Interview with Geeta McGibbon

Interviewed by Polly Sonifer February 13, 1998

PS: This is Polly Sonifer interviewing Geeta McGibbon on February 13, 1998. Good morning. How are you?

GM: Fine, thank you. How are you?

PS: Good. First of all, Geeta, tell me a little bit about yourself, where you were born, what day you were born, and things like that.

GM: I was born on April 21, 1960, in Nanital in India, which is a mountain city in the, I guess, foothills, but the hills of the Everest Mountains. It's a beautiful, beautiful area. It has a big huge lake. I was not there long, however. When I was six months old, my parents moved to Boston, so I wasn't there long. I have visited Nanital once since, in 1979, and that's how I know about the place. But that is where I was born.

PS: Were you the first child in your family?

GM: Yes, I was.

PS: Tell me your parents' names and what they were doing at the time.

GM: My father is Dr. Krishna Mohan Saxena. He's a physician. He's an endocrinologist now. At that time, he was practicing in Nanital. That's why we were there. My mother is Dr. Kusum Saxena. I am not sure if she was practicing there at the time or not. I really don't know. That's their occupation and their names.

PS: So your mother's also a doctor?

GM: Yes.

PS: Are they both still working as physicians?

GM: My mother is retired. My father is working.

PS: Did you end up having siblings?

GM: Yes, I have one brother, who is three years younger than me, Sanjaya Saxena. He's also a physician now.

PS: How did you escape becoming a physician yourself?

GM: Well, I went to school intending to do that, because that's all I ever really knew about and heard about. So I went to Carleton College, intending to be a biology major, ended up with an economics major. I really just prefer the business kind of life. Although I didn't do too much with it later, but just course of events. My father, although he truly would have wanted me to be a doctor, that's what I knew growing up, but he did give me my own choice and said, "You have to do what you really would love to do." So some day, after I raise my kids, I'd like to get back into some kind of business field.

PS: Do you know about why your parents came to the States?

GM: Yes. After I was born, shortly after that time, my father received an invitation from Harvard Medical School to come and teach there, and so he accepted that. That's why we moved to Boston, actually Malden, Massachusetts. They had never intended to stay in the United States permanently, but we were there in the Boston area for five years, then we did move back to India for two. I don't know if you want me to--

PS: I'd love to hear it.

GM: Before we left to return to live in India, he took a cross-country tour from the East Coast to the West Coast, and en route we stopped in St. Paul and we stayed for one month with a dear friend of my parents, Dr. Defoe. I'm not quite sure, again, exactly what the position was, but my father did work at St. Paul Children's Hospital for one month.

Then we continued our trip, which was basically pleasure and seeing the sights before we were going back to India. This was 1965. Then in 1967, my father received an invitation from St. Paul Children's to come and work there, as director of medical education, and then he built on that, and he also taught at the university. So that brought us back to the United States in 1967.

So what was the question? I've forgotten what the question was.

PS: I don't remember. [Laughter] So you went back to India when you were about five?

GM: Yes. Yes, I lived there for two years, from about five to seven years old.

PS: Then moved to St. Paul, and you've lived in the Twin Cities area ever since?

GM: Correct.

PS: Tell me about those years when you were really small. I'm assuming you don't

remember anything about India, if you were six months old when you left the first time.

GM: The first time, no. Then I have recollections of Boston. I started preschool there. My brother was born. He was born in Boston.

Then my recollections of India, I have some, mainly of school. I went to a Catholic school. I don't know the name. I had a uniform. I remember the houses. My grandmother's house is still the home she lives in today. So I really remember that, because I've visited there a few times since, and can remember that quite well. I remember relatives of my parents, such as their aunts and uncles, and their homes. I remember my grandfather from there. In India they live with extended family, generally. So my grandfather had quite a large home. We had the middle level of it, and my grandfather and one of my uncles and aunt and their kids lived there. We joined them and lived there. I just have a few memories of those places.

Then we moved to a place called Green Park, which is kind of a suburb, I guess you'd call it, of New Delhi. We had an apartment there, quite a nice apartment for India at that time. I remember the school there, my brother and I went to school. We would walk to school. It was close to my grandmother's house. So I have recollections of things from that time also.

PS: When you were younger than five, you were living in Boston, right?

GM: Yes.

PS: What do you remember about Boston?

GM: Not too much. I remember our apartment, like I said, when my brother was born.

PS: What language did your family speak at home?

GM: I'm told that I learned Hindi at first, and then when I went to preschool, learned English. So I was pretty much bilingual at the age of five. The Catholic school that I went to in India, I remember we would speak English. Then I think when I went to school in the Green Park area, I think, it was mostly done in Hindi, although they teach English along with it. So for those years, I was bilingual. I believe that at home we would speak mostly Hindi.

PS: That's your parents' native tongue?

GM: Yes.

PS: What part of India are they both from?

GM: From the Delhi area. My father's family is from Lucknow, which is a little bit south of Delhi. But mainly the New Delhi area.

PS: What do you know about how your parents met and married?

GM: I know that they met in medical school. Although it's supposed to be an arranged marriage, I know that my father had seen my mom--she is three years younger than he is--and probably had talked with her and so forth. They then selected each other and got married.

PS: They selected each other.

GM: I think so. The way the arranged marriages work is that one family agrees to meet with the certain other person, and the families will meet. Then the two that are in question, I guess, meet and they have a choice, they can say no, if they don't want. So they decided that they would get married, that they thought it would work, and wanted to be together.

PS: Did they court at all, or it was like one meeting and it was all decided?

GM: I don't know factually about that, really, but the way tradition is, and culture is, I'm sure they definitely did not date as we know it here. There's no courtship. I would doubt that there was any time away alone. Possibly in another room of the house where they could talk or something, or maybe an hour together somewhere, but I know there was no dating. At that time, I really doubt if they left the house together alone, but I could be wrong. I've never asked that.

PS: Have you not ever been interested, or haven't they wanted to talk about it?

GM: I guess I just haven't asked. Yes, I am interested. I don't know. I just haven't asked.

PS: So they were married for a while and lived in India, and both got to come here. When you came here the first time, your father was working in Boston. Was your mother working at that time as a doctor?

GM: Yes, in Boston she was. She was working part-time. I don't know the name of the hospital, but it was close to where we lived.

PS: How did they care for you while she was working?

GM: I went to nursery school. I don't know when I was an infant. I believe I went to, I guess, like a day care. Then I remember the nursery school and so forth. It must have

taken her a time to find a job also. So like I said, I'm sure a babysitter or something. I'm not positive on those facts.

PS: You just don't remember that very much?

GM: I remember my nursery school, but that was when I was three. I don't remember pre one year old and up to three years old, like that.

PS: When you were in Boston, who did your parents socialize with or hang out with? Did you hang out with other Indian people or white folks?

GM: I'm not, again, not sure. I know that she had a birthday party for me, which I have pictures of, and there were Indian people there, and American. My dad's colleagues were quite helpful, I know. So I'm sure they socialized with people that he met through his work and research that he did there. There's kind of a network with Indian people, so I'm sure when they arrived in Boston, they made some calls and found out about other Indian people there and probably met. I don't know that they have any ties with anybody there now. Although I just remembered, my dad has a cousin who lives in Boston, or in that area now, and I think that he was there and established there. He's an architect. So possibly through them, Raj and Cindy Saxena, that they may have met people, because I know he was there before we arrived.

PS: So then you were five years older, so when you went back to India, what was that like for you? Is it a shock to be in a place like India again, or did it seem like going home? What was that like?

GM: I don't recall what I felt like, what my emotions were, as a five-year-old. Our family is very close-knit. My parents have kept it close. Well, my aunts and uncles. We can get into that later. But my family, my husband and my kids, just went back last year, and I have realized that it's a very close family. So even though we were gone for the four or five years, whatever it was, I'm sure I was taken back just as if I had never left. So I don't remember what I felt like going back, if I didn't want to leave school. I really don't recall any of that. It was just a way of life. As a five-year-old, all you really need are your parents, and then you have the family. So I'm sure I really loved it, because I was with my grandparents again and my aunts and uncles and cousins and so forth. So I'm sure it was all great.

PS: Then two years later you come back to Minnesota, or you come to Minnesota.

