Jonathan Remund

Interviewed by Polly Sonifer On January 26, 1999 At Jonathon Remund's Home

PS: This is Polly Sonifer interviewing Jonathan Remund on January 26, 1999.

Good afternoon. How are you today?

JR: I'm doing fine.

PS: Good. First of all, tell me about yourself — your name, your birthplace, the date you were born, and some other general information about where you were born.

JR: Well, I was born in Calcutta, India, in 1973, assuming that all is correct, and there were no birth records. There's nothing of a paper trail. My parents assumed that everything was correct because the dentist took a look at my teeth, and they said that, "This is how old we think he is," and by the fact that my middle name is Basant, which is a Hindi word for "spring," that gave the idea that I was born in the spring. May 28 is when — 28th comes from the fact that my sister's birthday is January 28, so we just picked 28 as an arbitrary number. From that point, my name is fictitious, my birthplace is fictitious, and my birth is fictitious. So hypothetically, I could have been born in Nepal, because I spoke Bengali, Nepalese, and Hindi.

As the story goes, my father was Nepalese, my mother was Indian, and my mother had an affair with the Nepalese — well, my father, a Nepalese gentleman. From that point, my mother came back to Calcutta, gave birth to me, and the person that was my stepfather took care of me. Then at that point my mother ran away, and my stepfather, who I thought was my real father — and I just realized this about in '94 — turns out to be my stepfather, he gave me up for adoption to IMH, which is the International Foundation of Hope. I can't remember. IMH, Mission of Hope, yes. Thank you.

At that point, in 1980, my parents, Robert and Karen Remund, they adopted me. I was seven at that time, and I came to the United States in Minnesota, and since 1980 I've been here in Minnesota. Then, in 1984, I became a U.S. citizen. That's pretty much — I've lost all recognition of my Hindi or my Bengali, my Nepalese. I have minor remembrance of my past.

PS: Let's talk about that a little bit more. What do you remember about your mom? How old were you when she left?

JR: I have no clue. You know, memories are supported by your family members. What you remember as a child is by your mom saying, "I remember when you did this," and you're like,

"Oh, yeah. I guess so," because it's a matter of them just reinforcing all the memories. So most of my memories are either lost or suppressed. I mean, who knows? It could be anything.

PS: Do you remember your mom's name or anything?

JR: I don't remember my mom's name. I don't remember — it's basically life began in 1980 when I was in America. All I remember is it was a cold day. When it is never a cold day in Minnesota? So from then I don't remember that much.

PS: Do you remember going to International Mission of Hope? Do you remember being there at all?

JR: Yes. I remember vaguely being there. The ironic thing is, my mom said that I had a best friend there, in IMH, and that best friend happened to be my parents' first choice, but, strangely, he ran away, and so I became the second choice. They wanted a boy, and then I just was at the right time and the right place. Then my parents adopted — I have five sisters and one brother. They're all adopted. I was the fourth adopted one, adoption, and there's only two boys in the family.

But remembering the past, I don't have that much of a clue. I can't remember yesterday. So that's asking a lot, to remember back twenty-five years ago or something. I mean, I remember the good things. I can still remember sounds and smells. When I went back in '94 — I went back just to see where I came from — but smells and sounds and certain words come out.

PS: Those are Indian smells and sounds?

JR: Right.

PS: So then do you get a flood of memories?

JR: I do get a flood of memories, but not in the sense of I was like a genius, but I think it was just more like a little content — a memory. It's like, "Oh, I remember this." Or when I taste something, "Oh, yeah. This tastes familiar," but it doesn't bring back memories like out of nowhere, but it brought happy memories and stuff.

PS: Do you know how long you stayed at International Mission of Hope?

JR: I think it was about a year and a half, a year. I can't remember.

PS: And you don't have any of the paper records from there?

JR: I do. I mean, I could ask my mom. And then Sherry, who was the head of IMH, she could probably tell you, too, and she has visited us. But I can't. I think it was a year or so. Maybe it was

two weeks, but I think it was a year.

PS: And you don't have any memories at all of what it was like at IMH?

JR: No. I can remember I was playing marbles and playing tops. I find it very strange that out of my seven years of my life I have only the good memories to remember. I mean, it could be a psychological defense, that something happened traumatic and could get into psychotherapy, but I think it's just more that I'm an easy-going person, and I take things as positively as possible. I'm pretty lucky, so I don't try to dwell on the past. So I didn't have conflicts like most adopted children have about their past.

PS: Tell me about what you remember when you first came here. I'm assuming you didn't speak English at seven.

JR: Yes. I didn't speak English at seven. It was traumatic for my family because I was a very adventurous child. I went through every cupboard, and I still have a habit of going through every cupboard in the house. I don't know why. I have to, like, look into refrigerators. It's just that curiosity in me. But I went through every cupboard in the house. I didn't sleep for a while because I was afraid of ghosts. These are all that my parents have told me. So I do remember some sort of — and I was very aggressive against my sisters. I mean, I'm assuming that's just because of society, the fact that in Indian culture, women are suppressed, and I thought I was more superior to my sisters, and I'd boss them around, push them around. Luckily, my parents put me on the straightaway, because then I would never become best friends with my sisters, and they're really my best friends.

So just going to school and then just — I was behind in school because I didn't speak English. I had a difficult time. I started at school late. I was always two years older than most of the kids in the classes.

PS: What time of year was it when you came?

JR: I came in January. School had already started a while ago, and then I didn't enroll in school until, I think, a month later because my mom was just getting sick of me being bored, because she was like, "This kid's just got to do something." So she enrolled me in kind of like — not a nursery school, kind of a post-kindergarten school. Then after that, I think that same year, I enrolled in first grade, and then after that — it was a private school. So I went through private school for eight years.

PS: Which school?

JR: St. Peter's Lutheran School. It's on 50th and France. So they put me through school, which helped out a lot, because I think in a private school it's more catered to the attention of the student, and that helped me. I just remember making my friends, and then I still have some of the

same friends from grade school. Then in '84 I became a U.S. citizen, and I was just going up there, and I still have my little American flag.

PS: What was that like for you?

JR: It was just kind of weird, because it's like all these older people, and I was kind of younger, and it was more of the, "Hmm. This is kind of cool. I get a little flag." But I think my fourthgrade teacher, she found it more fascinating, because she threw a party for me in class, saying that I became a U.S. citizen. So I guess without her it would have been like just another day, but she put an emphasis on it and kind of encouraged everybody to learn about becoming a U.S. citizen.

PS: Were you the only child in your class who was not a U.S.-born child?

JR: No. It's ironic. One of my good friends, Nathaniel Woodward, he's Vietnamese. He actually came through the same foundation, IMH, in Vietnam, and it was really ironic that we became good friends. He was adopted, and I don't know too much about when he became a citizen, but I met him in fifth grade, and since then we've been good friends, and I just saw him last Friday. So it's kind of ironic. So he and I became friends, and then I don't recall anybody else being non-U.S. citizen.

I think it was '88, eight years from '80, so '88, I graduated from St. Peter's. Nathaniel went to Lutheran High, which is another private school, and I chose to go to Edina High School since we lived in Edina at that time. We lived only about three blocks away so I could walk to school. So high school was quite interesting. I guess that would probably contribute to the fact that I became more Americanized. High school is a big step to becoming a mainstream American, because I think when you're in high school you're under a lot of pressure to not be someone different, of a different culture. So I think high school really provided that stepping stone for me to be picking up a lot of colloquialism and a lot of ways of Americanism.

So after high school, which was-I graduated in '93-

PS: Well, let's stay in high school for a little while yet. Edina High School is kind of famous for being a college preppy kind of place. How was school for you academically?

JR: Well, academically, I'm assuming I was a bright student, since I always got As and Bs, but I found it difficult in the sense that there wasn't really a very diverse student body. I mean, I grew up with all-white, Anglo-Saxon kids, private school. I mean, Edina's all white Anglo-Saxon. It didn't faze me, I guess, since most of my friends are actually more diverse. I have all sorts of friends that are from different cultures. So I find it ironic that somehow I grew up in this Anglo-Saxon world, but all my friends are from different areas of the world.

High school wasn't traumatic. I find that my other adopted friends found that high school was

more traumatic, and they found their adoption to be more traumatic. But for me, I just coasted through and just did what I needed to do. I think I had a little more direction of what I wanted, and I guess the fact that I was Asian, I expected a little more out of my educational value, since there's this kind of theory or theme against Asians, saying they're good students, and somewhat I lived up to that idea, because I was a good student. I listened to my teachers. I wasn't very rowdy or did anything.

Probably in '83 is when I caught up to my classmates in the academic standards, because I was behind in the classes. I would do kindergarten work in first grade, and first-grade work in second grade, and then in '83 I caught up to the same level as the other students. So I've never had problems with academics. Maybe I shouldn't say that, since I didn't do very well last quarter, but I think it's just due to the fact that it's either I'm lazy or just kind of unmotivated or I just have different —

I mean, my paths are being drawn in different ways, and when you're getting older and being in the university for such a long time, it takes you different ways. Plus, in high school I was more adventurous and had more questions about a lot of things that — I didn't have people that could answer it. I mean, probably questions like, "What is my culture about? How should I react to this? How should I react to that?" and those questions weren't answered, so, for me, naturally if those weren't answered I'd just move on.

