

Interview with Abul Hasan Siddiqui

Interviewed by Polly Sonifer

**Interviewed on August 22, 1994
at Dr. Siddiqui's Coon Rapids home**

PS: Thank you for inviting me. First of all, tell me a little bit about what part of India you came from.

AHS: I come from the middle part of India called Hyderabad. It's the plateau with the temperate climate. There are three distinct seasons there. One rainy season called monsoons which lasts for four months; then followed by winter which is rather mild compared with Minnesota conditions, for four months; and then we go to summer which lasts for almost three. The annual rainfall is about 32 inches and the temperature varies but in summer it can go as high as 104, 105 degrees Fahrenheit. But in winter the lowest temperature recorded in our part of the country is around 50 degrees. But India is a very vast country, extending more than 1500 miles north to south and the same distance from east to west. There is snowfall in the north and tropical climate in the south.

PS: What year were you born?

AHS: I was born in Hyderabad on July 25, 1924.

PS: Tell me a little bit about your family in Hyderabad.

AHS: We also had a trying family system there. I was brought up by my uncle. He was in the civil service, he was a man of letters and he was the secretary of labor reforms.

PS: Of which government?

AHS: Hyderabad government. Until the fall of Hyderabad in 1948 when Hyderabad was integrated into India.

PS: Was Hyderabad under British rule?

AHS: Yes. It was a native state with a local ruler. Overall it was a protectorate of the British.

PS: Do you have brothers and sisters?

AHS: Yes, I have two sisters. They are in India.

PS: When did you first start thinking about leaving India?

AHS: I had my education in India. I did my medical degree in India, from Hyderabad with medium of instruction the local language, Urdu. Can I tell you about my medical background?

PS: Sure.

AHS: So I graduated from the medical school in 1947 as a top ranker and then I went to England for the boards in internal medicine. They call it MRCP which means Member of the Royal College of Physicians. So I had the post graduate education in London and in Edinburgh, I only worked in post-graduate hospitals. After two years and four months I appeared at the boards, got through the boards, got my MRCP, and then went back to India. After graduating from medical school in India, I finished my internship, and after the internship I joined the department of medicine on the faculty for about a year in India. I got membership degree in Edinburgh, Scotland and then went back to India. I got recruited in the department of medicine again, joined the faculty and remained until October 1968. I went back from England in 1951 and then I was there on the faculty till 1968. Due to some unfortunate circumstances, I was forced to leave. So I left the job. I walked out of my job. I was not happy.

I got my boards in internal medicine in Edinburgh, Scotland and then back to India where I joined the faculty of medicine again. That was in 1951 and I worked in that capacity in that job until October 1968 and I was not happy in that job so I left. Then I was in private practice. While I was working in medical schools, while I was teaching simultaneously, I was working in the hospital, and then I was doing research work on a very rare disease called flourosis. Also, I was doing private practice. When I worked out of the hospital (and in the hospital I used to teach the subject of diagnosis and treatment). So I was in touch with the practice of medicine. When I left that place I was professor of principles and practice of medicine. Which in the United States is the equivalent of professor of internal medicine. When I was working in the hospital, I did the research work on a very rare disease called

fluorosis for about 18 years. It was published from England and the United States. And the last piece of work was published by the World Health Organization in a special monograph called Fluorides and Human Health. There were 29 contributors from all over the world.

PS: Did you find a cure?

AHS: There is no cure but at that time even clinical aspects of fluorosis were being explored. I will show you the monograph if you are interested.

PS: Sure.

AHS: This is Fluoride and Human Health. It is published by the World Health Organization in Geneva. This was prepared in consultation with 93 dental and medical specialists in various countries. There were 29 contributors and I was one of them. It was published in 1970. It's the last published work of my research work.

PS: Is that the same fluoride that people use on their teeth now?

AHS: Yes. My first paper was published in 1955 in the British Medical Journal which wrote an editorial of my article in December of 1955. And when that article was published I was invited to the United States, and there were a few more papers published later on. And then I was invited by the International Society of Fluoride Research; it's based in Detroit, Michigan. I was asked to present findings of my research work. This was the work that done by me for 18 years. This paper was read in Paris in 1962. (*referring to a research paper he was showing the interviewer.*) This is all the work that was done by me. Then I concentrated more on the neurological complications of fluorosis. Then there were only a few neurological manifestations reported exclusively from India. Somebody else commenting on my article wrote that the only authentic study was by Siddiqui, 1955.

There were also other contributions that were made. This is a reference book of Tropical Neurology it is published in Oxford, England.

PS: What exactly is fluorosis exactly?

AHS: Fluorine is one of the elements just like chlorine and iodine, and belongs to the same halogen family. This work was started in 1952 and at that time they were experimenting the addition of fluoride to water content in the United States. So fluoridation of water supplies was started in the United States and there was a lot of opposition at that time. At that time it was a burning topic. And that's when I was invited by the International Society of Fluorides to discuss my findings. If it is deposited in small amounts in the permanent teeth. In the areas where I worked in India, it was present in huge amounts. It gets deposited in the bones and then bones will have projections coming out. The bumps come out and they start exerting pressure on the spinal cord. If enough are coming out of the spinal canal, they cause neurological damage.

PS: So a little fluoride is good but a lot is bad?

AHS: Yes, a lot is really bad.

PS: And there are places in India where too much fluoride is naturally occurring?

AHS: In the drinking water, in the wells. But this is now being de-fluoridated in small areas because I presented to the government how the fluoride could be removed. And now I understand after I left India, they look at the population where I worked, is now getting fluoride-free water; not only the human beings but also the animals are affected. The bulls are used for cultivation purposes there because they did not have the tractors there like in the United States, but in the villages the bulls are used to run the plows. They used to get crippled in three years and it was a great financial loss. Now they are having their fluoride-free water and the animals are not being lost at the same rate. One unfortunate thing is, once the fluoride gets deposited into the bones, nothing can take it out. So it is going to stay for the rest of their lives.