GM: Yes.

PS: Do you remember what that adjustment was like for you? By then you were seven, right?

GM: Yes, I was seven then. I remember starting school. I went to a school in St. Paul for a year, second grade at Linwood School. Then I remember our move out here to the Mahtomedi area and beginning school here. I remember like leaving the airport in India, and we had trunks full of things because we were moving here. Again, not permanently. I don't think my parents have said that they didn't ever intend to stay permanently. But I would imagine that at that time my father did not know. He was taking on a new position, a new job, an exciting job. I'm sure he didn't know exactly what the future--you know, how long we'd be here. But I remember that being quite tearful at the airport, leaving the whole family and everything.

Then coming here, we had an apartment in St. Paul. I remember the snow, lots of snow. Again, not really, I don't remember my feelings as to whether I was sad or frightened. I'm pretty easy-going and always have been. Since I knew English, that was a good thing; it didn't hinder anything. So I could go to school, or I could talk to people, and I didn't have a problem with that. It wasn't too hard to assimilate.

PS: This was about 1967?

GM: Yes, September of '67.

PS: What do you remember about the Indian community that was here in the Twin Cities at that time?

GM: I just remember meeting quite a few people. I was usually the oldest second generation, the oldest child, and being a girl, also, I kind of ended up taking care of the other little kids. I was telling my husband about this recently, it's kind of funny, they would, during the summer months, always have picnics at one of these parks, like Keller Park or Como Park, definitely, and we would go. All the Indian ladies would have all the Indian food packed up and ready to go. They usually had saris or another traditional outfit, which is a silver camis, just kind of a pants and a longer tunic-type top.

My husband was remembering that he had, maybe sometime in his past, in his childhood, gone and seen all these Indian people. I'm sure it was kind of a different sight with all these colorful saris and all the Indian food and the smell of that, maybe, and then all the kids running around.

But anyway, we had lots of picnics with the large groups of Indian people. So I recall that. Parties that my parents had. Just getting together in pretty big groups, usually.

PS: When those groups got together, what language did they speak?

GM: Hindi.

PS: All the kids would?

GM: No, the kids would speak English.

PS: What was that like? Did you ever think about that being kind of odd, or did that just seem real natural to you?

GM: Or actually I should say, with me, I was school age, and so I may have spoken Hindi at first to some of the kids. I know our parents and their generation definitely all spoke in Hindi. They still do, for the most part, when Indian groups of people get together, at least with my parents.

I'm getting ahead of myself here, but anyway, now when we get together like for Christmas, there's probably eight families that we have done Christmas with for the past ten, twelve years. We all speak English. However, there's a certain group of friends that my parents have, and when they get together, they mainly speak Hindi.

Anyway, back to the question. We may have spoke Hindi a little bit in the beginning, but I'm sure it became English quite soon. Then you get some of that, that the parents would speak in Hindi and the kids respond in English. But, again, I know for a lot of the kids that were maybe coming, we had been here and they were coming over, they'd speak Hindi. But at school, you had to learn English, you had to speak it, you had to become fluent with it.

PS: That was pretty easy for most of the kids?

GM: Yes. So I think at home, my brother and I would probably speak Hindi to each other, but quickly it became English. My parents would speak Hindi and we'd speak English. Then slowly it became all English, and now we all speak English.

PS: When you think about those years when you were young, grade school and younger, what were the values that your family stressed or communicated to you were important?

GM: Education was the main thing, I think. Of course, being a good, honest, hardworking person. Education was the biggest thing. That comes from my dad's side. Well, my mother, too. They're both highly intelligent people and have really worked hard and come a long way. So that, I guess, would be the one that I recall. But, of course, just being a good, loving, family-valuing person.

PS: So family was pretty important?

GM: Family was very important, yes.

PS: Was your family of Hindu religion?

GM: Yes.

PS: Were they practicing that?

GM: I recall that more when we moved to St. Paul, and probably been there a couple of years. Then we started. So we didn't always do it. I'd say, maybe, like 1970, let's say, when we started doing puja, which is prayer, on Sunday mornings in a little, not really a shrine, but with some statues of some of the prominent Indian gods. We had a bookshelf area, and then my mom would set up the little statues, and we would go there on Sunday morning and remove our shoes, of course, and pray probably for about ten minutes together, and do arthi [phonetic], which is, I guess, kind of a hymn-type thing, do that every Sunday morning before we had breakfast and so forth.

PS: This was in your home?

GM: This was in the home. We did that every Sunday then. We still do. They do, definitely, and if we go over there on a Sunday morning or something, before breakfast or brunch, we do that.

PS: Is Sunday the sacred day in India, as well?

GM: I don't know if it stands out like here with the Christian religion. That is the day that we did it. That's the day my parents go to the temple now. I don't know if that's just out of convenience or--I'm trying to think, in India, when we were there, but, see, usually when we go there, we go for weddings, and then it doesn't matter what day it is.

PS: Everything's unusual.

GM: Yes. So I don't know factually about that, if Sunday is the worship day.

PS: Getting back to when you were in school, in grade school, in the Mahtomedi area, my guess is that there weren't a lot of children of color at that time.

GM: No, not at all.

PS: How was that for you?

GM: I have been very fortunate in that it really was not a problem. I didn't feel any different. People were very good to me. You're absolutely right, this is a very "WASP" area. There was nobody of color at all here, I don't even believe, any Korean, Japanese,

anybody. It's mainly Catholic kids. I find out now from friends that knew meparticularly, we had a neighbor, and I am friends with cousins of theirs now, and they remember me as this cute little Indian girl that ran around. It's kind of funny to hear that.

There's only one time when my brother came home a little upset, because he had been teased about being dark or something, I can't really remember. I don't think I ever got any comments like that. If they were going on behind my back or something, I have no idea. But I know it was mainly that we were from India, and that my parents were both doctors. We were kind of, I guess, we were considered intelligent. I did pretty well in school and that came across. But I had friends. I had friends all the time. I had friends over. They would be surprised by the food that we may have had sometimes. My mom would always make the macaroni and cheese or the hot dogs, or something, along with it.

I have one friend, she moved into our neighborhood in third grade, and she still teases me about the fact that she was excited to come over and have Indian food, and here she got served macaroni and cheese and hot dogs, and thought, "Oh, no." So, really, I've been very fortunate that way. I have not felt any prejudice against me. Now, I know that my parents didn't talk about it too much, and this is from later, but I know that they felt some in different circumstances.

PS: Felt discrimination or prejudice?

GM: Yes, both. Yes, in different ways. I guess, they could tell you a lot more. But they didn't talk about that to us. There was never any--that we shouldn't associate with people. I mean, everybody around us was Anglo, I guess.

PS: So it sounds like you kind of had two different worlds. You had this group of people that you lived around in your neighborhood and you went to school with those kids, and then on these Sundays you'd have these picnics with all the Indian people who spoke Indian and wore saris.

GM: Exactly.

PS: Did you have the feeling of going distinctly between two different worlds?

GM: Not really. But you are right, and socially there would be times when my parents would have my father's, or mom's, colleagues over, and that would be American people. She'd have dinner parties or something. Then there would be times when there were the big groups of Indian people. There was rarely a time when they mixed. Whenever we went anywhere it was--I mean, they did that quite often. They socialized quite a bit, especially with the Indian groups of people. I'm sure that's because there was such a small community of them. I remember traveling to Apple Valley, and in those days that was quite the trip.

PS: Long way.

GM: Yes, a long way. Because everybody was spread out. But they would get together. But, no, I don't think I felt like it was strange. It was two different things. You'd speak Hindi at those functions, and when the American people were over, obviously, everybody spoke English. But I don't remember feeling that that was-that was just the way our life was. We, obviously, I mean, we knew we were from India and knew that we were Indian, but it wasn't difficult and it didn't seem strange.

PS: Was the School of Indian Language and Culture, the SILC school, was that around when you were young? istory kin

GM: I don't believe so. I haven't even heard of that.

PS: It's called SILC, S-I-L-C.

GM: It stands for what?

PS: School of Indian Language and Culture. A number of Indian parents started it here in the Twin Cities to teach their kids languages. But it sounds like you grew up being fluent in both, anyway, because of how you lived.

