

Interview with Deepak Nath

Interviewed by Polly Sonifer
March 20, 1997

PS: This is Polly Sonifer, and I'm interviewing Deepak Nath. It is March 20, 1997. Hello. How are you today?

DN: Not too bad.

PS: Good. Would you please start out by telling us a little bit about yourself, like when you were born, general information about your family at the time you were born, and so on.

DN: Okay. I usually start out any kind of description of myself as, obviously, I'm twenty-three years old. I'm a second-generation American-born Indian. Some people say that *desai* is a term used for anyone of Indian descent, so I am also what they call an ABCD, American-born confused *desai*. That was actually my first generation's fault.

I was born in 1973. At that time, my family had been here for approximately eight years. I had an older sister, and my mother and my father were married in 1966, and that was when they first came to this country. That's pretty much the history of what happened when I was born, at least.

I'm currently right now working for my father in his company, which owns and operates Burger King Restaurants and some real estate and other development, manufacturing and whatnot.

PS: And that company is called?

DN: It's actually called Nath Companies, which is an umbrella for all the specific divisions. I personally right now am doing what is considered new projects. I am actually titled new projects coordinator, and I'm in charge of any new products or any new concepts that we decide to go in. Currently I'm focusing in on TCBY Yogurt, which is "The Country's Best Yogurt," as they say.

PS: I like it.

DN: And the next concept we'll be doing is Baskin Robbins Ice Cream. Those both were chosen because of their complementary aspects for Burger King. So that's what I'm doing currently.

PS: And can you tell me what you know, briefly, about your parents' background in India, like what part of India that they were from and what their family was like there and so on?

DN: Sure. My father was born in 1940 in what was then Pakistan, or what is now Pakistan, what was then was India. In 1947, my mother was born, just seven years later, in New Delhi, I believe. Don't quote me on that one. My father, at the age of seven, when India and Pakistan split, was actually living in Lahore and he actually had to move to New Delhi to escape the religious differences between the Muslims and Hindus, and that's actually the reason why Pakistan and India split apart. And they're, what is it now, fifty-seven years old now, my father, and my mother is fifty years old, forty-nine, fifty years old.

PS: What do you know about how they met and married and all those things?

DN: I love this story. I tell this story all the time, actually. A lot of it is, to anyone of my generation or who was born and raised here, seems quite awkward. If you have no experience with Indian culture, it's very awkward.

My parents knew each other for approximately three hours and they were engaged. Now, by any standards, any sort of means in this country, three hours is an incredibly short amount of time. Some might say that might be my longest relationship. But three hours, they were engaged within three hours. My father actually went over to my mother's house on what I call the initial interview, and they call it the first meeting, but I saw it more as an interview.

They met with the parents, and the parents discussed, before even my father or my mother at the time even knew who each other were, before they were introduced, the parents actually discussed whether or not this would be a suitable match. And then they had one hour to themselves, in a room by themselves, to get to know each other, and when they came out, they had to decide right there and then is the person you want to spend the rest of your life with, and they decided to, thank God, or I wouldn't be here.

But so, that's as far as I know of how they got married. Two weeks later, my mother was in America, 13,000 miles away from home, in a new country, newly married. It's quite an amazing story, considering that they're almost married almost thirty years now, and they met for three hours before they were married, and that's 100 percent attributed to the cultural differences and views on marriage.

It's depressing to see that today, in 1997, over 50 percent of marriages in America fail, and I think that's fairly cultural. It's because you go in with the mentality of, "If this doesn't work out, I'll get a divorce, and it'll be over in a matter of minutes." And when you go in with that mind-set, you're setting yourself up for failure, and I think that's the

number-one cause for that.

More so in olden-day India, and I'm sure it's still very much culturally in India, divorce is a major taboo. It's just looked upon as not an option. That was never an option for my mother. And of course everyone has their fights, but they never thought of it as an option, and that's something I'm blessed with. That's part of the Indian culture that I've retained in my own sets of values that I don't see divorce as an option. I don't even consider it a part of my vocabulary when it's talking about myself. I will get married once. Whether or not I'm happy or not, for whatever reason, divorce is not part of our culture. And so that's something that I saw.

I don't know how I got on that tangent.

PS: Would you say that, from your point of view, that your parents are happily married?

DN: Uh-huh, very happily married. It's nice to see that, and a lot of what I've seen in my friends whose parents either are divorced or fighting, I've seen a lot of hate and a lack of respect and just a lack of love in the relationship. I've never seen one hint of that in our family, and for that I'm very blessed and thankful. It's always been as loving as possible from what I can see. My own frame of reference, I've seen nothing but love, which I am quite happy for.

PS: Yes, that's great.

DN: Sometimes I actually would even say there might be too much. My mother, I'm twenty-three and still doesn't want to let go. She still tells me to move home at twenty-three, and I say, "You must understand, I'm not going to come back home." A lot of that actually has to do with--over in India, the son would live with the parents, and the person that he married would actually move in with the father's parents and the father, and that's where they would live. Co-generational habitation is what the technical term is. But that, to me, is completely off base and asinine. That's a cultural thing I did not pick up. That's something that's very typical in India, but I would never personally want to do that, but that's just because I was born and raised here.

PS: Can you tell me any of your memories about your early childhood years, what language was spoken in your home, what was it like being a little kid in your family?

DN: The language was primarily Hindi, when I was probably born, in the home. As I got older and as we got more Westernized as a family, the more influence of English came into our life. Today it's purely English, with a little bit of Hindi thrown in. I would say ten years ago it was mostly Hindi, with a little bit of English thrown in. And so we've seen a shift towards the English language and more of Western society, which is going to be--it's unstoppable, because no matter what, you're going to have to acclimate yourself

to the place where you're living.

So that my early childhood, for language it was mostly Hindi in my early childhood. Beyond that, I have a horrible memory, so I don't remember too much about my early childhood. I do remember some stories which aren't too flattering, but everyone else here at this office knows them, so I might as well share them with you.

PS: Go ahead and tell them.

DN: It's not a secret anymore. I guess I was a pretty mischievous little boy. This seems pretty rare now, but I used to get tied up. My grandmother and my mother used to tie my hands together because I was so mischievous. When I was sitting at the table, I'd throw my food around, just like any little kid, but I would really wing it across the room. When I was in a stroller and we were shopping, for some reason, I don't know where it all started, but I used to grab women's skirts and look under. People say that was the start of it then. But it was quite humorous. And so it got to the point where they had to tie my hands together like that. And then I would still have my hands free and I would get out of my high chair or get out of the stroller and still do things, so they used to tie my hands together and then tie me into the stroller or the high chair. It was quite funny. What can you do?

PS: Were you fluent in English when you started school, kindergarten or first grade, whatever was your first entrance into school?

DN: Yes.

PS: You did speak English. Where did you learn that, if you spoke primarily Hindi in your home?

DN: Like I said, it was mostly Hindi, with English there. As we got older, it would be more and more English in the home. But I knew how to speak English.

PS: Would you describe yourself as fluent in Hindi right now?

DN: Choppy. I can understand it. I may miss a word here or there, but I could definitely communicate with anyone from India. I was just in India a year ago, and I was able to communicate anything I needed to do. So at that level, yes. I am fluent conversationally, very fluent, but overall I would say there are some things that would escape me. But I can always substitute English when I don't know. It would sound like I'm an American-born Indian that was speaking Hindi, because that's what people do. They throw in a couple English words here or there, and it sounds like you're speaking one language, some specific language.

PS: When you were really small, with whom did your family socialize?

DN: Oh, it was strictly their Indian friends, who are all in the same boat. My father came to this country initially in 1964 to pursue his master's degree at the University of Minnesota. He came, I believe, with a contingent of twenty or thirty Indian men who were all here for engineering and all here for their master's or some form of schooling. They all were friends, and they all became better friends by going to school together, and they all, because they were students here, also got immigration status to live here. So those who chose to come back knew no other place in the country, so where else would they go to live? They ended up all here in Minnesota. And so growing up, they all got married and they all started families here in Minnesota. To this day, my father's still friends with those guys he went to school with, and so that's who we were always friends with. Not until I was, I'd say, a young boy between the ages of five and ten did my mother start to become friends with what I called my neighbors, who were always Caucasian. Our exact neighbors were never, ever Indian, but they would be American. So slowly over time she would come to associate with them. But still, their social life is primarily their Indian friends.

PS: Are those Indians from the same region of India that they're from or from all over India?

DN: Mostly.

PS: And which region is that?

DN: That's the northern half of India.

PS: What province?

DN: New Delhi would be the city. Punjab would be the province.

PS: Did any extended family members live in your household with you?

DN: Not for any extended period of time. Of course, we had relatives visit. We had my father's parents and my mother's parents and various aunts and uncles always come and visit or stay with us, but never for an extended period of time. We never had any--as I said before, the buzzword was co-generational habitation, but we never had any of that.

PS: When they would come, how long would they stay, and what was that like for you?

DN: The longest I personally remember would probably be my grandparents. They would stay for a month or two at a time. Anyone else would be a matter of weeks, whether it be four, six weeks, two weeks.

But my grandparents usually stayed a little bit longer because they were making the trek, usually, from India, and if they're going to fly 13,000 miles, you might as well make it worth your while and spend some time. So they usually spent the most amount of time, and it was great. I mean, it gave us a chance to get to know our grandparents, because we were living that far away and their grandkids didn't have the chance to go, what is it, through the woods to grandmother's house. We could never do that. For us to see our grandparents, it would be a major expedition all the way back to India. And so it was nice that we got that chance to spend time with each other.

PS: How did you see your family maintain its connections to India? What sort of things happened that you remember in your young childhood that maintained their ties to India?

DN: My mother kept her religious faith very strong. When I was a child, she was still very religious, and that was due to her upbringing. That alone accounted for the majority of their ties to India when I was a child. That allowed her to still feel very Indian, even though she was living in America, where being Indian was so different. In 1960, there was not that many Indians in this country. Even today, there's not that many. I would imagine there's close to a million or less, and with 260 million Americans, that's not even a percentage point, and so it's quite a small number of Indians in this country. And so that was her primary way of staying connected.