PS: What sort of things would evoke these questions, "What's my culture?"

JR: Well, I mean, the fact that I am different skin-colored, I guess, does evoke that question. And then, other people ask me that question, and it's like I can't really answer it. I felt kind of inadequate when Anglo-Saxons would know more about my culture than I would. I mean, I wouldn't be depressed, but I'd just kind of laugh it off, and it would just be kind of ironic that it's like someone would come to me, "Oh, I love India. I love this," and, "I know this and this." I'm like, "Oh, yeah, that's nice. I have no clue what you're talking about." And, to me, I like to be educated as much as possible. So I guess those were the kind of questions that inspired that I should kind of look towards finding the answers.

PS: And where did you figure out to look, or didn't you?

JR: I think I tried with the Indian community, and I didn't fit in. I think it was just kind of, I couldn't fit in, because it was like cliques. The Indian community is like a clique, and there's a lot of tradition. There's a lot of people who know each other already from past experiences, and I think I realized that through Edina High School, because Edina High School's like the foremost cliques city, and it's a very — I mean, everybody knows each other and everybody has like family ties.

So, I mean, experiencing that at Edina, I was more independent, but I searched for the community or the Indian culture through the Indian society, but I had a little difficult time,

because the age group that I was looking for wasn't really there, and if they were, they were restricted by their family ties. It's like I would meet friends that were Indian, but it would be very difficult to really get to know them because of their parents' ruling or ideology. So I had a difficult time in that sense.

PS: Say more about that. The parents' ruling, what kinds of things? Give me an example of somebody that you met and then their parents —

JR: Right. I guess the difficult time I have is, for example, a lot of the Indian students that I meet are into school, and they're engineers or they're going to be doctors or they're going to be these high-flying people. For me, I'm a good student, but I don't stress the emphasis so much on that one career that's going to bust me out of the shell of — I don't know, society. I guess for me I just felt like I was more into trying to find my direction or trying to keep — I mean, trying to follow society's ways of — I mean, working and trying to, I guess, do what's right for me and trying to change the things that I could change within my power.

They always seemed to be in that book mode, and I had a very difficult time trying to find people who would not be in the book mode or who weren't tied to the family, or it's like, "My parents said that I have to do this." Independence, I guess, wasn't installed in most of the kids that I met, and, with me, I was independent since high school, and that's one thing my mom regrets, because we were separated because of the fact that my father had to work in the Cities, and my mom moved up to the countryside because they were doing a transitional thing. During high school I lived with my father, which kind of gave me that independence that I always desired. I mean, my father always worked, and I always went to school. And my father's a carefree person. He's just kind of laid back. So it's not like he was very stressed about me being out late at night. In that sense, I had a difficult time trying to have those questions answered.

PS: The questions about Indian culture?

JR: Right, about Indian culture, of, I guess, trying to find other adopted children, and if I did, I guess I always found them to be really weird.

PS: How so?

JR: I don't know. I just thought they were like so tied up on their past, so hung up on the emotional past of, "Well, I was left behind," or, "I was not wanted," and I guess I found a lot of people like that, who are like blaming their parents for this or that. I mean, I had a difficult time dealing with those kind of people than dealing with my past or my own self. So if I did find them, I just kind of shunned them, not like, "Oh, you're a bad person." I just didn't really try to get to know them. And I don't think there was a very amount of choices of Indian youths or Indian people to really be close to, either. So it was kind of difficult.

PS: You said you did have in high school a group of friends who were quite diverse. Where did

you meet them?

JR: Mostly in just kind of a — I happened to be the president of the International Club. I got attracted to these people. I don't know how. It's like I still question myself how I do it. I find these international people out of nowhere. It's just like a gift, I think, because, you know, some people are good at music, some people are — I'm just good at picking international people or diverse people.

PS: So they did have an International Club at Edina High School.

JR: Yes. I happened to be the president, and when I took my trip overseas, I visited most of them, most of the friends that I made at the International Club.

PS: So who was in the International Club at Edina High School?

JR: Let's see. Well, there is my Belgian friend. Actually, she didn't go to Edina High School, but she was in the Edina High School Club, because they didn't have one at her — I think it was Eden Prairie. Well, Eden Prairie is another school. I just talked to her about three weeks ago. She was in the club, and so we met and we became good friends. Then there was my Italian friend that I met, and I went to visit her.

PS: Were these people exchange students?

JR: Yes, these were exchange students. Then at that time — we'll get into my romantic life — but at that time I was dating a British girl, she was from England, and she was in Edina High School. So it was kind of ironic that I was dating someone international. Then right now I'm dating a French girl. So that's who I was visiting in Paris, since you had a difficult time getting hold of me. Then there was Nathaniel, and then I had another Korean friend, and she was adopted as well. So we did a lot of talking about adoption.

But I think for most people, when they look at me, they think that I'm either Hispanic — I mean, Indian is the last choice. I find it really ironic, but they wait for me to speak, or they wait for my name, and then they figure they can guess from that. But since I have an American name, it's very difficult for them to figure me out.

PS: Do you sort of relish that?

JR: Yes, I think so. I think I relish the fact that I can go into any country and people will come up to me and ask directions.

PS: In their own language and think that you'll answer them.

JR: That's right. So I relish that fact, I guess. If you hung around the Indian culture, you would

definitely say I'm Indian, but if you're not into culture and if you don't know, you would either guess Spanish or guess some other culture. The best is when I tell people I'm Indian, they ask what tribe. So I find that very — kind of interesting.

PS: That's unique to the Midwest.

JR: Yes. What tribe. I think the fact that my parents did the same thing that you did, they figured that having my name as an American name would help me in the business world, and it does. I think it helps a lot easier, because for people it's easier to pronounce, and Jonathan is really also an international name. So it can be pronounced in any language.

PS: Let's go back and talk a little bit about the family that you joined here, the Remunds. You were the fourth child that they adopted?

JR: Yes.

PS: And then they adopted two more after you?

JR: Right.

PS: So there were six children altogether.

JR: Six children.

PS: Tell me the names and the birth order of the kids, and if they were from other countries, what country they're from.

JR: Well, there's Steven. He's Anglo. He was born in Arizona, and he's twenty-nine. Then there's CC, who prefers to be called Liz because of her middle name, and she's twenty-seven. Then I'm twenty-five. It's ironic, because all the older kids are two years apart. Then there's Alo, who is nineteen, and she's going to Bemidji State.

PS: And where's she from?

JR: She's from India, the same. All the younger ones, from myself and down, we're all from the same orphanage. We're not related, though. We're from all the same orphanage. Then there's Tara, who's seventeen, and she's still in high school. Then there's Prema, and she is fifteen, and she is slightly handicapped. She doesn't attend school in the way we attend normal schooling. So she was the last one to come. So it's Steven, CC, Alo, then myself, then there was Tara, and then there's Prema. Then I have another sister Kathy, who is from my father's side, from a previous marriage. So she's our half-sister.

PS: And how old is she now?

JR: She's thirty-seven.

PS: An old person. [Laughter]

JR: Well, no. If she ever reads this, I don't want her to — but she's got a family, and I have one niece and nephew. But that's the extent of my family and my mom and dad and that's about it. They live up north. They made that transition because they wanted to get away from the city life.

PS: What kind of work does your father do?

JR: He was a computer programmer working with Unisys and Univac, and he retired, I think in '94, and now they own a resort up there. They converted it to a resort. It was a couple of cabins, and now they have like four cabins that they rent out. So it's only for the summer, but they keep themselves busy.

PS: And what was it like in this household? Did Kathy live with you?

JR: No. She was in college at the time, I think, when I arrived

PS: What was it like living in this house with five kids? Is CC from another country?

JR: No. She's from Arizona. Well, sometimes I think she's from another country. Same with Steven. You know, it was interesting. My brother and I, we got along, but I would play musical beds with him because I was scared of ghosts at the time when I came, and so I wanted to have someone to sleep with, and, I mean, he was a teenage male who's like, "What's going on?" and "Why does this kid want to sleep with me?" So that was the first experience with my brother. My brother is a starving actor. He's in New York. He's quite different from the rest of the family just because he's artistic. But he went to a private school all through his life, too, and he went to Iowa.

But with my siblings I didn't have too much problems with fighting or disagreement. Most of my family just got along. I mean, Liz and I, we're best friends. So we talk to each other all the time. I think it's weird because we're so different, but at the same time, we're similar.

PS: So tell me about your relationship with your siblings.

JR: My brother and sisters, I would never be friends with them unless we were related in some form of familyship, because we're all different. We all have different ideas and different attitudes, and I think the fact that we're all Remunds brings us close together. I'm mean, we're very unique. My brother's an artist. My sister's a biology major. I'm a business major, and Alo wants to be in business, too, but she's just starting the first year of college, so she's kind of exploring. She wants to go to England, and she's kind of adventurous. Tara's very talented. She's

very musical, and she's very athletical. She's good academically. And then Prema, she's just Prema, I think. She is kind of the center because I think we all have a focus in her, that whatever happens to the family, she brings us together in certain ways. I mean, she is handicapped and we do worry about her, but I think she's very positive. She doesn't communicate verbally like we do, but she communicates in a way that makes us happy and makes us stay together in different ways.

