a very dangerous country with men with machine guns?

DW: You know it's - 'cause I think you-we don't realize - 'cause even being expat, like you assimilate but you're still in a bubble. I mean, we're fortunate that we had people to look after us, and it was really, really scary, but... you know, like to me, this - it was our norm. We just didn't know any different. So, for us, we would make friends with the military officers and be like, woah can we, can we touch your gun? Or take pictures with it? And we just didn't know any, any different. But I know like for my dad, we had a chance to visit the Angkor Wat, one of the Wonders of the World, um, with this group of army officials and, and we went and we could hear machine gun firing at night. And it was close by. And, the hotel would power off electricity, like, at eight, nine in the night, um, so that they could conserve the electricity, but also so that it was safe for the residents. So, I remember that was the first time thinking yeah, it's, uh, really, really unsafe for my father to be posted here.

AT: Yeah. Were you kept mostly sheltered from these sort of intricacies of his work, or would your parents kind of like, let you know what exactly it was that he was doing, or the dangers that he was possibly facing?

DW: No. So, uh, he kept it, um, hidden from us. I think, just by nature, like I'm sure it's also any government job. The more delicate nature, the more secretive they have to be. And it was never my father's kind of, uh, personality to want to share what was taking place. But there were indications, um, like he would have a safe in the office or the office would be locked most days. And it was very clear... it's not. I-it... there's a personal life and a private life, and a work life and the work life did not seep into... So, for me, when we did the moving, my father was pretty active in our life, but Cambodia changed his personality.

AT: Oh, really...

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DW: Yeah. Like, I could - 'cause there's three of us, and three children, it's rambunctious, it's just noisy. So, when we moved after Cambodia, um, to London, I think there were times, I felt he really needed the solitude. To be away from the family. And sometimes I would just catch him kind of day dreaming or reading by himself. And it was really with the intent, um, I-I cannot be around noise right now.

AT: Mhmm. Yeah. How would you say his personality was before?

DW: Uh, he, he was a lot more - he's very jovial and I think he is still jovial, um, it was... Cambodia changed him. And I think it was with the sense of... like you see the cruelest of life, like, uh, I'm sure if you've done the Hol - like if people have survived the Holocaust, it puts things into perspective, and Cambodia - I'm not sure if you're aware or not, it-it went through Pol Pot's regime and all of this, so... when we went to the Killing Fields, there were no museums at the time, like you would see bones on the floor, you would see teeth on the floor and... pieces of garment, and you know you're walking as an eight year old and my brother's five and my sister's like eleven, and there are images of how they used to kill the children. And... again, we-we didn't know any better, we're like, oh my gosh, this is pretty horrific, but I remember we had a, a male, um, helper who had migrated with us to Cambodia and he had a newborn back in India. He just threw up when he saw the images of how they, uh, executed th-the babies.

AT: Mmm.

DW: Yeah, it was, uh, i-it's horrific, it's horrific. And I think I will... there's always a shine to living an expat life, and it was great, but I will never forget, and I will cherish those moments of when you realize, you-you have an opportunity to see into a country's history without having to adjust your entire life and I'm thankful.

AT: Mhm.

DW: Yeah.

AT: So, um... um, let's see. Uh, when you were in New Delhi, you were living with your mother and your family?

DW: That's right.

AT: Um, and so your education in New Delhi, how did it compare, um, to all the other places - or I guess in general, like how did your education in each place compare? Were you always in international schools?

DW: I-It's - so i-in Delhi, we weren't in an international school, we were in a private, like local school. In Hong Kong, international, in London, local, and in Zambia, international. But most of it's been British international. Um, so in India, it's very - I mean, the school system is such like you memorize and you study and - like I have a little sty right now, it-it used to be strong, but they would make people at eight years old study three to four hours a day. It was just very normal. The kids have to study hard. And because we'd gone to Hong Kong, we had to also pass two exams to go to next grade. One being - I think one was English or some-maybe a math class, but one was Hindi. And none of us knew Hindi, because

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we had pretty much forgotten it when we moved to Hong Kong. So, when we came back, I mean it was tutors every evening, and it wasn't to go ahead in the education, it was to keep up. With the rest of our peers. Um, I think you don't know any better, so to me I loved it, and I - we stayed in a place where all the diplomats all lived together. It was called, um, the external affairs hostel. So ev-every day I remember fondly we would come from the school bus, my mom would have a hot plate of our favorite food. And she would literally feed us with her hand. Like, it's - we're eight years old, it's ridiculous but she's feeding us with her hand. And-and after we're done eating, um, we would study, study, study, study, um, and all the kids finish at exactly the same time every night, and then we would go out and play until, honestly, ten or eleven at night.

AT: Mhmm.

DW: And it-it was... like when you think of like the Goonies or th-those types of shows, that's the kind of life we, we grew up with. So, it was really-like it was really beautiful. That was -that was a fun time. But, um, in terms of education, so, during India it was strong. Then we moved to Hong Kong. Hong Kong was an international school, it was easy to keep up. But London, the whole system, like we had design technology where you had to do home cooking, you had to actually build like electronic circuit boards and things of that nature, and we weren't doing that in India. At the time, in Delhi, for us it was just memorize, memorize, memorize, history, math, and like the stem classes we would say. So, I think for education, it was a big culture shock. Like, uh, in India for example, if the teacher calls your name you have to put up your hand, say yes sir or madam, and you have to stand up. So, the first day I did that in London, oh my god, they just tore into me. It was-it was pretty brutal. [laughs] It was really brutal! 'Cause they - yeah, in London you address your teacher probably like here, by the first name and, um, it was, uh, just really funny, um, the other thing is, the school that I went to - it wasn't probably the strongest or the best schools at all, so I was probably, like, the only Asian kid in that school. I feel this is the story of my life, [laughing] I am mostly the only Asian kid in school! Um, and they - it was like severe bullying, like they would wait for the teachers after school and a certain group would just beat up the teachers, man. Yeah. Like [laughing] that's like, I know! I know. It was crazy. So, it was a year and a half of trying to survive that nonsense. And, and then assimilating. A-and I will tell you this, as a parent you don't - like I have a four-year-old, I don't ever want him to go through that, but if you can survive that it'll really make you strong. Like, yeah. It's easy to go to college an-and then, and then, uh, manage. So, there was - okay, there was London and then Zambia was an international school. So, if... yeah. Not too, not too different but, um... Yeah, Zambia it's a - is where I developed my interests for what I wanted to study. So, yeah.