PS: Do people die from the neurological damage?

AHS: They become crippled over a period of years. They may die of complications like restrictions movements of the chest leading to respiratory problems, paralysis of the lower limbs (called paraplegia), or they get bladder involvement and those things. Gradually they get crippled over a period of years, say 25 or 30 years.

PS: It's a good thing to find a way to stop it. How did you actually come to the United States?

AHS: I told you I wasn't happy with my work. So I decided to leave the country. I belonged to the minority community there, the Muslim community which constituted about 13 percent of the population. The majority could not see the minority coming up, so they started causing hindrances and bothering me. It was beyond my capacity to endure, so I cannot live there. What about the future of my children? So it was for economical reasons to find a brighter future for me and for my children. I left India in 1970. I went to Saudi Arabia. I wanted to go to the United Nations because I had worked on the World Health Organization projects. So I wanted to go to Saudi Arabia through the World Health Organization. I opted for a few more countries. But the countries they offered were not acceptable to me. Then, the government of Saudi Arabia said they'd recruit me directly but not through the World Health Organization. I worked as an internist in a very decent hospital in Saudi Arabia for a period of about three and a half years. There was not good facilities for education for my children in Saudi Arabia so I thought about going to England or the United States because I had my post-graduate qualifications from Edinburgh, Scotland. I forgot to tell you on my research on fluorosis, I was given the highest honor of the Royal College of Physicians. I was elected FRCP (Fellow Royal College of Physicians.) There is no equivalent but maybe it is similar to the FACP of the United States. My qualifications were not accepted in the United States because the college of medicine is not accredited in Britain; it is the law of the land. I had to appear for a few exams before I could come to the United States. One was the ECFMG exam which I took in Saudi Arabia. I got through the exam and then I came to the United States.

I went to England with my son and I found that things were quite since in 1972. I thought England is probably not a better place for the education of my children. I decided to come to the United States. As I was preparing for the exam, a former student of mine was working in Anoka state hospital here. It's now called Anoka Medical Regional Treatment Center, and they had an infirmary. I was ready for anything because he was not only my student but also was an intern under me in India. So, this student of mine spoke to the director of the hospital, the late Dr. Theodore Greenfield.

He said tell your professor that a job is waiting for him here. He can come and take over as the chief of the infirmary of the Anoka State Hospital. He sent me the forms and it took about nine to ten months to do the background checks. There were lots of things. My father had died long ago and my mother was my dependent and she was to come here.

I had to get the death certificate of my father. It took about nine or ten months to go through all the procedures. Then ultimately I came. We all came to the United States. We came over a weekend, landed in Chicago, I had my cousin and my aunt living there. My son also was there already getting an education. We came there first and then we came to Minnesota for the interview. And the interview was arranged on a Sunday because my student, who was a good friend of mine, could not get off on weekdays from his job at the University, so the interview was arranged on a Sunday. The Director of the hospital asked me, "Can you come and join tomorrow?" (laughter) But I told him I had worked quite hard and that I wanted some vacation. I said I would like to have three weeks, and after three weeks I came and joined the infirmary at the Anoka State Hospital. I worked there for the next 17 years. The infirmary was taken away, but I was given another unit which was comprised of the most complicated medical cases having secondary complications. The Anoka State Hospital is a teaching hospital, attached to the University of Minnesota.

PS: You work primarily with mentally ill people?

AHS: State hospital is for mentally ill and chemically dependent. I used to get all the complicated medical cases with psychiatric problems and chemical dependency. I had one year of residency in psychiatry at the VA hospital in Minneapolis. I was not on the teaching side; I took care of the medical problems.

PS: How old were you when you came?

AHS: Fifty years. And I did my residency when I was 52.

PS: What was it like adjusting to a new culture? Well, maybe you had already done that with living in other countries before.

AHS: There was no problem because I had been in England so there was no difference as far as my adjustment is concerned; kids they don't take long to adjust themselves.

But it was a big change for my mother, my aunt and my wife because they came from a different culture.

PS: Did your family go to Saudi Arabia with you?

AHS: Yes.

PS: And they were in England with you?

AHS: No, not in England.

PS: And in Scotland?

AHS: No. In Scotland I went as a post-graduate student; I was young then; I was not married.

PS: Let me summarize all your travels to see if I have them right. When you were real young you were in India; then you went to Scotland for a time after you finished medical school, then you went back to India, then you went to Saudi Arabia . . .

AHS: From Saudi I came here.

PS: You didn't stop in England to take boards or anything . . .

AHS: No. And then I worked at the Anoka State Hospital. There were a few conditions for me to get a practicing license. One was that I pass the flex exam; and then afterwards that I do residency in any branch of medicine for one year as I had decided to stay in the state hospital. Then it was better for me to do a residency in psychiatry rather than internal medicine. I knew internal medicine, as I had done that for many years. So I did the residency in psychiatry so I could understand my patients better. And everyday I used to sit with the psychiatrists and the psychiatry team to decide about the treatment of psychiatric cases with medical problems. It was mutual consultation about the medical problems and the medications were prescribed. So I know quite a bit of psychiatry because I used to be on call; I used to take the calls at home for about four or five days a month. I had to take care of the psychiatry problems at the hospital when I was on call.

PS: How did you help your family adjust once you moved here to Minnesota?

AHS: There was no problem, as far as I was concerned. But for them, yes. I came here and I went for the interview and went back to the home of my friend, picked up a newspaper, saw the listing of the rented houses, contacted somebody, saw the house, approved one, and signed the papers. The following week I came and occupied the house and then started at the hospital in another two weeks.

PS: You had to buy furniture and dishes and all those things?

AHS: Oh, yes. When we came here, on our way from Chicago to Minneapolis, we stopped at JC Penneys to buy pillows, blankets; the whole house was carpeted. We came here by car because my son had a car here. He was a student but he had a used car in very good working condition. So we came from Chicago and settled in the house, and then went to the Target store to buy all the utensils and all those things we needed. In Chicago we had ordered at Sears all the furniture we wanted, with the intention it would be delivered in Minneapolis. For about two weeks we used to sleep on the floor on the carpet. It was the height of winter. It was January. It was fine. We adjusted. We survived.

