

**Ketan Gada**  
**Narrator**

**Polly Sonifer**  
**Interviewer**

**May 23, 2000**

**PS:** This is Polly Sonifer, interviewing Ketan Gada on May 23, 2000. How are you this evening?

**KG:** I'm doing great.

**PS:** Great. Thanks for taking time to meet with me. First tell me about how old you are right now and what you do for a living, and just basic things about you.

**KG:** I'm twenty-five years old and about three years ago, I graduated from the University of St. Thomas, with a finance degree, and since then I've been working at Cargill Financial Services, which is a trading organization in the financial markets, and I'm a trader's assistant, with aspirations to be trading in the stock market or bond markets of the world.

**PS:** And where did you grow up?

**KG:** I grew up in St. Paul, Minnesota, for pretty much all my life, and I spent six months in Spain, so I consider that part of where I've lived, so Spain and Minnesota.

**PS:** And have you been to India?

**KG:** Yes, I've been to India six times. Probably only remember three times, or four times, maybe, as the first two were when I was a baby. But most recently, right after graduation, three years ago.

**PS:** And what's your Indian language heritage?

**KG:** The native language is Gujarati, and more specifically, the dialect is Kutchi.

**PS:** Did you speak that in your family's home?

**KG:** It was more spoken to me, and I was pretty much responding in English most of my time growing up, and over the years, I think it's even gotten to be more English in the house and less Gujarati or Kutchi in the house.

**PS:** When were you involved in SILC [School of India for Languages and Culture]?

**KG:** I was involved in SILC when it first started. I was only maybe four years old, so I really didn't go there to learn, but my mother was a teacher and she had helped found it with Dr. Menon, who had started SILC. So I'd always go there. My sister was a student and a few other students, and I would just sit there and play or do whatever while everyone else was learning. So I have memories back to really young, being there and kind of just around that atmosphere when it was only maybe ten, fifteen people there. And I think I ended in ninth grade, so about fifteen years old or fourteen years old when I finally ended.

**PS:** So you went there for about ten years, as a student?

**KG:** Pretty much, yes.

**PS:** Do you remember what year that was, that you first got involved? What year would it have been when you were four?

**KG:** That was probably 1978, but I think when I started classes, maybe I was in first grade, so maybe it was 1980 or '81, I think, and my mom might contradict me on this. She probably knows better than I, but that's what I think it is, probably.

**PS:** And are you involved right now?

**KG:** Not currently, no.

**PS:** Do you think you might be in the future?

**KG:** Possibly, but the biggest thing I feel is I don't know how I could—well, as a teacher, no, as I don't know the language well enough to be teaching another student. And also with the history of India. I mean, I learned it, but I don't know if I know it verbatim. But I think, yes, getting involved in some sort of way would probably be something that I'd be looking to do in the future.

**PS:** And the capacity that you were involved in was as a student?

**KG:** As a student the whole time, yes.

**PS:** And how did you initially get interested in SILC? I suppose at four years old, you didn't have much choice, right?

**KG:** Yes, well, I mean, if I think about it, and not in a negative sense, but I never had a choice, because my parents were both very, or my mother was very involved with SILC when they

started it. And a lot of our family friends were also involved. My sister was involved. And so it was pretty much expected I would go, and when you're little, you know, you want to stay home on a Sunday morning, but I think it was just expected that I go, and I did. You fought it a little bit as a little kid, but I think you learn the value over time, I think, more than when you're eight and nine years old, maybe.

**PS:** So your recollection was that when you were eight or nine, you would fight against going or protest a little?

**KG:** Well, it was more just, yes, I didn't want to wake up or I wanted to watch cartoons. It was just the little kid things. But, you know, as I got, I think, older in those first years of going to SILC, it became just a ritual to go every Sunday and to meet up with other kids that you knew there, that you developed friendships with. So yes, I think it became more of just something I always did and enjoyed, as I grew into, I think, more.