AT: Um, could you talk a little bit more about the culture shocks moving from, um, so Copenhagen to the Philippines, to India, to Hong Kong, back to India slash Cambodia during the summers, and then to London and Zambia? [Laughs].

DW: Sure, sure. Oh my god, even I have to keep it straight.

AT: Right. [Laughs].

DW: Um, I think like, the culture shock, part of it is growing up and realizing you're going to be a teenager, and then middle school and all the heart aches of just growing up. Right? A-and then part of it is

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different culture and then realizing you're a minority in a minority group. And like, even - so I'm Tibetan by background, so I'm a minority in India out of one point two billion, our small little Tibetan community is a small minority group. Then you go to somewhere like Zambia, where there are no Asians [laughs], or-or I would say people from southeast Asian, um, so again, it's really quite shocking. And then in London, um, the-the predominant groups were, yeah, British-white or, um, or-or black from, from their country. So, to me, the culture shock was part of growing up, but it was also just, um, trying to realize who I was at the time I was in, and also assimilating fast.

AT: Mhmm.

DW: 'Cause, you know, you talk to - I'm sure parents tell you, like, individuality matters and stuff, but when you're trying to survive, like middle school and above, it's like survival mode. So, you don't want to stick out, you just want to assimilate and-and move on. And for me, the culture shock was how fast can you assimilate in a different country. Like, six months you gotta assimilate, you gotta make friends, and you just, that-that'll protect you for the next three years. So, there was that.

AT: Mhmm. When, um... I guess was like the food and the clothes - would it change at each location as well? Like the customs?

DW: You know, it's really interesting, so like if you look at the demography right now what -maybe if you and Kelly might be like an age group of twenty to twenty-five, right or s-some-somewhere around there. What the millennials wear today around the world is pretty much the same. Like the interests are all the same. And you can look through social media, and find out it's kind of the same things. And, and it wasn't different in the 90's.

AT: Mhmm.

DW: So, when I went to London, like this - the fashion changed, but when I moved to Zambia, they wanted the British designers. And they all wanted the cool cars and it's - they all knew about the same pop stars and rock stars, whatever it was. So, that's something of a shock to me, when you're the same - when you're young, it kind of normalizes. Like the same things that are popular are popular everywhere in the world.

AT: Right.

DW: And, uh, that-that to me was a shock. So, coming from London, I found it easier to assimilate to Eng-to Zambia because they wanted to know about the trends, th-the music, the everything. And since my sister was still based in London, I had a, I had a real feed into getting all of that without having to, to try too hard. Yeah. It's funny.

AT: Um, that's interesting. So, um, you were saying that in Zambia, it's where you left your heart so to speak, could you talk more about your time there?

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DW: Sure. Um. So, in Zambia... like I think, I felt after leaving London I had this power of 'I survived middle school' stroke entering into high school. And... I did not know who I was. I thought I did, but I-I really didn't. And in Zambia, when we, when we landed in to Lusaka, there were race riots within the first week of us landing. And they were race riots against Indians. So, I remember going to our house and there were Indians, I mean, crowded around our embassy because the embassy as you might know, is your country, is your nation's protection border. So, um, many of them were Zambians saying we're Indian national background, can we, can we seek refuge? And my dad couldn't. You have to be Indian. Um. And where was I going with this? I was going with this... in Zambia, the, the disparity between the have and the have nots was incredibly apparent. That is the first realization of race disparity I really came across. And by that what do I mean? I mean... so we had an international school and maybe two percent of that are expats, internationals, whatever you want to call us. But they ran the school. Even though there were wealthy Zambians, in the school, you could feel the inequality, so to speak. And, um, even though I almost feel like it was an African Beverly Hills, 90210, that-that was what it was trying to emulate, like who had the best cars, who had the best vacations and it-it was... it was, that was the little bubble we had. And I found a group of friends who just didn't care [laughs] about any of that nonsense, um, we just had our own little world and we were pretty happy so it-that was-that was the one aspect I really loved. I got to know the culture, and the people, and the local dialects, and in IB you have to volunteer. You just have to, right? To, to graduate. So, we did it in a-in a foundation house, Mother Theresa's AIDs foundation house. Um, and I would say at sixteen if you're coming into contact with AIDs patients, it'll, it'll change your mind, about-about how lucky you are in life. So, to me it - I think it was just this whole like, mind blowing realization of-of the world, and that happened in Zambia. And then, um, I also fell in love like hard for the first time in Zambia, so of course that's going to be soul crushing, good and bad. But, uh, yeah. That was in Lusaka.

AT: Um, just to return to the race riots you were saying against Indians?

DW: Yeah.

AT: Were - obviously it's hard to pinpoint exactly the causes of-of such things other than just blatantly racism, but um, I guess what was the sort of political-

DW: Climate?

AT: Climate at the time about, about this?

DW: Oh yeah, for sure. So, uh, okay, post-colonial era, um, of course, the African countries started breaking and Southern Africa was different than many of the others where there were no - there were - the race riots were terrible, but it was not like a blood... you know, massacre that happened in certain other areas, and what wound up happening, the power shifted, of course, to either white farmers or Indian business people. And they started treating the local black African nationals with such disdain that there was an uprising and when we came to Zambia, it was-it was around '94, 1994. So, a lot of the local banks were held privately by Indian or south Asian, um, business people. They wound up stealing the money and shifting a lot of poor people's entire life savings to Europe, to the Cayman Islands, to Swiss bank accounts. They filed bankruptcy and overnight they were gone. And so, what the race riots were, is a

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history of colonial era, of, of complete poverty, and knowing that they're not going to get out and they - at the time there was also stories that Indians were s-were doing tests on local black children for, for, um, religious purposes. And whether it was true or not, it really came out and that's-that's what wound up happening. So, we were Zam-so Zambia's here, South Africa's here [gesturing], and then there was apartheid, and then the end of apartheid. And we were there when apartheid ended in South Africa, and it spilled onto Zimbabwe and Zambia, very strongly. So, yeah. Within four years of us being there, local black African nationals knew that they don't have to have this colonial mindset that they need to be still run by the colonizer.