GM: Yes.

PS: Let's move on to your junior high and high school years. You continued to live in Mahtomedi?

GM: Yes.

PS: Did you stay in the public schools?

GM: Yes

PS: Did anything shift or change when you got to be in junior high?

GM: No, not really, except that question of dating was, you know, I knew that that wasn't an accepted thing for my parents, but I was always able to go to the dances. I don't know what you call it, like we had the Silver Bell Dance or whatever, where the girls asks the guy. That was in high school. No, not too much. Nothing too different.

PS: How did your parents communicate with you that dating wasn't okay? How did you pick up that rule?

GM: I was so intuitive. [Laughter] I don't know. I knew about arranged marriages, that that was our culture, that was our tradition. I was probably fifteen before I started thinking that that was not a thing for me. I didn't have anybody specific that I was interested in, or anything like that, but I just remember I was probably about that age, fourteen, fifteen, when I knew that I wanted to have my choice, that I wasn't going to be told that this was--although I said earlier that you do have a choice.

Now let me get into something different. In '74, I was fourteen. My cousin, my father's older sister's daughter, and she's ten years older than me, so she was around twenty-four, came to live with us. Her parents sent her over for education and so forth, and she came to live with us. I was quite close with her. She'd been here about a year, and then evidently my aunt and uncle sent a letter to my dad and my mom and said that they wanted her to get married. So this was kind of my first exposure to this whole thing. That was really interesting, because my cousin and my mom and dad would go on the weekend and fly to Chicago or Michigan. I don't know where the places were that they went. They would go and they would be going to interview the potential spouse and families. I remember her thoughts on it, she'd come back and talk to us, and she was sad, I guess you could say. She didn't think she wanted to get married. She was frightened, I'm sure.

Finally, they went to Chicago and she met the person who is her husband now. That's how I got to know about the process, I guess you could say. I was fourteen, fifteen years old as all this was going on. Those kind of years, in junior high, where my friends now at this time were getting together, starting to date, and I kind of had little crushes on guys at school, but I knew that I couldn't have them over to watch TV or anything like that. So I was making the choice, though, that this was not a thing that I was going do. I was going to do it the more American way, and date and find a guy, or whatever you're going to do.

But that was very interesting at that time and getting her feelings. She was afraid. She wasn't sure. She has been very happily married since she got married. They had the wedding at our home. My mom did all the preparation, all that work. That was very interesting, a lot of fun.

PS: She was sent by her parents from India to come here for the purpose of finding a man?

GM: Education, and then later the marriage. I don't know exactly how this worked, but I believe that some of that must have had to do with getting your visa and all that. She must have gotten the status where she could, or possibly she would have had to go back had she not gotten married. I would have to ask my mom and dad about that, if that was an issue at that time. But at any rate, yes, her parents notified my mom and dad that they would like them to try to find a husband for her from the U.S. area.

PS: They just trusted your parents that they would find the right young man?

GM: Oh, yes.

PS: Her parents never met him, even after she agreed to the marriage?

GM: No, they probably met with some of his family. He had family in India, also, so they probably did meet with those, and probably his parents. I'm guessing. But, no, they probably did not meet him until they traveled back to India as a married couple, right. But again, my dad and his whole family, but particularly the sister, are very, very close. Everybody respects my parents and their opinion, so I don't think that was a problem. Again, she had some choice. I remember that she'd come back and say, "No, that guy was not--" I think it was Detroit or something they went to meet somebody, and she didn't like that guy at all. So they didn't pursue that at all.

PS: But she didn't have any courtship with the fellow she finally married?

GM: No.

PS: It was one meeting and then she had to decide?

GM: Meeting, and then if you're interested, or think that there's some kind of hope, there were a couple other meetings. They went back. I think he may have come up here, up and visited us. So, before they got married, they did spend short amounts of time together. But I think, right, you kind of have to decide after maybe one or two meetings, that this is okay. And likewise, for the other side.

PS: So what I hear from you is that she was somewhat reluctant to do this process, but in the end she did.

GM: That's what I remember.

PS: What was it about her, do you think, that she was willing to get married, even when she wasn't really interested in getting married, or did this particular fellow just strike her fancy, the one she chose?

GM: I've known my other cousins, having gone through this, and as I've gotten older and been able to understand this whole process more, if your parents say that it's time that you get married, that's kind of it. I'm not saying she didn't want to get married ever. Maybe, let's say, had she been able to date, and done it kind of the more Western way, she may have waited. But she knew she wanted to get married, and if her parents said this was the time, and then they were doing all this process of trying to find somebody, that

was the time. So she didn't have much of a choice.

PS: It was out of respect and obedience to her parents?

GM: Absolutely, yes.

PS: Rather than a desire in her to get married?

GM: Right, at that time. Let's put it that way.

PS: Did you have any conversations with your parents during that time about your own future and how that might unfold?

GM: No.

PS: You were only fourteen or fifteen.

GM: Right. No. Probably neither of us wanted to bring that up. There were some difficulties. My parents were having a hard time. I was not a bad adolescent at all. They're pretty lucky that my brother and I were pretty good. But I think just the whole thing, just even that there were parties, a group of girls getting together and stuff, I think the whole thing was just new and different for my parents, especially my mom, because in India those kind of things just weren't done. Sure, they got together with their friends and went to a movie, or went to have ice cream, or something like that, but just like sleepovers, she just was not keen on sleepovers, and just as a general rule. Talking on the phone, I mean, something like that. Well, in India several homes don't even have phones. Now it's different, but at that time, there'd be one phone for the whole street, let's say, or several houses. So just those kind of things.

I think the whole adolescent thing was kind of difficult for them. Again, nothing terrible happened. I wasn't a rebellious kid. But we were just kind of drifting apart, where I wouldn't come home and talk to her about maybe that I had a crush on a boy or something. I just wasn't confiding in her that way. So, no, as those thoughts were going that I was going to date, or something, or choose my husband the Western way, I didn't express that, I guess, to them.

On the other side, too, I don't remember any formal conversation that they said that this is the way it's going to be, until later, probably more when I was nineteen, twenty, because at that time I had--my husband was--we were quite involved. Anyway, we'll get to that later. But I don't remember them saying at that time, when I was fifteen, those years, saying that this is what--it was just kind of known thing, that this was what I was expected to do, have the kind of arranged marriage and all that, as my cousin was going through at the time.

Same with my brother. My brother was, what, twelve at that time, or so. When he and I would talk, we would just say to each other that we couldn't imagine being told that this was the guy. I mean, that's kind of what we thought at that time. And not being able to "get to know" somebody the way you wanted to know them, and then decide if you'd like to get married.

PS: Interesting. So when you were in middle school and junior high and high school, what kinds of things were you involved with? I'm assuming you did pretty well academically.

GM: Yes. I skied, played tennis, was in several plays in high school, and then I did speech. What else? Skied a lot. I really loved to ski. I played a lot of tennis.

PS: Were you on teams that did those things?

GM: No.

PS: Just recreation?

ther GM: Yes. There was gymnastics. I did that, and then I hurt my knee, and was kind of out of that. But I did go to gymnastics camp with a bunch of girlfriends. That was in ninth grade at that time, in the summer. So I never have formally been on a team. I would have been, but I hurt my knee, like I said. There was no ski team for girls. There weren't really too many options at that time. Ice skated with a neighbor friend. They had a pond behind their house, and so I did that. She was a good friend of mine for a lot of years. That was about it.

Weekends and stuff, I remember getting a little resentful. This is just a thought that came to me. This could have been later, in high school. But my girlfriends would be going out, getting together or something, and I remember having to go with my parents to maybe an Indian movie at the university, or having to go to a party that was with their friends. I remember becoming a little resentful of that, and wanting to go out with my friends. But, again, I don't know how much of that is the Indian as opposed to Western, or just my parents being a little more strict than my friends' parents were at the time. I know now, being a mom of a thirteen-year-old daughter, we're pretty--I wouldn't say lenient. I'm quite strict with the things that I expect out of my kids. But as far as letting her be with her friends and going places and getting together with them, she gets to do all that. That's just the difference. I think that over the years--and my parents and I are very close now-that they see that, and that they understand all that, and know that they were, for whatever reason, just more strict.