PS: Does her disability have a name?

JR: Not really, because — I mean, I guess we could say mentally handicapped, because she's deformed in her body parts and her brain isn't fully developed. I guess retarded would be the closest thing, but I guess we don't think of her that way. We just call her Prema and keep it at that. She listens to her music, and it gets very difficult to find her a Christmas gift, because, I mean, in the general aspect we're so used to getting her certain age-group gifts for people. I'll ask my brother what he needs, and he goes, "Oh, I need money," a starving artist. Then it's kind of challenging to get her a gift, because we don't always want to get her books, and she loves books, but there's only a certain amount of books that she can have in her bedroom. But she does fine. She's in school, and she runs around in her little stroller, and she goes on outings.

PS: So she can walk?

JR: Not the way — I mean, she has to be in a wheelchair constantly, but she has like a little stroller that she pushes herself around. So that gives her mobility.

PS: So as your parents grow old and can't care for her, how do you think her care will be handled? What do you anticipate might happen?

JR: Well, that's a debate that my parents say is not a debate. It's difficult. I think my parents have planned something different, and us kids, we've planned something different, and it gets difficult to figure out what to do with each other's family members. I think that's one thing we lack, is communication about our future as a family, because I think we're — I think that may be just in general, Americans, where it's like you're eighteen, you just go out and go do your own thing, and family ties — family ties is there, but it's not as prevalent as it is overseas or in Asian cultures or maybe different cultures. Hopefully some resolution will come, something positive about what things will come out about —

PS: So if you could pick how it should be for Prema when she gets older, what would you pick?

JR: Well, I mean, I think I would pick — assuming that I'm financially stable and my other siblings are financially stable, it would be nice to take care of her individually, where it's like I would host her for a while and then my other sisters would host her for a while. My brother, well, you know, him —

PS: He'll be starving.

JR: He'll be starving. But, yes, I think that's the ideal way that we look at of how to do it. I mean, my parents have done well to look out for her future, but I think ultimately we want to incorporate her in our lives without also — I mean, we want to accomplish our dreams and our goals in life, and I think that's how family life should be, where you can incorporate your family members, but also you can incorporate your future goals. I think there's nothing wrong with that, because you should be happy. If you're not happy, then you're going to make the other family members unhappy. I think that's a very mature way to look at it.

But I think we've done well. I thank my parents a lot. I think I would say that I've won the lottery of life, and I've won a second time, so it's just — I mean, I find it very ironic. It's like I was a very poor child, and then I come to America, a very rich country. I mean, I have my own home. I have a school education. I have a good family. I think that to look at it that way is a very positive way, because not that many people have an opportunity like that.

I have my bad days. I just got robbed in Paris, and you think it's the end of the world, but I should just be glad I have something to get robbed, because some people don't have anything to get robbed. My friends have told me that — like I'm glad that nothing physically happened to me to have me hurt or remember. I mean, I only have my psychological scars of my diary lost or stolen and my passport. But everything is replaceable. It's all material. But to know that I had that opportunity of having something lost is kind of like very positive.

So I guess, I mean, I look at things very positively. Sometimes I'm too positive so it's too laid back that it deters me from, I guess, not making certain right decisions. I was looking at one of my classes. I was like, "Why did I take this?" and it's because I was laid back and I didn't really plan. Because I think up to now, up to my high school, everything was taken care of, and I think it's ironic because your life is set for a while, but at a certain point you have to direct your life in a different way. For me, maybe I'm just realizing this and it's maybe taken a long time. Since '93 I've been independent, and I've made my mistakes as an adult, and those mistakes come with rewards and more mistakes.

PS: Going back to your family again, growing up with your parents and your siblings, did you say when you were in high school your mom and some of your siblings moved up to this rural area? To what town did they move or what area?

JR: They moved to Park Rapids, Minnesota. At that point my older siblings were already out of the home. They were in college, and they were already out of the house. So my three younger ones were still living at home, and I was still living at home. I think it was in 1990 that we did the transition. They moved up, and my mom and my three little sisters and my assorted pets that my mom seems to have gone crazy over, and then they stayed there, and then my sisters attended high school there. I was still in high school, so they didn't want to pull me out. I kind of roomed — I mean, I was still, I think, a sophomore, and my father was still working there, and so he

wanted to pull in still a little more income before he retired.

So we decided to stay down here, and we didn't live far from the high school. So I went to high school, and then he went to work, and that was kind of the lucky break for me because I got a lot of independence. I had my own car; I had my own spending monies. I could do whatever. It was kind of like a teenage dream. And then I was kind of lucky in the sense that I was the only one who kind of got to be close to my father in the sense that I lived with him. I mean, out of five children, you don't really get an opportunity to be with your parents. So I got to see the side of my father a lot more closer than my other siblings. So it was very unique situation, and I was very happy to do that. I almost actually had the opportunity again, because my dad was going to come down here to take a job opportunity, and he decided not to, but he was asking if he could live with me. I was like, "Oh, no." I mean, that's all right. I have no problem with that, but it's kind of like a bachelor pad is not the best house to live in, but it's comfortable.

PS: Do you own this house?

JR: Yes. This is my own house. I get a lot of compliments. I just did a major reconstruction, built another bedroom downstairs and put a door outside and did some drain tiling to deter the water. This keeps me busy other than school, my house.

PS: A happy homeowner, huh?

JR: Yes. I don't know about happy homeowner.

PS: Houses take a lot of work. I know that.

JR: Yes.

PS: When you were growing up in your family, were there certain values that the family talked about or that you heard reinforced all the time?

JR: I think from my mom, I think she always believed that family was the most important and that family — I mean, you can have your friends, you can have everything, but family always stood by you, and I think that I always have kept in my mind that family was always there. Even though I detest family reunions because it's boring, but I think you have to make that effort to realize that your family is the most important thing. Your friends come maybe last or maybe third, but family is important. I think that it's like maybe my brother wants money, and I'd say, "Well, you know, Steven, it's like since you're my brother, I'll do that. Here's a couple of bucks," but I think that fact that he is my family, it makes it — it's like I have a responsibility to give him money or to help him out. My sister needs me to help her move, and it's like I have to drop everything because it's that important to me to do that, to help her out. I think that's one value.

My parents are very religious, so I was — I mean, I grew up Hindu, and then I was converted to

Lutheran, and then from that point, I think in high school I kind of drifted away from religion, and I think religion doesn't play as much of a role in my life as it does in my parents'. So I think for my parents, they use religion as their keystone, and they've looked it as a guidance, and I think my father is a very religious man, and I think their values come from religion. I mean, if any religion I condone, I think their religion is very — I mean, of what they've shown, I think they are very religious, and I respect their religion, and I think that they've done well to bring us in that religion.

So I think in values, I think they've done — I mean, they haven't shown us bad values. I would wish that our family would be a little different, but I think we all have dynamics in our families that we wish are different. I mean, I think media portrays families as idealistic families, but families come with wear and tear, and I know that my mom and dad brought baggage from their families previously, and we have to deal with that baggage. So that brings us maybe a little closer, maybe a little farther, but I think ultimately family is my goal and hopefully my siblings' goal. We try our best to keep in touch. But that's probably one of the value systems that we were brought up to have.

PS: You said you did well in school pretty naturally. Good grades came pretty easily to you. Was that a big focus in your family?

JR: Yes. I think for my family it was just because my father's a very educated person. He has a master's degree. My mom never went to — I mean, she went to college, but she never finished. So in that sense, there was a strong pull to have an educational value system. I think naturally our whole family was just kind of intelligent in that sense that we did well in school. We didn't really have problems with the system. Maybe my brother, but he's also artistic, so I don't know. I think his mind was somewhere else. I don't think education was easy to come by — I mean, I don't think grades for easy to come by for him, but I think for us, we just kind of fell into it, and we had the strong ethical value of work.

I find it ironic — and I think it's the family structure, too, but I also think that we, just general people, have that ethical value in our system. It's just our brother. He's just different. I mean, there's nothing wrong with being different, but, I mean, we're so used to having the mainstream ways, and he's different.

PS: "Different" is a very Minnesota word, you know. [Laughter]

JR: Right. I realize that. I'm trying to keep it at a minimum. I try to keep it at a minimum of judgments and families. He just called a couple of nights ago. My sister's getting married, and she's having it in Las Vegas, and we're having conflicts of the fact that she should have it here, and I said to him, you know, I've given up trying to give my inputs on family ideas and family ways. The best thing to do is either support it or support it at a minimum. I'm not going to go out and picket your house and say, "This is the wrong thing to do," or be mad at her or say, "Hey, look, I disagree and I don't want to talk to you again." No. I think that creates more trouble than

it's worth.