AT: Right.

DW: You know, even post-independence.

AT: Mhmm. so how did your father, as the Indian, uh, diplomat in a place where there's currently, like, a backlash of-against-against, uh, Indian nationals, how did he have to sort of deal with this, how did it kind of spill into your own life?

DW: Yeah.

AT: Your first year of adjusting?

DW: I know for him, he went head to toe with a lot of the private banks, so friends who were friends of mine - and we're-we're silly, we're sixteen years old, we don't know any better, but overnight they had to leave and their families packed their bags and-and were in-in the UK, and stories came out about, um, him basically trying to go toe to toe, and one thing I will say about my dad, I have always felt his moral compass is clean. So, a - he was very clear, it's not because you're south Asian background, there will be protection. He at the time sided with some of the African leaders, but stuff over there imploded that I'm sure he-maybe he-yeah it's a different account of how he sees things. But to me, I remember feeling like some of my friends were probably were blaming the ministry and other diplomats.

AT: Mmm.

DW: Yeah.

AT: Yeah. Um, so... if you want to, we could also circle back to - I know you mentioned that, like, in Zambia, uh, like, social relationships and stuff like that too, and also, um, you said that it was the place where you first fell in love for the first time?

DW: Yeah, oh my god. It feels like [laughs] ages ago, but yeah.

AT: Right, um, so that's not your current husband, right?

DW: No.

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AT: [laughs] Okay. Um, yeah. So how did you meet your, your current husband?

DW: How did I meet him? Um, we were – we're based in Houston and I was working at a company called Schlumberger previously, so it was through mutual friends that we met. And, um, we met at a place actually in Rice Military, just down the road, which wasn't popular back then at all. So yeah, it was, it was actually very fast. We intro-got introduced, and within six months, we got engaged.

AT: Oh wow.

DW: So, yeah it was-it was kind of nuts.

AT: [Laughs].

DW: But it's been fun.

AT: Yeah. Yeah, um, what was it that you said-what company did you work for?

DW: It-it was a company called Schlumberger.

AT: Okay. Um - oh wait, sorry, just to backtrack a little bit more-

DW: Yeah, sure!

AT: Um, you also mentioned in Zambia, that's where you found out what you're interested in studying. What exactly-

DW: Yes. Yeah.

AT: -is that?

DW: Um, so in Zambia I was very interested in history, political science, and I think if life had, maybe, gone a different way, um, I wanted to be a journalist. Like, yeah, really, I mean, work for CNN at the time, or go through a journalist program, um, was, uh, was of interest. And at the time, like my parents are in the government service, so, um, tuition and school is ridiculous - I guess things haven't changed that much, but it was ridiculously pricey and there were three of us. So, I applied to scholarships, um, and schools, and I got into some-some good ones, but, at the time, three going through university at the same time, I kind of made the decision to go with a s-a-with a subject that would be, like a, just a guarantee of getting a job. So, I-I kept those interests still there, but then I moved over to finance where I specialized, um, through my undergrad.

AT: Oh, okay. Is that what you did for Schlumberger?

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DW: Yeah, I did accounting finance and, um, my first internship ever was Enron. Um, so I was a summer analyst or-an analyst for one year for... um, in 2001, and then-and then I moved over to Schlumberger. Yeah.

AT: Okay, um, so, um, how old were you when you were g-had the summer internship?

DW: I was... I was like sophomore. So, I was twenty? Yeah.

AT: And then you graduated from what university?

DW: Uh, University of Houston.

AT: Oh, okay. So, you went to Schlumberger where you were-what exactly?

DW: Uh, I worked as an accounting supervisor, and then an accounting manager, and then, uh, I moved over to a company at-in Houston called FMC Technologies.

AT: Oh, okay.

DW: Yeah.

AT: Um, is that, um, your current, uh, work?

DW: No, so, um, i-it gets in the scheme of it. I did like, uh, FMC for about ten years and then I moved recently over to a company called General Electric, for the energy connections division.

AT: Oh, okay.

DW: Yeah.

AT: Uh, do you find that it sort of brings in your interest in the politics and the history?

DW: Yeah... I think you know, back - I mean, I would say really gradual, and even the culture shift with corporations, in our generation coming from school, you have to understand like it was prestigious to get into s-a company and work for the man a-and do all of that. So, nowadays, like for the new generation it's like the sky's the limit. You don't need to go to school to have a job. Like, it's a huge disparity. And, for me, the interests, I, I did a big shift from accounting moving to, like, marketing, which is more creative. And it happened in-it happened towards the end of my career in FMC. So, yeah, I find especially in GE where eighty percent of the revenue of the company is from overseas-

AT: Mhmm.

DW: It's been... it's been very interesting, yeah.

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AT: Yeah... um, let's see. Um, you also indicated on your consent form that you have a masters?

DW: Yeah!

AT: What in?

DW: Oh, so it's in international finance.

AT: Oh, I see! Okay, yeah, and you got that from U of H as well?

DW: No, it was from University of St. Thomas.

AT: Oh, Saint Thomas. And, um, what made you decide to, to get it?

DW: Um, so I wanted, I wanted to better myself and go to the next level of education and I was actually debating between, like, doing, um, a masters in English or something like that, or-or still with my interests, and I-maybe I've been a little bit lazy when I think about it, but finance came easy to me and math and s-that stuff actually came easy. So, the international aspect, wh-which is my interest, m-marrying it with the finance which came easy, I felt like it's a good fit and, uh, at the time at FMC, uh,b basically to get promoted and stuff you have to go for your masters. And I was like, yeah, I'm not going to pay for it. [laughs] I'm just not gonna. So, then they-they also just paid for my education which was good.

AT: Oh, oh okay. Um, also, uh, how do you spell Schlumberger?

DW: Schlumberger? S-c-h-l-u-m-b-e-r-g-e-r.

AT: Okay... Okay. Um. Let's see. Um, you initially moved to Ohio when you came to the United States, right?

DW: That's right.

AT: Uh, what, uh, where exactly in Ohio?

DW: So, I was in a town called Wooster, Ohio. Um, so in Zambia when I was doing the entrance exams for all the schools and stuff, uh, liberal arts colleges at the time, and I think they still do it, they target worldWide international schools.

AT: Mhmm.

