

**Interview with Bash Singh**

**Interview by Polly Sonifer**

**Interviewed on January 12, 1995  
at Mrs. Singh's North Oaks home**

**PS:** Good morning. How are you today?

**BS:** Good.

**PS:** First of all, can you tell me what part of India you were born in?

**BS:** I was born in a part which is in Pakistan now called Rawalpindi in 1944. Because of our religion we had to leave the part which became Pakistan in 1947 and we came to New Delhi.

**PS:** What religion was your family?

**BS:** I'm a Sikh. It is an off shoot of Hinduism, but it is a separate religion.

**PS:** Why were the Sikhs asked to leave that part of Pakistan?

**BS:** Because they were not Muslim. Anyone who was not Muslim had to leave; Hindus, Sikhs both had to leave.

**PS:** So, you were just little when that happened. You were three years old? What do you remember about Pakistan?

**BS:** Nothing.

**PS:** Nothing. Where did you move after that?

**BS:** New Delhi. My father was a businessman. When we left Pakistan they had to leave everything there, so they were very well off in Pakistan, but when they left for India they had to start all over again. But, he became a good businessman and was a good provider. We grew up with enough to eat and go to school and college.

**PS:** Tell me more about your family? Did you have siblings?

**BS:** I'm the oldest daughter of five. I have a sister who is married to my husband's youngest brother and they live in Kentucky. I have a brother who lives in Minneapolis and two brothers who live in India. I'm the oldest one, and my dad just visited me for my son's wedding, but he has gone back.

I lost my mother four years ago. We are a high middle class family in India with lots of servants to do things.

**PS:** Did your mother work outside the home?

**BS:** No, my mother never worked outside. That's a very customary thing to do, at least 40 years ago. Now, some of the ladies do work outside the house. She took good care of the five of us. She became sick when I was 10 years old. She had hypo-thyroid and it was never diagnosed. It was only diagnosed after nine years because she had a massive heart attack due to hypo-thyroid. She was feeling better. I called her from America in 1978 to have the medical second opinion and she just died five years ago.

**PS:** So, she lived for a long time like that?

**BS:** She was 68 when she died and she was in better health at that time than she ever was.

**PS:** That's ironic. Tell me more about growing up, where you went to school and those things.

**BS:** I went to school in New Delhi at a private school called Lahore Montessori. Then I went to Delhi University and did my Bachelor of Arts in economics. I got married right after I did my BA. It was an arranged marriage with mutual consent. My husband was out of India for many years. He came back there to get married. I was really reluctant to leave India. I could speak and understand English, but still I didn't know the culture. Growing up in New Delhi and coming to a new country was difficult. But, I have a nice husband and he is very understanding. We lived four years in Saudi Arabia where he was working with an American oil company as one of their physicians. It was nice in a way because we had all the servants and a nice house. Actually, that's where I met so many different people. It was a transition period for me. Everybody was a foreigner there. The Saudis were very nice; they could speak to us in Hindi and Punjabi. Some of them were educated in Bombay. But, actually, we didn't meet too many Saudis because we

lived in the Aramco compound; which was for senior level staff. They had a gate which nobody could enter unless you were working there. These were all professional people. So, it was a nice transition period for me. I met lots of Europeans, Palestinians, Lebanese. People we knew were all physicians and a few engineers. At that time, in 1964, Saudi Arabia did not have too much industry. I had a very good friend whose husband was teaching in the Petroleum College. She was my first American friend, and she was exactly my age and we got along very well. That was my first exposure to an American lady. Then, we met another American couple who kind of adopted me like their daughter, because their daughter was born on the same date, same year as me. Actually, I have learned a lot from her. She has been treating my kids like grandchildren and came to my son's wedding. She lost her husband, but she is doing really good. She is a really wealthy person, but that's beside the point. She has a daughter who lives in Saudi Arabia still. She was my first experience; she taught me a lot of things about the American way. I was basically a very shy person at that time. I think my husband has been really nice and taught me lots of things. He had lived in this country during his medical residency. It was a nice time in Saudi Arabia, but I have no desire to go back there from here. It was closer to India so we could go every year and the company would pay for the visits to India. We visited the whole Middle East at that time. Beirut was beautiful before the problems started there, and Jerusalem was nice. I really enjoyed that. We used to get paid in cash; because the banking system was not that great. They gave you cash and then you have to deposit what you wanted. Basically, you paid with cash everywhere you went. That's what I was used to in India. Even now in India, you don't pay with checks; very few people will take your checks. That's how the system works. Credit cards are becoming popular, but not like here. You always pay cash even if its \$10,000 or \$20,000, you pay cash. Our son was born there in Saudi Arabia. It was nice to have him there because basically the ladies didn't have much to do. I couldn't drive.

**PS:** You couldn't drive because?

**BS:** Because I am a woman, and women are forbidden to drive. The only person who could drive was the American consulate's wife.

**PS:** And why could she drive?

**BS:** She had diplomatic privileges. She was the only lady who could drive.

**PS:** So, did you all pile in her car and go places?

**BS:** (laughing) No. We met her, but I didn't miss driving because we had a driver from the hospital. If you wanted to go to the shopping center, which wasn't much, he would take all the ladies. The driver would say, "Meet us outside the hospital at 11 o'clock and I'll take you for two hours." Once a week at least we did that. All the ladies did get together for coffee. There were a lot of international people and we met lots of nice Lebanese and German people there. Even though it was an American oil company, there were all kinds of people. They approached my husband to work there because he was in London and they were looking for a medical pediatrician and they offered him the job. He was paid very well and they had very nice facilities at Aramco Company. He was there from '63 to '68. I got married in December '64 and until March '68, I was there. My son was born in August '65. He was almost 2 and a half years old when we left there. From there we came to Nashville. Actually, immigration was offered to us by the Consulate of America because they were looking for physicians. They contacted us to offer "if you want to go to America, we will give you immigration." We thought about it, and kept the immigration papers for a year before we decided to come to this country.

**PS:** What was the deciding factor to come?

**BS:** The changes in Saudi Arabia were very unpleasant when they had the war in 1967 with Egypt and Israel. It was not the place where we wanted to live forever. It was a place to make some money and it was closer to India. It was very hard for me to decide that I would never go back to live in India. I could always go to visit, but we had to look to the future for the children. My husband didn't want to start his practice in India; he liked the American system.

**PS:** So, it was his decision never to go back to live in India?

**BS:** Yes. We got the immigration papers and came to Nashville in 1968. It was me who held on to the papers for

a year. I didn't want to permanently leave India. But, once we came here, we found a nice Indian community there. Nashville was kind of a different place. They say they have Southern Hospitality, but we could see the discrimination.

**PS:** Did you experience that as an Indian person?

**BS:** Not openly. I could see it. My husband was teaching there at a medical college that was predominantly black. That's where the discrimination started, but it could be both. At that time, there were not too many Indians there. Then, I came to know that anybody outside of Nashville will discriminate anyway. But, we met some very nice people; our neighbors were nice. We were renting a house in the beginning. But, when we bought a house, that's when we saw discrimination. A couple of neighbors didn't like that Paul was working with a black college. They thought a lot of blacks would come to that neighborhood.