Her friends, because she became friends with all my father's friends' wives, and they became very close friends. So that allowed them together to be very social with other Indians, being another tie not so much to India, but to being Indian itself.

The second way they did that was, actually their first business venture was actually an Indian import/export company. So that's how they also had a way of keeping their tie to India, because they were importing all this stuff from India and they were purveyors of selling these same trinkets and brass this, brass that and a lot of the handicrafts that would be produced in India. So that was another way.

And lastly, I'd say the most fortunate one is, financially they were able to travel back to India often enough that they still felt a part of India and they were just visiting America, instead of the other way around, they were living in America and visiting India. As time went on, it became they were only visiting India, but they lived in America. But in the beginning, it was definitely they felt like they were only visiting America, but they wanted to go back to India as much as they could. That also was true when we had the majority of our relatives still living in India.

PS: Is that still true now?

DN: Today we have none.

PS: Not even your grandparents?

DN: There are absolutely no immediate relatives still living in India of my father's family or my mother's family. Both sets of grandparents are in the States. My mother's parents are actually here in Minnesota, living actually just ten miles from us. And my father's parents, my grandmother is now dead, but my grandfather lives in Canada. And so that's the oldest generation. They're both here. And all the siblings of my mother and my father all live either in the States or in Canada. So there's no longer any family ties, or immediate family ties I should say, in India anymore. So now it is just visiting India, because all they have now is friends or distant relatives.

There's a joke in our family that my mother has relatives in every country in the world. My parents are world travelers and they love to travel, and no matter where they go, my mother has a cousin. We say, "What cousin lives here?" We don't say, "Do you have a cousin here?" We say, "Which one is it this time?"

So if we go back to India, they still know many people there, and my dad still has childhood friends that are there, so they still always have a reason to go back to India.

PS: How often do you say they go to India nowadays?

DN: My father, twice a year; my mother, once a year, maybe once every other year.

PS: And often do you go?

DN: I've been very fortunate. In my short twenty-three years of life, I imagine I've been back fourteen times. Some of those were actually school related, and most of those were family trips, but it's been quite often. I was very lucky, because it gave me a chance to really visit what they call the roots and go back to see your roots. A lot of people don't get a chance to do that until they're thirty, forty, fifty years old, till they can afford to do that. I've been able to do that every year, every other year of my life on the average, and so I was very fortunate.

There was also a time where--I believe I was in third grade. My parents, I think they got so fed up with this country, they actually tried moving back. I believe it was third grade. For approximately six months, maybe nine months, somewhere in that range, they left this country. They said, "I'm out of here," and they left. They took the whole family back to India.

I believe what scared them was the American culture showing itself in their kids, and so they said, "We're going to raise our kids in India," because that's what they knew, that's what they wanted to do. When they got to India, they realized how advanced the Western

society is and how much we take things for granted here that aren't so apparent in India--at that time, running water, a toilet, a toilet more than a hole in the ground. I mean, those types of luxuries that, in India you call them a luxury, and here we call them just a staple of everyday life, which is not so true there. So they tried actually for a few months to go back, but they gave up there and said, "Oh, we better go back. We'll fight all the bad aspects of Western society, and we'll take everything else with it."

PS: What values did you see your family stressing in your early childhood years and how did they communicate those to you?

DN: My father was quite simple. He would always just say them.

PS: What were they?

DN: His two catch phrases, "Hard work and focus." Those have been drilled into me since day one, since my first words were spoken. I still think my first words were "hard work," because they kept saying that. That or school. I think one of those two things was my first words, I bet.

My father has--and I'm sure this comes from his father--has a deep-ingrained value on education, which you can't say one negative thing about, but it's so deeply ingrained that literally--you asked me what values I grew up with, and way to the forefront comes hard work, focus, and secondary to that would be education. Those are the three things of my father that he sincerely stressed each and every day. And I see those values in his everyday life and I've seen the kind of person he's turned out to be, and if those three things can get me where my father is today, or somewhere similar to that, I think he's pinpointed the American dream to a T, and I would love to follow in those footsteps. So those are the three big ones that I saw.

PS: Did your mother have different values?

DN: No, but my mother was a very passive Indian wife, and I always saw that when we were growing up. My mother was, not to sound sexist, but very emotional, so her values were based on religion. She held her religion very close to her heart, so those are the types of things that she gave to us, and the emotional type of values of caring for others and things like that. Anything related to other people or your family values, things like that, those all came from my mother, not as easy to articulate, because she never articulated them. It was more lead by example.

It's hard to say in words what my mother taught me, because what she taught was what she did, how she acted towards someone or how she treated her kids or how she treated her friends, those types of things, which I don't think are describable by English words. I don't think there's a language that describes them, just because they're true feelings and

something that comes from the heart. My father was quite easy, because he would say. So it's pretty easy to relay what he said.

PS: Tell me about going to school in the U.S. as an Indian child.

DN: Oh, nightmare.

PS: Yeah?

DN: I say that as a kind of a joke more than anything else, but it was very tough. It was very tough going to school being the only one who had a tan. I say it that way, because it's funny, but everyone's heard the phrase, "Kids can be cruel." There's more truth to that than most words describe. It was a very different experience for me than any of my friends, either Indian friends, because I had just as many Indian friends as I did as Caucasian friends. I shouldn't say American friends, because I'm American as the next person. [Telephone interruption.]

Going to school every day, like I said, the only one with a tan, those kids would look at you differently, because they didn't know any better. And I sincerely believe that racism is taught. It's not an inborn thing. It's definitely a taught hatred, and it's taught ignorance. Really, a good word to describe it is taught ignorance. But I had to go through those types of abuse when I was younger. I mean, they came up to me, and my sister was called a nigger, I was called a nigger. I was called "brown boy," "dirt boy," "spearchucker," all these types of negative terms. But the kids didn't know any better, and I forgive them for that, because I don't blame them. I blame either their parents or society for teaching those types of things, which I don't believe is their fault. But it's their fault to see the wrong in their ways and not to correct it.

So at first, my early childhood I tried to deny being different. I tried to deny being brown or being Indian or being different than the rest of my Caucasian friends. You can imagine the kind of confusion that gives you at home. I had to go to school eight hours a day, I was at home for eight hours a day, and I was sleeping for eight hours a day. Of course, those aren't exact numbers, but that's a typical day for me. Eight hours of those days I'm a white American. I'm a white Anglo-Saxon Protestant, that whole WASP thing. Eight hours a day I'm Indian. I'm supposed to be a good little Indian boy and follow the Indian path religiously and culturally and everything, and eating Indian food and that whole bit. Then eight hours a day I'm sleeping.

So I was going through life as two different people, until I learned to realize, when I got older, not to hate the fact that I was different, but embellish it and revel in it, and I loved it. To this day, I am so glad that I'm not white. I am different than you. I can say this as another joke. White people spend thousands of dollars a year to get my skin color. I have it, and I spend zero. I mean, it's great for me. But it's very tough to balance those two

things and to come to grips, actually, with being different.

I went through what I call the juggling act, trying to fulfill my mother's dreams and hopes to being that perfect little Indian boy, but then also assimilating with all my friends who were Caucasian-born. They had the apple pie dinners and they had whole church on Sunday morning and the whole bit, and I never was exposed to that aspect of life. But if I didn't act like I was, then I wasn't part of the gang and then I was isolated, and I didn't want that to happen.

And so that's the kind of juggling act that I had to go through, until, like I said, later in life when I was very comfortable with the fact of being different, and that proved not to be a disadvantage, but a great advantage in life, because you saw, as people got older and they got wiser, people wanted to learn more about you. Instead of ridicule you, they wanted to learn more. So now I became the center of attention, and people wanted to know what I had to say and what my background was because I was different. Because you could go to the next person, and they'd have the exact same way. They had the same apple pie and they had the same everything.

PS: What age were you when you noticed that shifting for yourself?

DN: That would probably be high school. I think it was high school when I really came to grips with it and matured, I say, into adolescence. I think before that it was quite a rough ride, and the crime in all this is the rough ride that goes on every day.

Now, I was very lucky--and I mentioned before that I hope you're ready for an earful on this subject, because I get very adamant on this subject. I was quite lucky because my parents had no problem becoming Westernized, because they knew that that would help me in my personal development into an adult. And so for me, it was very easy to make that transition. I did the realization process. I found out who I was and I became very comfortable with that, because I was not pressured to suppress any Western influence on my life, because like I said, eight hours a day, that's half your waking life is Western influenced, and that's going to be for any person living in this country. Whether you're Western at night or not, when you're at school as a child, you're in the Western world. There is no Indian school here that treats you like you're in India.

So I was very lucky that I'd never had those pressures, but I see example after example after example that today there are Indian parents who, what I have coined, like to recreate a "Little India" in their own home and they like to block out all Western influences at all, and what they're doing is not helping their child develop. They're putting them at a disadvantage, because they're not allowing them to grow or they're not discussing, not growing with their kids. You're going to have to come to terms with the fact that you are in America now, you are an American, and we're not Indian. I am Indian descent, but I'm very American.

It's a shame that a lot of these kids don't get that advantage like I did, and it helped that growing process. It's a sad sight to see. There are a lot of mentally confused Indian kids out there right now, and I see it every day, because they're the kids of my parents' friends, who are not as old as I am, but they are going through the same things I went through, and they're at that critical point where, if they're not helped over the edge, they're going to fall apart and they're going to develop some serious problems, and I've seen that happen to a lot of kids already.

PS: The serious problems would be things like what?