DW: And they give about a stipend of fifty to seventy five percent on scholarship and merit.

AT: Wow.

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DW: So, when I wrote the entrance exam for Wooster, it was like a five-hour scholarship program whatever, and then I-when I got in I talked to my-my advisor at the time in, in Lusaka, in Zambia and she said, I think it's better that you go to a small town versus an overwhelmingly big city in the US. And she was *wrong* [laughs] she was so wrong. So, I did one year of that, and yeah, I was like I need to go to big-a big city. Yeah. [laughs].

AT: Um, what was the name of the liberal arts sch-school?

DW: Yeah, it's called the College of Wooster.

AT: Oh, okay. Um, and so you decided - how did you decide on U of H?

DW: Um, so my parents - they were at the time still in Zambia, and I came - I was the first one to come to the states and then my-my m-my parents, my mom and dad got posted to Zam-to Houston. Um, as my dad was a consul general, and then I came over a year later. Um, just in terms of expense, yeah, i-it really, I felt I was burdening my parents.

AT: Mmm.

DW: It was just too much all happening [AT coughs] at the same time. So, I wanted to also come and live with them and my, m-my mom was also having health issues that I wanted to be closer to her. So i-it just, it just fit.

AT: Mhmm. Yeah. Um, so what is your - what do your parents currently do?

DW: So, actually, my dad is retired. Um, he sits I think on the, uh, as a board member for like a chemical company? From what I understand. So, he might, uh, go to, like, um, one meeting every three to four months, but it's-it's not too difficult. And, um, yeah, my mom is l-happy back in Delhi with her, with her siblings. Yeah. They come to visit once a year.

AT: Oh, okay. Um, and is your dad still here in-n Houston?

DW: No, he's, uh, he's in, um, in India now.

AT: Oh, okay. Okay. Um, do you visit them much? Do you do much traveling now or...

DW: Yeah, no I actually do, like with my little guy we still try to visit my fam-my husband's family in France and then my parents in India. So, we-we'll see them once a year as well.

AT: Yeah. Um, so, if you don't mind us going back again,

DW: Sure.

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AT: A little bit. Um... uh... wh-so your parents, um, met a lot of really important people, I'm sure, during their work, including Mother Theresa. How did that happen?

DW: Um, I mean it was... you know, it-it's not even hosting. Being a diplomat, you are basically being a good wi-you are being the best representation of your country overseas. So, whether that means exchanging or improving culturally or business wise or economically for your country, it is trying to marry the two countries.

AT: Mhmm.

DW: The one that you represent and then the one-the country that you're in. And I found dad to be charismatic. Like he was an actor. When I saw my father go overseas, he was an actor. So, he really chased after trying to make relationships.

AT: Mhmm.

DW: And then when he finished work, he was, it was on his downtime.

AT: Mhmm.

DW: And like with Mother Theresa and stuff, it-it-I felt it happened organically that he wanted to have the same types of homes that were in Calcutta-

AT: Mhmm.

DW: in Cambodia.

AT: Mhmm.

DW: So, she was trying to establish charitable homes all throughout. And having the Indian ambassador represented, um, in Cambodia was a big plus.

AT: Right.

DW: So yeah. That's what wound up happening with... either business people and, it's funny 'cause I know in life it depends on who you're impressed by. My parents were never impressed, well I'll say who they were impressed by [laughs]. They, they often congregated towards people of educated, um, backgrounds? Or, people who, who were survivors from war-torn type, um, events, and I remember having, like, writers and authors as well at our house. And so that's, that's what I remember, yeah, my dad's parties.

AT: Did, um, growing up as a diplomat's kid did you have to go to a lot of the sort of formal events?

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DW: Oh yeah, oh my god. That's crazy. I don't remember a weekend that my parents were at home. And, it was ok, because we don't know any different, so we had our sitter or our nanny at the time, three kids, and then, as we got older, it was, you just have to, you really have to represent, and in some cases, if they're doing something, they would make us, have to represent the, um, the consul or the high commission. Like I remember, in, in England at the time, it was my first job ever, um, there was a big like children's program or something, and we were representing the India house, and, uh, it was Princess Diana of course and all the royals, so, having the opportunity to meet Diana before she passed was, I think it was kind of...

AT: Right.

DW: It's like, it's legendary so...

AT: [laughs]

DW: [laughs] That's cool.

AT: Yeah. Do you remember meeting her very well?

DW: I do... um, I remember meeting her, I, um, what you see of course, her being shy, she was very like, she... she really hated the spotlight but when she was around the little children and she was shaking hands, she was hugging everyone, and I was, that was kind of shocking. And... before that, um, around the time, my first job was in a place called Harrids, and Harrids is like, I guess like the Barneys or Sacs of, of London. So, within the first week I remember, um, Prince William and Harry going through with their body guards, and, uh, it, it you know, it was kind of crazy cause, there's like thirteen-year-olds, and I'm a fourteen-year-old, um, working there, but that, I think those opportunities, I wouldn't have had if, yeah, my parents had been, hadn't traveled and, and, and so. It was fun.

AT: Yeah. Um... what was there a lot of pressure to act a certain way whenever, you were, kind of performing like diplomatic kid duties?

DW: Oh yeah...oh my gosh.

AT: [laughs]

DW: It's, uh, I mean I think we understand the diff-, the filter and it's just being courteous? But, I would say to be a diplomat's child, you have to be politically aware. It's almost the basis. You have to be able to hold your own ground because if they sit you at a table, you do have to know how to carry a conversation with any and everyone, even if the person doesn't speak a word of English.

AT: Right.

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DW: Um, you have to find out a way, so... there's a lot of expectations, but I will also say like my brother chose to completely not live by any of that. And he did not attend any of the functions, and my sister and I, we just enjoyed it, so we were ok with it.

AT: Yeah, and did your parents kind of not mind that your brother didn't - had no interest?

DW: I think they pref-, they were almost with the mindset, at least there's three of us, if two represent, it's better that he doesn't make a commotion-

AT: Mmm.

DW: -or a problem, then not being there. So, the joke is when we - when those same friends see my parents they're like "we didn't even know you had a son!" For four years we just never saw him so.

AT: Yeah.

DW: Yeah.

AT: Mmm. Ok... um, you also mentioned earlier that you have Tibetan ancestry but-

DW: Yeah.