**PS:** How did they tell you that?

**BS:** When we bought the house, in 1971, October, the person from whom we bought the house came over. We had given him downpayment. It was not a very expensive house, but in those days \$40,000 was a lot of money. We gave him \$2,000 down and it was all final that we would close the next day. That night, he came and said, "I don't think I want you to buy that house because my neighbor on the left side is really objecting. I will give you your money back plus \$2,000 more." We said, "What is the problem?" He told us, "I have no problem with you and the other neighbors have no problem. One person, an older person who lived in India during the first world war, who has some strange ideas about Indians. He's not very happy." We talked to our attorney, and he said, "There is no way anybody can stop you from moving there. You will move there." And we did move. We moved the end of October and two or three neighbors were very nice and brought us cakes and food and invited us over. But, somehow, I never felt very comfortable. Our son felt that way too. He was almost four years old. Our daughter was one year old. Our son wouldn't go out to play. He never told us, but I think that some other kids harassed him. Actually, it happened the same time that Paul was offered the job at Group Health in Minnesota. He came for an interview and he liked the people here, even though it was very cold! (laughter) We moved to the house in October and he accepted the job in December. It was more money than

the medical college was paying him. It was a combination of a lot of things; not only the neighbors. He was getting tired of teaching. He wasn't meant to be a teacher; he wanted to practice medicine. This job was something he wanted since he didn't have to worry about billing as part of an HMO. He was paid a salary plus other benefits. I liked the people. There was Dr. Hockness, who is still a very good friend. He offered for us to stay with him for a week till we found a place to live. Mrs. Hockness really helped us to look around. That's the time we decided we wanted to leave Nashville. As soon as we put the For Sale sign on the house, the neighbor who resented us, came over to apologize, "if my going against you made you leave the house, I'm sorry." We told him that it was maybe one factor, but not the basic cause. It was just a bad experience in our mind. We had also met some nice people too, so it was kind of balanced. We still go back to Nashville. We have a friend who lives very close to the house where we lived; actually, we are going next month to visit them.

**PS:** When your husband was teaching at the black medical school, did you socialize with the other professionals from that college?

**BS:** His boss used to have a yearly party. He had another colleague who was a very outgoing lady, so we invited them a couple of times to our house and we went to their houses. But, you know, this was 1968. Black people could not live in the white neighborhoods, and white people could not live in the black neighborhoods. We had a friend who was black and was married to a white girl. He had the most problems you could ever think of. We had nothing compared to what he was going through. Now, we go back to the same neighborhood and a friend was telling me there are about 15 Indians and 20 blacks who live in the neighborhood now. But, this was in 1968. Maybe it was the time we were there. Now, I don't think anybody has any problem there. But, we were very happy to move to Minnesota. I didn't care about the cold weather, but both cars died when we came to Minnesota.  
(laughter)

**PS:** So, it was winter when you came?

**BS:** We arrived the 27th of February. We left Nashville and it was 65 degrees. When we came here, it was minus 6 degrees.

**PS:** That's a shock.

**BS:** Yes. That's a shock. And we had to drive one car and one came on the truck. We drove in one car because we stopped in Ohio to visit my sister. As soon as we got to Dr. Hockness' driveway, the car died. So, he loaned us his car. Driving in snow was very difficult.

**PS:** Had you seen snow before?

**BS:** In the movies. In India I never saw snow. I had never seen cold like this. I remember we rented and moved to a townhouse the week after we arrived. My son was going to school, so I wanted to make sure he was on the right bus. I was holding my daughter who was 2 years old. She didn't have mittens on, although I had a jacket for her. It was not very warm, but it was all we had when we came here. She started screaming and I said, "Rema, what's the matter with you?" She just gave me her hand. I didn't realize she was getting frostbite. I had never experienced anything like that. My husband said, "Don't take her out in the cold weather without mittens." She was really screaming the whole day because her fingers were blue.

**PS:** Were you wearing mittens yourself?

**BS:** No, I wasn't. We came the end of February, and we couldn't find anything because the stores were all sold out. We had borrowed some from Hockness's but they didn't have the small size for her. That was an experience. We lived in a townhouse in New Brighton for six months. We met the nicest neighbors. One of them is still my best friend, Judy. She is the one who bought a house in North Oaks. We came to visit her and that's how we ended up here too.

**PS:** Is she still your neighbor here?

**BS:** She lives in North Oaks, but she is about a mile down. The first house we bought was three houses down from her. Then, we built this house five years ago. Because of her, I think it was very easy for me to adjust in North Oaks and meet people. She has four adopted children; two white and two mixed race. So, her daughter almost could have been my daughter when she was growing up because she had the same color and dark hair, although it was kinky because she is part black. She is the nicest person, and still my best

friend. I see her often. I give her a lot of credit. When we moved here, she had a big party for us and we met a lot of people. I joined a baby-sitting coop because of her, where I met a lot of people. We started a ladies coffee group and a gourmet club. Neither of us was working. The first time I went to do exercises was with her and a bunch of ladies to the YWCA in St. Paul. Our kids were the same age. Jesse was going to first grade. He really liked here compared to Nashville. After that experience, we put him in a private school in Nashville too. We felt that maybe he would meet different people. We didn't want our kids to experience prejudice like we experienced in the housing in Nashville. So, when we came here, he went to Snail Lake and loved the school. He started going to skating and hockey. He played as a goalie in high school, because he loved skating and skiing. He is still very much into sports.

**PS:** Those are all cold weather sports.

**BS:** Right. But, he just loved that. It was a good change for him. He liked the people and I think he went out of his way to do things that helped him be accepted by people. He just married a very nice person from Buffalo, New York. She's a Lutheran, and she's white. Even if I had an Indian daughter-in-law, I don't think she would ever be as nice to him and us. I hope she stays that way. (laughter)

Our daughter didn't have any problem either; she went to Snail Lake until sixth grade and then we sent her to SPA (St. Paul Academy) which is a private school. She was happy at Moundsvew too. We didn't want her to feel that we sent her brother to private school but we didn't sent her. She was happy there and had lots of nice friends. I don't think she ever felt that she was Indian or anything. Then, she went to St. Olaf. During her last year in St. Olaf there was a problem. That was when there was the problem in L.A. (Los Angeles) with Rodney King and police brutality. During that time, I think she could see some people who didn't know other cultures very well. They kind of resented. They didn't say anything to her, because it's a predominantly white college. I think there were only two Indian girls there. She belongs like a white girl because she was born and raised here and has no accent. Her friends are white. She could see some difference at that time in the things people said against blacks. She has worked in minority groups for a long time on internships and at college. That was a change for her. She had never felt in her mind that

somebody is different because their color is different or they come from a different nationality. We are very open in the house. I have the nicest friends who are American and good Indian friends too. We have two Indian friends who are married to Americans. That was the only time, and probably a turning point for her. She began to know more about her background. She had never thought of India. That's when she wanted to learn more about her Indian heritage.

**PS:** When your kids were little, did you make trips back to India?

**BS:** Every four years or so, and I regret that. I wish I had gone more often. Financially, we weren't poor, but four tickets are \$4,000. I regret that; I should have gone every year.

**PS:** How long did you stay when you went back?

**BS:** When the kids were little, I used to stay for two months. They grew up and in the higher grades, we couldn't stay more than two to three weeks. I don't think they learned too much about Indian culture when they were there. They were treated like kings and that was different from real life. In the house, we spoke both languages; English and Punjabi. My husband's mother lived with us off and on from 1969 till she died two years ago. She would stay here for a year and a half and then she would go to India for a year. Then she would come back. She had a green card, and she had the medical from here. She would go to India because her other children were there, but she couldn't stay more than a year because of her green card. So, my son learned more Punjabi from her, but my daughter really didn't care to speak the language.