But again, getting back to that, so I remember doing all these kind of things with my

parents' friends all the time and kids that I knew. But like I had said, that was one of the older kids, and I was younger, so it wasn't like a great fun time for me. I mean, it was okay. Especially as I was getting older, and girls want to be together with their friends, I wasn't able to do that. So those kind of emotions were happening at that time.

PS: So you didn't date behind their backs?

GM: I started to when I met Jerry, who is my husband. When I was sixteen, we met. When I turned seventeen, started doing things maybe alone with Jerry. I don't remember when this happened, but he would call, not very often. Yes, so guys couldn't even call on the phone. I don't remember how all these things happened, but I do remember that like with the guys in my grade, and so forth, it just kind of became known that I wasn't allowed to go out. I don't remember like saying that or announcing that, it just through my friends, or whatever, it happened. So guys I think were a little more reluctant, or nervous, and some people knew my mom and dad, and knew my mom was a little more strict than other moms.

Things were going on, I suppose, when girls got to be fifteen, sixteen, and they could have guys over to watch TV or whatever. Those things weren't happening with me.

Anyway, back to Jerry. I told my mom and dad I was interested in this guy, and so I know that they knew I was starting to date him. There would be times when I might be with him, but they kind of decided to pretty much shut it out, and I don't know what their thoughts were. I shouldn't put words in their mouths. So it was known that I was interested in him, that he would call once in a while. So they knew Jerry. I would talk with my brother, and he knew that at certain times I would be going out with him or something, but it was not acknowledged. It was not talked about at home. Again, I shouldn't put words in my parents' mouths, but I'm thinking that they just thought maybe it would go away, or that it wouldn't become a serious thing. Now they adore him. [Laughter] And they have acknowledged that.

Again, just for me, from fourteen years to after I got married, about twenty-three years, I was not close with my parents, you know, talking about things, and they realize that. It's hard to define whether those were just--a lot of it was because of their traditions, especially my mother's, and her wanting and having expectations of me. A lot of it was just so new and different for them, and maybe not accepting the Western ways and the way that teenagers were perceived to be and the dating thing and all that.

My brother is not married right now, still, and that's my mom's goal. She'd like to see him married. The arranged marriage issue has come up. They know that he is not open to that at all. So if their true desires could have happened, they would have arranged my marriage, and it probably would have been to an Indian man, probably just like me, who's grown up in America, but of Indian descent.

I was going somewhere with that. The interesting thing is, is that myself and Jerry have kind of approached my brother with the option of an arranged marriage. There was a particular woman that my parents had in mind, and so we've kind of come around, also, that that isn't such a bad idea. You know, not for us, but I think we're a little bit unique, too, that we found each other so young, and we do have a great relationship. Like I said my parents adore him now. But that doesn't always happen.

Anyway, so we've come around to this arranged marriage thing, that it's not as terrible as I had once thought. I've seen it work with family members and my cousins. So as an option for my brother, who says he wants to get married and has not been able to find the right person, or just made the commitment, you know, we had approached him at one time. Didn't go too far with it. He kind of put an end to that.

So, a lot of compromise happened between my parents and us, and just growing up and realizing how things were. If you want me to kind of get into their arranged marriage thing, my thoughts on it--

PS: Sure.

GM: Just recently, probably about six months ago, I was having a talk with my mom and found out, I had never realized this, but there is a lot of abuse, spousal abuse, in India, a pretty high percentage. Until I heard that, which was, like I said, recently, a few months ago, I was starting to think that, at least for the Indian culture, and Indian society, being that that's such a strong and old tradition, arranged marriage does seem to work. They're kind of getting into the little dating thing, but the older generations really look down upon that. So the arranged marriages have worked. The main thing about that is the commitment thing; there really isn't a choice for divorce. Few, few people get divorced, and when they do get divorced, it's a very bad thing. A woman divorced probably will never get married again, and if there's children involved, it's the worst. It's just not as accepted as it is here now. So I was starting to think that, you know, for that culture, at least, it's not such a bad thing. Then when I heard that, and started to put some things together about maybe some family members, and realized that I'm not real sure, because I think there's probably a lot of turmoil. The only thing about it is that they know that there's a commitment, you aren't going to separate. But what goes on then, I don't know if it's such a good thing. There's a lot of affairs that go on. I don't know if it's the best.

PS: The men and women are both having affairs, or just the men?

GM: What I know of, it would probably be just the men.

PS: Who are they having them with? Other married women or young women?

GM: I would think single. I don't have any facts on this. This is just a little bit of insight into a few--I don't have any facts to back this up. But who knows, it could be other married women. I don't know. I can't say on that.

Then that abuse thing, I was thinking, wow, that must happen much more than I had ever thought about. So I don't know if it's a good concept or not anymore, whereas, oh, about a year ago, for those who choose to do that, it is. But again, then I'm back to like my cousin, there is no choice, though, for a woman growing up in India, or at least pretty much not in my family, not my cousins and so forth. There isn't a real choice as to date.

I have one cousin, a male, he's twenty-six years old. I'll get into our trip. But when we had gone back to India in '96, this was very interesting. It's my dad's younger brother's son. He had been dating this girl for quite a while, against his parents' wishes, kind of, but was dating her. It was known that they would get together, go out, go out in groups mainly, or whatever. We asked him, Jerry and I, asked him if he was going to marry her, and he said, "Oh, no. I wouldn't marry her. I will definitely have an arranged marriage, because that is what my parents want, and she is not the kind of person..." Because she dated, and he wanted to date her, on the one hand, she isn't the kind that he would marry. He would marry somebody who wasn't that--I have to choose the right word--just that free with her going out. I mean, he chose to do that in his younger age and stuff, but when it came down to the commitment and the marriage and living your life with somebody, it was going to be somebody with more of the traditional values. We both were like, wow.

PS: But it was okay for him to date, that didn't disqualify him as a future marriage partner for someone?

GM: Right.

PS: Interesting double standard.

GM: Interesting, yes. A lot of the arranged marriage part has to do with your career and all that, also, and what the family does, and monetarily looking and economically looking at the family. That's why somebody like my brother, let's just say, would be a good prospect, because he's a psychiatrist and he has a good standing in society, good job, so forth. My cousin, this particular cousin, is a CPA, so maybe that had something to do with it there, too. A lot of it, the family looks at the economic situation. You stay within your class, in a sense, but the better the future holds economically, the better the prospect.

Things are really changing there. Just from our trip and talking with all my cousins. Dating is mainly in groups, I guess, but I suppose you could say that you're kind of with a guy, one guy. But they kind of go out in groups, and there's not a lot of going out alone as

a couple. But it is becoming more common. Although I have a cousin, we had gone back for her wedding. She, too, was kind of free-spirited, and wasn't going to get married and get it arranged, and ended up going that route, and now is really happy.

So, I don't know, given kind of conflicting thoughts on all this, as a general concept, I don't know what the statistics would be as far as is it a good thing, is it a bad thing. I'm sure, obviously, it's an individual choice and decision. Who knows what's going to happen if your husband, he may be great at first and then turn into somebody that's abusive. Who knows.

PS: So in your own situation, you started dating Jerry when you were sixteen?

GM: Seventeen.

PS: When your parents found out that this wasn't something you were going to get over, and that you were really serious, how did that all unfold in your family?

GM: It was tough. Jerry's three years older than I am. So when I had my senior prom, we went together, and he came to the house then and picked me up and we went out. My parents were there and knew that. They weren't rude, but for knowing that I had known this guy for a couple of years, they weren't extra friendly or anything. But not rude, like I said. We did that prom thing and all that. Three years later, I think, was the second time that my parents actually saw Jerry. He came to the house, and that was when he came to tell them that we were engaged.

PS: Oh.

GM: Yeah. So they knew all along. Let me backtrack. I went to college then, that fall. He'd come down and visit me and so forth. So we continued our relationship over the years. Then my junior year, I was twenty-one, he proposed to me, and I accepted. I was absolutely frightened, even to the point where I don't think that I could be happy like most brides-to-be are. I was just so scared, because our whole conversation that night afterwards, instead of being about our future and all that, was instead, "Okay, what are we going to do about my mom and dad? What are we going to say? How are we going to this?"