PS: It's such a shock to come in January from Saudi Arabia.

AHS: Oh, yes, yes. It was a great temperature change. From the heat of the desert, to the snow of Minnesota.

PS: Had you seen snow before?

AHS: I was in Scotland. I was in Edinburgh and London!

PS: They had snow there?

AHS: Oh, they have snow.

PS: But they have more mild winters?

AHS: Yes, they have more mild when compared with Minnesota winters!

PS: Had your family seen snow before?

AHS: My son, yes.

PS: But your wife and your aunt?

AHS: No. And my mother no.

PS: Did they like it?

AHS: They adjusted nicely. Because they said we are happy where you are. I told you we are a very closely knit family. So, whatever happens to one member, we all adjust ourselves, no problem.

PS: You settled in and stayed for 17 years.

AHS: Yes. Now you ask me, why did I choose Anoka State Hospital? I told you the job was waiting for me, number one. Although the case pay was much lower in the state hospital system and I could earn more going into private practice, joined some group or something as an internist. But I preferred to stay in the state system because I wanted a pension at the time of retirement. When I left India I did not get any pension, no gratuity, nothing of that sort. I left almost empty handed from India. I had to have something for my retirement so I took the state hospital job. Now I get my social security; I get my retirement pay.

PS: What kind of visa did you come on?

AHS: I came on an immigrant visa. All of us. All of us were legally admitted. Nobody came illegally.

PS: No, I didn't mean that. I meant that some people come on student visas.

AHS: No, my son came on a student visa. He was in Chicago. When I came in, I sponsored him. Then he got the immigrant visa subsequently.

PS: How long did it take you to become citizens after you came?

AHS: Five years. And all my nine grandchildren were born here; eight were born in the Mercy Hospital in Coon Rapids. They go to the same school now in Coon Rapids.

PS: You were quite a bit older than most of the people I've interviewed, so far, when you came here. Do you think that

was to your advantage because you had more experience in the world?

AHS: I wish I had come earlier, 25 or 30 or something like that. I had given the best part of my life to India. Not with good returns. When I left India and landed in Saudi Arabia (July 25, 1970 on my 45th birthday) with seven dollars in my pocket in my cash. When I came here, I was ready for the struggle, I could struggle once more. I knew that I had to do a residency. I'd have to do the exam, and I did without a wrinkle on my forehead, because I was prepared for it.

PS: Do it feel like a struggle settling into Saudi Arabia also? Was there a lot of cultural difference there?

AHS: No. That's not a problem because I'm a Muslim so there's no religion barrier. I was in Mecca; the main pivot where Islam was born. I had to learn Arabic which was no problem because the holy book is in Arabic which was the background of my mother tongue. I picked up Arabic in six months.

PS: Are Urdu and Arabic closely related?

AHS: Not closely but also Urdu is my mother tongue and I had my education in Urdu, even the medical school, a mixture of Persian, Arabic and some local languages. Picking up Arabic was not difficult. Within six months, I had a working knowledge of Arabic and there used to be translators there in Saudi Arabia. I knew English and Arabic and when there was a problem there were interpreters available.

PS: Did your children and your wife pick up Arabic quickly?

AHS: Yes, a little, not much.

PS: What kind of school did your children attend in Saudi Arabia?

AHS: Unfortunately, nowhere. That was the problem and why I decided to come to the United States. So I had to send my son to Chicago to high school. He attended Holy Cross High School. Now there is facilities there for education of children in English in Saudi Arabia, but in 1970, no. That was one of the main reasons I did not stay long although I

had a good job. They wanted me in the government to stay longer, but I said no. The education of my children is more important than earning a few more bucks. So I came and joined here.

PS: Such choices to make. It takes a lot of courage I think to make those kind of choices.

AHS: I learned one thing: if life is worth living some risk should be taken. And there was my own future and the future of my children.

PS: Tell me about how you married.

AHS: Yes. In the Muslim community, the Muslim culture, we can marry first cousins. My wife is my first cousin. Her mother and my mother were sisters. Both of them are now deceased. My mother was here. She died here in Coon Rapids.

PS: Did you know your wife when you were a little child?

AHS: Oh, yes. We knew each other very well. There was no period of adjustment. We were already adjusted. There were no problems. Well, thank God there were no major problems at all my life. But when I hear the stories or read in the newspaper those terrible things, I think, thank God I didn't have to go through it.

PS: Does the Muslim tradition arrange marriages?

AHS: Yes.

PS: Was yours arranged?

AHS: Oh, yes, yes. That's because my mother and my aunt talked to each other as sisters and everything was settled and we were little kids.

PS: Little, how little? How long did you know you were going to marry her?

AHS: She's seven years junior to me. Probably I was a teenager at that time when I came to know that I was going to marry her. We used to play and I used to tease her also. Oh, yes. We knew each other very well and we knew we were going to get married.

PS: How old were you when you did get married?

AHS: I was 29. I was officially engaged before I went to England at 25. I came back from England, did the boards in internal medicine, but I had to wait for two years to get to financially sound. Then I married.

PS: What was your wedding like?

AHS: It was a traditional Indian Muslim wedding.

PS: Tell me what that's like.

AHS: Oh, it's worth looking. Grandeur is there. All those golden robes and all those things. On both the man and the woman.

PS: Are there any special ceremonies?

AHS: Yes, there are ceremonies, too.

PS: How long does it take?

AHS: Ten to fifteen minutes.

PS: And then is there celebration afterwards?

AHS: Yes, there is celebration, and then she came to my house and there is no problem there.

PS: What year did you get married?

AHS: In 1953. So I have been married for 41 years now.