**PS:** And your husband's father had already passed away at that time?

**BS:** He passed away in 1968, the year we came to this country. But grandmother was a good influence on the kids. She was a very dominant person, but very loving.

**PS:** Dominant in what sense?

**BS:** She will want to have her way, which is not very common among Indian ladies. She was a very dominant, "You've got to do it this way or that way!" It was a little difficult

for me too, but you get used to compromising; she loved all of us very much. My son had some problems with her. He called her Manji, which is a term of respect. He would say, "Manji, why don't you go and live in an apartment like all the other grandmothers do?" (laughter)

**PS:** I'll bet she didn't care for that!

**BS:** My husband's brother lived in this country too, so there would be a kind of break for us. She would stay with us for three months and then go there for two months. She liked to stay in Minnesota more. It was a break for me and my kids. She wanted to be center of attraction, and the kids were kind of jealous in a way.

**PS:** You and she were home during the day?

**BS:** Yes. I spent a lot of time with her. She was a very religious person, so until one o'clock she would be busy with her religious readings. I did dental hygiene course in 1977. When my kids went to school, I just didn't want to stay home. I did some volunteer work, but I think I had never worked for pay. I wanted to do something for which I was paid. So, I did my hygiene course at the community college. I worked part-time for years, and really enjoyed that. My son left for college in 1983 to the East Coast to RPI (Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute). That's a very hard experience for me to let him go. I decided I had to do more with my life. That's when I started to think of having a business. Then I opened a candy store in 1985. It was called Sweet Connections, and I owned it for eight years and just closed it last year.

**PS:** Where was that located?

**BS:** In Pavilion Place, which became Crossroads; in Roseville near where Kohl's and the video store. That was good experience. My daughter was almost sixteen, and she loved working there. She's basically a very shy person, and I think for her she blossomed because she learned to talk to people. That was Mom's store and she could do whatever she wanted. For her sake, it was really good. I enjoyed it, but it was just too much responsibility and I really didn't make any money.

**PS:** It was just for fun?

**BS:** It was for fun, and for a couple of years, it was a good tax break, too. But, I gave up last year.

**PS:** Did you sell the store, or just close it?

**BS:** Just closed it; we sold the things. The center didn't do very well either the last two years. It was standing on its own, but I was putting too much time and effort and responsibility. When you have a lease, you have to have it open. If an employee was sick, I had to be there. It was a good experience, but I'm glad I closed it. I've been thinking of what to do now. My husband has Parkinson's disease. Right now, he's still working for Group Health, but semi-retired. We didn't like to be home, but now we are enjoying things. We have been doing things, which we didn't do before because he was busy.

**PS:** Is it sort of like a second honeymoon?

**BS:** Yes! (laughter) We are actually really enjoying the time with each other and we are taking lots of vacations. We have always taken vacations twice a year or so. Now, we are traveling every other month or so; a week here or a week there. This is nice. We built this house in 1988. People used to say, "Your kids are gone; why do you want to build a bigger house?" The reality is we want to have a nice big house where our kids can come and bring grandkids. The kids will have enough room to run around; we have a partially finished basement. They can play and make a mess and it won't bother me. I think our kids have come back a lot of times for vacation because they like the house. They grew up in North Oaks. If we had a smaller house, they might think, "mom doesn't have enough room, we should go somewhere else."

**PS:** Are there any really small houses in North Oaks?

**BS:** Yes, there are. Our older house had four bedrooms, but it was the way it was laid out; all the bedrooms were right next to each other. In this house, we have our bedroom on the main floor, but all the other bedrooms are upstairs. When they come here, they have complete privacy. But there are smaller homes. At least 70% are big, but there are smaller ones.

**PS:** Let's go way back to your marriage. When it was arranged, you were 20?

**BS:** I was 19. I was actually 18 plus a few months when I was engaged. It was the final year of my college.

**PS:** What was the process like for you?

**BS:** It was easier, because my husband's mother and my mother are related to each other. My grandmother talked to my mother-in-law. My husband is older than I am; which was the only concern my mother had. She asked me, "If you don't mind the age difference, we like the boy. But, you decide."

**PS:** Had you met him at that point?

**BS:** Yes, I had seen him. He came to the house and stayed for four days with his younger brother who he is very close to. I was 18 and a half and he was already a physician.

**PS:** How old was he then?

**BS:** He was 30. I kind of liked him even though he is older than me. My dad did tell me, "He is so many years older; and you decide in two days." It was a family pressure in a way, because my mother-in-law and my maternal grandfather are brother and sister. My grandmother was a sister-in-law with my mother-in-law. She liked me and thought I was a nice girl and Paul is a nice boy, so it can work out. I did have two days, but I had the power to say no too. My family is not really educated, but they are educated enough and they are financially secure. They could deny that too saying, "Our daughter didn't like him." My sister grew up very close too. She had some negative concerns, "He's out of India; maybe he has a girlfriend, you are so young." I was not bad looking either, so she said, "You have lots of chances." But, my mother really liked him.

**PS:** Did you actually spend much time talking to him?

**BS:** No. I think we went to see a movie, "South Pacific." I could not understand the English movie; it was my first English movie. We had his brother and my sister with us. But, they kind of left us alone; but we really didn't talk much. That was the first time. I could have discussed things if I wanted to, but I was shy and intimidated by the fact that he was a physician and I was just a college girl. I didn't have that much experience in life. I think I was happy that I was getting a nice educated person who is well

settled in life. His family had a lot of status, which is very nice to have. We were engaged for a year. It was my final year of college and he wanted me to finish college. We got married in November of '64 and left India right away.

I had a lot of mixed feelings too. I think my low level of education was a big thing for me, but he never let me feel that. He was a good provider, so we had no problem. Our personalities click; we are both kind of low-keyed and warm.

I think I made the right decision. My sister still teases him, "I almost didn't let Bash marry you." But, then she married his brother.

**PS:** That's the sister who went on the double date with you?

**BS:** Right. That's the sister, but it was a different brother, who was in London at that time. He met her at our marriage and he liked her. My mother-in-law didn't want two daughter-in-laws from the same house.

**PS:** Why was that?

**BS:** She had a superstition that since her son was very tall (he's 6'2"), she wanted a very tall and pretty girl. My sister is pretty, but not tall; she's only 5'3". But he only wanted to marry her, and my mother-in-law really resented her. So, the boy said, "If you don't want me to marry her, just pick anybody for me to marry." And he did marry another lady who was very tall, but things didn't work out. After three months, the marriage was annulled. He just couldn't be a husband to her because he was emotionally involved with my sister. Then, my father didn't want the marriage; he said, "We don't want to be the second choice."

It was a pride thing. The first time, they didn't want her. In India that's very important. It's a God-given thing; you can be pretty or ugly and you can't do anything about it. But, if somebody has a good family, but isn't very good looking, they will have problems getting married.

Families almost have to bribe, if they are rich enough. But we had to force my parents to let my sister marry to him, because two lives are involved. They were in love with each other and she didn't want to marry anybody else and he had divorced his wife. So, they did get married and they are very happy. They've been married almost 27 years now.

**PS:** Is that the sister who lives in Ohio now?

**BS:** They have two boys and they are still in love, I think.

My mother-in-law had to adjust to that.