DN: I mean, the social alienation, respecting their own body. I've seen that a lot with girls. Things with dating, things with school, depression. Even things with their own parents, the rebellions that occur. Because every time that happens, the parents are actually setting themselves up for a major rebellion, because at some point the Western influence is going to break through that shell, and when that happens, all hell is going to break loose, and they are going to completely disassociate themselves from anything Indian. You can go and ask 100 Indian kids the age of fifteen--or not fifteen. Let's say the age of twelve--how many of them want to eat Indian food.

PS: How many do?

DN: I'd say 99 of them don't, because they want to disassociate themselves from everything Indian, because they're not taught to balance the boat. And I was the same way. I didn't want to eat Indian food. I hated Indian food. I went to college, and I couldn't get enough of it. I eat Indian food six times a week now, because I've learned to like it. But I can also have American food. I've learned to like both. I've learned to take from both what I want. There's some Indian foods I don't like, and there's some English food or American food, if you want to coin it that, that I don't like. But I've learned to balance them both, because I was very lucky that I wasn't sheltered from one side. But some of those people are sheltered from anything Western, and it's a recipe for disaster.

PS: So was language any kind of problem for you when you went to elementary school?

DN: No, not for me. For my father it is. My father can't even say the city we're in right now. He still can't say Bloomington, because his accent has prevented him from ever learning the correct pronunciation of some English words. But it's quite funny.

I haven't had a problem with that. I've been able to express myself verbally with the English language as much as anyone else would. But I was born and raised in the U.S.

PS: So even when you started kindergarten, your English was fluent enough so you didn't have any trouble in kindergarten?

DN: As far as I know. As far as I can remember. That never became a problem for me.

PS: Had you eaten American food at home before you went to kindergarten?

DN: Very little.

PS: Was that an issue when you went to school?

DN: Not that I can remember.

PS: And your family was vegetarian or not?

DN: At that time, I do not believe my father--I think my father was not a vegetarian at that time. My mother was a strict vegetarian, I know for a fact. But my father, I'm trying to remember. I believe he did eat meat at the time, but meat was not part of our diet at home. It was not a big part of our diet from what I can remember. That was quite a few years ago, and like I said, my memories of my childhood aren't that clear, for whatever reason. None of it was negative, I can guarantee that. None of it is being suppressed or anything. I just don't remember most of it.

PS: What were your friendships like during the school years, especially in those elementary school years? Did you go to friends' houses?

DN: What friends?

PS: Okay. Sorry I asked.

DN: No, actually, if you think about it, that is a tough subject for me. My elementary years were rough, very rough, very tough.

PS: What school district were you in?

DN: I was in 621.

PS: Which is?

DN: New Brighton, St. Anthony, Mounds View type areas. I did have a very tough time making friends, but that was also the time when I was trying to distance myself from being Indian, when I couldn't help it. I tried my hardest, but I couldn't change the fact that I was Indian. I was trying to fit in, but no way I could ever fit in unless I learned to accept both.

And so I actually transferred schools. I was in a public school until seventh grade. That was the first year that I actually went to a private school. And it's something I look back on now and I say it's too bad, but I left that public school with one friend, and you think about that, that's a very sad state of affairs for any sixth grader. I would hate to go through life again only having one friend.

But I went to a private school and I got a fresh start, and that was when my growth really occurred, when I was able to finally go through that whole realization process or whatever you want to call it. But until then, no, it was pretty rough. My only friends would be the Indian ones, and those friends were because we were forced to spend time together at the social gatherings of our parents. Otherwise, my best friend was the TV.

PS: So you had a pretty solitary childhood.

DN: Those years. And by no means did that have a detriment on me. The only effect I would say that had on me is, if I was that solitary, then now I'm just the opposite. I'm such an extrovert now that I'm making up for it. Every year that I was by myself, I'm going to go out and have a good time now.

PS: What private school did you end up going to?

DN: St. Paul Academy. It's a very parochial school in the Highland area.

PS: Parochial in a religious sense or private?

DN: Private. It was from the seventh grade to when I graduated high school. I graduated in [1991] from high school. But I was able to make friends there. But even then, most of my friends were my neighborhood friends, who with time became better friends and grew accustomed to me being the different one and had no problem with it as we grew older. I'm still friends with those guys today, which is nice. I can say I still have childhood friends.

PS: So you finished high school in 1995?

DN: 1991.

PS: '91, okay. I was trying to add up how old you are.

DN: I finished college in 1995.

PS: Where did you go to college?

DN: I went to school in Boston, Massachusetts, at the school called Babson College,

B-A-B-S-O-N. It's a small business school that most people haven't heard of unless you're in the business world itself. It's actually ranked the highest for my specific major and was actually the reason I chose the school, which was entrepreneurial studies.

I knew that's what I wanted to do from my senior year in high school, and in choosing a college, all I did was, I looked for what school offered that major, what was the best school, and I went for the top one, and lucky that I got in. I thank God every day, because I don't know how I got in. My academics weren't too hot in high school, but I made up for that in college, at the pressing of my dad again, the whole educational bit. He told me I had four years to get through college, and the fifth year you pay for it yourself. I said, "Oh, okay."

PS: That's an inspiration.

DN: That was an inspiration to get done in four years. And then he said, "If you come home with less than a 3.0, then you won't be going back the next semester." So actually I was able to do that, thank God.

PS: Can we go back to your high school years just a little bit longer? You said in high school you went to St. Paul Academy, and you ended up having a lot more friends there. What were your friendships like at St. Paul Academy? What was different about those kids or you that made that work better for you?

DN: I think what was different was myself. I was able to deal with being different a lot more effectively than I did in elementary school, and a lot of that was self-taught. That's something my parents will never, ever be able to teach me, by no fault of theirs, just because they didn't go through it. There's no way they would have any form of knowledge or experience on how to do that, because they were learning what was going on just when I was learning it, too.

Our family, as a whole, was going through that change, that Westernization process, at the same time, and it wasn't like there was any words of wisdom. And they were the first-generation Indians, so they didn't have anyone to look to. But I was able to better relate my differences and to relate to other people, and I think I was a little bit funnier, too, when I was in high school. That was when my humor really kicked into high gear.

Actually, I'll tell you, a lot of that humor and a lot of the reason I make a lot of jokes now and the reason why I like to have a lot of fun and make jokes is because as a child I was ridiculed to such an extreme, and I was such a small, frail kid. I'm still, I weigh--I'm not going to say what I weigh.

PS: Oh, go ahead.

DN: A lot of people say a buck-o-five, but that's just a slang word. I was always the smallest and the scrawniest and always the weakest kid, so I was always the one who got bullied. I also was the one who looked different, so I was always the easy target. So my only form of defense was verbal. I could outwit someone just by my verbal attacks, and that was all just a defense mechanism to all the ridicule I had to face as a child.

On paper this may seem like it's an abusive childhood or a really horrendous childhood. I had a very happy childhood, because I had a very loving family. But without that, I would not be the person I am today. That family structure and that family love is what gave me the strength to continue to fight forward and to find out who I really was, because I knew it would be worth it, just because of that love itself. And that's why I say I'm very lucky in that sense that I had a loving family, because that gave me the tools to actually succeed in this whole process.

PS: When something would happen at school, some kid would call you nigger or sword thrower--

DN: Spearchucker.

PS: Spearchucker.

DN: It's pretty rough. People would say "dirt boy." They came up with some very creative ones.

PS: When that would happen, did you tell your parents about it?

DN: No.

PS: Because?

DN: I didn't see the effect that they could have. I didn't see them as someone who could do anything about it. The only time I went to my parents was when it would be physical, because that I knew there was nothing I could do. If someone was going to beat me up, then I would say, "Listen, I'm not going to get beat up. I'll tell someone about it." That was my only defense. When it came to name calling, what I did was, I learned from that, and like I said, I got very witty, I got very quick to respond, and I was able to turn it right back around. Once I was able to do that with my own mind and my own vocabulary and my words, that part stopped, and the only part I had to work on then was the physical bullying or whatnot. I just became a fast runner.

PS: What kinds of verbal comeback would you make when some kid would call you--

DN: It would depend on the--it was very specific to the person or the time or what they

said or whatnot. There's not any kind of standard comeback. I was always able to turn it right back around.

PS: Did you counterattack or did you make fun of them? What was it structured like?

DN: It was usually humor. I would just bring it back to fun. What I tried to do was not so much try to instigate an escalation of the attack. I would try to make them laugh to show them that there's no reason to bully me, because we could be friends and we could have fun together. And so if I could make you laugh, you'd be a lot more open to a friendship with me. And so that's what I would always try to do. I would always try to make light of the situation or make light of something, and that way the bullying would stop and it move more into a friendship.

PS: How old were you when you figured out how to do that consistently?

DN: Oh, I would say it was a process from seventh grade to twelfth grade. When I graduated high school, there was no one wittier. At that point, I'd taken enough abuse, I knew a comeback for almost anything you called me.

PS: When you were in grade school and kids would tease you, what did you do with that? You just took it inside and didn't tell anybody?

DN: Yes.

PS: You didn't tell your sister or anyone else?

DN: My sister and I didn't have as strong a relationship until after I went to college. I'm sure it was probably because of my experience and her experiences. We were just too different people until I got to college and grew up and realized again how important my Indian ancestral heritage is and how important my family is and whatnot, and I created a very strong relationship with her today.

I did have one confidant in elementary school, and that was the other Indian kid, who took just as much abuse as I did. We would revel in it together.

PS: Did you sit and comfort each other and talk about it?

DN: I imagine so. I don't remember specifically. I don't know this guy, and I couldn't even tell you his name today. But I do remember there was one other kid, and that was my one friend.

PS: Were there any black kids in your school?

DN: I believe so there was. I don't remember specifically or not.

PS: You didn't hang out with them?

DN: No.

PS: And why was that?

DN: I never had any friendships from school that were people I actually spent time with outside of school. Even that one friend I did have, I didn't spend time with him outside of school. Any friendships I was developing would be either friends, like I said, from my parents' social gatherings or my two immediate neighbors.

PS: And they didn't go to the same school as you?