AT: -that your parents are obvi-obviously from India. Um, so, were they immigrants, or were their families just back?

DW: No, I, from what I understand it was almost three to four generations

AT: Oh wow.

DW: Um, and, uh, yeah, cause it - at the time of course there were no borders, so people did migrate from the northeast very easily through China-

AT: Mhmm.

DW: -Tibet, and then to India, and there's a large Tibetan-Nepalese community, of course, in India. So, um, I would say, pro-maybe it's similar to, to Americans. You feel Indian first, but it's what is your heritage in you, and then you feel very close ties to being Tibetan.

AT: Right, yeah. Um, so were you raised with any specific sort of, Tibetan, uh, customs?

DW: Yeah, um, so, it's, it's little things like for New Years, uh, like we have, uh, uh, a New Year's it, on the lunar calendar, so it's very similar to Chinese New Year?

AT: Mhmm.

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DW: It's pretty much sometimes the same day and it's called Losar, so we always visit the temple, we go for celebration, and even on the western New Years on January 1st, we always go to temple. Um, we, my parents whenever practicing Buddhists, they were very spiritual though, so we went to the five, um, cities, that are very important for Buddhists. Like where Lord Buddha got his, um, enlightenment and, and, so, where he was born, and then finally where he passed.

AT: Mhmm.

DW: So, we've done a lot of, um, visiting of temples, and, and, uh, monasteries as well.

AT: Mmm. Was there... I don't know the, um, political climate towards Tibetans, but was there ever any, like, discrimination?

DW: Oh yeah... Oh yeah. Um, not against necessarily Tibets because Tibetans if you, if you might, um, understand... We're, we, uh, it's a peaceful group, and it's small, um, it's a small number and because Hinduism being ninety percent of the population of India, and Buddhism are so closely tied, there was never any issue with Tibetans per say but-

AT: Mhmm .

DW: -because we look different, and there were attacks in the 60s aga- by the Chinese, to India. So, if anyone looked, Southeast Asian backgrounds, I mean, our, my mom told me that they would have, signs on their cars if people, hordes of people, were coming to try to attack or break into the windshields, you know we're Indian, we're not Chinese.

AT: Oh.

DW: It, uh, yea. And, like India... it's interesting cause everyone, I think, I feel, it's, uh, good melting pot of living in harmony. And, they're very clear, like affirmative action, is set in stone in India. So, for the college systems, it's called either tribes of people from, from tribal backgrounds, or castes, have a solid quota.

AT: Mmm.

DW: That, uh, it's just guaranteed.

AT: Oh right.

DW: And, uh, yeah. It's, I, I do think it's important, I mean they've pushed that even more so, with the government today.

AT: Mhmm. Um, do you think that, um, these sort of negative feelings towards, like, Chinese or anyone who looks-

DW: Yeah.

AT: Um, East Asian, do you think that these, um, attitudes still exist today?

DW: I think so. If I had talked to my parents, they will say no.

AT: Mmm.

DW: But if you ask our generation, like I, but I, you know I think... you might not understand like, growing up now, we - there is a lot more demand for your right.

AT: Mmm.

DW: And what is your right in the first place, and, and then, and then ever existed before.

AT: Mmm.

DW: So, I think the youth of today are demanding their rights stronger than has ever taken place.

AT: Right.

DW: So, like when you hear of his holiness, the Dalai Lama, and of course, Buddhism, and, spirituality being peaceful, it's very important but, the younger generation are impatient. And they're saying if it's not going to be given to us, we'll find a way to take it. And so, I think, with that discourse happening in India, with, with all the feminists, you know, pro-women push that has taken place, from a top-stand government approach, from the people, like, the country's just, it's so exciting to see where this 1.2 billion people are gonna go.

AT: Mmm. Ok, thank you. Um.

DW: Yeah.

AT: Did you, in your childhood, have to face any, sort of discrimination, um-

DW: Oh my god. It was all the time [laughing].

AT: Really.

DW: Really, yeah. Um, sorry, what was your, do you wanna-

AT: Um.

DW: -finish the question? Before I jump in.

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AT: [Laughs]. No, um, I guess in each of the places, I mean obviously it's in different social backgrounds-

DW: Sure.

AT: - different environment. But how did discrimination play in at each place?

DW: Sure. So, probably the one place I didn't feel it was Hong Kong. Um, [laughs], but, uh, I would say in, in, in Delhi, I was still young, and I mean, you know, if they're saying... hateful words, they would say it, um. My - I will give my mom the credit. She really told us, they do not get away with it, so the moment they say it, you have to do something about it. And she, always demonstrated to do something about it. So, we were pretty quick to do it. I think the shock to me was London, cause you're like ok, I don't understand, you're a minority, if you're a, um, black British... and you're discriminating against Indians, or other races, it's, it's strange. And, I mean I was...it, it, I think it's one, kids being cruel, they'll be cruel worldwide at any age. They'll find a reason to. And if they can't find something, they'll pick on race. And, so in London for the first year, when I say it was difficult, it was difficult because I was Asian.

AT: Really.

DW: Yeah, it, for sure. And, um, it was antagonistic... one being an outsider, and then two looking different, and, you realize how to get around that pretty fast. Um, in Zambia, being a minority, I think, really it was, "oh you don't speak Chinese", but I, I, I will tell you Anna, to me, the biggest shock, is in a multicultural city like Houston, or the states, feeling it.

AT: Mhmm.

DW: And... in present day, that's the type of stuff. Like, I think maybe it must've been three years ago, I was in my office and some, some officer of the company was walking around, and he was like, "Oh, I need someone who speaks Chinese. Do you speak Chinese?" and then I'm like "No! Cause I'm not Chinese!", and he's like "Why don't you speak Chinese?", and I was like "Don't, why don't you speak Chinese?! A billion people speak it!".

AT: [laughs].

DW: I mean, yeah, and, uh, I think people, yeah, it's just all those types of situations I can think of. And it's happened in New York, its happened in Chicago... it is not small town-

AT: Mmm.

DW: -you know, what you would think. So, when I came to the U.S., and this is any immigrant worldwide, you think of U.S. and you think of New York, the Statue of Liberty, the Golden Gate Bridge.

AT: Mhmm.

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DW: Think of super big cities, and you don't realize this... middle America and this disparity of big cities versus rural, living.