**PS:** What were the most significant things that you learned while you were at SILC?

**KG:** I think and I believe I feel that the most significant thing that I learned there was the language. I learned to write, actually, not only speak a little bit, but we learned the alphabet. We learned how to write it out, you know, to write sentences, read, and speak. Now, I wasn't fluent, but that probably goes back to in the home, if it had a lot of Gujarati being spoken, maybe I might have spoken better. But I think learning the languages was a huge thing.

I mean, the history of India was great, because I actually enjoyed that type of knowledge. I just remembered history very easily, and it was always interesting with India, too, because those were the glory days of India that we learned about. So it was always, that was interesting, but I think the other thing was, later in SILC's history and when I was older, I took cooking, and that has served me well, even to this date, because I'm able to cook Indian meals. Maybe not good anymore, without practice, but nonetheless, I learned to cook and mainly, the reason I did that as a kid was because I liked to eat. I was the only boy in the class, and I would go in there and we'd cook and at the end we'd get to eat it. That's the main reason why I started and then I enjoyed learning to cook it and eat it, pretty much.

**PS:** So are you still cooking?

**KG:** Once in a while. Mainly just getting leftovers from Mom.

**PS:** That always works when you're a bachelor. Do you think that being involved with SILC changed the way you thought about yourself, as either being an Indian or being an American, in some way? Did it affect those perceptions?

**KG:** I think it definitely did. And I didn't know that at the time, and I think about it now, or I have thought about it like when I've done papers and I've written about SILC before, just as it affected my life, in a positive way. And I feel that I was able to—it sort of created two lives for me, in a sense. My Indian life and my American life. Because Sunday was always the day we had that. Now there are other functions, but generally, I hung out with my Indian friends on that day, as a little kid.

And I think that it definitely taught me to respect my culture, that it wasn't just a country that was overpopulated, that was only what we heard on the news in the media here. There was a lot more it had brought to this world in the form of invention and religion and culture.

But the other thing is, is that I just feel that I definitely gained. I mean, even though we were in this small, Twin Cities community, with not that many Indians at the time, I was able to be, learn to be more Indian, or learn more about my culture and appreciate it than I think a lot of people, even in bigger cities, where, yes, there's a big Indian community there, but they didn't learn about their country. They still tried to just get Americanized, and almost forget that they were Indian, as little kids. Most little kids try to do that, I think, because you want to assimilate to your culture.

But at the same time, it was a good thing, I think. Maybe I didn't know it at the time, but I think about it now and I know it was like the best thing our parents could have ever done for us, in teaching us about our culture and ourselves, because that's something we'll never be able to get away from. It's who we are. And as a little kid, you might not know that, but now, as an adult, you look back and you say, "That was maybe the best experience, one of the best experiences of my life, that helped me grow as a person."

**PS:** So did you have a sense that you had one set of friends that were your American friends that were Monday through Saturday, and then the other set that was just Sunday?

**KG:** I sort of did. There weren't too many Indians in my school. There was one down the street from me and we were friends. I mean, it wasn't that I couldn't hang out with other Indian kids during the week, but as a little kid, you don't have a car, you know, your parents, it's a little more difficult. So yes, during the week, I most definitely hung out with the neighborhood kids, whoever they may be—American, Oriental, whatever. We all played in the neighborhood, and as a little kid, I think that's just the way it goes. You don't travel a lot to go spend time with someone else.

I think in my life as a kid, I think I did separate the two. I know a lot of people definitely just, you know, their friends were their friends, and they all hung out together. I don't think that just happened too much in mine, and I couldn't really say why that happened, why they didn't come together, or why we didn't come together, all together.

**PS:** So like if you had a birthday party when you were nine, you would just invite one group of friends but not the other?