My brother gave his two cents, and I think for me I just support her in what she's doing. I mean, I don't have to agree. I don't have to agree with anything with my family, but I think I have to support them in a way that they feel that, hey, he is there and he's doing the best he can. I mean, that's the way I have to do it, and I try to stay away from family feuds.

PS: Let's go back now to the time when you finished high school, you graduated from Edina High School. What year?

JR: In '93. So, May of '93.

PS: And what did you do immediately after high school?

JR: Immediately after that I went to Colorado, thinking that I could find myself. I realize that searching for yourself is longer than just a summer vacation.

PS: [Laughter] Did you find yourself in Colorado?

JR: No. I think I got more confused.

PS: What did you do while you were there?

JR: I actually was — I looked for a job. My brother was living out there at the time, so that's why I went out there. I lived with him, so that was another experience, living with my brother. It's ironic, because I've had individual experiences with each of my family members, where I've lived with my father, I lived with my brother, and then I lived with my older sister about two years ago before I bought the house. But when I went to Colorado, I spent about two months just kind of searching for what I wanted to do in college, and I think it was kind of the ideology that you get out of high school and you go straight into college, and I had a difficult time with that, not as much because I was so into education.

So I went into college right after that. I spent two months out with my brother working, and then I came back, and then I enrolled in Normandale Community College, because I still didn't have any direction, but I said, well, if I'm going to blow my money, I'd better blow it at a cheaper place. So I took some classes. I thought I wanted to be a music major since I played in the band at high school, and then after realizing that music wasn't going to get me anywhere because I wasn't talented enough, I was still bumming around.

By '94, I was taking a math class, and I had an emotional breakdown because I didn't pass my math class. So I was just like, well, you know, if I'm not learning anything and I'm not doing well in my math classes or I'm not doing well in my classes — I was getting poor grades, and I just said, well, forget it, I'm just going to go to India. And I just decided I wanted to go to India

for six months. Then it turned out to that I wanted to go to India for a year. Then I was thinking, well, what am I going to do in India for a year. Then it turned out that I was just going to go overseas and I'd spend some time in India.

So in August of '94, I left for India, which was — actually I left for England. I arrived in England. I stayed in England for a week, then I went to France, then I went to Belgium. From Belgium I went to Switzerland; Switzerland, Spain; Spain, Italy; Italy, Greece; Greece, Turkey; Turkey, Israel. I worked in Israel for a while, and then after Israel, after two and a half months I went to India, and then that's when I started my journey of trying to figure out what direction I wanted. During all this time I was still trying to find out direction. So I said to myself, if two months didn't work in Colorado, maybe a year will work to find myself. So I tried that, and I ended up traveling all over India and then backpacking.

PS: Did you travel by yourself?

JR: Yes, I traveled by myself and visited my friends and saw

PS: You had friends in India?

JR: Actually, Prema's parents still live in India, and we still keep in contact, so I stayed with them for a little bit. Then I met a friend here, and then I stayed with him, and then basically I rented a flat, an apartment, in Calcutta, and I worked at the Mother Theresa Center. I worked there for two and half months and then traveled around. Then my roommate in India, actually, I just came back from visiting him, so we were just talking about past experiences.

That was quite an experience. I felt that I learned more about my country, my culture, about Americanism, than I learned about — I mean, I learned a little bit about myself. I found out that I could travel without being homesick. Then after about ten months I started getting homesick, and that's when I came back. I felt that I had a little more direction. I think the fact that I was kind of bored and I didn't have that much to do, and I felt that I couldn't communicate the way I could, I decided I should come back and enroll in school. I knew that deep inside of me I had to finish school. So I came back in '95.

PS: You said you couldn't communicate. You mean because you couldn't speak the language where you were or because there was something else that blocked the communication?

JR: I think there was something else that blocked the communication. It was difficult to — I don't think anybody could, even if it was English, I don't think anybody could understand what I was going through in the sense that I didn't really know what I wanted, and I think that's typical of a lot of kids. Fortunately, I was lucky enough to experience that overseas and not be trapped in some dead-end job or be trapped in school and doing drugs or something like that. I think I was very fortunate that I was doing my search overseas, and I think that helped my kind of globalism and that helped my worldly knowledge.

PS: At the Mother Theresa Center, were you a volunteer there?

JR: Yes.

PS: What kind of work did you do there?

JR: I worked at this place called Prem Don. It was kind of the death and dying. It was kind of an old home place and handicapped.

PS: Old home, meaning for elderly people?

JR: Yes, elderly people and for some handicapped. But it was an experience.

PS: Did you physically care for people?

JR: Yes, physically. I was giving showers and feeding people and cleaning up and stuff like that. But I think we're all going through a phase where you're just there, and to my knowledge, I think working for the Mother Theresa Center, I was just there as a body, my soul was somewhere else, and I think that I just wanted to just do something and I didn't care what it was. I didn't really enjoy it the way that most of the people there — I mean, a lot of the people that were there were for religious reasons, and they were fulfilling their religious values. For me, I was just kind of there. In Calcutta, I was kind of there.

Calcutta is kind of a — I think it has soul, but it doesn't have soul. It's kind of — I mean, Las Vegas, it doesn't have soul, or Denver, it doesn't have soul, but Calcutta kind of has soul, but a different kind of soul. Then I just kind of did a transitional phase with Calcutta and then all of India. I just thought I was looking in. I was looking into a globe, and that was how I felt when I was traveling in India.

PS: You were looking into a globe.

JR: Yes. It was just kind of like — you know how you look into a snow globe, and you can just see the people. I just felt like that traveling through India. I wasn't really participating in a future that I thought would benefit me.

PS: So you were an observer rather than a participant.

JR: Right. I was an observer. Correct. I'm a really easygoing guy. I'm a nice guy, but don't think I've smoked drugs too much. If I play this over again, it's probably that most of the stuff sounds like that I'm off on a tangent. I think it's about who I am and trying to find my direction, and I think every day I try to find my direction. I don't know if it's India or it's inbred in me, but I'm a very philosophical person, and it could be Indian, that Indian side of me. A lot of the Indian traits

that I have, I found that they must be Indian, because I don't find them in a lot of American people or other people in general.

PS: Traits like what?

JR: Well, I had my philosophical questions when I was younger, I mean like seventeen or sixteen and eighteen. I mean, most eighteen-year-olds in high school were getting drunk and plastered or whatever. I found that I would rather discuss the theories of life or just the theories of different things. Now I'm twenty-five. Now I'd rather go get plastered.

PS: [Laughter] So you've matured.

JR: I've regressed, I think. Yes, I think so. I mean, I don't get plastered, but I just find that it seems to solve a lot of your problems a lot quicker than spending time over and over again. But, yes, I think what India has done to me, if anything, is made me really relaxed. I was very uptight when I was in high school. I was very aggressive towards my future and towards things. Now I think I'm more aggressive in kind of little more sophisticated way. India has kind of slowed me down, that aggressiveness, and I think it's just the way the culture is, because you go to India and it's like you can't get anything done, and that has put me on the straightaway of saying, "Well, it'll come along." In some ways I hate that attitude, but in some ways I think it helps me relax. I used to get ulcers when I was in high school. I was that stressed out, and I would get headaches and have stomach pains, and now I don't have stomach pains. So I think India has helped me relax in that way.

PS: When you were there, did you find yourself picking up some of the language again?

JR: Yes.

PS: In Calcutta they speak Bengali, which would have been the language you spoke when you were seven, right?

JR: Right. I actually tried to pick up Hindi, and then when I came back, I studied Hindi for two years. So that has helped me get a little insight into more of the Indian culture and has given me ideas. I guess another thing that India has really put me on is I'm more cynical. My jokes are more kind of evil in a sense, because, I don't know, I think India is a very depressed country. I think it's a very sick country, but at the same time, there's humor in a lot of the ways. It's like there's humor in just everyday life there. I think, for me, I found that the best way that I could deal with everyday life was to come up with sick humor, and then the sick humor in the sense that maybe I'll laugh at something that I wouldn't normally laugh at. If I get hurt or something like that, I'll just laugh at it instead of saying, "Oh, what a bummer." If I get something stolen, I'm like, "Oh, well. It just got stolen." And I think it's brought me into a kind of cynical attitude about life and that things are happy, but things are also unhappy, and I have to look at things realistically.

PS: So the sadness and the joy exist side by side.

JR: Right. I think that the fact that I came from India, a wealthy family, I go to school, my parents give me a car, everybody around me is well to do, they don't have financial problems, they dress nice, and then I get into hypothetically the real world, and it's like I see what's out there, and I get a little more hardened than I would have if I didn't go overseas, and I get a little more knowledge, and I think my mind has expanded a lot bit more than if I was to be still in Edina, still. It would be monotonous.

PS: Who paid for your time that you were traveling for a year?

JR: I paid for it myself.

PS: So how did you pay for this whole trip?

JR: When I was in high school, I was working three jobs. I went to school, I was working three jobs, and so a lot of the money was coming from those three jobs, and then my parents helped me on that one, so that was kind of nice. I did the finances on it, and it was a lot cheaper to travel overseas than live in the U.S. or go to school, so it was kind of like the money was there, and so I kind of traveled.