PS: That's a good long time. It's good that you like each other. (laughter)

AHS: We are getting closer now. Closer every day as time passes. One of the nurses in the hospital, at Anoka State Hospital, she was going to get married. She was engaged to her childhood sweetheart. She asked me how long I had been married. So I told her the number of years. She asked me, "With the same person?" (laughter!) And I said, "Well, we don't treat our spouse as a piece of real estate to keep until another comes along. The commitment is final until death does us part. "

PS: Some of the other people I have interviewed said in their tradition love follows marriage, that you don't necessarily love each other before you marry. Is that your belief?

AHS: We knew each other so well . . .

PS: Well, there are people I know real well that I don't love.

AHS: No, no . . . both of us we loved each other.

PS: So it was just a good marriage?

AHS: Unless some others used to tease her, she'd get a little embarrassed . . . I said "I am nicely tied. That is it."

PS: Tell me how your kids came along.

AHS: I was married in 1951 and in 1955 my first son was born.

PS: And his name is?

AHS: Mustafa. He went to Holy Cross in Chicago and when I came here, he came here (to Minnesota) then he joined the community college at the University of Minnesota. Then he graduated in computer science but they didn't have computer science at the University in those days, so he had to go to St. Cloud. At the present time he is the project manager of Norwest Technical Services. He works in Norwest Bank. My youngest son graduated from Coon Rapids High School, then the University of Minnesota. He is now the controller of Minnesota Technology. He's taking his post graduate course. He goes to the college even now part-time.

PS: And what is his name?

AHS: Murtuza.

PS: And your daughter?

AHS: My daughter's name is Fouzia. She is exactly one year younger than my oldest son. She was married in 1977 and she lives in Washington D.C. Her husband is an M.B. from

Harvard. He is also a distant relative of ours. He's my first cousin's son. He has his master's degree in economics and an MBA from Harvard. He works at the airlines. At that time my daughter was married, they went to Paris for three years. When they came back they were in Chicago all these years. A year ago they were transferred to Washington, D.C.

PS: Do you get to see them very much?

AHS: Oh, yes, they come to me four times a year and I go there once a year. I've made my summer trip already. My sons go there more frequently. They drive. I don't.

PS: That's a long drive.

AHS: They don't mind the driving. Even sitting by the side, no. Because I have some arthritis and two surgeries on my back and surgeries on both knees. I can't sit. I can't drive my car. and that is a problem. I can't sit in one place for a long time and I can't drive long distances.

PS: How old were your children when you moved to Saudi Arabia with them?

AHS: Let me think for a minute. My son was fifteen and my daughter was fourteen. My youngest son was born in 1960 so he was 10.

PS: I imagine that going from a Muslim tradition to a Muslim country that child-rearing practices were similar?

AHS: Oh, yes.

PS: How was it coming here? Did you notice the difference in child-rearing practices, like the kids your children started hanging out with, were they different?

AHS: No, they made American friends really quickly in the whole community and the neighborhood.

PS: But did they have different rules about what you called your parents and how you acted at home and all those kind of things.

AHS: Oh, yes.

PS: What struck you the most about that?

AHS: Discipline and everything. Discipline was there and strictly followed in my house.

PS: So if you say something, the children do it?

AHS: Yes. And we listen to them. It's not a dictatorship. We listen to them. They listen to us. It's a give and take. But there are rules.

PS: Was it sometimes hard for your children to understand?

AHS: No, there was no problem because we eat together, we live together, we talk to each other.

PS: But when they first came, I imagine the culture shock for children.

AHS: They got adjusted in no time. My mother and aunt, it was very difficult for them. It was a cultural shock. But for my children, they adjusted in no time. They would go to school and come back and in the neighborhood they'd become friendly.

PS: How did you help your mother and your aunt adjust? Did they learn to speak English?

AHS: Not my mother. But my aunt, yes. She can understand English.

PS: Is she still living?

AHS: Oh, yes. She is still here. She had surgery on her spine last month so she's recovered from that. She stays here.

PS: She must be very old by now.

AHS: She is 76.

PS: Did you notice any changes in the way you divided household tasks once you were living here in the United States?

AHS: We adjusted ourselves. We do have our works assigned. I am very fond of grocery shopping. I love it. (laughter) Even when the kids were there they didn't like grocery

shopping. My wife and I went there. I love grocery shopping. But I do not plow snow and I do not mow the lawn. The kids used to do it. They were their assigned duties. And even now I do the grocery shopping. I very much enjoy.

PS: Do you cook?

AHS: No, I don't cook. My wife is a very good cook. So we don't eat outside. My aunt is a good cook. My late mother was a good cook. And my daughters-in-law, both of whom live here, and they are good cooks. We don't eat outside. Ours is a big family and eating outside twice a week, we can't afford.

PS: Did your wife ever work outside the home?

AHS: No.

PS: And she liked it that way?

AHS: Yes, she liked it. And bringing up the children was the great responsibility and she did that job very well and taking care of the house. My son was married fifteen years ago and the youngest son was married for ten years. Before that time my mother, my aunt, my wife cooked and had to do everything.

PS: It is a big job.

AHS: But now, not when it is divided. My elder daughter-in-law she works in the bank full-time, and my younger one has a two-year-old she still goes to the evening classes for accounting or something. My youngest son is also in accounting, so probably would like to start his own business. My youngest son is working on an MBA.

PS: How did your children find their spouses? Did you help arrange it?

AHS: Yes. They also are distant relatives of my family. The marriage of my daughter was arranged. My son-in-law happens to be the son of my first cousin.

PS: Did he come from India?

AHS: He was in Pakistan. From Pakistan he got his master's in economics. Then they married. He was over there in

Paris at the time they got married. So he came over here and got married. So they got settled.

PS: So your daughter probably didn't have a chance to get to know him before they got married?

AHS: No. Not much. But they knew the family. They had seen each other. They knew each other to a certain extent, but not much.

PS: But not the same way you and your wife knew each other having grown up around each other?