AT: Mhmm.

DW: So, that was, the biggest culture shock ever.

AT: Yeah.

DW: Yeah.

AT: Yeah. Um, so what would the kids in London say or do exactly.

DW: Yeah, so, I mean, they would, they would tease about the eyes, "can you see properly", yea and this is a fun one, and they would say... you know "chink, gook, and they, all of those types of words would always, um, come out. It was, "why is your skin so yellow, yeah are you not getting..." yeah and so it's, those type of hateful things were always said, but it was, when you... when I think back, it's almost a test to see how much can you take, before you break. And... I have a mixed-race child. And, you know the situation in the world today, especially in the states, like between, um, talking about privileged societies, and privileged cultures right now. You don't have to look too far to see that it's, it's happening still of course, very strong today. And I tell my husband, who thinks I'm dreaming all of this up in my head, um, and he's like "it doesn't exist in Houston". I'm like "you won't know it, because, you're not Asian, but you will experience it when your child experiences it." And he will experience it. And you have to be ready, when he experiences that, cause, yeah. Yeah.

AT: Mhmm.

DW: So, it's, it's interesting, yeah. Um, it's interesting. That's it I think.

AT: Yeah. Um, let's see. So, your husband is white?

DW: Yes.

AT: Is that right?

DW: Uh huh.

AT: So, your, your child is four.

DW: He is four.

AT: Okay, um, have you... has he... have you had to deal with anything as a parent, regarding like any kind of discrimination towards, um, your child yet, or...

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DW: No, he will, you know it's funny, it's not, it's not even about discrimination, it's maybe about stereotypes just in general.

AT: Mhmm.

DW: Like he will say, "Oh, I wanna be friends with this girl, but she doesn't have blond hair, so, you know, she, she's not like my, she's not like a Barbie, she's, she's, she's not worth knowing. And I can see that the kids, I don't know if they're bringing it from the homes, I think they're bringing it from the homes.

AT: Mmm.

DW: Cause... they will say things that are, it's just upsetting. Our next-door neighbor plays with our son all the time, and she also said, you know, "I can't, can I marry a black boy?" And she's five. And I'm like, the fact that you're questioning, can you, as it is no one should be marrying anyone or talking about marriage at four or five years old, it's shocking, but the fact that you think you have to ask for this race, versus any other race, is what shocks me. And, the mom of course is embarrassed and stuff, but I'm like, "you understand we send them to schools where you don't see those people". So, they don't know any different, because, the standard, when we were growing up in Disney films and schools, is everyone looks, one way. So, they're gonna think that, cause we all, we all, everyone is, is one... certain class.

AT: Yeah.

DW: So...

AT: Yeah.

DW: Yeah...yeah... it's crazy... it's crazy.

AT: Um, how has your, experience, in Houston, um, been different, uh, or compared to every other place you've lived in?

DW: Sure, um, so Houston I think it's you know, like, I was just driving here, and, it's been the longest I've ever stayed in a place. I feel... its diversity, with pockets of diversity showcased. And you get like a Hurricane Harvey, or right now with the Astros and the Dodgers and World Series, the city comes together. But it takes a catastrophic event for the city to come together. And that is how I've felt. I think, we acknowledge each other's' existence without really understanding each other's' existence as a city.

AT: Mmm.

DW: Or maybe as a community. Um, I do think this next generation of like, your age and younger, are gonna change that drastically. And, it's - I think it's a good time to be alive right now. Like, it's, I look at my son, and I know there's other issues going on, but I'm like it's a great time to be young-

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AT: Yeah.

DW: -and to be alive. Yeah.

AT: Yeah.

DW: Yeah [laughs].

AT: [laughs] Could you expand on that a little bit more?

DW: Um, yeah sure, it's, I think, you know it's just... like so you saw Harvey, and, and, I'm sure, were you guys around for Katrina, but like, so, we've seen a lot of natural disasters, and Harvey the way our city, th-there's many reasons, but I, I'm a big believer, Harvey, at the essence did not have too many casualties because of social media as well.

AT: Mhmm.

DW: And this connectivity of people and assets, and the internet of things and all of that, but this connectivity of people worldWide has never been so prominent as it is now. And I think, a child growing up in like rural Madagascar has the same opportunity to get into... a program or not, as a person in upstate New York. And, even if they don't get into schools that previously was a pyramid scheme of, what happens in life, you have people who are able to make livelihoods from social media, from, from platforms that didn't exist before, so what I say to my son, like, the school won't define you, people around you won't define you, if you want to be a pink princess today, which he wants to be, a pink princess, today, I'm like, that's cool, because society today is accepting in a way that just didn't happen before.

AT: Mhmm.

DW: Even, even five years ago it wasn't accepting. So, and it's, uh, it's a cultural phenomenon. People don't know what to do right now.

AT: Mmm.

DW: So, that's why I say it's a great time to be alive, yeah, and young.

AT: Mmm. Um, let's see. Um... have you sort of brought in, I guess because your background is such, uh, a sort of quilt of different cultures, uh, because you've lived in so many places and, you are of course the daughter of diplomats, but how do you sort of bring in those, ties to your culture, uh, now in your daily life-

DW: Sure.

AT: -and also in raising of your son?

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DW: It's, it's funny cause you know, you don't realize your culture I think until you have a child. You can be, you can have it with your parents and everything, but, um, it's funny my husband will do it through language, so Kenzoo (?) knows French.

AT: Mhmm.

DW: I'm not so adamant about knowing Hindi, which, which I do know. But I want him to understand the roots of what has made his background from being Tibetan-Indian to now. So, in terms of food, in terms of even books, like we do the readings of like, um, the Bhagavad Gita. or the, the, the famous books for, for India. Just about all the princes and princesses, and the, the kings and, and, um, gods have existed throughout time. So, to him, they're kind of like cool, Star Wars characters, but he doesn't realize he's learn-learning about Lord Krishna or whatever it is. I also want him to open books, that there's a blue baby and a brown baby, and, you know, it, it's, it's different so I'm trying to incorporate that into our life. And I would also say that food for us, like, Indians love to eat.

AT: Mhmm.

DW: And, that's a huge part of what I want him to grow up, with is knowing the different types of cuisines. So, like we've tried to introduce him to sushi, to Indian food, to Thai food, stuff like that, so.