**KG:** Oh, no, no. In those types of situations, definitely, everyone was invited to those types of things, and I guess, in that sense, yes, they did all mix and we all had a great time. It wasn't ever a problem, I'll definitely say that. It's not like I intentionally said, "I need to keep these separate, because it's like mixing water and oil." No, it wasn't anything like that. It was more just kind of the way it happened, I guess. Not having a lot of Indians in my school was the reason, I would think, or in my area. But yes, birthday parties, special things like that, or even coming over for dinner or something, you know, sometimes it would be just a mixture of people.

**PS:** Did your parents socialize with other Indian people a lot?

**KG:** Yes, that was I think their main—when I was younger, especially, too, their main, every Friday or Saturday was a dinner party at another Indian couple's house, be it Gujarati or any other Indian family from India. I think my parents were pretty well-rounded in that respect. They had friends from all the parts of India, which I think definitely stemmed from SILC, because we were able to just forget about where you were from for a little bit and just kind of say, "We're all Indians in it together," so I think they were able to—and I always went to these dinner parties. Parents wouldn't leave you at home, so it was another time where we would get to spend time with other Indian kids, and that's something I really remember, is always going to those dinner parties as a little kid.

**PS:** What were they like?

**KG:** It was interesting. I mean, the parents were always in the room and fathers were all talking about serious stuff always, you know, and the mothers, either they were talking in there also and it's always loud in an Indian conversation. You just hear talking everywhere. Or the women were also preparing food, or whatever was going on like that. But the kids usually tried to find another place to go, maybe downstairs or in another room to watch TV or a movie, or play games. So that was always fun.

And usually, it was always either the little kids with me and then my sister, who was five years older than me, and her friends, or the older kids. So it was a little separated there, but it was always a fun thing to do. And we were always out till like twelve o'clock at night, so you got to watch TV that you never got to see at home that late or whatever, so it was always fun going to those dinner parties.

**PS:** And then haul you out of bed on Sunday morning and make you go to SILC.

**KG:** Exactly. That was the toughest thing, I think, is, if it was a Saturday night party, and waking up early for SILC was a tough one. You didn't want to wake up and have to go to class, but you did. Sometimes your parents had to drag you, kicking and screaming, but they still got you there.

**PS:** What kind of food was served?

**KG:** Where?

**PS:** At these dinner parties.

**KG:** At the dinner parties, it was mainly Indian food, depending on where whoever was cooking was from, it would be that region's food, I would think, normally, if I remember right. Generally, Gujarati cooking, you know, western Indian cooking. And they would always have a side dish for the kids because there were kids that didn't like Indian food when they were little, or just to have a little variety for the kids. As I remember it, I remember macaroni and cheese being the standard at a lot of these things. The mothers would be like, "Okay, we'll just make them mac and cheese and be done with it," so I remember that as being the dinner many nights when we didn't want to have Indian food as a little kid, because you eat it five other days out of the week.

**PS:** So they would indulge you in that way?

**KG:** Yes.

**PS:** So tell me about the first time that you remember being in class. What was that like? Obviously, you'd been playing for—

**KG:** I'd been going for a while, so I'm trying to narrow it down in my head what could have been the first day, or what my first, at least, memory was of being in class. It probably wasn't my first day in class, but what I remember as being one of the things that really just sticks out in my mind, was in my Gujarati class, level one, you know, learning the basics, and I really didn't catch on too quickly, let's put it that way. I was a little slower than the others, I think, with a different language. I think it was, I don't know, it just didn't click in my head right away.

But I think it was my teacher then who, I just remember being really scared of her, and I don't remember if she was yelling or if it was just me being scared as a little kid, not knowing what was going on in class. But I think that was one of my memories of my Gujarati class was that I was scared. I think that was my memory, but I just remember that class and that was usually the first class of the day, right when you woke up.

And then after that, we would have general knowledge or Indian knowledge, basically, and I think I just really liked that right from the start because you'd hear these just unbelievable stories, and yes, there would be the boring parts, too, but there were always just these exciting stories of

kings and queens and these little battles, or big battles, I should say, and it was always just really interesting. I just remember liking that class quite a bit.