DN: No. In elementary, no. And actually, when I went to seventh grade, I was in a different school again, too. I actually never went to school with any of those guys. They were always my neighbors.

PS: They were the kids that you played with after school or on weekends.

DN: Yeah. If I would ever play after school, it would be with those two neighbor kids.

PS: And they were both boys?

DN: Yes.

PS: The same age as you?

DN: One was one year younger than me, one was two years younger than me. I was always the oldest one.

PS: Okay. Interesting. Were there any advantages that you found when you were in high school about being an Indian, about being of Indian descent? You talked about some of the downside of that. Were there any things that were good about it?

DN: Oh, there's an unlimited amount of things that are good about it, and those can all be grouped into one big term, and I would say it's because I'm different. That alone allows you to have a different--everything. You could have a different perspective on any topic.

We talked about racism, and if someone who is Caucasian speaks about racism, I have a different angle on that, because I am different and I was able to talk about differences between East and West, and a lot of Caucasian people don't know what the East is like. I

know what both are, because I was raised in both, and so I have an access to both. So just your viewpoint as someone who has been raised in two different cultures, both West and East, I have a unique perspective on any topic and every topic. So that alone is different.

Any kind of academic work that I had to do, I always a specific viewpoint, which was always different, and so mine would always stand out. For good or for bad, I was always different, and that alone brings attention to you. I love being different. I don't want to be a Joe Schmoe. I want to be the one who's different.

PS: So by high school, it was okay to be different with you?

DN: Oh, yeah. That's when I was very comfortable with being different, and life got a lot easier when you're comfortable with being different.

PS: You said you had friends in the Indian community that were in your parents' social circle. Did you also attend the School of Indian Language and Culture, SILC?

DN: I think I went for one Saturday.

PS: One Saturday?

DN: I think so.

PS: What was your impression of that?

DN: It was a joke.

PS: Because?

DN: It wasn't going to teach you anything.

PS: You already knew everything they were offering?

DN: No. I sincerely don't believe that was the case. I didn't believe what they were teaching there at the time--and I'm not saying this was the right decision or not--was going to give me anything out of it. That may or may not have been a good decision on my part. But I was never forced to go to it. I went for the first time on my own and I stopped on my own, so it was something I did and stopped on my own.

PS: Do you remember about how old you were when you went?

DN: Not a clue. SILC does sound familiar, though.

PS: Tell me about your family's involvement in the religious community. I know you said there weren't very many Hindus here when your parents first came, and I know that a Hindu community has grown up around here. Were your parents or you involved in forming a religious community?

DN: I know my mother is, was very devoted to the Hindu religion personally. On a community-wide level, my father has been a leader in that department. I don't believe he's been a religious leader, but more of a social leader, a representative for the whole community, because I know that he's not the most religious person in the community. He has no desire to be the religious authority or anything like that. But what he has is a lot of knowledge from his business dealings and his experiences that he is a natural leader. So in that sense, he was involved in the religious community that way. I believe he actually was president of the society for a few years, and he was always serving on the board and was always very actively involved in continuing that. Beyond that, I don't believe my parents had a very strong prominent role in the religious aspect of the community.

That's also the reason why I'm not very religious today, because my parents have never forced their children to be active members of it. It was a very personal thing for them, and it became a very personal thing for my sister and I.

PS: You said your mother was very religious. Did you watch her practice religious ceremonies at home?

DN: Ceremonially, we were very, very devout.

PS: Can you describe some of those for me?

DN: Off the top of the head--and I'm sure more and more of these will come off as I speak about them. My favorite one--and don't tell my sister I said this.

PS: She might read it.

DN: Has to be the religious, I don't think it's a holiday, but it's a ceremony called Holi. I'm sorry, not Holi, Rakhi, and I don't think it's the boxer. I think it's with an I, not a Y. Don't quote me on the spelling there. That ceremony itself, I believe, symbolizes the true essence of family and love, and it's, to me, the most beautiful ceremony that I know of. That ceremony is actually a vow that a brother takes to protect his sister with his own life.

Every year--I believe it's in August--we do the ceremony. The ceremony involves the sister taking a string and wrapping it around her brother's wrist and her brother giving some form of a gift to his sister, the sister also feeding something sweet into his mouth. And I believe there's some deep religious reasons why those are the procedures, but that's

how we've adopted it. And the whole purpose behind this is to create more of a bond between the brother and sister, because once the parents are not in the picture anymore, who else do you have left in your family? It's your brothers and sisters. And I'm sure there's also even a cultural thing, a cultural basis to all this in India, where brothers and sisters had to take care of each other in some way.

But each year I have taken a vow to protect my sister with my life, and I think that's beautiful. That symbolizes everything about family and love that you can possibly have all in one simple ceremony, simply tying a string around the wrist, tying like a bracelet, and the giving of gifts, more even this is the reason of why you're doing it.

That's my personal favorite one. Some other ones, like I said as I actually started at the beginning, are Holi, I believe, the celebration of color and the celebration of light. In India, the country as a whole stops, and everyone--it's like one big party. It's like Mardi Gras in India, and instead of beads like you do in Mardi Gras, it's actually throwing colored powder and colored water on everyone. And so you wear white, and by the end of that day, or actually within minutes, you're covered in dyes, in red, green, blue, orange dyes and everything, and there's water guns and people are singing and dancing and having a great time. I think that's great.

When I was a child, that was my favorite holiday, just because I got to have water guns every year. To me, I just wanted the water gun that I would get. My grandparents would always bring me a water gun from India. That was my big thing, I had to get a water gun every year, the new and improved model, the bigger and the better one every year.

There's another festival, Dipavali, which is coined the "Festival of Lights." It actually is the celebration of the homecoming of Lord Rama. It's kind of an interesting story, and don't quote me on whether it's Rama or Krishna. But there is some god that was exiled into the forest, and this is all in Hindu scriptures. He was exiled into the forest for fourteen years, and after fourteen years, when he came back out, the people turned every light on so he could find his way back to the city. And so now what they do is, every year in November they celebrate Dipavali, the homecoming of this god. Everyone keeps on all the lights, they let off fireworks, and it's a big joyous occasion because they're celebrating the homecoming of a god.

And so that, to me, was also very a very fun one when I was a child, because I got to play with fireworks, but when I got older, it was just the beauty of it that there was really a history to that, too. Just like how Christians celebrate the birth of Christ, this is like the Indian Christmas. They celebrate the rebirth--I don't know if you could call it Easter or not, but the homecoming of a god.

That's a few of the holidays that we celebrated. That alone right there gives me something to talk about with someone who's Caucasian. There's a great example of me being

different being an advantage. Everyone celebrates Christmas. Not everyone celebrates Holi, Rakhi, and Dipavali. That story alone, just telling people about Rakhi, that's an enthralling story. I've told that story many, many times, obviously because I love the holiday so much, but also because it's a very interesting story. To a lot of people, this is very different. And these are the types of things that I came to realize that are great positives. I love the fact that I can tell these kind of stories. And if I was Catholic or Christian, I could tell my stories about Christmas to someone and they'll going to look and me and say, "Yeah, so." And then what? I would need to make up some kind of twist on Santa Claus or something to make it interesting.

PS: So at this point, you say you're not very religious in terms of practicing any rituals on a daily basis?

DN: Me personally, no. I have a personal problem with organized religion. I have a very strong belief in God, but organized religion itself I have a problem with, because if you subscribe to one religion, you are forced to subscribe to every one of their what do you want to call it.

PS: Their beliefs?

DN: Every one of their beliefs, every one of their rules. And if I have a problem with one rule, then I'm no longer a devotee, and I have a problem with that. Because I have no problem believing in God. I do believe in a higher power. I do believe in the Hindu religion. But I don't believe in organized religion anymore.

I can't subscribe to one specific religion, because there are aspects about every religion that are positive, but then I don't want to be tied down personally or religiously into what I have to believe in. I don't want to be told that I have to believe in it. I want that to be a decision on myself. There a lot of things I do believe in that happen to be very Hindu. So in that sense, yes, I am Hindu and I am religious, but I still have a problem with organized religion. I hope my mother doesn't get offended by that.

PS: Maybe she'll skip this page. [Laughter]

DN: Mom, if you're reading, stop.

PS: Tell me about dating. Did you date? Do you date? You said your parents had an arranged marriage. I'm just curious to explore--

DN: I hope they write "laugh" in when they transcribe this.

PS: They can write "laugh" in.

DN: I personally haven't ever considered an arranged marriage as an option for myself. That won't happen for me. I don't want it, and I know my parents don't want it. I don't think it would work with me. I wasn't raised with that being the socially acceptable norm. And I believe if I was raised in India with that belief, knowing that from day one in some point in life your marriage will be arranged, then I wouldn't have a problem with it. But now that I've lived in this country for every day of my life, except for that short little six to nine months when I didn't live here, there's no way that I personally could go through an arranged marriage.

What I see happening is myself marrying an Indian person. When it comes to dating, though, I have no problem dating anyone of the opposite sex, whether she be Catholic or whether she be Hindu, whether she be blonde or whether she be brunette, redhead, or black hair, or whatever. I'm color-blind in that sense. But I will end up marrying an Indian girl.

The reason I say that--and a lot of people ask me, "Why do you say that?" That it's not an absolute. That's not a rule I'm going to live by. I'm not going to rule out marrying anyone, because like I said, I am color-blind. I say I see myself marrying an Indian woman just because the values and the culture that I grew up in and the things that I believe in would most closely resemble someone who was brought up in the same type of situation. And when it comes to marriage, I see the reason why marriages can last and why some of them are lost are because of personal values and things like that nature. So if I looked at what would I be most compatible with, I believe I'll be most compatible with someone else who is an American-born Indian. Not to say that's a rule and not to say I rule anything else out, but that's what I see happening, just by what I was raised to believe in.

PS: Is there a good pool of American-born Indian girls that you're interested in?

DN: Currently?