AT: Mmm.

DW: At least, yeah.

AT: Yeah.

DW: We do our, I think in our mind, what is our part, but, um-

AT: Mhmm.

DW: -at the end he is also American, so that's-

AT: Right.

DW: -that's important.

AT: Yeah. Um, and, uh... how do you sort of tie it into your daily life. Um, you mentioned earlier that you still go to temple I'd suppose?

DW: Yeah. Yeah so when we wake up with Kenzo, what I try to do, maybe I'm also being a little lazy, but the moment I wake up, I'll say "lets meditate" and make sure that we can count up to twenty, doing a breathing exercise, and that is how we start the day. So, I tell him, that is, I want you to be able to calm

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yourself, that you're not in a panic the moment you open your eyes. So, we'll try the one, two, three, then breath in and out. And I find it settles him better, so he's ready to go to school.

AT: Mhmm.

DW: Um, from a day to day life, we'll talk about our backgrounds quite a bit, but I also want him to know-

AT: [coughs].

DW: -he's not quite unusual like the other kids. Like, for example, I send him to, just a Montessori program, but I'll send him, you know, Indian food, and it can look interesting, I'll put it this way, it's probably not meatloaf or a sandwich. And, so, he asked me the other day, "Can I just have a sandwich?" And I was like, "No, you will eat the food I'm giving you," cause it's probably healthier, and... once he goes to college, and once he goes to high school, I know the cafeteria will be a certain way, so I'm trying to incorporate just making sure he likes food that we've grown up with as well.

AT: Yeah.

DW: I sound so crazy, I feel like I sound pretty crazy about that but-

AT: No!

DW: -but food is important.

AT: It makes sense. Yeah! No, of course. Um, you also mentioned earlier that like, your mom would, would cook you your favorite foods and, like, feed you by hand too.

DW: Yeah.

AT: Right. What exactly is your, your, your favorite food? Is it Indian or Tibetan, or both?

DW: No. You know it's, uh, its continued to evolve, but, at the time, I just, I mean it's just local home-cooked food. Like its lentils, and rice, and some yummy curry, and like papadongs (?), and stuff-

AT: Mmm.

DW: -like that. So, I remember coming home famished and three plates and her just, so much love, we didn't know what to with all that, affection, so...

AT: Yeah.

DW: Yeah, that was, that was fun.

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AT: Are your parents, um, I know that they live in India, but are they very involved as well in, in raising your, um, son and also in your daily life?

DW: You know, I think, and I will say this wisely, my mom - so, in my in-law's case they have taken a very active role in my child, and the grand kids. I would say my parents have deliberately chosen not to take an active role, not for lack of interest. My mom said it six months ago, "You guys are the adults now and you need to find your way with your family"-

AT: Mhmm.

DW: -"it is not for us to navigate." And I respected that she actually said, like, you guys run the house now, and you need to, but if you need help, we'll always be there.

AT: Right.

DW: So, they're active in the sense they will send over information, they will ask to see, we will do Facetime. But are they trying to pivot us to where our life should be? No.

AT: Mhmm.

DW: And I think, it makes me sad to have my fam-my parents overseas when all three children are in the same city.

AT: Mhmm.

DW: And we have often debated if there were to relocate-

AT: Mhmm.

DW: -it's not difficult to come here-

AT: Mhmm.

DW: -and settle here immediately. One, being ex-diplomats, you get, you get citizenship pretty fast.

AT: Mhmm.

DW: But, they have zero interest.

AT: Mhmm.

DW: And I would say number one, my dad is very proud to be Indian.

AT: Mmm.

DW: I think it would kill to give up his passport.

AT: Right.

DW: It is my personal opinion. And then number two is I think my mom has felt, because she had interesting in-laws, but she has felt, to be... too close to the kids will finish them-

AT: Mmm.

DW: -in the long term. It will, it will be detrimental to the marriage, it'll be detrimental to the kids and the growing up.

AT: Mhmm.

DW: So, I, I am appreciative of what they've done, but I miss them every day.

AT: Mmm.

DW: Of course. Of course...

AT: Um, uh, did you ever have any problems, um, immigrating to the states? I know that's a big, like, current topic of conversation-

DW: Sure, sure.

AT: -cause how difficult-

DW: Oh my god.

AT: -should it be for immigrants to, uh, to get visas and green cards and citizenship?

DW: Sure.

AT: But, I suppose as a, as the daughter of, of, um, diplomats was it difficult for you at all?

DW: Sure.

AT: Uh, in immigrating here?

DW: Uh, we will go long into this story. So, in the 80s, up until about the late 80s, it was fairly easy what is classified as easy. Um, if you got into your undergrad... you get a job, within six months you get your green card, within one year you get your citizenship.

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AT: Mmm.

DW: And, at the time for me, coming overseas. and I had a diplomatic passport, you're right, no problem. Then 9/11 happened.

AT: Right.

DW: And 9/11 was the shift. I'm just, I-I don't think people understand, 9/11 was the shift about how... coming into the country changed everything, and, um, for us it wasn't too difficult, but we're - when my parents retired, you get your Indian passport, and having an Indian passport does take longer than, a European passport. So, for us I think it maybe took seven or eight years which is pretty long. Um... and now it has become basically impossible. It is just impossible.

AT: Mhmm.

DW: Um, unless you come at a senior executive level, into the country, I would say even through education now, come - at the time in Houston, Enron, all the energy companies did visas without question. They just closed their eyes and did, everyone did it-

AT: Mhmm.

DW: -and now you look and it-it's just one after another will not do it.

AT: Mhmm.

DW: And it's not that they don't want to do it, they want to. They're not willing to go out, cause what winds up happening is the quotas got smaller. So, in our year, and I might be off so please forgive me but it's just a ratio to understand, in 2001 it was like a 250,000 open visas, now it's like eighty, and then it went to forty. So, you're competing, even if your company says I'll sponsor you, you're competing with so many people.

AT: Mhmm.

DW: My husband's company for example, they sponsor, um, two interns every year. The interns are quite often denied.

AT: Really?

DW: Yeah. Even though they're willing to do the paper work, they've paid the legal fees, they're, they're denied because, they're fighting with one out of, what, maybe a hundred people for one spot.

AT: Mmm. Right.