**PS:** When you got married, you didn't have a sense of being "in love" with your husband?

**BS:** No. You see, in India, we are raised that you get married first, and then you love. Love follows the marriage; its not the other way around. You don't have to love somebody to marry. I was brought up that way. I'm trying to explain that to my daughter too. I don't think we can do anything like that for her. But, she wants to marry an Indian boy. We want to help her meet somebody; and then if she likes him, let her go out with him. That's how they will get married. In our case, Paul was living in Saudi Arabia and after we got engaged, we did write to each other.

But, I was still a little bit scared in a way, because he was a physician, and I don't know anything about medicine. But, I think I adjusted pretty well; maybe my colleagues helped me. I could understand English pretty well, but I was very shy to speak. I feared that he would think, "My wife is not educated." But, he never let me feel that way.

I remember when we got married, we stayed in a five star hotel for honeymoon for three days. I had never eaten with a fork and knife. We used the spoon all the time. I had never cut meat with a knife, so he taught me. I still kind of tease him, "That was a nice way of giving me to this Western world." He is a very kind, patient person. Being a physician, he does have a lot of patience. He is very good to me.

**PS:** Sounds like a good choice on your part.

**BS:** It was my mom's choice.

**PS:** Was he the only one that your mother offered to you?

**BS:** No. My father was a businessman, and she had some tough times with the joint family. When we were growing up, she always told everybody, I don't want my daughters to marry a businessman. She wanted a professional. Before my husband came along, she had introduced me to an engineer and I just didn't like him.

**PS:** What was it about him that you didn't like?

**BS:** He wasn't too good looking at all; he was very dark. In India, anybody who is very dark is thought to be not good

looking. He had very nice features, but there was something about his mother that I didn't like. She came to see me and she was making comments about something. I wasn't ready to marry. I was only 18, although I got engaged to my husband when I was eighteen and a half. I liked his family, their mannerisms. I didn't know much about him, except about his position. That wasn't the only thing to decide because I knew I could have married anybody else as good too. Family status, and I was in college, and I could pick and choose at that time too. I think I made the right choice.

**PS:** Your husband's name is Paul?

**BS:** Paul. His full name is Pritnival, but he is called Paul.

**PS:** Tell me about your wedding. What was that like?

**BS:** We had a very nice traditional Indian wedding. I enjoyed all the things, but my husband had problems with it. He lived so many years outside of India, he resented going through all the additional things. But, then one of his uncles told him, "Please your mother; this is the time she has been waiting for. Do whatever she says." That was a wise decision for him. He went along with what his parents told him.

**PS:** I understand a lot of Indian weddings take hours and hours of time to complete. Was yours like that?

**BS:** Yes. Actually, it started the night before with groom's dinner and he came riding on a white horse. We exchanged the garland. They came to our house where the bride's parents pay for everything. We had made arrangements for 100 and some people to stay at wedding halls, with 15 or 20 rooms that are especially meant for that. We provided for their meals and everything. They came that morning and that night they came in a procession to our house with a band and singing and dancing. That's part of the ceremony. He came on the white mare and he gets down and we exchange the garland and pictures. We don't see each other after that, though he stays in our house, but not with me. He stays with his best man in a different room. The next morning was the religious marriage ceremony. We had a big tent in front of our lot and a big ceremony. We have a holy book, the Guru Granth Sahib, and we make four rounds around the book. There is a priest who is singing

wedding hymns and every time he sings, we make a round. After the fourth round, he pronounced us man and wife. We didn't have a ring exchange, but he did give me a ring later. That's more the American way, but has now become the Indian way. The bride and groom both give a ring. That's how we got married. Then, we drove the same evening to his parents' house in Agra, which is 120 miles from New Delhi. We reached Agra at 9 p.m. and they had already arranged for us to stay in a nice hotel. I'd never been to a five star hotel before, like a Hyatt Regency. It was the first time I went in an elevator. It's still there in Agra. That was my first time to see Western things. The first time I ever saw somebody drinking alcohol was my husband. My father never drank, and I lived such a protected life. That was a shock for me. Maybe all educated people drink socially. He doesn't drink much, just socially. He offered me, and I had never tasted it. I did taste wine; I kind of liked it. I didn't resent it. But, I did find myself thinking, "I hope he's not an alcoholic." You always have the worst picture in your mind.

**PS:** And you really didn't know him very well.

**BS:** No, I didn't. We had the best time in Saudi Arabia getting to know each other. We used to party a lot because there was nothing to do. We used to make our own alcohol even though I didn't drink much. Once in a while I had a sip of drink. It wasn't available, so most of the Americans had a still in the house.

**PS:** Really? (laughter)

**BS:** And we had one. Everybody kind of knew, but if somebody reports you, the government will expel you from the country.

**PS:** So, it was very secret.

**BS:** It was very secret, but in the Aramco compound, people could do those things because it was basically an American small town. We had our own commissary, bowling alley. I didn't know how to bowl, but I could go and watch. There was an English movie house. There were not too many Indians at that time in Saudi Arabia. I think we had two Indian friends. One was our friend for many years until he died a few years ago. He became like a brother to me; I was missing that part of siblings. He was there and very nice.

Then there were two Indian nurses, and that was all.

**PS:** Did any of them speak Punjabi?

**BS:** No. The friend of ours was from Pakistan and he spoke Punjabi.

**PS:** Do you also speak Hindi?

**BS:** Yes I do, because I grew up in Delhi and the medium of writing is Hindi. In college you have to use Hindi as the imparting language. I still speak, read, and write Hindi as I was taught.

**PS:** Tell me a bit about raising your children, both in Saudi Arabia and in Nashville and in Minnesota. How has it been different than if you had stayed in India and raised them there?

**BS:** I think we raised them in both the American way and the Indian way. We want them to know our values. I think they have learned that; they were never involved with drugs or anything. I know my son loved to drink, but that was part of growing up in college. He doesn't drink a lot now, but at one time he loved beer and wanted to have big parties. That was hard for us, because we thought we would miss Indian culture and our parents not seeing our kids growing up. On the other hand, when they grow up, what Indian parents expect from kids, we won't get from our kids.

**PS:** Which things are those?

**BS:** We have been taking care financially of my husband's mother and she lived in our house. I could never think of that here.

**PS:** Your kids wouldn't do that for you?

**BS:** Right. They may if the time comes, but that's not expected of American kids here. And that was expected in India. My husband was the oldest son and he had to take care of his mother until she died. We paid for everything she needed. His brothers did help, but basically it was my husband's responsibility. He's the oldest one and financially we are a little bit better off than the other brothers. The way our kids reacted to a lot of things was more emotional. They said, "Mom, I don't have to do that!"

I said, "Well, I can't help it. We will provide for you as long as we can." They kind of enjoyed that. They still like that Indian things and both have American and Indian ways. Just for example, when we go out to eat, I don't think I want my children to pay because we are the parents.

Our daughter-in-law has sometimes difficulty with that. Each family has different values. Money is not the only thing. A lot of other things are involved too. I think our kids are now coming back more to our values. But, when they were growing up, I think they resented some of those values.

**PS:** Which ones do you think they resented?

**BS:** They resented that they couldn't go for dates.

**PS:** You didn't allow them to date?

**BS:** We didn't allow it, but I think they did anyway. My son and daughter dated. But, we had told them, "We don't want any grandkids before marriage. We don't want you to live with somebody you are not married to. We will not be able to stand that." I think they have been very nice; my son got married to a nice girl. But before that, he was dating girls, but I don't think he ever lived with anybody.