PS: Well, do they exist?

DN: Of course. Of course. I've met some very intelligent and very well-adjusted Indian women. I've met some on the opposite end of that, too, where I've met some very socially immature, mentally immature Indian women, who I believe are victims of that "crime" we discussed earlier, where they were never allowed to grow as a human, to grow into an adult, where they are still treated like a twelve-year-old.

There is a great pool of interesting and beautiful and--actually, I don't want to sound like I'm shopping or something like that, but there are Indian women out there that I do see that are very intelligent and smart, and so I have no doubt that there is someone out there for me. I don't know who she is yet, but I'm only twenty-three. I don't want to get married anytime soon. You can write that, exclamation point.

PS: Did your parents ever communicate guides to you about dating? How did you learn about dating?

DN: Self-taught. Again, very self-taught. Actually, I should[n't] say self-taught. I should say society taught me, my friends taught me, and I taught myself. It was a combination of those three things.

Dating obviously was never a topic discussed. I shouldn't even say obviously. It wasn't ever a topic discussed in our home. That was because my mother never dated. She never felt comfortable discussing those topics with me or with my sister, so my sister, actually, and I both were forced to learn that aspect of life on our own. For better or for worse, that's what we had to go through.

My father has sat me down and spoke to me frankly, and they have expressed to me that their main concern is that I'm happy. Thank God that that's the first and foremost that they care about. And if that means I marry someone who's not Indian, so be it. They have also said that they would be much happier if they see me with someone who's Indian.

So that's the extent of dating that I've gotten out of them. Everything else society or myself taught me. And I've dated Caucasian women, I've dated Indian women, and I've dated everything in between.

PS: What's in between?

DN: Latino or Hispanic or Asian or anyone else.

PS: Have you ever dated a black person?

DN: No.

PS: No interest? Just haven't met any?

DN: Just haven't met someone I'd want to date. I have friends, but I've never been physically attracted to anyone who is black.

PS: When you think about yourself and choosing a mate--you said at twenty-three now, you're far too young. It's not something you're ready for yet.

DN: Yeah.

PS: Do you have any kind of magical number in your mind, like by the time I'm X I want to be married?

DN: Before thirty.

PS: Before thirty? So you've got seven years.

DN: Yeah, a mighty long time. And that thirty could be forty very quickly. No, it won't. By thirty, I would see myself being ready to settle down. And the reason I say I'm not ready to get married is because I'm still very young, like I said, but I still have a lot of things I want to do in my life and I'm not ready to settle down. I see myself already settling down from where I was just two years ago, and using that as my gauge, I see myself settling down somewhere in the twenty-eight to thirty range and really looking for someone, a perspective mate or a wife at that time, and hopefully finding someone at the same time.

PS: When you think about your life ten years from now, when you're thirty-three, what's your vision of you in ten years?

DN: In ten years, I would be married, hopefully, hopefully happily, probably either already have a child or have kids on the way, starting a family. I see myself still working for this company. I see myself in a leadership position. I see myself in Minnesota, working for the same company, hopefully very happy. I don't see anything in my life right now that could possibly happen that would make me not happy. I'm on a path that I think is to happiness and that I'll be very happy with it.

It's a tough question to answer, especially to someone who's a little younger. I've never planned out ten years. When I was thirteen, you couldn't ask me what I was doing at twenty-three. You asked me what I'm going to do at thirty-three when I'm twenty-three.

PS: People do make assumptions. They just don't often verbalize them. We all have expectations.

DN: Of course. I don't think I could have told myself I'd be working for my dad when I was thirteen. That I never saw happening.

PS: What changed? What changed to make that--

DN: He had a business. He started a business. He didn't have a business when I was thirteen that I would have gone into. It wasn't a big enough business that I would consider doing that as my life. I'm very happy with the opportunity now, though.

PS: Do you own a home right now?

DN: Yes.

PS: And where is that?

DN: This is pretty humorous. In North Oaks.

PS: Do you live there by yourself?

DN: I live by myself, with a friend of mine, a roommate of mine. When I say by myself, I mean not with my family. But it's quite funny to know that my parents are two and a half miles down the road and my brother-in-law and my sister are a mile and a half down the road and my uncle and my aunt are probably two miles down the road and my brother-in-law's parents are probably two and a half miles down the road. We're quite a close-knit family, and we actually live all together very closely now.

PS: Do you socialize a lot with your family now?

DN: Daily, even beyond the work, because we do work with each other every day. So we do see each other every day, and even outside of work. If we're not talking on the phone, we're still either having a meal together or still spending a lot of time together. So it's nice. Like I said, it's a very strong family, a very close-knit family that I wouldn't trade for the world.

PS: Your roommate that you live with now, who is that person?

DN: Actually, it used to be one of those neighbors.

PS: So he's a Caucasian boy?

DN: Yes.

PS: Man now, twenty-three, as well, or probably twenty-one.

DN: No. Actually, it wasn't the one I was friends with. It was his older brother. I was friends with their whole family, and so I consider all of them friends. I socialized with the one that was one year younger than me more than anyone else in that family. This is the one who was four years older. I think he's my sister's age. It was very easy for me to associate with someone older than me, for whatever reason, so I have no problem living with him or being friends with him.

PS: Well, we're getting to the place in the agenda where some of the things I was going to ask you, you've already answered in one way or another, but let's go through them at least briefly again. You said you went to India fourteen times.

DN: I believe. Something like that.

PS: How old were you the first time you went?

DN: I wouldn't be able to tell you. I was such a small child. Before I could speak my first word, I imagine.

PS: What's the first time you remember going that you were conscious of going, any impressions that came on you at that point, like, "Wow, these people dress funny," or, "It's hot here." Was there anything that struck you when you became conscious and went to India for the first time?

DN: I would say the first time it became conscious to me was probably in early high school, somewhere in the seventh to tenth grade region. That was the first time where I went back to India with some sort of understanding of my life and who I was and what this country I was in had to do with my life and what America really was to me and whatnot and how different they really were. That was the first time I really saw any of that.

I think the first time that I fully understood it to the best of my capabilities was probably in college, when I went back in my junior year of college, so in the spring of '94. I was really able then, because I went back for academic reasons. I was really able to focus in and study that difference, study the difference between West and East cultures. It was, in a way, forced, because that was what we were doing in my college at the time. So that's the first time where I really studied that difference. And everything else in between there, all the other trips were usually just for pleasure's sake, either like a family wedding or a visit of some sort.

PS: How long would you stay when you went, typically?

DN: Typically, I would say approximately four weeks.

PS: Were those often in the summer, did they pull you out of school, or how did that work?

DN: Very rarely they pulled me out of school. It would either happen over my Christmas break or it would happen over the summer break. As we got older, the summertimes were just so hot there that they would rather go on the Christmas break and take either like a week off when school started. So I would sometimes miss school, never any extended period of time, because my father still had a very strong emphasis on education. He wouldn't sacrifice that for anything. So we did miss school once in a while, but it would usually coincide with my vacations from school, too. And if I did miss school, I'd have to do the work anyway, so it was like I was there anyway. I still had homework on the

plane. Everyone hates their parents for making them do homework on vacation.

PS: That's right. Are there any stories that stand out in your mind about things in India, meeting a particular relative or something that really grabbed your attention when you were a child traveling in India or being in India?

DN: I think the concept of having servants there is probably the biggest difference, the biggest understandable difference that I could actually articulate to someone else without having to go into a big long discussion. A lot of people can't comprehend or don't comprehend how socially acceptable it is to have a servant there, and these servants aren't black and they're not dressed in a rag around the groin and that's it. They're not chained by the neck, and they're not shackled up in any way, shape, or form. They're what I call personal assistants, and that's a very politically correct way of saying a servant.

In India, they call them servants. They're the financially and economically and socially challenged class in India that, for a lack of a better way of getting out of that lifestyle, created themselves a future by saying, "All I ask from you is a job, and I'll do whatever you need me to do. I'll do your laundry, and I'll such things." So anyone who was fortunate enough to be born into a higher caste or a higher financial situation, they were able to afford to have servants around the house, and it was very typical that each house has three or four servants, someone who does all the laundry, someone who does all the cooking, someone who does the driving.

People who are rich enough or economically stable enough to own a car usually also are economically stable enough to own a driver, so no one has to drive themselves. Here, to have a driver in this country, you've got to be a millionaire. People think of a limousine and you must be some corporate bigwig or a rock star or something like that to have a driver. There, everyone has drivers. Very few people drive themselves. Of course, some are going to drive themselves, but the concepts of having drivers and servants and things like that, that is really hard to comprehend, coming from the West.

The first experience--I did think of one now that you brought it up--of an experience I had that really opened my eyes when I was a child. I went there once, and, of course, I had the tennis shoes, the craze at the time. I don't know if it was the Nike or the Reebok or whatever it was at the time that was the tennis shoe to have. I woke up one morning, and the servant was washing my tennis shoes with a toothbrush, cleaning them off. I was a young kid. I grabbed them back and said, "What are you doing?"

He said, "I'm just washing them for you."

I said, "Don't do that." I got confused. Wash tennis shoes? With a toothbrush? I'm like, "What are you talking about?" I was all confused.

I went to my mother and I go, "Get him out of my room. What is he doing? I don't want him anymore." I didn't realize, all he was trying to do is help out, because that's what he was used to doing. And if he had no work, he would have to find his own work, and so he'd shine shoes and shine people's tennis shoes with toothbrushes.

PS: Just to be busy.

DN: Just to be busy. But that, to me, was crazy. And people don't have to cook their own meals there if they economically can afford a cook.

That, to me, is probably the biggest difference in Indian culture that you don't see in the West here. Most of the other cultural things either have come from the West or you can see it in modern-day India a lot of influence from the West. But that was the one thing that you never see in America anymore is modern-day servants, and I use "servants" very liberally. That's the term they use there. You say servant here and you think slave, and in no way are they a slave.