PS: When you were in some of those cities in Europe, did you stay with your friends?

JR: That helped a lot, staying with my friends. It's like all I had was travel expense.

PS: So they would feed you and give you a place to stay.

JR: Pretty much. And then India is like dirt cheap, so you can live on a dollar a day. Yeah, I guess. India is fairly cheap. And I worked in Israel, too, so that also helped kind of finance the trip, too.

PS: What kind of work did you do in Israel?

JR: When I was in Israel, I worked in a kibbutz, and then I worked there for — like on a chicken farm. And then after that, I worked at a youth hostel, and then after that I left the youth hostel and I left India for Israel, because I wanted to spend Christmas in Israel. I just figured, you know, it was the birthplace for Christmas. I was in Turkey at that point, and I didn't want to spend it in India and I didn't want to spend it in Turkey. So I said, "Well, let's go to Israel." So I went to Israel.

PS: And how long were you in Israel?

JR: For about two and a half months.

PS: And how did you find the kibbutz that you stayed at?

JR: They have an organization that will hook you up with a kibbutz. So they'll like kibbutz search. So they hook you up, and you tell them how long you want to be and where you want to go.

PS: Were there a lot of people on the kibbutz that you got to know and connected to?

JR: Yes. There was one girl that's from Denmark, and we became good friends, and we write. Then there was a German gentleman, and we became friends, and after that, actually, we went traveling around Germany and he introduced me to a German girl that he met, and she and I became friends, actually, because he left, and so we became friends. When I was in France, I talked to her over the phone, how she was doing, and it was weird because she's this six-foot-five German girl, and I'm this five-four Indian guy, and we were traveling around north of Israel, and these Arab men were saying, "Are you guys married? Are you guys married?" It was just the funniest thing. So those are the kind of little funny encounters I had in India and other parts of the world, just kind of those kind of humorous things.

PS: On kibbutz, did you study Hebrew? Was it an Ulpan?

JR: No, I didn't study Hebrew. I thought Hebrew was kind of a useless language. Nothing against the Hebrews and the Israelis, but, for me, languages are — I mean, I studied Spanish and Hindi, and my girlfriend wants me to study French. So, for me, languages are either the most popular, that are the most useful, so that's how I pick languages. So I'd like to learn Arabic and I'd like to learn Chinese or French. I mean, Chinese would be nice just for traveling, but I don't think I would be using it for anything else. But Arabic I would like to learn, because I think that culture fascinates me just because of the religious aspect, because I don't understand them, and when I don't understand something, I like to learn as much about them as possible.

PS: So you finished traveling and found yourself.

JR: Well, assuming I found myself. I mean, I still screwed around with classes. Yesterday I was upset that I was taking classes that I didn't need for my major. So that's wasted money and time.

PS: So you came back in '94?

JR: Right.

PS: And now it's '99, so the last five years you've been doing what?

JR: School, pretty much. From '93 to '99 I've been in school with one year off for traveling, for

my own education.

PS: And where are you going to school?

JR: Business administration. So that seemed to be the easiest to get, the quickest.

PS: How close are you to being done?

JR: Right now 1. JR: Right now I have four more classes to go, not including the two classes I'm taking now. So hopefully I'll be done this fall. Yes, this fall. So if I take a couple of classes this summer and then a class this fall, I should be done. So that means that I look for a real job. Well, my plans are to just kind of take a three-month vacation and go traveling and then go search for a job. I plan to leave Minnesota. I plan to keep the house, but I want to work somewhere warm. The Indian blood is getting thin and can't handle this weather.

PS: When you finish college, you'll travel to where? Do you have an idea?

JR: My place that I'm thinking of is somewhere south, warmer, and then somewhere — I'd like to go back to India. I'd like to go in another country. If a company can send me overseas, I'd be like excited. I think that would give me something to do that would give me cultural insight. I don't know how I could handle it, but I would certainly enjoy it. I just have this philosophy that staying at home in Minnesota is not going to enrich my education, I mean personal education. I can be educated in books as much as I can, but if I don't educate myself outside of my books, I don't think I'm worthwhile of achieving my goals. So I think I'd like to go overseas just to be educated beyond the American culture.

PS: And you would specifically like to go to India to work?

JR: Yes, I think so, because I think that would give me more insight to myself and the culture. I think as much as I would like to run away, I think there is this desire to learn about it. I mean, we try to run away from our past, I don't know, maybe for some reasons we don't understand, but for some of us, we would also like to understand our past.

PS: And you'd like to go to India, even acknowledging that it's almost impossible to get anything done there.

JR: Yes.

PS: You just love pain or something, right?

JR: Yes, well, I think because it forces me to think differently. I think we're all so into a certain way of thinking and we're all so encouraged to think certain ways, and we're encouraged to act a certain way. I mean, there's a lot of illogical things that the Indian society lives by, and it disgusts me, but then it's like I have to look within our own culture, and there's a lot of illogical things about our own culture that should disgust me, but it doesn't.

PS: Because it's your culture.

JR: Right, it's my culture. And I'm hoping that maybe going to a different culture, I will see that and incorporate kind of the goods of both cultures.

PS: What are some of the things in Indian culture that you have noticed that just disgust you?

JR: I think religion disgusts me, in general, so I have a very difficult time with the Hindu religion, and naturally in the news lately, I don't know, the Christians have been persecuted, and this Christian gentleman and his two kids were burned alive. I think religion, in general, disgusts me. I think there's pure religion in the sense that it's in their heart and you can find those kind of people, and then there's this disgusting religion where it's like they have riots.

I think that India, as a country, they call themselves democratic, the biggest democracy, but I think I'd call them the biggest religion country. I have a very difficult time with their religion, Hinduism, because — or I have a difficult time with religious countries. So I guess that's one thing that confuses me.

And then, another thing that confuses me is just their oppression of women, I guess. I have a very difficult time with that, not because I'm Western, but just because I think humanity in itself is — they're so oppressive. Eastern religion, Eastern culture is so oppressive, and I find that very difficult.

PS: Oppressive of women or people in general?

JR: Well, women and of people. I mean, there's different classes and different societal ways. We have a class system here, too, and we're oppressive here, too. So, I mean, I don't disagree on that, but I think that there's more of an opportunity to break out of that. I mean, I'm a minority, and just recently, I mean, what, in the early fifties and sixties, we've had general rights. So I mean, in that sense I also look at that. I think I have a very difficult time with India's — I mean, it's a very philosophical country, it's a very religious country, but I just don't think they follow their ways of peace and harmony, as they call it.

There's some pet peeves I have, but then that's — like asking for directions, and they won't — Indians just won't tell you no. You ask them for directions, and they don't want to know that they're stupid or they don't want to know that they don't know. It's like they'll just give you

directions, even if they don't know. I found that the biggest pet peeve. And then just the cheating attitude and the Baksheesh, the bribery attitude. So I find that a very — maybe that's my Western way. I find that very appalling. And we have cheating here, too, so we have that. I guess in India I just see it in more prevalence, so that's why. But they're exactly like us, probably. It's just that they just do it differently, and we just do it with a little more class and they don't. Maybe that's how we can state it.

Then there's Indian culture. There's the beauty of it, there's the mystique of it, and there is something about India. I mean, we're a very intelligent society. We're very educated in that sense of well learned, and we're a very ancient society. So there's a lot of things that we've gone through. I mean, we've been conquered by many societies, and we're still strong. So we have a lot of hang-ups. And I don't know. So India would be — it's in my heart, I think.

PS: Are Prema's family somebody that you think of as your Indian family? Do you have a cult of people that you think of as your Indian family?

JR: Yes, I mean, I think I would consider them my Indian family. I mean, in India you call your elderly uncle and auntie, and I took that role of calling them Uncle and Auntie, and I refer to them — I mean, here I have an uncle and an aunt, and I call them by their first name. I think I have a little more respect for that sense, because that's the cultural ways. And here might be a cultural way, too, but I feel more comfortable calling them Uncle and Auntie than calling my uncles and aunts here. But, yes, I would consider them my Indian family.

PS: Do you ever have any thoughts about trying to find your birth mom and your birth dad or your stepdad even?

JR: I think I've had those ideas, and I think I'm not ready yet. I think that's a very realistic idea that maybe, hypothetically, I would learn something that I didn't want to. I don't think it's a matter of fear; I think it's just a matter of responsibility. I'm a very irresponsible person in the sense of I don't want — I mean, I don't want to have pets, I don't want to have children, I don't want to have a wife. All I want is a mechanical thing that can be non-emotional and non-responsive. I think that's due to the fact that I'm still exploring myself, and I'm still having hangups about myself, and I think at age twenty-five, I think I'm not ready to "settle down."

A lot of my friends are already getting married, and it's like I find that very difficult. I can't take care of myself and so that's how I look at it, and so, therefore, it's like if I go back to India I might have this whole entourage of family members who are, "Oh, you're back," and, "We want you to support us." That's one way to look at it. I don't know. And the other way to look at it is maybe there's nothing to find. But until I'm ready, I think I will — and I think I know when I'll be ready.

PS: For now you're just comfortable having it be an unanswered question.