AHS: No. And my youngest son also; my other daughter-in-law also happens to be a distant relative of mine. My wife and parents on the other side, they communicated. They had all just come here for the wedding of my daughter, so my son had seen his would-be spouse. So he okayed. And that was arranged.

PS: So your daughter got married before your older son?

AHS: Yes.

PS: Is that unusual?

AHS: No. Because my son was still in college. I wanted to marry my children when they were still young. My eldest son was hardly 23 when he got married and my daughter was 22 when she got married (or maybe even younger). And my youngest son turned 22 on his birthday, and the following day he was married. So we went to the wedding of our son to Karachi, Pakistan where he spotted this lady, his would-be-wife and she happened to be a relative ours, the one you saw just now. He okayed. A mutual okay was obtained on both sides and then the wedding was arranged. So we went to Pakistan for the wedding because the wedding always takes place at the place of the bride. My daughter's wedding was conducted here in Minneapolis, then we had to go to Karachi for both weddings of our sons.

PS: I'm just curious how it was with your children marrying somebody who had grown up in a different country. But your children grew up a great deal of the time in India as well. And they knew the Indian culture really well, too.

AHS: There was no problem.

PS: And they are all happy?

AHS: Of course!

PS: That's great! (laughter)

AHS: In the Muslim religion, in Islam, divorce is permitted but it is the least desired; it is permitted but it is disliked.

PS: So people don't do it?

AHS: No.

PS: Do you use astrology charts to match at all like the Hindus do?

AHS: No, no.

PS: So the Muslim tradition doesn't believe in that at all?

AHS: No, no. Every day is auspicious, so it makes no difference. But there are certain months where we do not get married, because in Moharam it is regarded as a month of mourning when the grandson of the prophet was killed.

PS: What month was that?

AHS: The first starting month of the lunar calendar.

PS: Does it correspond to any American month?

AHS: No. There is a difference of eleven days between the AD calendar and our calendar. So it keeps changing. Once I told my colleagues, I celebrate the birthdays of my children twice a year. And they were, "how, how is it possible?" We go by the AD calendar and by the lunar calendar both!

PS: They've gotten very old by now with celebrating two birthdays every year! Right?

AHS: (laughter) They are used to it. We still do it here at home.

PS: You came here in 1974?

AHS: I came here in January of 1974.

PS: Were there any Muslim associations going at the time?

AHS: There was one Islamic Center here. That was the only place. That's it. An Islamic Center--- you know Islam is a universal religion, Egyptians, Syrians, Pakistanis, Indians, Indonesians, Iraqi, Iranians, everyone. They come there so it is a multi-cultural place where the common thing is that they are Muslims. So when we go to the Islam Center for prayers there are people from Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Syria . . . every place.

PS: So you feel comfortable because the bond is there with everyone being Muslim?

AHS: Yes, although we speak different languages, but English is the common language, but the religious language is Arabic.

PS: You joined that existing organization?

AHS: Yes, it was just in infant stages at that time.

PS: How big was it?

AHS: At that time it was not that big but now there are about 15,000 families in the Twin Cities.

PS: Fifteen thousand?

AHS: Fifteen thousand families in the Twin Cities. Yes.

PS: I'm amazed. I didn't realize that the Muslim community here was that big. Is that purely a spiritual community?

AHS: Yes, non-political organization. We don't indulge in politics at all. One of the fundamental principles and rules: no political associations. Just a religious one. We've got discussion classes and we've got religious classes every Sunday for children where they are teaching the Koran, and other religious things. They go to regular school five days a week but on Sundays they have got one class at a school in Fridley. The classrooms are there, so the kids are all divided up according to the ages and they are under the teachers.

PS: How many children are attending that now?

AHS: I don't really know. I do know there are many.

PS: There are a lot?

AHS: Yes.

PS: And your grandchildren go?

AHS: Yes.

PS: Are there social gatherings?

AHS: Yes. Yes Yes. We have to offer the prayers on Sunday in the gym because the community is so large.

PS: And what school is that?

AHS: Do you know the Totino Grace High School? It is the building right in front of that one. The school was closed because the building was not enough for them and they wanted to sell that building so the Islam community bought it for a million dollars.

PS: You bought the building?

AHS: We acquired the mortgage first but it is almost paid up in the past 7-8 years.

PS: Fifteen thousand families all go to that one center.

AHS: All of them don't come; but that's 15,000 families in the Twin Cities area.

PS: Big group. Are there any other Indian associations you have been involved with?

AHS: I have not been in any other Indian associations at all. There may be some, but I don't get involved.

PS: So the connection with the Muslim spiritual community is the primary one?

AHS: It's the only one. I do meet friends from India and Hindus also but I don't associate with the Indian Association or other social groups.

PS: What kind of professional associations did you belong to?

AHS: American Academy of Family Physicians that I was attached to. I was a member since I came here.

PS: You mentioned something about the World Health Organization. Do you have any formal tie with them anymore?

AHS: No. They offered something and they are not acceptable to me politically. There are some African Countries and Turkey. At that time Turkey was not politically sound. I wanted to go to Saudi Arabia, they said they wouldn't take me through the World Health Organization, they'd take me directly. So, I have no association with the World Health Organization because I decided to stay here now. One has to move about from one country to the other all their life with all the cultural differences. Supposing I'm posted in Nigeria, what cultural opportunities will my children have compared with the society of the United States. That's why I wanted a few countries, but I could not get those through World Health Organization. What they offered was not acceptable to me. So, I came here.

PS: What do you see as the advantage of belonging to the American Academy of Family Physicians?

AHS: It is just one community. Even when I retired in the first week of November 1990, a little less than four years [ago], I still maintain that practicing license although I don't practice medicine. If I need to write a prescription for the family or something, I need a license. There are a few things to fulfill; one I should produce a certificate of having attended a few certified lectures (category one) approved by the American Medical Association every three years. My license is renewed every year. When I go and attend a category one lecture, automatically I sign that and it goes in the computer, so every year my license is renewed on my birthday and every three years they just see how many lectures are entered in, they want a written statement from me and then they get a check from the national computer. The Academy Family Physician computer is right there.