**PS:** So they would tell the stories of what?

**KG:** In general knowledge, it was, usually, we'd go through a book and go through time periods, and you'd learn about the different rajas, which means kings, and there are different dynasties, and the different religions that ruled at the time. And talk about just history, I guess, that was predominant for each of those eras, what it was known for, what it was like. This general knowledge went all the way back to the Indus valley civilization time where one of the oldest civilizations in the world.

So we learned about that, and I just remember learning about how they had streets that were carved out, they had sewer systems, and also like toys for kids and just a city plan, basically, that long ago, which just amazed me. Because we saw pictures of what some of the toys looked like, and I just remember that being just a really interesting thing, learning that far back, that they were that advanced.

And going through the years after that, and learning that Indian culture had produced so much knowledge and information for the rest of the world over the years. It was amazing just learning that different types of mathematics were created in India, different types of thought, so many religions came from India. It was a positive thing to learn about your country, when you only hear negative things as a resident in the United States.

So it was definitely a very positive thing in that way. It gives you a little more—as a kid, I think self-esteem is always a big thing, being of a different color and different person in a predominantly white or American culture, I guess. So it was a positive thing to see, where you felt positive about that, and that was one of the good things, really good things about that class, I think.

**PS:** So general knowledge was taught in English?

**KG:** Yes, it was taught in English, because it was a big grouping of kids. It could have been Marathi students, it could have been Hindi students, it could have been Bengali students, Malayali students. It could have been all these different regions of India, so English, even, just as in India, is sometimes used as the universal language, because most people can agree on using that language.

**PS:** So when you were in general knowledge class, did you have textbooks?

**KG:** No. SILC's—even to this day, I don't believe they do, but back then, we started with humble beginnings. There would be one book, or a couple of books that the teacher would teach

from, that was brought from India, because you couldn't obtain that here. There was no amazon.com [online bookseller] back then.

**PS:** Can you imagine life without amazon.com?

**KG:** I know, so you just couldn't obtain just any book, so whenever people would make trips to India, they'd make it a special point to find books for students, or for the teachers. And I think what the teachers generally did was, either they would tell us and we'd take notes, or they would make photocopies and bring it in as text to follow along with, to study with, and that type of thing.

**PS:** And when they told the stories about the rajas, were those all fact-based, or were any of them drawing from mythology?

**KG:** You know, actually, they never, in my general knowledge classes, we never discussed the literature, such as Ramayana or what's the other one, I'm drawing a blank here. But basically, we didn't discuss those stories or individual stories of Hindu gods, or anything like that. We didn't talk about what's considered fact, or questionably a fact.

Generally, they stuck to, this was the ruler in this time period, his wife, what their big programs were, whatever they did for the community at the time, how they ruled. And they'd try to do a general overview. It was very hard because if you think about India at that time, there were rulers all over the country. But they talked about the different time periods, where the Muslims came and invaded India, took control of the wars with China. It goes all the way up to 1947, the independence, but that was, I think, how they did it. I can't remember. I don't think that they actually told us the stories that might have just been stories and not fact-based, or religious in nature, because there were people of different religions and they didn't want to kind of force that on you, I guess.

**PS:** So as you think about all the stories that you heard about, the history of India, and the periods of time in India, what were the ones that captivated your imagination the most, as a child?

**KG:** As a child.

**PS:** Or a teenager. Which ones did you particularly relate to?

**KG:** I would have to say, I think, I mean, the one that really just made the biggest impact on me, and it's probably a given, I think, with almost any Indian, was Mahatma Gandhi. I mean, they spent the most time on that, and it was just the most unbelievable story that someone could, without violence, and that's something that my religion also preaches—nonviolence, so I actually was able to see something that my parents told me about in action by someone, having it work

against the powerful empire of the British. I mean, honestly, that's the most unbelievable story—and the one that I really cherish—of Indian history. That story line, or that history, basically, is just what captivated me, in a sense.