JR: Right. I think for a lot of people they find that kind of odd and they find that kind of annoying, because it's like, "Why don't you want to know?" I think answers are supposed to be answered in a certain time and place, and when you foresee answers it creates different destinies, and so that's how I believe.

PS: So you're at peace with it.

JR: Yes, I think I'm at peace with it. I think I owe a lot to my parents. I think they gave me that second life and opportunity, and I think — I mean, they're fine with it. They don't have any problems with it, but I think for myself, I'm not ready, and I think I'll wait. I don't think I have the hang-ups of feeling that I was abandoned and feeling that I wasn't wanted or that I was a reject in society. I don't know why I don't feel those ways. I feel that a lot of people who have "psychological problems," they blame it on the past, and it's like I sometimes wonder if I should be insane and if perhaps I should be some psychotic person because I have perfect opportunities to be psychotic. I was abandoned. I didn't have a family life. I was poor. I don't know what could have happened to me. I was taken out of my culture. So many things happened to me that were negatives, but I don't think they're hanging me up like some people do.

PS: So you think there might be something wrong with you that you're not more disturbed. [Laughter]

JR: Yes. I think there's something wrong with me. I wish I was more disturbed. Yes, I don't find that I'm disturbed that much. I am disturbed. I mean, I have a bad sense of humor, but I don't think I'm disturbed in the sense that — I mean, I have my hang-ups. I'm very procrastinating. I get lazy. But those are hang-ups that anybody has. And I'm very much of a dreamer, and I think those are hang-ups that I'll hopefully grow out of. I just find that ironic, because it's just like I just want to slap those people around and say, "Get out of it. You're in the very richest country in the world. Opportunities are here."

But also that personality of mine gets it very difficult for me to — if something happens bad to me, I always think of someone else having worse problems, and I think I should try to balance that, because things should happen to me and I should take a look at them and say, "Hey, look. This was a bad thing. I should deal with it as best as possible," and not try to think that someone else has it worse than I do. I mean, I was really hung up over the fact that I got robbed, but it's like something worse could have happened. Sometimes I wish I didn't think like that, but sometimes I'm glad I think like that or that would get me insane.

PS: So you're going to finish college pretty soon here, look for work in a warm climate, preferably overseas?

JR: Right.

PS: When you think about your future, project yourself five years into the future, what kind of a

vision pops up for you? You'll be thirty. Describe what you think your life might be like when you're thirty, in the ideal.

JR: Thirty. Well, a lot of people say that thirty is just the beginning. I don't know. People say that thirty and forty is just the beginning every year. I think I would like to accomplish things. I have set goals that I'd like to accomplish.

PS: What are those?

JR: One is I'm a very entrepreneurial person, and I'd like to own my own business. I think money plays a big role in my life, because the fact that I grew up from having nothing to having everything, I think that has given me the idea that I'd still like to have that kind of lifestyle, and, also, money has given me the fact that I will be able to afford anything, like traveling. I love traveling, and I love to own things. Like this house, I love to own it. I like to own my little Volkswagen, and it's those material things that I'd like to own, but I'm not driven by the fact that I have to have those. As you can see, most of this furniture is not mine. Most of the things in this house aren't mine. They're just on loan from friends who don't need them right now, and I'm more content owning those special items.

I think money plays a role where it's like I can satisfy my needs and help those I need to. So I think — I don't know. I mean, I don't want to be this person who says, "Oh, I want to save this world. I want to give a lot of money away," because I don't know. I mean, I don't even know if I can accomplish those without achieving what I want. I can't give to others if I can't provide for myself. At first, when I was eighteen, I thought — I mean, we all have these idealistic dreams, "I want to save India." I wanted to save the world. And I think we all go through that phase.

PS: I went through it.

JR: I think we do. As a social worker, you must. I mean, it's like, "Oh, I want to help this person," and I think the more you grown older, the more you realize the best thing to do is help those people around you. You've done that by adopting your own children, and maybe I'll do that by adopting my own dog. I don't know. But I think to make a difference, my ultimate goal, to make my name, or the family name, live on forever, and I think the reason is I don't want to have children, and I know my brother is incapable of having children. I don't know. He might have a family. I don't know.

PS: But they would all starve.

JR: They would all starve. No, I'm just teasing. No.

So I mean, it's like I guess in the old style or manner, the man is supposed to carry on the genetic genes of the family name, and if we looked at it that way, I guess I would like to have a company that would carry my name as the son that I always dreamed of. I mean, I would like to have that.

That would be my goal ultimately. But if not, I would be just content to own a house and some countryside and work on it and then make certain people's lives different. I think, if anything, I'd like to enrich my mind and my capacity to achieve my goals and to think differently. So, hopefully, people will touch my life as much as I touch theirs.

PS: So by thirty you imagine yourself having this Remund Company started?

JR: Yes. Over winter break I've been coming up with my company name and stuff like that. Yes, I'd like to have Remund Company as a name to be well known. I think that's something — I don't know what I would do. I have no clue of what I would sell or if I would do anything. I mean, I'd to be like maybe the Dow Company or the Rockefeller, Dayton-Hudson or something, something of that stature. It would just kind of be nice to have that name, because it's a unique name, and it just fits me. I don't know, Jonathan Remand is just — you know, certain things just fit, and it just fits. And I'd like to have that, and I would like to achieve those goals. I'd like to travel and achieve worldly knowledge as best is possible.

PS: So you're real clear that you don't want to have kids, though.

JR: Yes, I'm quite clear. Even though a lot of people have advised me against it, I've actually thought of — I don't know if I can say this on the tape, but actually I've thought of getting snipped, just because I don't think that — I don't feel the need to have children. I guess I have a problem with overpopulation, maybe because I come from a country that has overpopulation, but maybe it's a phobia of overpopulation. I think I'd rather give the opportunity to a child that needs it. I mean, not that many children of age seven get adopted. More people want these cute little babies that are fresh and can be molded in their way, and I think that I got an opportunity of a lifetime, being adopted at age seven. I don't know. I mean, maybe I'll mature. I think it's all about maturity. I'm twenty-five, and it seems like I should be mature, but there's a lot of maturity that goes with a lot of things.

PS: When you imagine yourself at thirty-five or forty, what kind of picture do you have in your mind about what you want it to be like?

JR: Well, I hope I'm busy. I don't know. Maybe I'll be watching cable TV. But, yes, I just hope I'm busy, and I hope I achieve something other than just being a waste in society. I find that there's certain people in life that are just there to be there, there's no reason for them to be on this Earth. They're just there to be born, consume, waste, and then die. They're a transitional to maybe a greater person out there, I don't know, but I think there's people out there who are just there for a certain transitional person, and I'm hoping that I'm not one of them, where it's like I'm here on this Earth for a soul purpose.

PS: For a soul purpose?

JR: Well, yes, I think it would be —

PS: A purpose of your soul?

JR: Right. And maybe for others souls' purpose. I mean, my parents' soul purpose, my mom's, was to have my dad as a husband and then to fulfill his life, and my dad and my mom together to give life to us, and I think I find that — I mean, the fact that they're close to me, I guess my judgment of them is I find they're pretty — that is their purpose in life, is to give that birth to us kids, then. It's maybe and maybe not a very positive way to look at it, but ultimately maybe that is their goal, is just to achieve that. So in that sense I would hope that I achieve, if I do have a child, and maybe that's my goal, to have the next genius or maybe have the next child who just provides to the world, or maybe I am the next child who — I don't know. I could just get an ego — "I'll be the next President," even though I can't be. I wasn't born in this country. No. I think that maybe you might have the next President. I guess to make a difference in this world.

But there is still that little "bug-ee" in the back of my head: "Oh, you're going to be someone. You're going to be someone." I think that, in itself, kind of drives me, because I'd like to be someone. I don't fit into any society, so I guess if I must fit into any society, then I create my own society, and that society might be someone who changes ways of thinking.

If anything, I would like to, when I'm thirty or forty, to be an innovator of things, to innovate and to come up with new ideas. Right now I can't come up with any new ideas. I seem to be revolving in my own head, "cable TV, cable TV, cable TV." So in that sense, I think that — I mean, I don't think I could ever reach the statures of Michelangelo or Einstein and of Beethoven and Mozart, and those are maybe trendy people that I think they have a gift to society. They will always live on, then. And I wish that I had a gift, but I have to be more realistic. I realize that I'm intelligent, and I feel bad for people who don't have intelligence. I think they struggle with the fact that they can't conceive a lot of things in the world. Fortunately, I've been given intelligence that I can think about things that are beyond just cable TV.

PS: Even though that's what you're thinking about.

JR: That's right. That's what I love. It's ironic. I mean, I love cable TV. I love media. But they are the evil of this society. They are the epitome of evil ways, but I love it. I mean, it's like I know that they dictate how society should go. It's like, are you in favor of the President? The TV will tell you. The President is doing this. The President is the greatest President there is. "Oh, I believe it." And I think media plays on our psychological thinking, and I have a very difficult time because I have two conflicting things, I love media and I love TV, but I also have this somewhat intelligent side that can perceive that it's not a very good idea, not a very good way.