You have to accept alot of things from your kids, because you don't want to lose them. But fortunately, we didn't have to make that choice.

**PS:** So, does your daughter want to meet an Indian boy? Are you helping her meet some, or is it too soon?

**BS:** There are actually two families here whose daughters have been married with semi-arranged marriages. There is a paper, India Abroad and people advertise in there. I don't think our daughter will ever want us to go that route. But, if somebody suggests a boy. I told my sister, "If you know somebody nice, tell us." The way it works, is to send pictures and then if my daughter likes somebody from the picture, we will arrange a meeting and maybe date for a couple of months, but with the understanding that this is going towards marriage. It's not just dating. If it works out, we'll have a semi-arranged marriage. That way, we have already seen the family, and know they are suitable. But, the final thing is up to her to decide. She is very Americanized and loves to go out to parties. I think a lot of Indians don't allow that. I think that we may be too liberal for an Indian family, so she may have some problems.

We always had so many American friends and did things very openly. Being a physician, my husband talked openly about sex and drugs in the house. He used to see those problems in his work. There were very open feelings in the house. My son said, "I want to marry an American girl. Somehow I don't feel comfortable with Indian girls because I'm raised as American." That was his choice, and we agreed to his wishes. We had a traditional Indian marriage; almost more traditional than we had in India. He (my son) wanted an Indian marriage.

**PS:** And his wife was okay with that?

**BS:** Yes, she enjoyed everything. She's a Lutheran and they did compromise in their marriage. We had a traditional Indian marriage for them here, and her parents had a very Lutheran marriage for them in Buffalo. I had asked them what your kids are going to be. Linda said, "They will be exposed to both cultures, Sikhism and Christianity. They will be part of both. Their name, of course, will be Indian." She has no problem with that and has kept her maiden name as her middle name. She is known as Linda Roberts, and now is Linda Roberts Singh. She says, "whatever my kids want, they will have no pressure from me or from Jesse. If you influence them more and they become Sikhs, that's fine."

**PS:** Where are they living now?

**BS:** They are in Pittsfield, Massachusetts. My son works for GE Plastics. He is in marketing there. Our daughter-in-law works from home for Minnesota Public Radio (MPR). She is the marketing director, and they didn't want to lose her when she got married. So, they made arrangements for her to work from her house in Pittsfield, and she comes here once a month for one week. I don't know how long that can be done, but she is very happy with that. They are happy with how she works, and she has done a good job. They'll probably keep her until she decides to quit. She would like to get out of the house. It's a new place and she doesn't see too many people. She said she'll try it until April and maybe after then, she'll change. She lives with us when she comes.

**PS:** So, you get to know her?

**BS:** Oh yeah. We get to know her and I get to talk to her

about anything I want to. She's very understanding. That's what we told our son, "no matter who you marry, we want them to accept us the way we are. We are not going to change, and I don't want you to be in a position where you have to choose between your parents and your wife." I think he did a good job.

**PS:** When you were raising your kids, did you see differences in the way you raised them, especially in how you split up tasks in the family or anything? At least, different from how it would have been if you had been in India?

**BS:** I think we raised them the way we were raised in India. Sometimes I think we should have raised them more like here. I was home all day, and my husband was tired when he came home. He really didn't help in the house; that's how he was brought up. My kids really grew up that way too.

**PS:** Did you have servants?

**BS:** In India we did, but not here. I was home and I didn't mind. I was used to it that way. Mom does everything. It was easier for me to do things than asking them to do things wrong. If I had to do it all over again, I would give them more responsibility. When my son moved out of the house, he told me, "Mom, I'm not used to doing all these things. But now I have to." My daughter had the same experience in her own apartment. But, I think she's learning. When I was growing up, my mother never asked me to help in the kitchen or the house. She always told me, "Once you get married, you will have your own house and you'll be working all your life. Just enjoy it when you are unmarried and at home." I had no responsibility of money. I got pocket money so I could buy anything I wanted to. That's what we let our children do. They liked it, but I think it would have been better to have some tasks in the house; emptying the dishwasher or the garbage. But, they were always so busy studying. I used to feel that I'm home all day, and I can do it. They don't have to do it. I think being a mother I did that. But something would have taught to them.

**PS:** How about their religious upbringing? I assume you raised them as Sikhs?

**BS:** Yes, we did.

**PS:** How did you practice that here in Minnesota?

**BS:** We believe in one God, and we have our holy book. We've always had that here in our house since the kids were little. My mother-in-law brought that book with her the first time she came, and I didn't know how to read Punjabi. I did learn, and now I can do it very well. We open the book every morning. We have a special room upstairs in this house. In the old house, we made one of the small rooms our prayer room. They could see that Grandma religiously does everything every morning. I wish we could have taught them more. We were learning ourselves too. I was 19 when I left India. When I was growing up in India, you lived with the religion, and it was understood that you knew enough of it. But, when we came here, there was nobody to ask anything so we were learning ourselves from the Holy Book and other books. So, we taught them what we knew, and they will bow their head and fold their hands outside the door of the prayer room. That is tradition to do before you leave the house. It's like saying a prayer in your mind. We told them to read the five stanzas before they go to sleep at night. They used to read with me. I think we probably made enough impact on them religiously. In Nashville, there was a very strong Baptist community. They would come to the door and ask us, "You're not praying anywhere. Why don't you come to our church?" I said, "Sure, we will come to your church." We would go there just to see what they do. Then they asked us, "Why don't you convert to Christianity?" And I said, "No, I'm very happy with my religion. I respect your religion and you'll have to respect mine too. You can't convert me because I have enough faith in my religion." To me, my God has different names. They call it Christ and we call it Guru Nanak. Its the same God. That's what we have always taught our children too. They didn't know much about Sikhism, but they still felt strong enough. They didn't know too many Sikhs. In this community when we came, I think there were only three other Sikhs. We have all Hindu friends, and they are all nice people. A number of them at that time weren't much into religion. I see the difference now. I think in the last 10 years, there is more Indian community bonding than there was 20 some years ago. We were all trying to be more American, to be accepted by Americans. I think half Indian and half American, because I also grew up here. I was young and I had nice American friends. I have taken a lot of their nice values, and I hope they have taken some Indian values too. I am still a religious person and I do

my prayer every day. I think my kids see that. Now, my son is married to Linda who is not a Sikh and won't convert. But, before she leaves the house, we have to do our prayer.

**PS:** Does she do it as well?

**BS:** Yes. She does it with us. I do it and they stand. We have to cover our head, and traditionally put a Mandala; a quarter in front of our Holy Book. Each time we go there, it can be one penny, but you have to put something called "Das." You are leaving the house and asking God to look after your safety to reach your destination. That is tradition; they cannot leave the house. Linda will stand and say, "Mom, let's go upstairs to the prayer room." She doesn't understand everything, but she is trying, which makes me feel very happy. Our daughter does that too. Right now, she is going through a tough time, and I say, "Go in the prayer room and sit and you will get peace of mind. You can tell God what you are going through and maybe He will pull you through." I have my days when I spend a lot of time too in the prayer room.