It actually is, and some people might call this justification from the rich, but it actually is a way for--and again, the politically correct word is economically challenged--members of society from that caste or from that part of life, that this is a way for them to get out of poverty. What you get for being a servant usually--they're usually younger kids. They get an education, and they get their meals paid for, they get clothing, those three things, which we take for granted, because we have the welfare system, if you don't get it from your parents, or you get it from your parents, typically.

There it's not a guarantee. I mean, more people are in poverty in Indian than there are people in the United States. You take the whole population of the United States and put them all in poverty, and it's still not as big as the number of people in India who are on poverty. That's how many people are in poverty. So for them, it's an opportunity to get out of that whole lifestyle. I know what my grandparents did and their servants that they always had, they always sent them to school, they always fed them, and they always clothed them.

PS: Did they provide them a place to live, as well?

DN: Yeah, and they slept there. That was their whole life.

PS: So the children--it would be a young child who would come in and be a servant?

DN: Sometimes it would be a younger child. Sometimes it was an older lady or whatnot, but usually it was a younger child.

PS: How young would they start being a servant?

DN: Probably eight, ten, twelve years old, and they go through their whole adolescence with the family. People have nannies here to do the chores and do the stuff and raising the kids. They have servants to do the chores. Not to raise the kids, but to do other things.

PS: Who looks after the kids in the upper-class families in India? Do they have what we would think of as nannies?

DN: Oh, I'm sure they have--

PS: Your family didn't have those when you visited?

DN: No. A lot of times--now, this is a complete guess on my part, I would imagine because a lot of women don't work there, most women don't work in India, they were able to stay at home and take care of the kids, if they were financially able to.

PS: Any other stories that just jump out of your mind of weird experiences I had as a kid in India or playing with your cousins or foods that you ate or going to a movie there?

DN: There is one story that I'm sure anyone who ever reads this will be able to relate to. The Indian economy is based on a lot of people peddling food, and the way they do that is, as you'll see in Chicago and New York you have street-corner vendors, like someone who sells a hot dog. That's commonplace.

Well, you can live off of street-corner vendors in India, because you can buy everything. The vegetables come to you. You'll see people come around in either horse-drawn carts or actually hand-pulled or pushed carts with vegetables on them, and they will go up and down the streets, and because it's so hot and it never snows in India, there's no windows per se, unless you live in a very expensive house, but usually there's no windows, they'll yell out what they have, what they're selling. They'll walk up and down streets, and if you want what they're selling, you walk out and you buy and go back in your house.

PS: And these are raw vegetables?

DN: Raw vegetables and raw peanuts and raw anything. They'll sell toys. Like the ice-cream truck comes around in this country, there was the guy who sold all the little toys and whatnot. You know that bell, and the kids would always want to buy something from this guy.

The story that I have, I couldn't tell you the age I was at. I must have been somewhere in the seventh to tenth grade time or I must have been twelve, thirteen, fourteen years old. I went back to India, and some cousins were also there. At my grandparents' house, my father's parents' house, their top floor was kind of like a patio, and didn't have a roof on

the top floor. The top floor actually was the roof. But it had a ledge, and you could look over and see the street. It was like a cobblestone street, and it was a clay house. It was very primitive.

But these guys would walk up and down the street, and they'd come and they'd say the word *chole*, and I believe that was some kind of a vegetable or some kind of a bean. They'd scream it. They'd say, "Chole." There's no way to transcribe that, but it's a very long, drawn-out word. We would be on the top there, and we'd go, "Chole," and then we'd duck down. This guy would, because he would want to sell something, so he'd stand around and try to find where we were calling him from, and he thought we'd want to sell him. We were throwing things at these people. We got in so much trouble. It was just bad.

PS: They should have been tying your mouth shut.

DN: Exactly. I'm sure they tried that one, too.

PS: Fun stories. Do you watch Indian movies?

DN: No.

PS: Did you ever in India?

DN: No. I have never enjoyed Indian movies. A lot of Indian movies are too predictable for me. The whole story of girl gets raised to be a good wife, boy loves girl, girl doesn't love boy, and this is a big soap opera. They're all just three-hour soap operas and they're all musicals, and so I've never really gotten into watching Indian movies.

PS: You must have watched at least a couple to know about them.

DN: Yes. When I was younger, my mother would--my mother, to this day, watches Indian movies religiously. That's part of their social life. That's something that almost every Indian loves to do, the reason being is, the Indian movie industry actually puts out over 700 movies a year. Hollywood puts out less than 100 a year. The Indian film industry is actually the largest and the most-producing film industry in the world. They produce that many movies, and so the whole culture is hooked on these Indian movies.

Movie stars here are considered icons and idols and whatnot. In India, they're gods. If you are a movie star in India, you are a god and you have more money than you could ever want to spend or ever try to spend. It's amazing there how important the Indian movie stars are, because the whole society revolves around those movies.

But I never really got into them. It probably was because I don't think I can keep up with

how fast they speak the Indian words. So in that sense, when we go back to how fluent I am in Hindi. I may miss a word here or there, and so then you kind of lose the effect of it. And I hate watching subtitles. I will read them sometimes, and I also miss what I'm trying to read because I'm looking up and looking down, looking up and looking down.

PS: It can be trying. Tell me about what it was like being in college. You said you were out in Boston for college for four years. You kept at least a 3.0 average. What was college like for you socially and culturally and friendships and academically and all those things?

DN: College for me was, overall it was great. I had a wonderful experience. I did a lot of growing up. I did a lot of self-discovery. I became very independent, both in my thinking and in my life itself, which I think were all positives. My mother doesn't think the independence thing was a positive, but she can't change that now because she already sent me to college.

My college life was dominated by two things. One, obviously, first and foremost was my academics. Even though my friends didn't think so, I was still very academically focused, because I had to be, and that's what I wanted to do. I did want to succeed, because in high school I didn't succeed academically. I was going through too many mental things in my head to really succeed mentally, and so there I really wanted to do something and to show that I can do, because I knew I was smart enough. It was a matter of what they say, applying yourself. That was the biggest part of my college career. It was a very tough school for business students, so I did have to push myself, and they did have very high standards.

But my second biggest thing in college was my dancing. I was in a dance company for the four years I was out there. I was a part of the Babson Dance Ensemble, and from, I believe, the second day I was in Boston till the day I was graduated, I was part of this organization. When I was in orientation for college, we went on a harbor cruise through the Boston Harbor on a ship, and they had a DJ there. I was dancing there, and the person who was the president at the time of the BDE, is how we call it, the Babson Dance Ensemble, actually saw me dancing there and asked me to be in the dance ensemble from that point on.

PS: What kind of dance did you do?

DN: I personally did hip-hop dancing and character dancing and some jazz dancing. The dance ensemble did everything, all the way from tap to ballet to hip-hop to jazz to classical to anything, a lot of character pieces, a lot of fun things. We did a lot of things, even alternative dancing, things like that. The ensemble did almost everything. Each person had their own specific outlet and personal thing that they wanted to do, so over four years we got to see quite a few different styles.

But that took up, I would say, more than 50 percent of my social time. I was both a choreographer and actually a dancer, and so that was a big part of my college life. I was known on the campus as "the dancer." It was quite a fun thing for me, because that was kind of like my little stardom thing on campus. Everyone knew who I was, because they always saw me on stage, and we became, the four years that I was there, the most-popular organization. We were voted like the best organization on campus and whatnot. I was part of it at its peak. It was a lot of fun and it was a great thing to do, both for exercise and for the love of dancing and for just the camaraderie that you had from the other dancers. I mean, I got to meet a lot of different people that way.

PS: Was the student body there fairly diverse?

DN: No.

PS: Mostly what?

DN: Mostly Anglo-Saxon kids from the New England private schools. I would say 70 percent, maybe 60 percent, came from that background. They all went to boarding school in New England somewhere, and they all went to Babson after that, and they were all very typical white, everything New Englandish. That was the majority of the students.

The other majority, beyond that, was international students, so in that sense, I guess we were diverse. We did have a very large contingency, I think it was 20-some percent at the time I left, of international students. Our school was famous for being able to recruit people from other countries to come to the United States for their education and choose Babson, where they wouldn't want to go. So we had a huge international student body, relative to other schools. Twenty-some percent international student body is quite a large number, when typically the average college has anywhere from 7 to 10 percent, maybe 15 percent. We had 26, 27 percent, I think the final number was.

PS: How big was the student body there?

DN: Twelve hundred, quite a small school, for me personally.

PS: So who did you feel more comfortable socializing with?

DN: This is the greatest part of it. I could do both very easily, because at this point I was very comfortable with being both, depending on what hat I wanted to put on that night. If I didn't want to go and do the typical binge drinking, what they consider the American drinking tradition at college, if I don't want to do that, I could easily go out with the international student body, go out to the nightclubs, go out to the Boston Proper and go out to the nightclubs and do that whole bit, and dress up in a suit and do that whole thing

like they do in whatever country they were from. Or I could go right back to my campus and I could go to the keg party, and I could assimilate myself to those people just as easily. That's where I was very lucky, that I was comfortable with both aspects of life.

They had no option. This is what their whole social life revolved around. If they were part of the hockey team, the hockey team always had a binge-drinking party. I was roommates my first year with a hockey-team member, so if I ever wanted to go to a party like that, I was there. If I didn't want to go to that, I could say, "I'm not going to that party tonight. I'm going to go to the club." So I got to have a taste of everything. I was very lucky in that sense. Then I also had my dancing to keep me occupied, too. Like I said, I had a great time at college. I was always doing something fun, and I was able to get the good grades. Don't tell my dad that.

PS: Were there things that you noticed, cultural differences between East Coast Americans and Midwestern Americans that stood out to you?

DN: Language.

PS: Language?

DN: Their accent. "You'll pahk your cah in the Hahvard Yahd" type thing. There definitely is truth to the East Coast accent.

PS: But you didn't find any cultural differences?