PS: Maybe your innovation will be to make intelligent TV, that's not so biased, you know.

JR: Well, that's true. That's true. Yes, I mean I guess so. I never thought about that. That's your idea. I can't take that away from you.

PS: Oh, I'll sell it to you.

JR: Okay.

PS: We can talk about a price.

JR: Yes, innovation. I think I try to achieve to be different and try to achieve to be different from the mainstream, even though I am mainstream.

PS: You talked a couple of times about not fitting into any culture, not having a culture that's yours.

JR: Yes. I mean, for a while. This was when I was younger. I thought I was from a different planet, but that's me watching too many *Star Treks* on TV, probably. Fitting into a culture, I am between two cultures. I was born in India. It's not like I was a baby and I was thrown into the Anglo-Saxon society and therefore I am Anglo-Saxon. I mean, I have a piece of me that my habits, maybe, come from the Indian society when I was younger. So I don't feel like I'm very part of the Indian society, and I don't think I'm part of the American society. Even though I am American and I act American, I just think I'm more of a non-typical American who wishes to learn more about other cultures and more about other ways than just be stuck in the American "We are the great." We're so ethnocentric, this society, that it's difficult to really see beyond it in our world.

One thing that bothers me about this society is like the whole world is economically crumbling and other countries are having financial problems, and we're spending a dollar-twenty for every dollar we make, and that doesn't make sense to me, how we can spend so much and consume so much and still sleep. It's a society that I don't like, that is so consumer-oriented. So, in a societal way, I don't think any of us ever fitted into a society. As much as we say we want to fit into a society, I don't think we ever fit into a society, as human beings, we have such hang-ups about our own personal conflicts, about our own well-being that — I mean, I can't speak for everybody. Maybe you fit into some society. So I think we all have that deeper feeling that we don't fit into a group or that we don't fit into anything. Even though if someone says that they feel that they fit in, I think that's only for a short period.

I think humans have that nature, that we create society, but we also create individuality, in the sense that we're forced to be by ourselves, maybe not individuality, but maybe more in the loneliness that we all achieve. I mean, loneliness is a — we've all felt hungry, we've all felt lonely, and it's a global problem.

PS: Do you think there's something unique about your situation, though, in that you were born in one culture, lived there about half of your childhood, and then lived in another culture half of your childhood, and then went back to the first culture to explore it? Do you think that that

makes something about your situation unique?

JR: Yes, I think so. I mean, I haven't found anybody like my — I mean, I've found people that have been born in one country, lived in another country, but they've lived with their family.

PS: With their birth parents.

JR: Right, with their birth parents. And I've found people who've been adopted into a family, but I think I find it unique that I was at such an older age. And other people find it unique, too. "How old were you when you were adopted?" and I say, "Seven," and they find — "Oh, really?" So in that sense I think, in general, people think that's odd. I think just in general people find that me being adopted is intriguing and exciting for them.

PS: What kinds of questions do people ask you most often about being adopted?

JR: The most famous one is, "Do you ever want to go back and try to search for your family?" So probably that's one of the most ones, and I just tell them no. Most of the time, if I know they're going to probe and it's going to take a long time, I just tell them short sentences, and that leads them into the direction of no more questions. But I'm happy to answer them, because I think, for a while, I was like, "Oh, stupid people," but then I realized I think I'm an ambassador to myself. I'm an ambassador to my cultures, and I think I should try to do the most of trying to give my information out. Because I'm doing the same thing when I ask someone questions. I'm invading into their world, and I'm asking them questions. Maybe they might not have an exciting life, but they still have something to add to my understanding of human beings.

The only way we're going to ever understand each other is to learn about each other. Well, that's what we're doing right here. But I think we're all ambassadors of our own lives, and it's just a matter of how we give it out. I've met some people who are just — I would never want to meet them or never care to meet them, and I hope they find a nice peaceful grave.

PS: When you were in India working at Mother Theresa's center in Calcutta, did you find people there perceiving you as Indian? Did you get equivalent kinds of questions from them about what's it like in America as you get here about what's it like being Indian?

JR: Yes. I mean, most of the questions were in reverse. So they found that fascinating, that I was born Indian and stuff like that, but some Indians didn't think I was Indian, and most of them could pick out that I was American because I wore American attire. Some days I would wear Indian attire, and it would help me get around a lot easier. But it was nice traveling around India with Anglos, because you would be approached first.

PS: Approached for what?

JR: Well, just for money. It's like in India everybody wants to talk to you, everyone has

something to say, or everybody wants your phone number. So I found it a lot easier to get away from that and didn't have to deal with that hassle.

PS: Because the other Indians would perceive you as Indian and leave you alone?

JR: Right, and so they would just leave me alone.

PS: Was that when you were dressed in American clothes as well?

JR: Well, yes, because Anglos would stand out a lot more than I would, and then, on top of that, people would ask me where I'm from, and I would tell them I'm from Canada, and they would be like, "Okay," then leave me —

PS: Canada?

JR: Yes, because after a while, when you tell them you're from America, they're like, "Oh, America! I know a friend in Chicago. I have relatives in New York." And it's like, "Oh, man, just leave me alone." So I just tell them Canada.

PS: And they don't know where that is.

JR: Yes, then they're like, "Oh," then they go to someone else and talk to them. So I find that it's a lot easier to tell them a country that they have no clue about, and it leaves you alone. I mean, you pick up these tricks of the trade a lot quicker. So it's like bargaining, it's just a matter of knowing how to play the game.

But, yes, it was very enjoyable to answer their questions, and then I would ask them questions. I think they were more fascinated by money. Again, media plays a big role in their society, and they see a lot of American movies, and they think that American women are just sex objects and that we have a lot of money and that we're a very violent society. Well, we are a violent society, but a lot of their misinterpretation about the society is either through ambassadors like us or media. Unfortunately, media gets to them faster than I do.

PS: Did the Indian people that you met in Calcutta understand about adoption?

JR: I don't think I explained it to them. I don't think I tried to explain it to them. I didn't find any discrimination. I would think that they would find discrimination. I think the fact that they figured that I was American, there wasn't a class system. I don't think there is. I think they figure all Americans are wealthy. Well, I mean, yes, I mean, you have to be fairly well off to travel overseas, and anybody who travels overseas to India, I think, has to have some sort of money system. So for them, I think that they just saw me as just either money or as just an American.

PS: They didn't connect that you looked like an Indian American.

JR: Right. I don't think they connected that. They just figured that I was an American and that I had money, and maybe because I was just around the tourist areas, too.

PS: But while you were living in Calcutta and having a flat —

JR: Right. During the flat time, I didn't have any problems. I was like in the main Indian residential area. I didn't really have any hang-ups there. I didn't have anybody approaching me or trying to ask for money or stuff like that.

PS: Did you get to know your neighbors?

JR: Not really, because it was owned by this one guy, and he just rented it out to us. And I didn't really care to know anybody other than the people that I knew. At that point I was just kind of negative, so it was kind of like I don't want to know any Indians. I mean, I want to know Indians that I can communicate with, that are going to look towards me as a friend and not as some American. In that neighborhood, it wasn't very easy to meet people that speak English, either, so it was kind of difficult to communicate with them.

PS: Were there other people, staff people or nuns or something, that worked at Prem Don that you interacted with?

PS: They're not allowed to interact with males, I guess, because I did interact with them, but they told me that they couldn't interact anymore. I guess it's one of their policies. So I found that disconcerting. I was like, "That's a bummer." But they were not allowed to communicate with us in the way that — I mean, it's like, "Hi, what's going on? What was your day like yesterday?" we weren't allowed to do that. So I found that strange, because I got to be close to these two female nuns, and we would joke around and kid around, and then a couple days later I was joking around with them, and they were acting weird, and so I was like, "What's going on? Did I do something? Did I offend you?" and they were like, "No. We just can't communicate with you. We're just not allowed to talk to you."

PS: They were sisters of the order?

JR: Right. I mean, they could talk to us and just say, "Hi, how are you?" but they couldn't get into personal lives and stuff like that. So I found that interesting.

PS: And how is it that you chose to go there and do that sort of work?

JR: I was bored, and I just thought that it would be something interesting to do. It wasn't something that I really enjoyed and was like saving the world. A lot of those people came for like religious reasons. I just was kind of bored and just wanted to do something, and I thought it would be interesting. I tell people I worked at the Mother Theresa, and "Wow! Did you meet the

Mother?" I'm like, "Nah." I mean, it's not something that I —

PS: Did you meet her?

JR: Yes, but it's not something that I — I mean, it's not like, "Hey. What's up, Mom?"

PS: It wasn't any big spiritual experience to you.

JR: Yes. I mean, she did something great, and I think she's a very wonderful person, and I think that the world owes her great gratitude, but I don't — I mean, any figure, celebrity or figurehead, I just don't feel like that me going up to them and saying, "Hey, it was nice to meet you," or, "The thing you did was a great job." For other people, that's fine, they can do it. I just don't think that that adds to their daily routine of achieving anything. I mean, it's like what is it going to accomplish. I mean, if I have something worthwhile saying, but I don't think that — I don't like to bother them, so that's how I feel.