And also, I just think back, because I'd hear stories from my mom about my grandfather, who was part of the freedom movement and the nonviolence movement at the time, and how he was outcasted for believing certain things, out of his community, but he did them for the belief that this was the right way to go. And so I think that really hit home and it was just something—it was recent, also, so I think it really kind of, you know, really struck a chord with me, and it's something I really enjoyed learning about as a kid, or more as, I guess that came when I was a little older even.

**PS:** So throughout the years, the ten years that you attended, did they cover, during every year, did they cover the whole history of India, or were there certain years that they covered certain years of history?

**KG:** I think it was certain years they covered certain time periods. And so, I guess over the ten-year period, there probably was some overlap where we probably covered that three years ago, but because there were general knowledge classes that went one, two, three—there were different levels, so generally, there wasn't too much overlap. You'd learn something new in a whole new year, but I think there was only maybe three or four levels, so if I'm there for ten years, I probably had learned some of the same stuff over again.

**PS:** But then again, you told me you were kind of slow, right?

**KG:** Yes, exactly. As a little kid, a lot of times your parents just want to get you there at first—not to be a straight-A student in these classes, but more to interact with other kids, to learn your language a little bit more, and just get involved in your community a little bit like that, so I think there are dual purposes in the SILC school.

**PS:** What do you think was your parents' primary motivator for bringing you?

**KG:** Well, I know, I mean, well, my mom helped start this school with a couple other people. They just wanted to preserve culture and language for us because I think they had the foresight to see that, living in America is great, but within a couple of generations, we'll have all but forgotten our home and our heritage, just as many other ethnic groups that have come here in the past before us have now gotten so assimilated that they just are an American, and not an American-Italian, or an American Irish person. They've gotten very Americanized in that respect so that don't still know a lot of their own history, with kids my age, at least, I can say. And this was the main reason, I think.

And another reason I think is, it was a good way to connect with other Indians, but generally, I think the main reason, at least that I can remember my mom saying is, "We want you to know the

language. We want you to know that you came from a really great place, India.” So I think those were the main reasons.

**PS:** You said your family took at least six trips back to India that you went along on, four of which you were conscious of?

**KG:** Right.

**PS:** Did you have enough Gujarati language that when you went back to India, that you could converse with people there?

**KG:** I would say no, for me. Like I said, I didn't pick up on Gujarati as a kid as well as I could have or should have, I guess. I could always understand it, for the most part. And the thing was is I would always mix the two—my dialect, Kutchi, and my language, Gujarati—because at home, Kutchi was spoken but they would sometimes mix Gujarati and then my parents would mix Gujarati and Kutchi and English, so I could never really tell the difference between the two because they sounded the same anyways.

So in that respect, I could understand a fair amount, because my mom and dad, they'd say something, and I'd go do it or I'd answer in English, but I wasn't so good about just speaking. And I think a lot of it goes back to, and I think I learned this later in life, is that I was just afraid to speak and be wrong, instead of just speaking and if I was wrong, I was wrong. And I think my mom always told me that and I was like, “Yes, whatever.”

Because my sister was just a talkative kid. I mean, she learned, at the age of three or something, how to speak Gujarati and could speak full sentences and everything by four, I bet. And she had no fear of just speaking to anyone, saying the wrong thing. She didn't care, she just said it.

So as a kid, I was, you know, I'd go there and my family would be like, “Oh boy, when is he going to learn?” And even now when I go back, “When is he going to learn?” And they just question, like, “Why don't you know it yet, completely?” And it's something I had no answer for. So that was how it was in India.

So in India I think some of my family spoke English—very few I would say—and most of them spoke just Gujarati and I could understand them. I mean, I had never been a super talkative person, especially as a kid. Maybe in elementary school. In class, I always was. I wasn't super talkative, so I think that came out definitely when I was in India, because I couldn't communicate as well.