**PS:** Is meditation part of the Sikh tradition?

**BS:** Yes it is. Meditation is not a big part, but you are supposed to get up early in the morning as it is a good time to do prayer because your mind is fresh and you can meditate into God. Whatever you say is heard more. During the day, there are more distractions. Actually, Sikh religion is very new; it is only 500 and some years old. But, it is more modern. It may look old because my husband wears a turban. We are not supposed to cut our hair. I have cut mine, but the teaching is that hair is part of your body and it is sacred. You're not supposed to cut it.

**PS:** So, Paul has never cut his hair in his life?

**BS:** No. He wears a turban and he is accepted like that. At Group Health he has been head of the department for the last 20 plus years.

**PS:** How long is his hair?

**BS:** See, once you don't cut it, it doesn't grow. The more you cut it, the more it grows. (While showing wedding pictures) See, this is our daughter. Our son doesn't wear a turban, but he did for the wedding. This is the Buffalo

wedding. This is the wedding party. These are my son's friends who wanted to wear a turban. This is a friend who lives just a few houses down from here. He and Jesse had been friends since they were seven years old. They went to same school; he got married last year. Jesse had 90 office friends who came from all over the country. He wore Indian clothes. It looks like a Marine's outfit, but it is traditional Nehru jacket. We call it Jodhpur jacket. This is my husband and son in their Indian atchkin, which is traditional brocade. Actually, we were surprised when my son said, "I want a real Indian wedding. Get me Indian clothes." So, we had to get everything from India. Linda wore real Indian clothes. Our daughter and four of her friends danced Indian dances at the reception at the St. Paul Hotel. We had a couple of ceremonies here. So, its a mixture of two cultures and it can be the best of both.

**PS:** Sure! Can you tell me about any Indian associations that you are part of?

**BS:** Actually, I used to be part of India Club. My husband and I both served on the Board. I think we got away from that because we got busy with our own social life and the kids. We are still part of Sikh Association of Minnesota, and my husband is the president of that. We just bought a temple about a year ago on University Avenue. It was Old Macdonalds, but we turned it into a Sikh temple. As the population has been growing older, they need a place where they can worship together. The same kind of people have a bonding. I never felt that until we started going to the temple every Sunday. Since my husband is the president, we feel obligated that we have to go and take care of things there. He is really enjoying it, since he is semi-retired and works part time. It is really a good experience for me emotionally. That's part of being fulfilled to go there. Its not that I enjoy all of those people, but its just getting together with them as a Sikh. We couldn't do it when there were so few Sikhs. I get to pray and get peace of mind. It has given us a lot of happiness in the time we spent every Sunday.

**PS:** How big is that association right now?

**BS:** It has 50 members, but there are also non-Sikhs who come there. A lot of Hindus believe in Sikhism, and anybody is welcome. That's a part of Sikhism that you have a lunch every Sunday and everybody brings something. We sit on the

floor with everyone. Somebody else could be a beggar, but you all have to sit together on the floor. The last guru started this because of the caste system in India at that time. In Sikhism, there is no caste; if you are a Sikh you are a Sikh. So, God has made you human beings; it is not about rich, poor, black or white or brown. So, that's the basis of our religion. We share the same food.

**PS:** Are the other's here in the US who are Sikhs tend to be professional people as well?

**BS:** Most of them are, but in the last five years, we have been seeing more motel, hotel, and restaurant owners. I guess in the beginning, the visas were only given to professionals. But now, I can sponsor my brother. I'm a citizen for the last 20 some years. I did sponsor my brother. He is not a professional; he had a tough time adjusting to this culture. He still lives and thinks like an Indian, although he lives here. He would like to go back to India, but he likes the lifestyle here. He doesn't mix with any Americans. He would have been happier in India. I wish I hadn't brought him. It was a big adjustment for him.

**PS:** Was he also a bit older when he came?

**BS:** He was 27 and he wasn't married. He went back to India to get married, and his wife had a hard time adjusting here too. She wasn't accustomed to going out to work, and they both have to work to make a living. He's had a tough time to make ends meet. They have two children and have to get insurance and those things; this is very hard for the average person. They are doing better now; they just bought a house. They lived in Cedar Apartments for ten or twelve years. That's a rough neighborhood. I'm scared to go see my brother there. It was just a very strange sight to see; we've never been exposed to that kind of atmosphere. If I have to go to his house at 10 o'clock at night, I'll tell him to come downstairs and meet my car and bring me to his house.

**PS:** Any other Indian associations that you have been a part of?

**BS:** Indo-American club. When we moved to Minnesota that was the only Indian association. It was connected with the university and they used to have movies once a month. Actually, that's where we met most of the Indians when we

first came here. Everybody was looking for someone to associate and socialize. We found some really nice people and have been socializing with them for the last 20 some years. There are different associations for each region of India. We are Punjabis, and we do associate with them, but we have a lot of Gujarati friends too. Sikhs were so few, but now there are some. We do socialize with some of them but some of them are not professionals. They are nice human beings, but you kind of want to socialize and spend your time where you feel comfortable. We associate with them at the Gurudwara, our temple, but not socially.

**PS:** Are there any other U.S. organizations that you've been a part of? You said you belonged to the YWCA.

**BS:** No, not really. There was an Association of American Physicians from India (AAPI.) We belong to that. We went to their convention. The first time we went I was amazed how many Indian doctors there were. This was in Pittsburgh and the whole Hyatt Regency was reserved by AAPI. It was like going to India. When you opened the elevator, there were Indian kids all over. (laughter) They served Indian food. My first time, I thought, "I am in India!" There were close to 4,000 people at that convention. The hotel ran out of rooms, and had to rent neighboring hotel rooms. They had Indian entertainers from India, and the mayor of Pittsburgh came and he invited the Surgeon General from the Medical Association was there. They were amazed how many Indian doctors were there. They said the American medical system could not do without the Indian doctors. It is an important part of the American Medical Association. Some of the best known physicians are Indian.

**PS:** Deepak Chopra is Indian doctor who may be the best known.

**BS:** Right. Right. There were lots of people doing research. It was nice to see so many people.

**PS:** Tell me a bit about your volunteer work when your children were younger.

**BS:** Yes, I used to work with the Snail Lake school. At the PTA meeting, I volunteered to cook and bring cookies. I think I'm going to start doing more volunteer work now again. I've taken lots from this society, and I think its time to give something back.

**PS:** What kind of things do you think you'll volunteer to do?

**BS:** Now, I'm involved with the Parkinson's Association at Methodist Hospital. They've just started CREATE, a new facility. We are meeting next week and doing inventory. This would be a center where people with Parkinsons can come and talk to each other or get help if they need it. Maybe because my husband has Parkinsons, I really want to know and help people. I think we both have lots to offer. We have time, and we can afford to give some money to this work.

**PS:** And he feels good enough that he can help?

**BS:** Yeah, he can. Some people shake, but everyone has different symptoms. His brain doesn't make enough dopamine. Then he has to take dopamine by mouth. So, in between sometimes, if he doesn't have enough dopamine in his system, his muscles become very rigid and he can't move. Then he is frozen, and just sits and waits for better times. Some days he is perfect all day. Its a neurological disease. We can share with people and they need volunteers. I once went to Group Health to do volunteer work, and they had lots of opportunities there. Its a commitment that I think I'm ready for.

**PS:** The kids are raised.

**BS:** The kids are raised and I've had enough time at home. I want to get out of the house and do some work that will bring me mental satisfaction.