This was right before Christmastime, so I had six weeks off. We picked a day, and I think I told my dad that Jerry was going to come over and talk. It was scary. So he came over to our house, and my mom didn't even--she didn't sit with us. I don't know where she was in the home. My dad and I and Jerry sat there, and Jerry said, "Well, we've decided to get married and we're engaged." My dad started to cry. My mom didn't talk to me for six months, basically did not speak with me. My dad tried then. He told me he didn't want me to do this. A lot of that, too, they didn't feel that economically Jerry's family was up to

the standards that they wanted me to have a life with or whatever. He would talk to me and tried to tell me that that wasn't a good decision and all that, but, on the other hand, the three of us went out to dinner a couple of times. So, I mean, he was making efforts to at least get to know Jerry. Like I said, it was the second time they had met him, even though we had been dating for almost six years at this point. We got married a year and a half later, after I graduated.

So then my dad and I, I said, "Well, we've got to start making some plans. We've got to reserve a hall and all that kind of thing." So we kind of started that, and probably after that six months, I know that there were communications between my mom and dad and the family in India. Surprisingly, we've been told when I've gone back to visit and all that, everybody there, my aunts, uncles, cousins, so forth, understood what I was going through. They seemed to. They were behind me. So I owe a lot to them, because I think there was a lot of correspondence, which I, again, never seen a letter, or whatever. But I think some of my mom's sisters, particularly one younger sister, I think she really tried to explain things to her, that I had been growing up in America, that this isn't the worst thing. So, again, a lot of correspondence. Probably about six months before the wedding, my mom started to come around, and then help with the arrangements a little bit more and a little bit more. One of my aunts and one of my uncles came over for the wedding, and that was helpful. It was really hard, really hard for her. I think there was a time when she wasn't even going to come to the wedding, and my dad absolutely said, "You must be there."

PS: So this was a big thing in your family that you were marrying this white guy. What does Jerry do for work?

GM: He's a CFO (chief financial officer). He became an accountant. He's a CPA, and his profession now is different. He sells organic soybean to Japanese, and contracts with the farmers here. So it's very new and exciting. He's a partner with another guy, and they're building the company. So it's real different. But he's an accountant, an CPA. That's what he became, and that's what he started doing. He has just recently started this new work.

I thought of something that I should talk about a little bit, aside from the marriage thing and what we were going through. At that time, I remember my dad saying, as we were growing up a lot, through the adolescent years and all that, that my brother and I didn't want to hang on to the Indian values and didn't want to do Indian things. It really was not that. Again, this is now that I know from my own kids. It was just we had our own interests and things that we wanted to pursue, and just because they did not match what my parents expected of us, or wanted us to do, doesn't mean that you're dispelling all Indian traditions.

My mom taught me to sew and knit, which I am grateful for, but it just wasn't things that I wanted to do, spend my time doing at those years of my life. I know that now from my

kids. I really have wanted them to play piano, but my daughter played for six years now and has quit her lessons. She still plays a little bit. That's something that I wasn't upset with her; I understand that her time has to be spent on things she needs to do. But I really wish that she would have continued. So that's a normal thing that you go through with kids.

But we kind of got the feeling that if I didn't want to sit down and sew at the time, that I didn't want to do these things that she wanted me to do. Again, I don't know if that's an India thing or just kind of a personal trait that they had at the time.

My dad was, again, very oriented to education, education, studying all the time, that's the main thing. I just think that's different from the way we are as parents now. Not that that's not important, and not that even that task is the most important thing for the kids right now, but it's not the only thing. You need to be a well-rounded person. Anyway, so I just kind of wanted to add that. I always had that kind of overlying guilt that we were throwing away all our Indian things, but it really wasn't that. I mean, I don't think my brother and I sat down and said, "We don't want to do anything Indian, don't want to have anything to do with India." I don't feel that way at all. But that was a guilt that we kind of had at the time.

Okay. So, back to the wedding and wedding plans and all that. I was a senior at Carleton, the normal stresses of going through graduation and all that. Graduation was great. My parents were very happy. Then a month later, I was going to get married. But by this time my mom had come around a little bit more. We had not maybe sat down and had any close talks or intimate talks, or any of that stuff, but we weren't like that at that time anyway, together. We were just kind of making the plans and getting all the things done. It helped when my aunt and uncle came from India to join us for the wedding and all that. The actual wedding and the reception and all that went quite well, and was a lot of fun.

PS: Did you have a Hindu-style wedding?

GM: Yes, for the most part. We had a hard time finding a--my husband is Catholic. His family is Catholic. We had a very hard time finding a Catholic priest. We wanted to do a little bit of both. Finally, a friend of one of my brother-in-laws agreed to do a simple, simple--actually just the vow part of the Catholic ceremony was done. He left like right afterwards. I wasn't even able to give him his gift. We can get into that part a little later.

But it was mainly a Hindu wedding. One of our close friends, my parents' close friends, married us. He's a pundit, so-called priest, Hindu priest, who performed the ceremony. It lasted about an hour. Then we did the short part with the Catholic priest. I don't know if you care for me to get into that. I think that I've realized how hard it was for Jerry's parents also. They're quite Catholic. Again, they've lived in Mahtomedi pretty much all their married life, anyway, St. Paul or Mahtomedi. For them, the whole thing was hard,

although they were always really, really nice to me and accepted me. They have six boys. They raised their sons, they're all great guys, but never really made them do things that they would want them to do, as opposed to my parents. So there was a difference there. But, again, it must have been really hard for them to have this all happen, although they like me a lot as a person, as a person they like me, and knew that we had a good relationship, and knew that we loved each other.

PS: Did your parents meet Jerry's parents before the wedding?

GM: Yes.

PS: How did that go?

GM: That was fine. Everybody was very friendly. It was very tense. I mean, nobody was rude to each other or anything, but it wasn't the way I want things to go with my kids. They see each other when we get them together and they get along fine. There's no extra effort being made to get to know each other, or anything like that. Jerry's parents are a little bit older. But that was fine. I don't know. I guess I would have different expectations for when I meet my future in-laws, or whatever they're called, the parents of my son-in-law or daughter-in-law or whatever. Anyway, but, yes, they did meet and it was okay.

Again, the wedding and all that was great, went okay. A few quirks, which were probably more personality things that happened. The greatest memory we have of our wedding was, after the reception, finally, Jerry had a little Honda Civic, and we were going to drive to the hotel, and then leave the next day for a two-week trip to California. And that sense of relief I got when I hopped into that Honda and it was just the two of us, it was amazing. I could just feel, actually--and I will never forget--just feel this pressure lifting off my--because we were finally together. We had finally done this and gone through all this, and, you know, just how difficult it had been. I guess at that point nobody could change it. We were married and they couldn't change that.

We had some tough times after that, not the two of us, but because of my mom and dad, just feeling bad about things, or whatever. That has since all gone away, but there were times like that. But that sense of relief right then, just feeling like I wasn't going to get yelled at anymore, or something like that. [Laughter] It was incredible, and I'll never forget that.

Again, I just want to add to it, just because I'm getting a little emotional here. My father has since apologized for just realizing how hard they made it. I don't think they intended to at all. They're truly--I mean, my mom, they both love us dearly. I don't think they ever intended it. It was so different and so hard. A lot of it, too, was that I was one of the first second-generation kids doing this. They were, and rightly so, they were worried about

what their friends would think, and they were worried about what their family would think.

Again, like I said, after visits, I find out that everybody was behind me, everybody there, my family in India understood, and they didn't have to worry about that kind of stuff. And expectations, of course. Ideally, I should have married an Indian doctor and become a doctor, and that would have been perfect. So they've come a long way and really realized, and we've grown up and realized, too. But, again, I do say that my parents have been really lucky in that I could have been--I used to say and think this--I could have been one of those teenagers who just, at eighteen, left and never related with them and really took the rebellious way. But we are a very close, loving family, and have just gone through the hard times. It's great that now things are way, way better, and we get along. They're still quirky, but they're great. [Laughter]

PS: Your kids will say the same thing about you. [Laughter]

GM: Exactly. Exactly. Yes, I mean, thank goodness everything's turned out great. But it was a really hard time. The first year, it was hard because, as everybody who's been married knows, your relationship with your spouse, it's hard enough getting through that with the things you deal with just being married and just trying to grow together that way. We never have had those problems. I think it's probably because we've always had these outside pressures that we've had to deal with so much and done it together and strongly stuck together. So we've never had to worry about that kind of stuff, because everything from the outside was always so difficult.