PS: It's helpful to you to maintain . . . Do you have social

ties?

AHS: For example, how would it feel if your driver's license was taken away? even if you were not driving the car? How would it feel?

PS: I'd like to keep it. (laughter)

AHS: Yes, so I'd like to keep my physician's license, even though I am not practicing. As a matter of fact, once in awhile I pick up the phone, give me ID number, then I get medication on a weekend. I go to my doctor, but once in awhile if my family needs something I can get medications.

PS: Do you have social ties with anyone in that medical association?

AHS: Yeah - Oh, yes. I know so many people at Mercy Hospital. I go to Mercy Hospital every Thursday morning for the grand rounds and I get one category one lecture. For ten months of the year they are on those grand rounds. From summer until September they are closed because people go on vacation. So I see them every week. My contact with the medical community is here. I go to my own hospital, Anoka State Hospital every two to four weeks, and see the nurses and doctors I worked with.

PS: Those are important ties to keep up.

AHS: Oh, yes. People ask me after retirement if I miss the patient, and I said no. I worked with patients 43 and one half years; that is enough. No more botheration, no more calls from the hospital. And then the worries are not there and the patient cannot say, "I'll sue you, doctor!" I'm glad not to hear that phrase. Just the social contact I miss. The other day there was the wedding of my head nurse's daughter and she is 22. I have seen her growing up. As a toddler, she used to come and sit in my lap and sing, it was like seeing a daughter taking the vows. Yes, I enjoyed it. I did attend the wedding.

PS: It's like those people became a part of your extended family here.

AHS: Oh, yes. I go there. I get calls some days. My head nurses' mother is not well. She is in a terminal state. She told me only last year she's on a vacation.

PS: Can you draw for me some comparisons about the style of work and attitudes here and in India and Saudi Arabia? Especially attitudes.

AHS: Yes. In India the doctor is the dictator. Whatever he says is final. People don't argue much. If they don't like the doctor, they say thank you and they go and there is no problem. The government hospitals are free there because of socialized medicine. Anyone can walk in and get treatment with no problem. Even if the person in the hospital dies, the state takes care of the burial and cremation of anyone who dies; according to the religious beliefs. So there is no problem there.

In Saudi Arabia, it was an enjoyable experience for me to work there. The people are nice; very hospitable and very cooperative. If you don't like the doctor, you say you don't like them, you walk away, and that's it. There are no legal implications there.

PS: No one would sue a doctor there?

AHS: There in Saudi Arabia, no, in India, no, no. In India they practiced socialized medicine. When I was working I can cite one example: once an ambulance brought a patient - - he was a Canadian I came to know about it later, because he was involved in drug culture. He and his girlfriend came to know that marijuana and those things are very cheap in India, so they went to India. They got involved with drugs, and then he doesn't know what happened but he lost his girlfriend.

PS: He lost her?

AHS: Yes. Nobody knows what happened. Later on he was found lying on the road. He was anemic and ill with bed sores and everything. The police spotted him and an ambulance was sent. He went to the hospital and he was in my unit. I did not know who he was but I knew he was a European or an American, with brown hair and blue eyes. I did not know who he was. But anyway he was incoherent. He could not tell you where he was. So I gave him blood transfusions and then treated him well, and he started settling down. He became aware of his surroundings after a very long time. Then he told me he was a Canadian and belonged to a very well-off family in Toronto, Canada. Our

social worker in the hospital contacted the Canadian embassy in New Delhi and they located the family and the father was very, very concerned. His father was there and he was financially well off. He transferred his son to a private nursing home and I used to go and attend to him until he was fit enough to take his journey back home. He was immunized.

All these immunizations were outdated. I can't tell you the joy I had when the father flew from the airport with his healthy son!

PS: Did he ever find his girlfriend?

AHS: No. I don't know what happened. He did not keep in touch with me, but I was very happy. That was one of the very happiest moments of my life. Yes! I had really helped somebody, a foreigner who was 10,000 miles away from home.

PS: He had no one to look after him.

AHS: That is one of the advantages of socialized medicine.

PS: If you were going to create the perfect health care system, what elements would you take from the cultures you've worked in?

AHS: In the United States it is impossible to go to the health care system that exists in other countries -- like Saudi Arabia and India --- it's impossible because the financial implications are so great. When I was in England in 1949, the National Health Service was just introduced with all the pomp. The hope was that all will go and then they'll get all the health they want without spending a penny. Later on, they realized how difficult it is. As a matter of fact, the National Health Service and the unions, these were the two factors responsible for the financial break down of Great Britain. Everybody came and demanded everything, but as it is now, the National Health Service is in shambles in England. Now supposing they want an elective surgery; one lady with a gall bladder problem had to wait two years before she was admitted to the hospital and operated on. Two years! Remember emergency service, they get service straight away, no problem. But elective work like annual physicals here and all those things are impossible. We have got a choice of doctors. We can go any place we want according to Blue Cross Blue Shield. As far as the diagnosis and treatment is concerned I don't think anyone can excel the United States.

PS: You think we have the best diagnosis and treatment?

AHS: Oh, yes, absolutely. It's extremely expensive; provided you can afford it.

PS: That's the problem.

AHS: For those who can afford, no problem. Those who can't, I don't like what happens.

PS: Do you see differences in the way people view their work? Physicians and nurses especially, medically people?

AHS: I used to go to the hospital to visit my patient even when not on call. I came in sometimes two hours early because the one on call would not know the patient. I would rather wait for two or three hours in the hospital, without being call. I'm talking about my moral obligation. I used to stay there and work. For example, one day one patient, her heart rate was going down. She needed a pacemaker. But when I was leaving the hospital one day at 4:30, I thought this is not the time for a pacemaker. In the Anoka State Hospital you don't put in a pacemaker; you send them to Mercy Medical Center which is about three or four miles away. So the patient was not fit to be sent there. So I waited for about 2 - 2 1/2 hours and then I decided it was time for the pacemaker. I called an ambulance with the flashers and sent the patient. I used to feel in my conscience that it is a moral and professional obligation to go the extra mile.