**PS:** You said your sister is in Ohio and you have two brothers in India.

**BS:** Yes, I have two brothers and my Dad in India.

**PS:** How do you keep up your ties with those family members in India?

**BS:** As the years pass by, I think in the early years we were very much involved. We thought about them, and wrote letters. The telephone system wasn't that great. You had to book a telephone and it sometimes took five hours to get through and the connections were not good and it was expensive. Expense was not the only thing; we could afford

it to call once a month for \$50 or so. I wish we had kept better ties. As we are growing older, I think we are getting more close to them. But, those years we can never get back. So, I feel we have fallen apart from each other.

They were young when I left India. I was 19 and my oldest brother was 14. My sister is one year younger than me. They were basically kids when I left India. They feel like I am the oldest sister, and I'm untouchable; like a mother to them. I would like to have a better relationship with them. They respect me like an older sister and do whatever I say. But, I would like to have a close relationship with them. Now, I do call them once a month and talk to my dad.

Its cheaper and you can get through right away. The distance is still there. When my son got married, my brother said, "Gee, I wish you were closer and it wasn't so expensive."

**PS:** Did he come to the wedding?

**BS:** No, but he would have come with the whole family. He's not a poor man, but to buy three tickets is \$4,000. That's a lot of money in India. They know my husband has Parkinsons disease and they would like to spend some time with him and me, but they can't come here.

**PS:** Have they ever come to visit?

**BS:** My mom and dad came. But, my brothers have never been here.

**PS:** So, you've seen them every four years.

**BS:** Actually, the last five years, I've gone there three times, which was nice but expensive. The only thing is that when you go after five years, a lot of things which used to be common are not common any more. According to them, I've become very Americanized. I'm not that Indian any more. Some of the things are kind of difficult for me to accept. They'll do something, and I'll say, "Why did you do that?" They do it more the Indian way, and I sometimes think the American way is better. Like, if we go out to eat, I would like to pay once in a while, but much of the time we can just split the bill six ways. They don't like that, so then you end up not going because either they or I have to pay the full amount. I don't want to pay all the time either. But, if we can't afford it, we don't go. I told them, "I like the American system! What is wrong with that?" You go

out and have fun and pay for yourself. They have a tough time with that.

My brothers live with my Dad, and I tell them, "Why don't you pay rent to him? He's old. He needs money. You have been here for ages, and this is his house, but basically it's your house." They have a problem with that. They say, "Dad's house is our house." I say, "No, this is his house; he can kick you out!" He'll never do that. But coming from me, they think that's pretty strange for the older sister to tell the Dad to kick them out. I don't see anything wrong with that when they make so much money and he is old.

**PS:** But, don't they take care of him too; buy his food and so on?

**BS:** Yes, they do. But I tell them, "I think you should compensate Dad." They do take care of him, but once in a while, they have to know that it's not their house, it is his house. They should know that if he wants to give part of the house to this son, they shouldn't have any problem with that. If he wanted to give to a daughter, that shouldn't be any problem. But, according to Indian custom, daughters should not get any share from the father's estate. I do accept that, but I still have a problem. In my mind, whatever we have will go to both daughter and son. It won't go to our son only.

**PS:** When your father passes on, will your two brothers likely just stay living in the house there with each other and their families?

**BS:** Yes.

**PS:** Are they doing a joint family?

**BS:** Actually, they have been until the last six months had a shared kitchen and bathrooms, but they have separate bedrooms. They eat together in the same dining room. But, I think recently there have been some problems with the wives. They disagreed about who was cooking more and who was eating less. So, it was time for them to separate. They still live in the same house; they just built another kitchen. As long as the eating is separate and the expenses are separate. They used to give so much money every month to my dad, who used to buy the groceries. It was great! One sister-in-law cooked in the morning and the other in the

evening. Each one had some time off. Even my nephews still call their uncles Burder Papa - meaning older dad and younger dad.

**PS:** So, they feel like they have two dads and two moms.

**BS:** It was great, but I knew it wasn't going to last too long.

**PS:** When your husband retires, which will probably be in the next few years, what is your plan?

**BS:** That's a tough decision and we've been thinking about it. We love the community here, and we are part of it. The only thing is, its cold here. If our kids settled down in Minnesota, we probably could stay on here. The cold hasn't really bothered us too much. We usually take a vacation in January for a week. Since he'll be retiring soon, we could go for a month. Next month, we are going to visit my sister for two weeks. Maybe we could rent a condo in Florida or California or some warm place. But, we haven't really decided. Once my daughter gets married, I think we will decide from there. Right now, we'll be part of the this community. Its like extended family to us; we have been here 23 years. This is home and our roots are here now. To go to a new place and start all over again, especially when you are old, you need a company of people. You have more time. That's why I feel kind of lonely. When you grow older, you feel lonely and you want to see your brothers and sisters. I think its a tough time for us. We have three friends our age, and I think they face the same thing. A lot of Indians are younger than we are, and so they even think about it. Older people who are here are the parents of immigrants. We were one of the first ones to come, and we are the first to retire and get old. It can make things tough.

**PS:** Do you think you'll go back to India?

**BS:** I don't think so. I feel like a foreigner there.

**PS:** Might you go back to visit more often and stay longer times, maybe?

**BS:** We were thinking to try living there for a couple of months; not live with anybody but rent a flat. That's the way we will know if we want to live there. When we go from

here, we usually stay at my parent's house. Dad has a big house. We stay there for two weeks, and then visit Paul's sister or brother and stay one week with each of them. You are living out of suitcases and that's different. My son may be going to India on his job. If he does, that would give us a chance to go and live with him; he will have a big house from GE as an American.

**PS:** They might sent him to work in India?

**BS:** Actually, they are training him to be a plant manager when they open up plastic factories in India. I think they have a problem with his age; he's too young to be a plant manager. (laughter)

**PS:** He'll outgrow that after a while. (laughter)

**BS:** He's 29, but he's pretty bright and he knows the language and he can handle it. They are debating; they haven't decided 100% yet. He would like to go for a few years at least. We support him. We've said, "You go and we will come and stay with you for six months." That way, we will know if we can stay in India for long time. We used to have a lot of land and properties in India, but we sold those. Its not that difficult to buy an apartment in India with American dollars.

**PS:** Would you settle in Delhi?

**BS:** That's all I know; I had always lived in Delhi. Its a big crowded city. We are most concerned about the medical aspect, because my husband will need medical care. He has quite a few friends who practice in Delhi, but when you need medical services, its not the same in India as here. Law and order are not really good there.

**PS:** You mean there is a lot of violence and crime?

**BS:** I'm not sure because it's getting bad here too. But, I think sometimes you need to be in the warm climate with your relatives. Even though I have a sister here, she lives in a different city; we see her twice a year. My brother lives here, but we don't see him that often. There is a gap. He's not a professional. Even though he is my brother and we have good relations with him, but still we don't do the same kind of things he does. Due to the age difference, there is a settled gap between his kids and my kids. He's

still my brother, and I see him once in a while, but they do different things. It has become a little lonely. I was talking to some of my American friends, and they feel the same way. When your husband is semi-retired, you kind of lose contact.

**PS:** You're not as engaged in life.

**BS:** Right. I think we are that stage right now.

**PS:** That's a developmental stage of life. Are there any other things that you want to talk about that I haven't asked you yet?

**BS:** There are some values that we have taught our kids. I think I want them to value those values. For example, we are a very close knit family, and we would like that to continue with our kids. Maybe they will have the same with their kids. Family values are very high. I think the American system needs that too.