So, that first year of marriage, I don't know, just feeling guilt, I guess. I don't know. Then the issues about what kind of religion are you going to adopt. That was a big thing. Jerry and I, we had talked about it before we got married, before we decided to get marry, that, yes, Catholic and Hinduism, Catholicism and Hinduism are vastly different, two opposite realms of the spectrum. But we were never going to change each other. He's still Catholic. He is much more liberal. He grew up and went to Catholic school, grew up going to church. Then on his own time, not with me, but on his own, has decided that it's a little too strict and a little too old-fashioned, and that some of the things that he truly believes in, and doesn't like those real kind of archaic thoughts that some people think Christianity holds. But that really didn't have anything to do with me.

Me, I had told him I was never going to change my religion. I was never going to change from Hindu. First of all, I'm not a practicing Hindu. I believe in some of the basic idealisms that Hinduism has. To change into something else, for me that was just something I just would not do. So we had that. We knew that. I wasn't ever going to expect him to become a Hindu.

What we decided about our children that we would have, the main thing I believe in with

religion, I don't know if I should get into all this, but I'll cover it briefly, because it's, of course, an important part of deciding to get married and having a family. I want a belief in God. There was a time period, I don't know where my brother stands now, but when he said that he was an atheist and did not believe in God. I remember that really bothered me. To me and Jerry, there's a God. Everybody has a God; he has a different name. If you look at a religion, all the various religions, I mean, mainly what are the goals? The goals are to have values and to be honest, good people, and a belief and a faith in a god. I believe in that also. What they're called doesn't really matter. The name doesn't matter. The different rituals you go through, those are just cultural and traditional-type things. It doesn't matter how you pray. If you look to the East, or if you go into a little room in your house, or if you go to a church, I mean, what does it matter? Your belief is what matters and the kind of person you are.

So we had decided that we would teach the kids, kind of give them as much as we could, both religions, and when they get old enough, they can decide. They were all baptized, though, which was tough--tough for me and tough, I think, for my parents. I don't know, I think Jerry was kind of strong on that. I don't know if this was ever said, but it was kind of like, well, we did the marriage more the Hinduism way for my mom and dad, and kind of for his mom and dad--and she is a believer in the limbo-type thing, so I think it was very important that our kids be baptized, so that they weren't left hanging in limbo. But that was hard for me, because I didn't know a lot about it, for one thing, and I felt like I was kind of leaving my traditions. But again, I knew that the important thing was that how they were going to be raised, and we were very comfortable with what we had talked about. Now, thirteen years later, the way we've done things, I have taught them over and over, they know a lot of the differences. They probably know more than most American kids about Hinduism. They know about Catholicism, some of the major beliefs.

If they sleep over at a friend's house and they go to church the next day, they're fine to do that. They do that. We've gone to the temple. We go to my mom and dad's, and, like I mentioned, have prayer and puja and all that. When we went to India, there was a lot of religious ceremonies going on with the weddings that we attended. So they've seen both sides. They know what Jerry and I believe, the belief in God and all that. So I think it's turned out well. What they do when they're older and want to decide, that's really up to them. Again, I wanted to ensure a real belief in God, and they have that. So it's pretty open as far as what we think about religion, I guess, here, but those are some tough things, too, and, again, just realizing how hard it must have been for Jerry's mom and dad to go through that.

On a lighter side, the Hindu ceremony, you sit on the ground. We made a podium in the hall on a little stage, so we sat up a little bit. But it was on the floor. Jerry's dad's a little bit older, and they had to remove their shoes. Mom is just real concerned with her hemlines and all that all the time. She had a dress on, or a skirt, or something.

PS: This is Jerry's mom?

GM: Yes. She had to remove her shoes and sit on the podium. Just those type of things had to be so difficult for them, too, and just so new to them. I know that they had no idea what a Hindu wedding was like. So, just those kind of things that we made them do, I guess. They just kind of went along with it and didn't say a whole lot. I really love that about them, too. When I think about it, it just had to be so hard for them, with their family, and her sisters, and wondering what was going on. But everybody was really accepting on his side. Again, I think because--this is probably stretching it a little bit, but just that whole idea of dating, and they knew that we had been together already for almost seven years at this point, and that our relationship was good. So kind of the other stuff didn't matter.

But that's the difference between the Western side and the Indian tradition, where in India, I think, they believe that the family needs to choose the spouse, and the family of the spouse, and who you're going to be together with, because you all become one family. But that happens here, too, in Western culture. It doesn't always, but it does happen. But I think it's left to the individuals to decide. Main difference, right there. So, his family, even though this must have been just so odd for everybody, they didn't complain and didn't say anything about it.

PS: Had you talked with them about what the Hindu wedding was like, or anything of those things?

GM: Oh, sure. Yes, we had told them, and I'm sure she was worried sick about it. I mean, to sit on the floor. We really should have used chairs. I guess that just wasn't a thought. But they did it and they were happy to do it. I should show you some pictures.

PS: How long have you been married now? What year did you get married?

GM: 1982, fifteen years.

PS: Fifteen years of marriage.

GM: Yes.

PS: You have three kids?

GM: Yes.

PS: Tell me about your kids, how they were born. What that was like for you?

GM: Well, they're all really close in age. My eldest is a girl, Neelu, and she's twenty

months older than my son, Nick. Then Nick and Tony are--it wasn't planned this way, but they're one week short of a year apart. They were supposed to be a year and one week apart, but Tony was born two weeks early. So they're kind of what they call Irish twins. We love that they're so close together, because now they go through their stages in life all together, and they do the same kind of things. At this point in our lives, they're all three hockey players, so we're really busy. But a lot of people didn't like that. But those are issues outside of what nationality you are, I think. I had strangers come up to me and ask me, was I nuts or what, that I had these three under three. It never bothered me. I'm really happy that they're close together.

I was scared to death to have a child because of having had no extended family around. Oh, I should talk about that a little bit, too. This is a little bit off the subject. But I had feelings, as I was growing up, that I knew I had this huge family, but they weren't here. So for holidays and stuff, all my friends would be going to their extended families for Christmas and so forth. It wasn't like I was an only child, or my parents were only children. So I kind of missed a big family-type thing. It would have been nice to have family support here. Like I said throughout the interview, we're a very close family, and I think that my parents stand out in their families as being a little more traditional and more strict than the rest of them. So had I had some of my aunts and uncles here, I think things would have been a little different and easier, and we wouldn't have had some of those troubled times. In fact, I know that.

But again, realizing what my parents went through, they left India in the early mid-sixties and had those traditions, and then came here and were determined to keep those traditions and culture, and not stray from those things, and not become so-called Westernized. In India, everybody's moving along with the times, progressing normally, as times do and people do. Western culture, the same thing, everybody's progressing. And here sit my parents with mid-sixties' and fifties' values from India, and not moving from that, because that's what they've decided to do. That's tough. It's a tough transition. I think that they do realize that. My relatives in India have said that and realize that. That's really hard. It's been hard for them to open up to that.

I think part of it has had to do with--again patting my brother and myself on the backs-that was a time for, here, in the early seventies, we could have been bad, you know, easily got into the wrong stuff.

PS: A lot of nasty temptation.

GM: Sure. They're lucky, and we are, too, we're lucky that we didn't do that. I know that part of that was somehow because of their love and their guidance. It's because of that. It's not all just us. Yes, there were times when you wanted to run away, or whatever, just like all kids, I'm sure, feel. But it's due, again, to their love and their guidance, too, that even though you get mad at stuff, but I'm sure you knew what was best.

Wow, I've hit a lot of subjects there. I don't where I started.

PS: You weren't expecting this.

GM: I'm going all over the place. My main point there, though, I think if it would have been--it's hard to do. Of course, we've tried. We've tried to have family come over here, but you just can't because of the immigration laws and so forth. But it would have been nice to have some family members here for several, several reasons. So I miss that. I do remember all the holidays and Easter. I didn't really know what some of those holidays were for a long time.