DW: So, yeah.

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AT: Yeah. Um, but it would still, if your, if your parents would decide to come over-

DW: Yeah.

AT: -because they were senior executives, they would be able to?

DW: I think, I mean, yeah. It - through, uh, green card, through dependent, um, and then I know the diplomatic, uh, passport...at wh-when he retired, the offer was there, to come back and, uh... yeah. I-I respect him, but he said no.

AT: Hmm.

DW: Thank you, but no thank you.

AT: Um, you also mentioned that you're involved with the, um, I-I can't remember exactly what it's called but it's the Indo Chamber-

DW: Yeah.

AT: -of Commerce?

DW: Yeah.

AT: Could you, um, tell us a little about your involvement there?

DW: Sure. Um, so, the chamber started in 2002, I think it actually started with my dad and some of his friends for the Indian community, and, what they have tried to do, in the beginning, was small business, um, expansion of Southeast Asian and South Asian people in town.

AT: Mhmm.

DW: And it's kind of taken a form of itself that the chamber has now become laced with kind of the political parties in town. And, they also do like showcasing of, like, female leaders who are minorities, or you know, um, South Asian leaders in kind of the oil and gas, or industrial sectors. So, um, it's been, I-I work at GE, so working with the Indo Chamber has been a perfect, uh, opportunity to bring in guest speakers from both sides.

AT: Mhmm.

DW: So, we'll represent, most show some representation from GE, to the Chamber, to have events, and then they will in turn be able to maybe get us, like, the mayor, to come to our campus an-and give a talk.

AT: Mmm.

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DW: Which has been, incredible.

AT: Yeah. Um, and with your job at GE, what exactly are your sort of responsibilities?

DW: Sure. So right now, I'm doing product marketing for a business called automation and controls. Um, we make control un-units for basically, all industrial type assets like, turbo machines, um, for airplanes, for oil and gas equipment.

AT: Mhmm.

DW: And, um, like, ten years ago, you were selling stuff that was hardware, and now, like, everyone's moved to software services, as a sale, so-

AT: Mhmm.

DW: -that's, it's a whole business model change.

AT: Yeah.

DW: Yeah.

AT: Um, let's see... um, are there other parts of your experience in your life, or maybe even just your parents' experience that we haven't had the ability to touch on life yet.

DW: No, I-I mean, you know it's, I think the questions that you are asking have been incredible, because it's, I've not, asked myself that. I would say if - just like any person's perspective, it's unique, so mine is different from than what my sister went through, to what my brother did, but, um, I think, first generation immigrants are interesting, cause, uh, you don't feel like you belong in the one country - I'm twenty years here. You don't really feel like you belong here, but you will never feel like you belong there, and that is I think, what makes America also pretty neat-

AT: Mhmm.

DW: -because there's so many.

AT: Mmm.

DW: There's just so many of us. And then you get the generations through and I think... I want to touch on it, it's really like the evolution of the culture right now, you can smell it, you can feel it, you can see it. And, um, I think...y-you know, back in the day, you had to go to college and blah blah blah. It was the fixed thing. I think for my parents' generation to comprehend that we would do something of interest and actually get paid for what we love is shocking-

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AT: Mhmm.

DW: -and then, I think, as we get older we will not understand what motivates individuals like you, Kelly, or even my son.

AT: Mhmm.

DW: In twenty years, so I think it's just every, decade you see a mind shift of people and how the country's going to move. And I, and I-I that's, that's what I wanted to share I think it's, uh, I-I'm very proud of my parents, for showing us this opportunity and giving us this opportunity and, uh, hopefully we make something of ourselves for our kids as well.

AT: Mhmm. Mmm, alright.

DW: Oh, that's it.

AT: Um, do you - have you found that there is a community of, of the first-generation immigrants where, like, um, Indians or Tibetans here in Houston that you've been able to connect with?

DW: Yeah, I-I - it's interesting cause - so through the Chamber or through my parents, still have strong ties in the neighborhoods we grew in, yes. But, I would say most of my friends are probably first generation of somewhere, and they're ex-pats or they're ex-army brats or diplomat-brats or, we-I have found that, it is, uh, a melting pot of groups of friends that I have. So, I wouldn't say it's actually, probably Indian or Tibetan, but, uh, maybe like from Latin America or, um, from Europe and from Asia-

AT: Mhmm.

DW: -that they're the probably strongest groups.

AT: Um, if Kelly has any questions, um.

KD: Um, ok. I guess one question I had was earlier you mentioned that although you wanted to initially do, like, um, journalism or something-

DW: Yeah.

KD: -and you said you moved to finance, but you wanted to keep like, some aspects of journalism. How exactly did you, like, maintain that kind of hobby, or-

DW: Sure.

KD: -interest.

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DW: Um, for, for me, it was goin-it was almost on a personal level, so outside of the nine to five job, you like-you know I did a lot of screen writing, and I still pursue that today, and before it was like, oh it's a voice in your head that you just write in the evenings and now I'm, as my son gets older and I have more time for myself, I-I really wanna see if I can pursue that hobby of, of the writing aspect. I think, and you will probably experience this in college, if there's something that you love, and you decide to do something different, that voice never goes away. It really, it'll be ten years, twenty, thirty, it never goes. So, in my case I think that voice was always in the back, and I, did something that I was good at but, uh-

AT: [coughs]

DW: -it really is important. And I think why, like I'm right now taking classes at UCLA, for a professional program for writing-

AT: Mmm.

DW: -um, I-I told my husband I also want to do it to tell my son like, you need to what do what you love, and I don't get to tell you that if I didn't do that. So, yeah. That's it.

KD: Yeah, that's it.

DW: Ok.

AT: Is there anything you would've done differently, uh, if you had a chance at sort of redo anything at all?

DW: Um... the easy answer is to always say no, you know, it's, it's where you are today. I would say there's small little things, but in the big scheme of it I am very happy for the life that we have, and I think it is my personality to always try striving for perfection, but, uh, it will make you insane. So, 20- this year especially has been, be content and, um, really understand where, you know, the blessings that you have, so I would say no. At this point, I'm very happy with how, how things have turned out.

AT: Alright. Thank you so much for spending your afternoon here with us.

DW: Thanks Anna, thanks Kelly. Yeah. Yeah. Alright.