PS: Did you find that different in American physicians?

AHS: Yes, in England, too. They felt, "My time is over. Thank you."

PS: So, they just leave and go home when their time is done?

AHS: Yes, and somebody else has got to take over. In our hospital, there used to be tremendous cooperation. They used to call each other and say, "These are my cases. You're on call tonight," I'd say, "Dr. Goldstein, I have these cases; one, two, three, four, you just go write down. This patient, this one, this one" And I used to tell the nurses and the doctors, "If there is any problem with my patients, call me any time of the day or night." And I

would be there. They'd call me and take instructions, and the doctor would give the right regimen to my patients. So all the other doctors at the Anoka State Hospital, before they would leave they would call if there was a particular patient to take care of for the weekend or at night. But I used to be available easily on the phone.

PS: How many hours a week did you work on an average.

AHS: Forty hours usual and then five days a month I used to take the calls. I was always on duty for 48 hours on weekends. I enjoyed it. I never felt sorry for becoming a doctor. I decided to become a doctor when I was in third grade and I followed it up. When I joined the medical school, I saw that my professors had post-graduate degrees from London and Edinborough; I wanted to get them and I did go there. I never felt sorry for becoming a doctor, even now. No regrets. I was frustrated many times; the frustration was there, but I never felt sorry.

PS: How does it feel being retired?

AHS: I enjoy it. I am looking forward to it. I am a voracious reader. I like the classics. So I read a lot. I get many magazines, and I have a very good classics library. I read six or seven hours a day, I work on my treadmill for my exercise all the year round, and then get the grandchildren from school, do some grocery shopping. I make some social calls in the evenings or on the weekends, go to my Islamic Center once a week but that's enough. Spending time is no problem. I enjoy being retired.

PS: How often do you go back to India?

AHS: I told you already that I left India with a broken heart. I left in 1970 and I went back in 1971, and that's it. I have not been back since. My two sisters there come here and I keep in touch with them by phone frequently. My nephew and his wife they are all working there in family practice and adjusted to those surroundings. I could not live there.

PS: Are they still living in Hyderabad?

AHS: Oh, yes. I could not adjust myself, so I have not returned back. I said, "Never look behind. Close the chapter." The nightmare is over.

PS: Are you comfortable saying more about the details of what happened when you left India?

AHS: Well, if you want. Muslims are a minority community about 13%. They are not treated well. They are persecuted; they are not allowed in the to take exams for the police force or for administrative duties. Even in professional colleges, bias is there. I did not like that.

PS: The line between Hindus and Muslims isn't visual. It's purely based on your religious preference. So, how does someone find out that you are Muslim? By your last name?

AHS: Yes, by the name. Sometimes it is by the way you dress, even though they dress very similarly sometimes due to the mix of the culture. You have seen my wife putting on a sari? So, that's the way. My daughter-in-law wears the Pakistani clothes at home, but when she goes out, she dresses like an American.

PS: Were there people blocking you within the medical community because you were Muslim?

AHS: Oh, yes.

PS: How did they do that?

AHS: Well, for example, I was working in a hospital. If I'm working, impediments and obstacles will be there.

PS: What kind of things?

AHS: Oh, there are so many. When a promotion comes, preference is not given to you; you are over-ruled.

PS: Does anybody tell you that it is because you are a Muslim, or not?

AHS: It is just very obvious. They don't tell but it is obvious. They claim to be secular, but they are not. The Christians are well off; they are a minority, but they are well off. But only the Muslim community is oppressed.

PS: What are the roots of that conflict?

AHS: It has been going on for centuries based on religion.

They do not treat us well; we do not treat them well.

PS: And nobody can forget it. That was what broke Gandhi's heart.

AHS: That was very obvious now after the independence of India. I do feel we are better off under the British rule. They gave us a good systems for education, transport, postal, currency. Although they oppressed the Indians, on the whole, they were good. I became very fluent in English and had no problem immersing myself, although my accent was different. For example, in pre-meds, in English we used to have Macaulay's History of England in prose.

PS: You said the British oppressed the Indians?

AHS: Oh, yes.

PS: But, did they oppress the Hindus and Muslims equally? (laughter) So, they were equal opportunity oppressors? (more laughter)

AHS: Yes. Not only equal opportunity, but they used to put the rift between the Hindu and Muslims. It was divide and rule.

PS: So, the British encouraged that hatred?

AHS: Oh, yes. They encouraged that hatred. They put fuel on it all the time. Yes!

PS: Not much of a gift to leave to the Indians.

AHS: The other thing is that most people usually think the Indians are uncouth and uneducated. But, no, that is not a fact. That is a wrong representation. Whenever you see pictures, you see the bullock carts and the plows with bullocks, but they don't show the good universities and those things that are recognized all over the world. They don't show it.

PS: I think most people don't know that India produces more movies than any other country in the world.

AHS: In my hometown, for example, there is the big university with the engineering college and medical schools. Even in my state, there are eight universities.

PS: What are the cultural values, the most important things that you wanted to make sure your children got?

AHS: Our religious values; be tolerant of others, respect other cultures and other religions. Yes. Religion to me is a personal thing; we don't try to impose it on anybody else.

We say that Christians and Muslims, we celebrate the sacrifice of Abraham and follow many rituals of Abraham. We believe in virgin birth and in Virgin Mary; Maria and Marion are very common names among Muslim ladies. And Esaw, which is called Jesus, is a very common name. Whenever we say that also for our prophet's name, we say "May peace be upon you." We say that also when we say Christ.

PS: So you revere many spiritual teachers?

AHS: Oh, yes. But, we follow only one religion. But we believe in the four Holy Books; the Bible is a holy book. Sometimes people say, "throw away the Bible." I can't tolerate that.