DN: There was that, too, not like you would see if you were studying East versus West, but you do see the Northeastern culture being a little more focused inward, not so friendly. The whole concept of "Minnesota nice" has a lot of truth to it. I don't think the movie *Fargo* had any truth to it, but I definitely think there is that friendliness in the air here in Minnesota. I don't know if there's something in the water or what it is, but you definitely, people say hi when they walk down the street. You don't have to know them to say "hi." I wave to the people while I'm driving down in my neighborhood, just because they're my neighbors. I know they're my neighbors. I mean, I know who they are, that they're my neighbors.

And typically in that area, it was very, you stick to your own family, stick to your own friends, very fast paced. You walk with your head down to get to where you're going type of thing. It wasn't very personal, and that's the type of person I am, though. I like to be talking to people, meeting new people all the time. So that part of Boston I didn't like, and that's the number one reason why I would never live in Boston. It was the most fun city. It was the greatest city to go to college in. I would never want to live there. But that's just because that's who I am. That's not my style.

PS: Did you live on campus all four years?

DN: Yes, all four years.

PS: And how was that for you?

DN: It was fine for me. I actually lived in the same room for three years, actually the same area. The same group of six guys lived together for over two years. Like I said, I had a great time, because even in Babson itself, it had both sides. It had the international and the typical American social life. I could do both, even in the same building I was in. Living on campus, to me, proved to be the greatest.

My school was in an area in Wellesley, Massachusetts. A lot of people have heard of Wellesley, but that was a very secluded town. There wasn't a lot to do specifically in that town itself. So if you didn't live on campus, you kind of excluded yourself from anything social. And so living on campus was really, if you wanted to be part of Babson's social life, you had to live on campus. If you lived off the campus, you already had your own life, or you were a commuter student and you had other priorities. But if you lived on campus, that was the only way to be part of that social life, to be a big part of that social life.

PS: Was this time in college the first time you were away from your family for significant chunks of time?

DN: Oh, yeah, by far.

PS: And how was that?

DN: Oh, liberating. Oh, it was great. Don't tell my mom that. It's always great to have the freedom to do what you want. I was lucky, because I was always given freedom when I lived at home to a certain extent, so when I got to college, it wasn't new to me. I had no need to exploit it. I had no need to go overboard. I already knew what it was like to make my own decisions, because I was doing that already at home. So I didn't go overboard in my freshman year like some people do, and I had no problem adapting to being on my own, not being able to go back to Mom for food every night. That came very natural to me. Like I said, I was very lucky, because I had that from my parents. So moving to Boston for four years, I had no problem with that.

I do know that emotionally I still had a lot of ties back home, so that first year I visited home, the first year of school I was out there for nine months, it's typically what a school year is, I think I came home seven or eight times in those nine months.

PS: That's a lot.

DN: That's an incredible amount. I left in September. I was back in October, back in November, back in December. I didn't leave back for Boston until January, came back in February. The month I did not come back was March or April, because I went on spring break. And the year was over in May, I was back again. So emotionally I still was very attached to being home. The last year that I was in college, I came home twice, or once. So it definitely gradually went down, till I didn't need to be home all the time.

But independence-wise, I had no problem adjusting to be on my own, which I know a lot of kids did have that problem, and I think a lot of Indian kids could run into that, too, because if you're going to be sheltered all your life, and, boom, you're thrown into college, where there's no one there to lead you in the right way, and you have all these different things coming at you, you're going to definitely drown, because you sink or swim, and you're definitely going to sink, if that's the way you're brought up.

Anytime I see that happening to someone that I know, I make it a personal crusade of mine, and not so much, I'm not a hero or anything like that. It's just something, like I said, I feel very adamant about. I try to show even the parents, and I've had many conversations with parents about what's going on there, because I've already been through it and I know how they're dealing with it and how this is going to affect their kids later on. And a lot of Indian kids have that problem, where they don't know right from wrong, because they were never allowed to experience live before they were let loose on their own, if they are ever let loose, which is even more of a crime, because at some point they will have to let go. You're not going to be sixty-five living at home, and if you are, you're a gone case already.

PS: Are there any other experiences in college that struck you as very significant.

DN: It was wonderful for me to be able to associate with Indians at my college who came from India for educational purposes only, so they were born and raised in India. They were the same age, so they had the same amount of life under their belt as I did, yet two vastly different experiences.

So I got along very well with a lot of the Indian kids who were at Babson, who all very well adjusted, but it was great to do that kind of a comparison on how you were brought up, how was I brought up, and what were the differences and what were the pros and cons of that and what did you have that I didn't have, what did I have that you didn't have. That was an ongoing thing. That wasn't one specific occasion. It was every time I went out, there were Indians I could go out with. And then there were the Indians who were still in denial, and they were just like the hockey guys. That's who they were.

PS: Pretending to be white?

DN: At that state, I think that's what they were more comfortable with. And then there were the Indians who came from India who were still very religious, always had Indian food. They didn't do anything--they did everything that was part of the Hindu religion. It was a very straight arrow, very typical good little Indian boy stereotype. So I saw both extremes. I saw the wild Indian kids, and saw the straight-and-narrow Indian kids, and I was somewhere in the middle. My mother thinks I'm on the wild side, but she doesn't know. If she only knew. That was a really interesting aspect of college, for me at least, to be able to do that comparison.

PS: Did you feel safe telling those other kids from India about your experiences in growing up here and being taunted and teased as an elementary school student?

DN: In college, you're speaking of?

PS: In college.

DN: At that point in my life, I had no problem sharing every experience of mine, because I usually bundled that story with humor. And so people always wanted to hear that side of the story, because I would always make them laugh. And I have no problem sharing what I went through. I have no deep-rooted secrets to share. I have no traumatic experiences. It was kind of like a long ongoing learning process that I had to go through. I'm the better person for it today. Those people are the worst for it.

PS: How did they respond when they heard those stories from you about being teased and taunted, because my assumption is that they were not teased and taunted in India.

DN: Of course, because everyone there was Indian.

PS: Right. So how did they respond when they heard those stories?

DN: Some of them, they didn't know what to say. They didn't think that was possible. On the other hand, there was some of that in their life already, but from the other angle, where they became the taunters. And this is probably the most shameful part of Indian society, but they are also very racist. Besides being on the side of racism, Indians could be just as racist as the next person. So they do know what it's like to taunt someone just based on skin differences alone, too.

PS: And who did they taunt in India?

DN: I would rather not say. I don't want to--because this will be on paper. There are certain colors out there that Indians are not so enthralled with.

PS: So it's based on skin color?

DN: Yeah.

PS: Okay.

DN: But that's something that I haven't carried on in my life, and I know my family and my kids won't be raised in that. That was something cultural, and I'm not going to deny that it exists in my culture. But I've got to take my culture with the good and bad. I can't change my culture what it is.

PS: So it's based on skin color rather than religion or economic status?

DN: Religion is a huge one, also. I'm sure a lot of people are aware of the religious wars going on in the Middle East, but the country of India is split based on a religious difference. They split into two separate countries just because of their different religions. So that alone, also. I mean, the way they would view another religious person, a person of another religion, the same thing. There's no reason they shouldn't be able to co-exist. I'm not asking you to believe my religion. I'm just asking you to respect it and respect that I want to believe a certain thing.

PS: They could only experience it as having been the taunter, not the taunted?

DN: But they've been taunted, too, for being Hindu, so they have that understanding of it. Everyone has some sort of experience with it, but they didn't have any profound reactions to what I had to say.

PS: How was it being able to share all these stories with a group of people who seemed more like you? Was that helpful or--

DN: I think it's all more of a learning and a healing process all bundled up into one. The more I talk about it, the more comfortable I am with it, and there's never a point where I want to be too comfortable with this topic. Still, to be able to tell someone that I was called a spearchucker takes a lot of guts, and it took a lot of guts the first time I told someone. To tell someone I was called a nigger, it takes a lot of guts. You get more comfortable with saying it the more often you say it, so now I have no problem saying it.

PS: So that was a real important part of healing, to bring the secrets out?

DN: Sure it is. I don't consciously think of it that way. I can consciously think of it as just sharing my experiences, but I imagine it has some sort of healing effects to it and some sort of mental benefit of it. You become more at peace with yourself.

PS: Now, you're not married yet, so I'm going to skip the whole section about marriage.

DN: No, no, no, no! You can say that four times.

PS: And you said you don't have kids. No kids that you know of. [Laughter]

DN: My brother-in-law and I always look to each other on Father's Day and go, "Happy Father's Day, I hope not." My mother always hits me in the head still to this day when we do that joke.

PS: So your sister's married?

DN: Yes.

PS: What was her wedding like? Was hers a marriage of love or arranged?

DN: Oh, it was just my sister and her husband and just a few of their closest 600 friends.

PS: Say more about that.

DN: Hell, my father wanted a small, intimate wedding, so he just made it 600 of his closest friends. It was quite an occasion. It happened two and a half years ago, in June of '94. That would be two and a half years ago?

PS: Uh-huh.

DN: For me, it was a lot of fun. It was a wonderful experience all around. It was planned to a T, and it came off incredibly perfect. At least that's how I saw it. I'm sure she saw it that there wasn't any big glitches or anything like that. So it was done really well, and it was done very traditional.

I think that's the part that was the greatest aspect of it was that it was done very, very Indian style. That to me, again, there's another benefit of being different. I don't have to get married at an alter and walk down the aisle like everybody else. I get to have a ceremony. I get to this thing and that thing, and Indian weddings take a week to be complete. I mean, it's not just that forty-five minute ceremony or however long your specific religion is. It's a long, drawn-out process, and it's a very joyous occasion, and there's this ceremony and that ceremony and then this night and then that night. So it's a lot of fun, and we got to go through all those steps. So it was very interesting for me to get to go through all those steps, not being exposed to those types of weddings a lot growing up here in America. Most of the weddings I've ever been to have all been Catholic weddings or those types of weddings where you walk down the aisle to the alter and the bride wears white. So that was fun.