PS: Did you go to International Mission of Hope?

JR: I tried searching for it, but I didn't have any luck. Well, I didn't really look hard, either. I just kind of wandered the streets of where the location was.

PS: And it wasn't there?

JR: I don't know. I wasn't looking hard enough.

PS: You think that you didn't really want to find it?

JR: I thought I would give destiny a little teeth. I'd say, "Destiny, just let me walk the streets. If I find it, then I find it." I had the street address. I was asking people, and destiny didn't help me. So I was just kind of like playing with it, seeing if I could find it. I mean, I wasn't trying hard enough in the sense that I didn't do it the next day or the next week. I just said, "This is the time I'm going to give it. I'm just going to go look. Here's the street address. I'll walk around. If I find it, I find it," So that was it. That was my search for the orphanage.

PS: If you went back to India again, do you think you'd look harder?

JR: Not recently. Maybe when I'm older. But if I go back, I think I would like to do other things than that.

PS: Were there any times or places in your life where you felt like you were discriminated against because of your heritage or skin color or anything else about you?

JR: I guess discrimination. I have a difficult time with it because I'm a very easy-going guy. So

if someone wants to discriminate against me, I find them either to be stupid, so in their head they're very stupid. There's no word to describe them, I guess. It appalls me more to find my own people and my own society discriminating against themselves. Like, for example, I had an Indian roommate, and he was against blacks, and he's like, "Oh, those blacks." He'd just bad-mouth blacks, and I'd say, "Hey, look, I don't appreciate that. I don't think you should say that." I did my best, and I was like, "Look, media just does a bad job of portraying blacks, and I don't think that's right," and he still wouldn't believe me. I found it very disgusting, and it's like I'm glad he moved, and I'm glad he got out of here, because I found that he was as dark as most blacks were, and he just didn't like them, and I didn't really appreciate that. I find him more disgusting. Because if people want to make names at me and call me racial slurs and stuff, I have to laugh, because it doesn't affect me the way that they think that it affects me.

PS: Has that happened to you?

JR: Not really. I find it difficult when sometimes getting service, like once when my sisters and I went to go bowling, I found it very difficult to get service, and my sister, my Anglo-Saxon sister, she got upset. She got, "Oh, those racist punks." To me, I didn't look at it that way. I just was there to go bowling, and that was it.

Discrimination, I don't find that much discrimination. I think one reason is because I speak English so well and I'm very verbal. So when I speak, what they hear makes them realize, "Oh, he's just an American," and I speak in such a colloquial way that for them it doesn't seem like I'm very ethnic or diverse. I think for most people, they just think I'm a —

PS: Dark Norwegian? [Laughter]

JR: Dark Norwegian. Right.

PS: There are some, some very dark-haired Norwegians with brown eyes.

JR: Well, you think about it, it's like what do you call a person who was born in Africa who's white and his parents are white and he comes to America? You call him African American, right?

PS: Yes

JR: I mean, that's how you look at it, because he's just as African as the next — I mean, maybe not the way we think of an African. So, I mean, discrimination, I've been pretty lucky. I haven't had that much discrimination. I don't know why. I think I've just been lucky in general that discrimination doesn't follow me. I mean, my sisters have been a little unlucky with the situation.

PS: What kinds of things have happened to them?

JR: Well, like my younger sister Alo, she was wanting to be friends with this male, and he didn't want to be friends because their family was racist, and then other people would approach — like some kids on the bus would call Tara the "N" word, and it's like those are the kind of problems that they've had. I mean, they shrug it off, too. And I've told my sister that it's important for her to meet international friends and it's important for her to get to know people from different cultures, and that that's the way you should lead your life, is try to achieve those friendships, because there's nothing wrong with having Anglo friends, but I think you should try to achieve to meet different kinds of people.

PS: Are both of your sisters darker than you, or all three of them?

JR: I think I'm the darkest. Tara might be a little darker. It depends on the season, too. I think I'm the darkest. But in the summer I just get dark. It's like I'll get black. I'll get really dark. Discrimination isn't a problem. I know that it exists. I know that I'll have problems with it. I just have to try to deal with it as best possible. I think in the business world it's very difficult, too, because there's discrimination. And I try to stay up to date with seminars on discrimination, cultural programs, talks about how to deal with discrimination. I try to support those kind of seminars, and I've gone to seminars where it's like a two-day seminar on just Asian culture and "Asian Culture: The Hidden Culture." So I try to do my best in keeping up with the times.

PS: You said that you had studied Hindi for two years after you came back from India. At what level would you say you're fluent at this point? You can read it, write it, speak it?

JR: I can read and write and speak it, but I think it's like a second-grade level.

PS: Are you finding ways to keep that up?

JR: I'm not doing a very good job. I've been thinking about — well, I have a friend who was in my Hindi class, too, and I'm thinking of kind of doing a one-month — something like that, where we just kind of speak it or study it. I think that might encourage me to keep up the language.

PS: So you haven't found a group of Hindu speakers to hang out with?

JR: Hindi. Hindu is the religion. No, not really, and if I did, there would be blah, blah, going fast. So I don't think so.

PS: Do you watch Indian movies?

JR: If they're top sellers. They're all the same. Yes, I mean, I do watch Indian movies. I just can't sit through three hours, though. I have a difficult time.

PS: Do you find the music a little distracting? They just burst into song all the time.

JR: Yes.

PS: Are there any aspects of being an adopted person from India that you find particularly pleasant or sweet, and then the other side of that question, are there any aspects that you find particularly difficult?

JR: About Indian children?

PS: No, about your situation, being a child who was adopted at seven and came from India and so on. What do you find particularly good about your life and what you have, and what do you find particularly challenging?

JR: I think it's very exotic. I think people find it to be an exotic lifestyle, and I find it boring, but when we live our life, it seems to be more boring than other people's. But, no, I think I find that people are really intrigued by that, that I am from a different culture and that I am different, and that kind of sets the stage for a conversation, I guess. It's like, "Oh, where are you from?" It's like it's easy to get into a conversation.

One thing, if I had my way, I wish I was born in this country, just because I think I'd be a little taller, because I think it's due to the nutrition, too, because when I was younger, I didn't have much in nutrition so I was skin and bones, and I think my nutritional value was very low. Also, I would like to know how intelligent I would be, because I think if I've converted into a society so quickly, I wonder how my language skill would be, how my writing skill, how everything would be if I had those extra seven years, because I'm not bad at English or bad at math or science or those programs, but I think I could be a genius then, but that's my ego, too. But I think those seven years could — what would my potential be as a student? That's my biggest question, and what kind of people would I meet if I had been born here. But I don't think I would ever give that up, because I've got that connection to internationalism, I've got that connection that sets me apart. So there's history, there's a rich history with me, and that's what I love about it, and I continue to want to have more rich history. That's one of my goals as well.

PS: So when people first meet you and they say, "Tell me who you are," what do you tell them?

JR: Actually, I'm a very private person, so I try not to reveal anything about myself. Most of the people that know me or try to get to know me don't ever get to know me because I rarely reveal any insights, just because I don't know if I'm not comfortable or it's — I'm just a private person. So it's like, for me, I usually just reroute the question to them, and then they're usually chatty, and they'll just tell it. I don't know if that's just the American way, but they'll just tell you everything about themselves. I think I'm a very difficult person to crack in the sense of asking questions. I don't know why. I just don't like to reveal things. I'm just a private person. I've always been that way.

PS: Are you being more open with me than you are typically with people?

JR: Yes, I think so, just because it's like this is a documentary and maybe it will give some insight to myself and maybe it won't. Maybe just a lot of people will read this and say, "Ooh-la." [Laughter] So, yes, I think I'm giving more insight to — I'm being more concrete in what I'm saying instead of just going off on a tangent. I mean, it's more tempting for me to ask you questions. I mean, I've never been interviewed where I haven't asked a few questions.

PS: You're doing really well.

JR: So I'm doing pretty good. No, usually I put a data file on most people and have more information about them than they do about me, and my friends have a difficult time knowing what's going on in my life, too. I think it's wrong sometimes, but it's just the way I am sometimes, too. I try to reveal things that I think will enrich our friendship. I mean, I call my friends and tell them what's going on in my life, and they tell me what's going on in their lives, and I think that's fair. I think there's an equal exchange, and that helps out. And most of my friends know me fairly well, but it takes me a long time. Most of my friends have been more than five years, that I've really been close to, that I consider friends.

PS: Are there any things that I haven't asked you about yet that you think might be interesting to read or learn about you when somebody reads this five or ten or fifteen or twenty years from now? Is there any things that you think would be important to say?

JR: No. I just hope that I achieve my goals and that, whoever reads this, it inspires them to achieve their goals. Whoever reads these documentaries will get insights into different ideas, and maybe it will inspire them to do things. I think what you guys have done is a great thing. Unfortunately, I find this stuff boring, but some day I will be probably snapped in the butt, and I'll actually start doing this, probably, to other people. But I think it's a great advantage to be one of the selected few.

PS: Thank you very much for your time this afternoon.

JR: Thanks a lot.