We had high moral values. I didn't want my kids to have kids before they were married. We have taught them, "No sex before marriage." As far as we know, they were okay, but some things we don't need to know. Some things which may hurt us, I don't think we need to know. They are adults.

Strong religious faith is needed to fall back on. It can be any faith; not only our religious faith. It gives you moral support and gets you through the hard times. We like respect for elders. We have taught our kids. Sometimes they will start discussing things which we never did to our father or grandfather.

**PS:** You mean, disagreeing?

**BS:** Disagreeing, yes.

**PS:** Is that hard to take?

**BS:** It was in the beginning. But now, I think its a healthy thing to have, as long as its within limits. Disagreement can be nice. They have read something and they have an opinion and we have our opinion. They can both be right, and we have to respect each other. It is good. I had a hard time, but now I'm better. We don't expect too much from our kids. We don't expect them to take care of us

when we grow older. They have told us they will be there if we need them, but financially I hope we don't need them. That becomes a burden, and we don't want to do that to our kids. I think we have good kids. I think we are very happy.

There are families whose kids have gotten really strange. They couldn't decide between both cultures, and they had pressures from parents. I know some Indian families where the kids went strange. When they went to college they became alcoholic and resented all the Indian values. We told our Indian values to them, but we were not really strict. We didn't force. The kids come back and tell us, "You could have been a little bit more strict. You were not very strict with me, and I turned out to be a very nice person. But, I could have gone the other way too." Both kids have said that, but it was our way of giving them freedom to decide. I think they decided well.

My son used to have wild parties. We let him have parties only when we are here at home. One year, he had one hundred people and a couple of people got really drunk. We told them they had to sleep at the house. We won't let them go because we are liable.

**PS:** Were they under-age?

**BS:** They were in high school, so I guess they were under-age. This was 1982 or 83. They were not supposed to drink, but they brought their booze from their home, so what can you do? One time, they had a keg of beer. We will be here, and we want to make sure nobody drinks too much. I think they resented it, but if that was the only way he could have his friends over, he accepted that. I didn't mind if he had friends over, but he had to behave. Paul is a physician and he can talk to people. I know my son resented that. He said, "Why do you have to be here when my friends come?"

**PS:** Because its against the law to drink when you're 15!

**BS:** But, I would rather he did it at home, rather than go out and have an accident or something. Most of the time, whenever he had parties, his friends slept over. Then, I would fix a nice breakfast in the morning and they would all drive home. So, somethings I think we learned while our children were growing up. Our daughter was very different. She didn't like the parties or drinking. Our son never

drank too much, but that was his way of being accepted by other kids as an Indian. He looks very Indian and he is very handsome looking. He has done very good in his life. That was his way of showing people that he's not any different.

**PS:** Does he cut his hair?

**BS:** Yeah. We cut his hair when he was 7.

**PS:** Did he ask for that?

**BS:** Yes, he did. He used to say, "Why did my God make me like that so I have to have long hair?" We could see some problem with his growing up, so we decided that if he would live in this country, it was not fair for him to have long hair. Growing up an Indian, they would probably have a lot of pressures, being a Sikh with long hair when there was nobody else in this community who he could associate with. So, we did cut his hair. He kind of blossomed. He's a very outgoing person and that was a turning point for him. I think he respected us for that. After that, my daughter and I both have cut our hair. But, my husband still wears his turban. Paul is not a very religious person, but he sees himself in a turban. His nurses and kids he cares for respect him the way he is. Some of the kids who have only seen him, think that all of the doctors should wear a turban. (laughter) At Group Health, he has always been accepted for who he is. One day, at Halloween time, the nurses said, "We have never seen you without your turban. We would like to see you." So, he went without his turban in a hat, and they didn't recognize him because he looked like a different person. One of the nurses looked at him when he walked in and said, "Can I help you?" He looked at her, and she gasped, "Oh, my God, Dr. Singh!" (laughter) Nobody recognized him without the turban. He doesn't wear it all the time. He wears it socially. When we go shopping, he wears regular hats and matches the hat to his outfit. He has a lot of baseball caps and some fancy hats.

**PS:** Does he keep it tied up?

**BS:** Yes, his hair is just a little bit longer than mine, but mine is very bushy and stiff. He makes a bun up here (pointing to the top of her head). The roots are grown upwards after so many years of being carried up. Its a small bun; he has very thin hair, and he always wears a cap.

He has never gone out without it. It feels to him like he's naked; as if I went out without my blouse. I don't think he has ever been uncomfortable about it. There are some situations when we went to a New Year's Eve party. Somebody said, "I like the hat you have on! Can I have it?"

Paul said, "You can't have that. That's mine." The man said, "Why not? I want that hat!" We had to kind of explain to him it was a turban. But the man insisted, "If you are wearing it, I want that!" Somebody was very drunk.

Luckily, we have never been exposed to that very much. Maybe the people we associate with are educated enough and they accept you the way you are. Maybe you have to start from scratch.

**PS:** Any other things you want to talk about?

**BS:** I think we have achieved the so-called "American Dream."

**PS:** Uh huh. I think a lot of Indian families have done it. I'll bet that feels good.

**BS:** Right. Most of the Indian have done very well in this country and education was probably one factor and the Indians are very hard-working people. Indians are very helpful and honest. I think the whole of America has offered a lot to Indians. I think it is good to be part of this nation. I think all the older people say we should be more involved in politics now. Financially, Indians are very secure people. Indians are the most affluent minority group in America. It was in Forbes magazine. They quoted figures that the average earning of Indians were more than \$50,000 per year. I'm not sure exactly, but it was way above the average salary of Americans, so I guess Indians have done very well. But, maybe the first generation of immigrants always does well because they have to prove themselves. I hope the second generation does as well. Right now, I think the next generation of Indian kids are very intelligent and intellectual, but I'm not sure what will happen after that. That is yet to be seen.

**PS:** It will unfold over time.

**BS:** Right. I think, basically, we have been very hard working. I'm not that way, but I see that a lot of Indians kind of stick together. This bothers me, because if we don't expose ourselves and our culture to the Americans, how

are they going to know about us? We have to make the first step. When we moved here, we used to live on another street, but our new neighbors didn't know who we were. When we moved into this house, we wanted all the neighbors to feel comfortable with us, so we gave a big party. We had lots of people over for dinner here. If they had some notions about how Indians lived and how we eat or whatever, it kind of cleared the air. We are not different. We are human beings.

**PS:** And you can eat with a fork and knife just like everybody else! (laughter)

**BS:** Right. So, we know all the neighbors pretty well, and we are not involved day to day, but once in a while we have Christmas party. I still have my best friend, Judy. She was the first one I met here. We are very good friends, and see each other often. I can talk to an American lady much more openly than I can talk to an Indian lady.

**PS:** Really? Why is that?

**BS:** I don't know, maybe because I kind of grew up here. My two best friends are American. They understand me and my Indian culture enough. Sometimes they will say, "I don't know why you have to do this." I reply, "Don't ask me why, but I have to do it." (laughter) But, I can talk to them about anything. We confide in each other.

**PS:** That's a gift.

**BS:** Yeah. Friends are a big gift; they make things easier.

**PS:** I appreciate you taking time to talk to me today. This has been really nice.

**BS:** Thank you. I enjoyed it and I think I look back and we had a pretty nice life. Adversities do happen, and my husband's sickness is one of those. Its hard to accept it, but that's the way life is. God has been nice to us.

**PS:** Thank you very much.