But as a kid, I guess you don't notice it because you'd spend so much time playing with other Indian kids around, and I don't remember it ever being a problem that I couldn't speak with them, because we could always communicate. When you're playing cricket or when you're playing any game on the top of a terrace in Bombay, it didn't matter if I spoke English or

Gujarati, we all just played, and I don't remember it ever being a problem there. Maybe just with my family as I got older, I recognized that, you know, you've really got to learn this language so you can communicate.

**PS:** When you went back after college, how were your language skills at that point?

**KG:** At that point, it was very tough for me. First, I didn't go to my family's homes in Gujarat or Bombay. Because in the five previous times I'd been to India, I'd only been to two places, or two states, let's say—Gujarat and Maharashtra, where Bombay is. And in Maharashtra, there was just Bombay, and in Gujarat, there was just Baroda, which was where my family lived.

And so that was something that kind of irked me, that my parents had never taken us anywhere. I think I might have seen the Taj Mahal when I was a baby, but again, I was a baby. So my sister got to see it, but I don't think I did. So that was the thing I told my parents. I said, "You know, when I graduate, I'm going to India, but I know the family wants me to spend the whole month there but I can't do it. I have to go traveling first, and then I'll meet them down there after my trip."

So I started in Delhi and made my way through Rajasthan, and down to Gujarat, and then I met my mom in Gujarat and we went to Bombay after that. So getting through most of the other parts of India, knowing Gujarati wouldn't have helped anyways. I mean, I guess knowing Gujarati, I could understand a little bit of Hindi, because they are sort of similar and they even are written a little bit similar, where you can kind of understand what a word is, or what someone's trying to say to you.

So that helped a little bit but generally, English got me around outside of my family's homes, because I guess I was maybe in more touristy areas where English is pretty much the spoken language for the things that you needed to be talking to people for. So no, I really didn't have any problems not speaking Gujarati there.

I think the toughest thing for me is first, I had gone away and been away from my parents for four and a half years, through college, so I'd been away from Gujarati for quite a long time. And over that time, I had spent six months in Seville, Spain, learning Spanish, and Guatemala for one month, and Puerto Rico, and all these different things while I was practicing my Spanish. And it was mainly because I went to Spain. Before I left I could barely speak any Spanish, but I immersed myself, and six months later I could speak.

And so that was something I knew if I did that with my language in India, I'd probably learn it a lot quicker, not having a crutch to back up on and just say, "I've got to speak with people, because I need to eat and I need to find this, and I need to go here," just as I did in Spain. So the biggest problem for me, getting around in India, was that I would mix Spanish in by accident. It would just come out. I would think in Spanish sometimes, which was tough, to try speak in Gujarati then.

**PS:** I can see why. So what motivated you to study Spanish?

**KG:** I had learned it in high school, but high school Spanish is generally—you don't learn too much. They go very slow, and they don't just force you to learn it really quickly, or like, immerse you and just start speaking Spanish, like they do on the college level, I think.

And basically, the main reason was, is I wanted to study abroad, and I figured, "Well, where do I want to go? It could be anywhere in the world, I guess." And Spain had always intrigued me. It's just a beautiful place, and I heard great things about it, so I decided to go. It could have been France, it could have been Italy, but I chose Spain and so I learned Spanish.

**PS:** But you were drawn to go to Europe, rather than India or China?

**KG:** Yes, and I think, for most American students, or popularity-wise, (percentage-wise) that would be the case. India as a third world country, but because I was with my family and I felt comfortable there. But making the decision to go abroad alone, without knowing anyone, kind of scared me, and Europe, generally, just sounded like the right place to go at the time, I guess. So I picked out Spain and it ended up being a lot of economics involved, too. I found a great program that was inexpensive, actually cheaper than my school in the [Twin] Cities, so I was able to do that and pay my way through, for most of it. So that was good.