Christmastime, I mean, now I probably overindulge for the kids at Christmastime, because I just kind of like that. There was never a holiday in India where you got a whole bunch of presents at one time. Friends were having all that and we didn't celebrate Christmas. I mean, I wouldn't get upset or anything, but just, kind of, you felt like you missed out a little bit on that and didn't know.

PS: Now that you're a mother, are there any particular values that you really want to make sure that your children get that you learned in your family, or that you perceive as culturally Indian values, or spiritually, Indian values? Are there any particular things that you're taking extra care to make sure that they absorb?

GM: Well, the religious beliefs, I think I kind of described what I feel, but I think a lot of that is based--when I was at Carleton, I took a couple, well, they were history of India courses, but we did get into religion. I learned a lot, kind of the academic way, about Hinduism and about Indian culture, which I had never had before. I think that my beliefs in God and religion and values were kind of formed through what I learned and then related to what my parents had taught me about Hinduism and religion, mainly the belief in God. That's one of the main values that I would like to instill in my kids, and we've done that.

Family, importance of family, and closeness. I'm always telling the kids that I expect them to remain close, even when they're older, that we are a family, and we together as a unit are the most important thing. Education, of course, and working hard and striving for, and confidence. That's something that I think I got as a negative. I know that my parents really loved us and wanted the best for us, and I know my dad would do anything for us. Indian kids are told you have to respect your elders, your parents, your authorities. You show them that they should respect you; you can't make them respect you.

PS: Self-confidence.

GM: Yes, confidence. Thank you. It wasn't a choice; you just had to. It's a good thing. I

mean, because sometimes I go to volunteer at the schools, and you see these kids that are so rude that you can't believe that they're being like this to an adult, a parent of a kid that they're a student with. So I'm not saying that that's a bad thing. But there was just that feeling that you had to respect, just because he's your father, or something. I should just say we don't go about it that way. I teach the kids that they should respect their teachers and elders and so forth, but it's not something that they're made to do. Along with that, then hand-in-hand goes the self-confidence. So I think when you're told that you have to respect, you kind of feel like you're a little bit inferior. I don't know, again, knowing that they loved us very much and they cared for us and felt secure, but I don't know that we got a lot of self-confidence instilled in us, although my brother--

[Tape interruption]

PS: So your brother got something different than you?

GM: Yes.

PS: Say more about that.

lvedir **GM:** He's a psychiatrist, and maybe if we really delved into it we'd see that he seems very self-assured and all that. He's pretty confident. I don't know how that happened. Also there was a difference, he's three years younger than me in school, but four years difference in age. So when I went to college, then he had three or four years with my parents, just the three of them living together. Of course, I'd come back for summers and all that. He was always the kind, he would yell back with my dad, if he disagreed with my father or something. I never did that. Just difference of personalities. I didn't like things, and I would always, within reason, I would make sure that I got my own way. Then as I got older, of course, made my own decisions, but I never talked back. He would argue openly, and that's probably a better thing. Again, we're getting into human nature now more than cultural differences. So, somewhere along the line I kind of did not get instilled in me the self-confidence.

So back to your question, that's another main value that I talk to the kids about all the time, to have pride in what they do, and that we're always behind them, and they should have confidence. They're turning out to be very confident kids, and that's a very good thing. Part of that might be, like I said, we let them--I mean, they're still young, they haven't really hit the teen years yet, but we've let them do things with their friends. We just let them develop as kids, and they're not kept under us. I think that as growing up I kind of sometimes felt that.

But, again, things have really changed with my parents, too. They've really, really come a long way. Relatives in India have said that. So a lot of these things I've said over the past hour or so, it's hard to divide whether they were cultural and traditional, or just

personality traits. It's really hard to say. A lot of both, the way I grew up and all that.

PS: Are you teaching your children to speak Hindi?

GM: No.

PS: Do you still speak it?

GM: I can speak it, I'm not very fluent. When I go to India, I can understand most everything. It's hard for me to understand the news on the TV or radio, and I don't understand songs very well. But I can get along in a market. My grandmother doesn't speak English, she knows a few words, so I speak with her. I'd say I'm probably on kind of a six or seven-year-old level. I can understand everything. My vocabulary probably isn't--academically I'd have a hard time with some of the vocabulary.

PS: Do you read and write it?

GM: No. I've kind of lost a lot of that. Just have not practiced it.

PS: Do your parents still speak Hindi to each other?

GM: Yes.

PS: When you're with them, what do you speak to them in?

GM: I speak in English. It's just the way things have developed. So sometimes they speak Hindi to us, most of the time English. Between themselves, they just kind of go back and forth, I think, in between scattered here and there. It's something I could pick up really quickly because I do remember. I can understand most everything. It's something that my father would love to teach the kids.

When we traveled, Jerry and I took a--there were two trips in '96, one with just he and I, then later in the year the whole family went.

PS: To India?

GM: Yes. So there were phrases and words that we taught them. They got kind of a feel for it, but, no, they don't speak it. They don't know it.

PS: This trip in 1996, is that the first time that Jerry has been to India?

GM: That was the first time, yes, and the first time the kids went. We went in February for a wedding, just Jerry and I. That was the first time he had ever visited and met all my

family. No, I'm sorry. Neelu and I had gone with my parents in 1990 and that was for a wedding also. She was six at the time, so she had gone. Then '96, Jerry and I went in February. Then it just happened that another cousin was getting married, this one that I spoke about earlier, who said she would not have an arranged marriage and so forth. Now she's happily married and just had a baby and so forth.

But that came about and we just thought it was a good time, with the kids at the ages that they were, that they'd remember, and it would be a good experience for them, and with school. In the summer it gets too hot, and once they hit the high school ages--you need to go for at least two weeks, and it's just too much school to miss. So it just turned out that circumstances being the way they were, that we thought we'd bring the kids along. So we ended up with two trips, a lot of frequent flyer miles. But it was a very hectic trip. We were there for ten days. We went with my parents. Went to four cities in ten days, not including the travel. We did tour Amsterdam for like nine hours, also. So not including the travel to and from India, ten days in India, four cities, a wedding, which was a three-day ordeal, family reunion, seeing everybody we could, it was really hectic, but a good experience, a really nice experience for the kids, and a very intense learning experience for them.

Again, the thing that made it is the family. It's like you never left, the way you can talk with your cousins and it's just really nice.

PS: Do you make an effort to get in touch with your family in India in other ways, like call them on the phone or write to them?

GM: Yes, my parents do quite a bit. In fact, they called to inform us that Anju just had a baby and so forth. So we write and talk, not real often. My parents do much more often. But, yes, we do. We didn't before my trips to India. Since I've been here, I think we went twice before I was nineteen. Then in 1979 I was nineteen, and I really remember that trip because I was at that age. It was an interesting trip. We'd always go in the summer. So I think there were two or three prior to that time since we had been here.

Then the next time I went was in 1990 as a married woman with children, and I had Neelu with me. That was a nice time. Since then I've been kind of more part of the family. I mean, I always was part of the family, but I've just kept in touch more with them, related with my cousins because they also have kids, kind of at the same level as my cousins and so forth, and being observed more as an adult from the older generation, accepted more that way. They did a lot of talking while I was there as to what I was all about and letting them know. That was really interesting and nice to hear their thoughts on when I got married and all that kind of stuff, and how they knew what it was like and how difficult it must have been because of my parents.

My mom and dad, like I think I briefly said, hold the status of both sides of the family.

They're very respected in their opinions and what they've done with their lives. But yet it's known that they are almost military, you know. [Laughter] My dad's the eldest son in his family, and you know how controlling they can be and so forth. So it's kind of nice to have levity when you're talking with family and people that understand that and help you through those things.

PS: Going back to your career, when you finished college, did you hold a job when you first got married?

GM: Yes.

PS: What did you do for work?

GM: I was a financial analyst with a mortgage company. Then I'd been there about a year and a half and became pregnant and had a really hard time. That's right, I was talking about that. Scared to death about having kids. That's how I got into it. Because there was no family around. I had not grown up with, obviously, brothers or sisters having kids. But no cousins having kids that you go visit, or aunts. I mean, I had babysat, of course. Like I said, in my younger years took care of all these little kids when we'd get together at functions and all that. So I had a hard time deciding what to do.