PS: Because the book itself is very sacred?

AHS: It is sacred if its a scripture. Yes. Well, it came from Christ and the Koran came from Mohamed. There are other scriptures.

PS: What are the other two holy books?

AHS: One is Torah. One is Zabure. I don't know what happened to Zabure or Doude we call it in Arabic. Those are the four holy books. From a religious point of view, the Muslims are permitted to marry Christians. They are called "the people with the book."

PS: Who is called that, the Muslims?

AHS: Yes, the Muslims as well as the Christians and the Jews. So Muslims are permitted to marry them. I feel personally that a very important aspect is to respect other persons; give and take respect. I wouldn't like to impose my view on others. No. But as far as my household is concerned, yes, we follow it. And I tell my children to partake in the same way; they know how to recite the Koran. They know the basics of Islam. We don't like even the extremist in Islam. They are most undesirable; they are not

perpetrating the religion of Islam.

PS: The extremists are like the groups in Iran?

AHS: Iran and in Algeria. Yes. I can't get along with those Iranis.

PS: What is the hardest thing for you about getting along with those extremists?

AHS: I can't tolerate them. I can't sit with them. Their views are so narrow and so rigid. They believe, "The others are wrong. Only we are right."

PS: There are a lot of Christian groups that are like that too. And, I find them hard to be around.

AHS: So, even in Islam, we belong to a very broad-minded group, just like the group in England called Protestants; more liberal minded.

PS: Are there some extremists in the Twin Cities who are part of the Muslim community?

AHS: Not really; not many. It is a religious congregation, but it is not a political group. Politics is not discussed at all. It is one of the basic, fundamental principles in the charter of the Islamic Center; this is a non-profit and non-political organization. We don't discuss politics; only religious matters are discussed; things in the Koran. And people from our community who are more knowledgeable give lectures in any of the churches and they compare Islam and Christianity.

PS: Have you seen changes in the Muslim community in the 20 years that you have been here?

AHS: No.

PS: Not even in the numbers of people or where they come from?

AHS: The number is there, but there are no extremists. Most of the Muslims here are law-abiding citizens who don't get involved in politics.

PS: Have you seen changes like more people coming from

Egypt for a time, and then more from some other country?

AHS: Mostly they are from Egypt. When I worked in Mecca in Saudi Arabia, I happened to work with Syrian Egyptians (Sudanese and those from Jordan.)

PS: So, do you feel real comfortable with those folks?

AHS: Yes. It is no problem. I go to the center for two things; to pray and for some social things. Six or eight times a year they hold Egyptian or Indian or Pakistani cultural dinner. British Guyana also has a few Muslims here too. There is one gentleman who just moved to Florida recently.

PS: Guyana? Is he of Asian Indian origin.

AHS: Yes, he is of Indian origin, but his forefathers settled in British Guyana.

PS: Very interesting. Some of the things on my list we've already talked about. Are there any things I haven't asked you yet?

AHS: You asked the questions, and I'll answer them.

PS: You said you keep in touch with your sisters in India.

AHS: Yes. My sisters and a few other members of the family I keep in touch with.

PS: Do you go to Pakistan to see your children's family?

AHS: No. I went to Pakistan only once and that was for the wedding. Before that, I had gone there once. I haven't traveled much, since I had my education in Europe. So, I've seen Europe so many times. I worked in the Middle East, so I've seen the whole of the Middle East.

PS: So, are you kind of done traveling? Ready to settle down?

AHS: Yes. I'm happy with my life and all that I have done and with the present circumstances. As soon as five years was over with immigrant status, we became US citizens. Well, I don't owe any allegiance to India anymore. I am an American. I honor the American flag. One of the key

teachings of Islam is "whatever country you live in, be fit for that country." You will always find people who say, "in India it was that way, In Pakistan it was that." Well, I think that is wrong! Whichever country you are in -- be fit and faithful to that country. Otherwise, who is asking you to stay here. Go back to that other country! Also, Islam teaches you to be thankful to anyone who helps you in any way. Be grateful.

PS: That's a good principal to live by.

AHS: People ask me, "how do you keep your friendships?" I don't do three things. One: I don't discuss politics. Second, I don't discuss religion. Third, unless they personally get involved, I don't get involved in personal matters. Unless somebody has a mutual interest in each other's personal life, like between the nurses at the hospital. But, I won't go and try to be nosy. These are the three fundamental things.

PS: You were showing me earlier before I turned on the tape, about how you have your house laid out here. Please explain again on the tape.

AHS: This is a twin home; custom made in one household. So there are five bedrooms on each side. And that's it.

PS: And the lay-out in the kitchen with two separate kitchens with one very big table in the middle of the two rooms.

AHS: When we came here and the house was constructed 11 years ago, when I was working, I owned this house. But just before I retired my ownership was transferred to my oldest son because I can't afford to pay the mortgage payment. The elder son now makes the payments and we share everything. That is the best. Even in the winter when the weather is bad, we can still meet each other.

PS: So you see each other every day?

AHS: Yes. We have breakfast and supper together. We can have three meals together on weekends.

PS: Are the sons off working during the day?

AHS: Oh, yes. They have full time jobs. My eldest son is

a project manager of project manager of technical services at Norwest Bank. My youngest son is the controller of Minnesota Technology.

PS: Who cares for the children who are home during the day? Your wife and daughter-in-law?

AHS: Yes. yes. yes.

PS: It's a good system.

AHS: My aunt has now had surgery and we are taking our turns.

PS: Does everybody take care of her as she recovers?

AHS: Yes, she has a catheter and she is being taken care of.

PS: Are there any other things that I haven't asked you about yet?

AHS: No. You can ask me a question and I'll answer that.

PS: Well, you've answered everything that I have on my list.

AHS: Well, I'll not take more than two hours.

PS: You're doing just great! We're 15 minutes early! I really have enjoyed talking with you.

AHS: Thank you very much indeed.