I can't remember exactly why I chose Spain, but I don't regret one decision I ever made in doing that, because I think it was what opened me up to wanting to live abroad now and after that, just having the travel bug, I guess. I mean, I want to go to India. I want to go to Africa. I want to go to Asia and Latin America. Those are things that I gained from that trip, where I learned I just really want to learn about other cultures, and not just one specifically, I don't think.

Since then, I've been wanting to do that. Just quit my job and travel around the world for a year or something like that. It's something that I really want to do because of that trip to Spain. And my trip to India—because when I was in India, I met quite a few Australian tourists, who would pretty much work, get a whole bunch of money, quit their jobs, travel for a year, and get a ticket around the world that had certain destinations, and that was something I admired about them and also want to do. I mean, I wanted to go to India, be able to just spend a month there, wherever, and go to Africa for a couple months, and Asia and the Orient for a couple months. So that's still a goal of mine, but it came from my trip to India, my trip to Guatemala, my trip to Spain.

**PS:** So that first exposure, when you were a tiny child, going to SILC school and learning another language, and learning to think, to a certain extent, through the lens of another language or another culture, other than the one you were actually growing up in, how do you think that influenced that travel bug developing in you?

**KG:** I definitely think it helped me, in the sense that, I already was able to think in two points of view. A lot of people can only think in one point of view, and that's the only point of view. Jainism, my religion, one of the main tenets is multiplicity of viewpoints. Basically, any answer or any solution has so many ways of getting to it. You might not see them all, but there are, and you have to respect that.

And so, being able to kind of live through two lenses, as you say, I think it helped me in the sense that I go to these countries, and I try not—I mean, this is the biggest thing, I think, for a tourist, is I try not to judge them to the American standard of living, or of morals, or of practice. Basically. I mean, it is hard sometimes because that's human nature, I think, but that's something I always try to strive for when I'm in a new country, is to understand why things are happening, and not get mad at someone for doing something that seems really odd in America, but in their country, it's considered completely normal, and just understanding that. I think it helped going to SILC school, definitely, because of that, just knowing that there are so many different people.

Even within SILC, there were so many different people that had different languages and different legends and different ways of doing things. So I think it helped, definitely. It probably got stifled or something along the way, but it came out when I went to Spain and I just learned, you know, it all came back, kind of, that this is really interesting, learning about other people's cultures.

**PS:** So there was a seed for that planted, somehow.

**KG:** I think so. I probably hadn't thought about it until now, but yes, I guess I would say that's true. Going to SILC school definitely helped me broaden my horizons. Maybe not at the time, I didn't know it, but it laid the groundwork for what I am today.

**PS:** Did you have any choice about which classes you took?

**KG:** The standard courses you had to take were your language and your general knowledge. In the beginning years, that's all they had. And also they taught dance. And you didn't have to do that, but I generally always was in dance.

**PS:** How was that?

**KG:** It was interesting. I always felt I had two left feet, and I didn't like it for that reason, and Rane Ramaswamy, who is well known in the Twin Cities for Bharatnatyam dance, was generally the teacher, and then over the years—I mean, she didn't do it every year, because her dance company got big or her students, you know, she had her own thing, but we always had some teacher in there, teaching us. In the beginning years, it was her, or just various teachers.

So I think, I don't know, I mean, we did skits, we did plays, we did many things like that. We performed at the Festival of Nations as kids, because of this. And that was a positive experience,

I think at the time. I always felt like I was a terrible dancer. The teacher was always saying, “No, you’re doing it wrong,” and I was the uncoordinated little boy, the skinny little boy. And there were all these other guys in there, too, but I always felt that I was the one who was screwing it up, but you know, I think it was generally probably most of us boys who weren’t doing it right.

But that was an interesting experience. Not saying this negatively, but I was forced into it. My mom would say, “You have to do this, it’s good for you. You should do this.” And as a little kid, your parents steer you in certain directions, for whatever reasons they choose. I look back, and I really—I mean, I don’t know if it really helped me, because I’m still not suave or anything like that on the dance floor, but it was interesting. I learned a lot about dance and Indian style, and learned that I liked it, to watch it at least. Yes, it was a great experience, dancing, and that was something we did, that was the extra thing.