What happened was, a month before she was due, we were both working full time and we were both going to school. I was starting my MBA at St. Thomas, and Jerry was going to St. Thomas also. So we both had full lives. I needed bed rest, total bed rest for a month. So I did that. I wasn't able to feel secure with some kind of a babysitter for this newborn I was going to have and all that, so I decided to stay home. I've stayed home since then pretty much. I've been happy with that decision. I think it's necessary right now, the way things are. Again, having the three kids close together, like I said, I am really happy with the situation. My parents, that was hard, too. "What are you going to do for career? What are you going to do for a career?" I think my dad's finally accepted the fact that this is my job and it's important. It's necessary for the way our life is. Anyway, all that. But that was a tough decision, and it kind of just fell that way.

But we had no idea about what a baby was going to be like or anything. I just had not grown up around kids or anything. Jerry's brothers are older, and actually had kids more around the same time we were having kids, so there weren't any nieces or nephews on that side either.

PS: So you said you always had this longing for this extended family. Do you find that you have that through Jerry's family? Do they get together on holidays?

GM: We get together on holidays and are kind of close in a sense. We don't really get together aside from holidays and socialize. One brother lives in Cannon Falls. Actually,

one lives real close. They have adopted two Korean boys now and so we see them a little more often. So, close in the sense that we all get along great and get together for holidays. We don't make time especially to maybe go out on Friday night with his older brother and his wife. But we all get along great. But, no, it's not the same as the feeling I have for--I mean, not the feeling. It's not the same as having your own aunts and uncles. These are his brothers. He's the youngest of the six. His oldest brother is eighteen years older than he is. It's a little different in his family also, that they're a little spread out. So, no, that did not fulfill that kind of desire that I had. It's different from grandparents and aunts and uncles and your own cousins.

PS: When you think about your future, what do you imagine? What's it going to be like ten years from now in your life? What's it going to look like?

GM: Well, hopefully, a dream of ours has always been for Jerry and I to have a business together. Although the goal and the desire and the dream hasn't changed, the situation has changed because he's been at his job for two years, it's a really exciting thing. They're just building it. But that's a dream. A lot will change for me once Tony graduates from high school, or possibly a little before then. But I am very strong on the fact that I need to be here through their school years. But I'm also strong on the fact--just this past year I have really gotten involved with a lot of different organizations. I do a lot at school, volunteering in their classes. So I am a busy person and I like to do that, doing a lot of fund-raising for different groups and so forth. So I know I will be doing something.

The dream, like I said, for he and I to work together and have a business together would be great. Realistically, who knows if that can happen. That's a goal. That's what I'd like to see. Get these guys through college, and just be there for them to get them going on a good career path and personal path through their lives. Probably go somewhere warm, because of my knee troubles. The winters really bother my knee. I have arthritis in there already, and I'm too young for that. I guess a lot to look forward to. I don't quite know what it will be, but those are the goals and the dreams.

PS: Do you have any vision for living in India for any extended period of time?

GM: I don't think so. I don't think so. It's a difficult life. Definitely keep in touch with my family, absolutely, and visit. What we'd like to do is, we would like to really go on a tour. Every time we go back we are, I don't want to say, not obligated, but desire to stay with family and be with them. But what I would really like to do is to tour that country and really see the sights. I really haven't traveled. We've been to Bombay, and, like I was saying, four different cities. But I'd like to do the tour thing there and really see the country. And my parents say that, too, although I don't know about my mom. I think my dad would definitely not live there anymore either. It's just too hard, too difficult a lifestyle.

PS: Are there any aspects about being your generation, of an immigrant family, that you find particularly--I'm going to ask you both sides of it--both particularly challenging and particularly rewarding? You can speak to whichever one you want first.

GM: Yes, because I'll have to think about challenging part. Rewarding, definitely. Just having the knowledge of a Third World country, that now people in America are becoming, that I encounter, I guess, are becoming much more aware. But if you think back--we laugh about this, to the early seventies, late sixties, whatever and through the seventies even, we'd go to a restaurant, and my mom would have a sari on and a bindi on her head. The comments you'd get from people, I mean, nobody had any clue what kind of people we were, where we were from. Many people, we seemed to think, did not even know what India was. Was it a country? Was it another state? One woman had said to us, "Oh, Indiana?" We laugh about those things. I think that's changed. I think that in school they're learning a lot more, and people, in general, are much more aware of what it is.

But definitely, I feel blessed that I have a first-hand experience, been there, have family there, and I know some of the politics about it. I know the economics. I mean, I know about a Third World country. Just because of that, I think I'm broader knowledge-wise in just the whole world. That's a wonderful thing, just being able to look at something from that kind of standpoint, just knowing what I know about India. Then when you study another country or something, you can look at those things. So that, absolutely, I think that's a wonderful trait.

I think that we've given that to our kids through the trip itself, but just from things I tell them. I think that had a big impression on me growing up and having people not even know what India was, that I wanted to teach the kids that you have to know about the world, and you have to know that people are different culturally.

Now, my husband works with a company that sells to the Japanese people. He will be visiting there in a month or so. I think, me being Indian and him having traveled there, that's been an informative thing for him also. It helped with his business with the Japanese people, because they're a whole different culture and have different customs and things are expected and so forth. So all those things have been very rewarding. I'm glad that we have that kind of outlook on the world. Religiously, too. That idea that I went over before, about a broad belief of God and the different gods, I think that's been a beneficial thing for me.

Challenges? Well, I don't know that I felt different, because it's just the way you were. I mean, I wasn't going to change that I was Indian. But those feelings, when I was younger, that the guys weren't calling because--but, see, I don't know if that was because I was Indian or because they knew that they parents were more strict than others. It's hard to distinguish. Challenges. I don't know.

It's kind of nice in this area, in the St. Paul area. This has been a new concept to me, but I think if you went to New York, let's say, that Indian people are known more as the 7-11 owners or taxi drivers or something. Here, we've grown up where Indian people are quite respected and many of them are doctors and so forth and highly educated people. So that's been very nice. That was a whole new concept to me, probably a few years ago, that that's what some of the rest of the nation has thought of Indian people, more as these store owners and all that. That's just changed with the influx of Indian people. I think at the time when my parents came, well, you had to be quite educated to leave the country, for one thing, and then to be accepted and gain admittance here, too, and get a job and so forth.

PS: Only the finest are drawn to our quality of life here in the frozen tundra. [Laughter]

GM: Yes, yes. Well, I know why he came; he came because of the hospital. But my mom was a--they were both troopers. I mean, remember, oh, we had some of the worst--I think 1967, I don't know if it's in the record books, it was a bad winter, though, from what I remember, with the snow. We'd pile on the boots and she'd troop through the snow. So we really just dove into it, you know, the weather.

I can't really think of any kind of a challenge just because I'm Indian. Like I said, I've really been fortunate in not having felt the prejudice and all that. I know that my parents have gotten some of that, the discrimination and so forth, but I just really haven't felt that. It may have to do with lack of accent, too, part of that.

PS: Here's a final question. If someone says, "Describe yourself," who are you? In a nutshell, what do you say to them?

GM: Well, right now it's usually I'm a mom, because, you know, it's what I'm proud of. But, let's see. Let me go a little further than that. Mainly a loving, sincere, pretty emotional person, but all in a good sense, I think. I work really hard for the things I care about, and part of that is the kids. So far we've been really lucky, they're really good kids, doing really well in all aspects. Just this past year, like I said, being involved in all these things, I think I'm just willing to work, put a lot of time in, work hard, keep busy. I don't know.

PS: Do you identify more with being an American, or with being an Indian, or someplace in between?

GM: I think really an American, although I like that I look a little different. People probably remember me more. I like that I have a different name. Again, I feel I have something unique in that I know about a Third World country, something so different and a little bit exotic. But I'm definitely American through growing up here. Values, I think, are just from the family. I don't know that those are either American or Indian.

India Association of Minnesota Historical Society (Minnesota Historical Society) **PS:** Is there anything else that you want to say that I haven't asked you about yet?