PS: You would envision for yourself a traditional Indian wedding?

DN: Oh, yeah. Yeah. Just a few of my closest friends.

PS: Six hundred or so.

DN: Just 600 or so. That's what my sister had.

PS: Put me on the guest list. And how did your sister meet her mate?

DN: What I consider and how I've coined what happened to them was a pushed arranged. I don't know if pushed arranged was the term I used to use. It was not a typically arranged wedding. It wasn't thought of as that.

It's quite an interesting story, actually. My brother-in-law and my sister actually grew up together. Like I mentioned before, our parents all live in the same city, and my brother-in-law's father and my father knew each other. They were part of a group of friends that would spend holidays together, and so we spent a lot of holidays with their family. When we were growing up, for the ten years that we spent every holiday together, my sister thought her husband, Dave, hated her, and Dave thought Shalini, my sister, hated him, so they never talked, for ten years, and we'd always spend all these holidays together.

So then they both went off to college. Dave went out to RPI, I believe, in New York, and my sister went to Boston College. My sister moved to L.A. and got a job, and she was back here working, and Dave went to Houston and was working and worked in some other places, so their paths never crossed, until one day Dave came back to Minnesota to visit his parents and they happened to go to a party of some sort or somewhere like that, and Dave saw my sister and goes, "Oh, my God," and went to his mother, "Who is that?"

And his mother goes, "Oh, that's Shalini," knowing that they hated each other, or knowing that they thought they hated each other.

Dave was taken aback. He said, "That's Shalini now?" You could tell my sister didn't look the same now as she did back then. I'm not going to be mean to my sister, so--

And so the next day, Dave's mother conveniently had a brunch, or the next week or something like that, conveniently had a party, where conveniently David and Shalini would conveniently meet again. And it worked out that they started talking again, and the rest is history. They started dating from then on.

After their first date, my mother asked, "Are you ready to get married?"

My sister was all confused and said, "What?" Because my Mom had three hours. My

sister had seven. My God, in seven hours, my mother thought, she should know by now. My God. My sister said, "I don't know. What are you talking about?"

And at this point, my mother had been putting a lot of pressure on my sister to get married, to get going on it, because my mother was married at nineteen. My sister at the time, I believe, when they first met was like twenty-five, twenty-six years old, maybe even twenty-four. But in India, that was getting up there in age. And so they went out a couple more times, and after every date my mother would ask, "Are you ready to get married?" So it was very pressured in that way. So not pushed arranged, pressured arranged.

Okay, where were we?

PS: So you were talking wedding rituals.

DN: Okay, yeah. So they were dating for approximately maybe four or five months, and they decided very quickly also. By typical standards in this country, pretty quickly. They knew within a few months that, yes, this is the person that they wanted to marry. From within a year of meeting each other again, they were married. But it wasn't from the first time they ever met, because they met as kids, which, I think, was quite funny.

I found out this story after they got married. I wish they would have told me before. But when I was younger and they knew that I was coming over, the Walias (David's last name) would always hide their toys, because I was coming over and I was notorious for taking kids' toys.

PS: Stealing them?

DN: Not taking them home, but playing with them and not letting the kid play with his own toy. And so I guess I was notorious for that. I was a very mischievous child.

PS: I see.

DN: My hands weren't tied, so I could take toys. That's what he tells me. I don't know if it's true or not. I don't remember this. But he says he remembers the childhood nightmares because I would be coming over to take his toys.

PS: And now here he is--

DN: And now he's married to my sister now.

PS: And he works in the family business here, as well?

DN: Yes, he does.

PS: At Nath Companies. Okay. All right. Well, the last few questions are about values. When you think about your own future, what are the values that your parents held dear that you want to continue to embrace for yourself personally?

DN: Personally? The value of hard work, I think, cannot be substituted with anything in this world. I think that's the biggest deficiency in most people's--in the majority of the world, the lack of ability or desire to work hard, especially in this society where immediate gratification is so stressed and so desired that no one realizes what hard work even means.

I think those are the two most important words in my vocabulary. I've seen that both by being taught and by example, not just my father, but specifically and most importantly my father. I've seen what hard and what that got him, and I know what it does for yourself. You put a hard day's work in, you do feel better about yourself. And it's a lot easier to complain than to actually go out and change your life or change your situation by working hard.

I think that's the number one value that I want to take forward in my life is the ability to work hard and to have the people who work with me work hard, and the only way to teach them that is, I believe, by example. You can tell someone--this is a phrase my dad used to use. You can bring the horse to water, but you can't make him drink.

I think the value of family and the core of family values and the love there and that whole system is another value that I definitely would like to continue in my personal life. I have seen the strength it gave me in everything that I've ever had to deal with, whether it be making decisions about my own personal decisions in my life, anything from when it came to dating, when it came to drugs, when it came to driving decisions, everything. That family system really gave me a lot of strength, and that's another value that I'd like to keep to go in my life.

Education, of course, is going to be a strong part of my life from here and to my kids and hopefully to their kids, too, that there's no substitution, because we're all in one big learning cycle, because that's never going to stop. But your education has to continue, and if you become lackadaisical at any point, you're going to lose touch.

PS: Do you anticipate ever going back to college for an advanced degree?

DN: We're currently actually at St. Thomas.

PS: We are?

DN: The family.

PS: Oh, okay.

DN: And the family itself is involved in a family business class at St. Thomas. It's kind of more of a seminar. So that's part of the education that we're kind of continuing. Because we have a family business, we need to discuss the issues that we're going to face as a family business.

The top fifteen managers or top fifteen people in this company are also taking a mini MBA course at St. Thomas. So in that sense, we are continuing our education already.

I just got into the office, and I think within five to ten years I will go back to get a master's degree, once I specifically narrow down where my discipline of choice really lies, because entrepreneurial studies is quite dynamic thing. It's more of a personal thing. You're an entrepreneurial person, but now what do you want to do with that? Whether you want to be a financial entrepreneurial person or whatever you want to do, that's where my continuing education will most probably occur. So I don't want to be a doctor. Too much education there.

PS: Some of these, again, you've answered already. Would you ever consider living in India permanently?

DN: No. There are too many parts of me in my life that are too Westernized to be able to assimilate in India. It's two different worlds. I feel more comfortable here, just because I was born and raised here. I have no problem going back there, no problem adapting a lot of their values, but living there, I don't think I'd be able to. It's way too--the poverty is just too striking, it hits too close to home. It's very, very dirty. Not so much dirty as in the people or that type of thing, but dirty in the fact that there's just dust and pollution and things like that. It's not even healthy to be there.

So that's some of the reasons I'd rather stay here. Plus, of course, I'm accustomed to the simple things of life here that you take for granted, but in India you would have to look for. So I don't see myself ever living in India again. Visiting many times, but never living.

PS: How often do you anticipate you'll go visit?

DN: Once every few years. I don't see anything more than that, because all the relatives, which usually are your primary reason for visiting, are all in this country already. I did a lot of my self-exploration already when I was in India both for academic reasons, and whenever I visit there now, I'm doing a lot of that self-discovery type of things.

I do imagine at some point I will take some trip to do the tour of India, where I visit all the specific areas of my culture, but there's no strong need for me right now to make a trip every year or anything like that.

PS: Are there any aspects to being a first U.S.-born generation which you find especially difficult, that you haven't talked about already?

DN: I haven't talked about already? Not off the top of my head. I think I spoke about some of the things that are most prominent in my head.

I think the words of wisdom that my experience could hopefully someday help someone else would probably be most to the parents of first-generation kids--and some of the words to the first-generation kids, too--is allowing your kids, and not so much, and helping your kids develop as adults as American-born Indians, and not preventing that from happening, because your kids will be better for it, not worse for it.

A lot of people, I believe, they think that if they assimilate too much of the Western culture, they're the worse for it, and I think that it is possible to find a balance between East and West, assimilating the positive values from both and not assimilating the ones that you consider negative. You find a happy medium there, and you're the better for it. It's a lot easier to go through life being Indian in this country if you are able to balance those things. That would be my words of wisdom to them.

To the kids, I would stress exploring yourself, exploring the world a little more, not keeping yourself so sheltered just in Indian society. And I've seen that more and more as time goes on, you see less and less of parents being really restrictive. There still are occasions where you're going to have the parents who like to create their "India," but more and more over the kids are becoming a lot more intelligent and assimilating. So it's nice to see that.

I see that firsthand. I used to be a counselor at a church camp, where I started out as a camper, and I got into my teenage years I became a junior counselor, and then became a regular counselor, and now I go back just once a year, as my one church thing I do every year, that I help them out. And I get to see firsthand the youth of our community, and I like to see the youth and how people are developing socially and mentally and the state of affairs. It gives me a taste of how the kids are these days.

PS: And this is with the Hindu church?

DN: Yes, this is the Hindu church. It's the Hindu church camp, actually. I DJ their party every year. When I was a camper, I was the one who--because I was a dancer, I had the most dance music. And I ended up playing the music one year, and then the next year I brought my own speakers. From then on, I was the one to do the party at the end of the

week. And so now I'm kind of--I don't know if I got roped into it more than I want to. I don't mind doing it. It's my one DJ gig a year, so I call myself a DJ all year long, say, "Yeah, I'm a DJ." Once a year, but--

PS: Are there any things that I didn't ask you about what you think it's important to share with the people who might be reading this?

DN: I don't think, especially. I'll answer anything you ask me.

PS: Okay. In closing, if somebody asks you to describe yourself, what do you say? Who is Deepak? Tell me.

DN: I'm very unique. That was always my buzzword. I'm unique. I'm not different, I'm unique. A very unique, American-born Indian who likes to play as hard as he works. Well, that's probably about it. I'll leave it very general, because if I go into any more specific than that, I have to go into too many different things.

PS: Thank you for all you've shared today. I appreciate it.

DN: It was great.