Then they started offering yoga classes and I did that for a few years, and dance was usually after school anyway, it was an extra thing. So you could still do yoga and dance. So I did that for a few years and that was good, that was interesting. We had music for a couple of years and we could choose all three.

So a couple of years, we learned singing, Indian singing, with—I can’t remember the teacher, but whoever the teacher was at the time, but we would learn the scales, basically, the ‘do re mi’ for Indian songs. And so we learned that.

And as I got older, through the years, and the population of SILC grew exponentially, almost. I mean, I remember being at the peak, and there being over 120, 130 kids, when it started with five, ten students. So it was a pretty amazing thing, where we had a big facility. We needed a bigger school to use, and I remember that’s when we started offering a whole bunch of things, and this was when I was maybe twelve or eleven, where they offered something called SAP, SILC Achievement Project.

And what this was, was just, you go into this class and it was like a study hall, I guess, if you want to call it that, or something, where you would, the teacher, Anoop Mathur, at the beginning, he would say, “Okay, guys and girls, think of a project that you want to do, something that you’re really interested in doing. It can be a group project, it can be your own project. Whatever, if it’s a science project or if it’s whatever, just do it, and learn from that experience.”

And it wasn’t necessarily just about India, so it was just trying to teach us to organize and to do a project, set goals, and finish them and learn how to do different things. And I remember, the first year what we did was a yearbook, and that was the first yearbook that SILC ever had, and it was because of this class and Anoop Mathur’s guidance that helped us do that.

And I remember, we had a yearbook. There were photographers, everyone took a role. There were photographers, there were writers, there were the people who collected advertising money to pay for the book, and I remember that was my job, to go get advertising. Through my life, I

have always been the biggest procrastinator in the world, and I remember waiting until there were maybe two weeks left, and I hadn't gotten that much money, and we needed some money, so my mom comes to the rescue, who knows everyone in the community at that time. I mean, even now, but she pretty much started making some calls with me and for me, and by the end of it, we had sponsors from Chicago to Minneapolis, and we had plenty of money for the yearbook.

And so that was an interesting experience, basically, not waiting until the last minute, because I felt terrible for not getting it done. But the yearbook was a phenomenal success. Everyone loved having it. It's such a great thing to have, to be able to remember it. And it had pictures going all the way back to the beginning, so that kind of helped out, that we could remember those days, also. So that was a great thing, having that.

I did it one more year and we did a different project, but it doesn't stand out in my mind right now, but basically, years after that, I think they continued with the yearbook, and I'm not sure if it still exists today, but I hope it does because it was just a great experience, just to organize that type of thing at such a young age, where you have all this responsibility, and just learning how to put something together, learning about printing and presses and now it's all computers, but at that time, it was typing it up and going to a printsetter and having the pictures in there, so it was a lot of work, but it was great, for learning. And like I said, there was cooking and dance and all that stuff, so I tried almost all the classes I think they offered. The only one I did not take was sewing, and I don't know, I just wasn't interested, I guess.

**PS:** Tell me about yoga. Who was the yoga teacher?

**KG:** I can't be certain that this was the first teacher, but I think it was Mr. Patel. I know that doesn't say a lot.

**PS:** And why doesn't that say a lot?

**KG:** Well, Patel's a pretty common Gujarati name. It could be anyone, let's put it that way. It's like saying "Mr. Johnson" or "Mr. Smith." So that doesn't really say a lot. I should know this, but I'm drawing a blank on the name, and it'll come to me while we're talking, hopefully. But basically, the classes were good. I mean, it's something, I don't know, just different. I didn't understand what the whole deal was. I was like, "Well, why don't we run or why don't we do this kind of exercise?"

But at a young age, we learned to get a little more flexible. And it was kind of fun because you would relax and you would stretch out and then they would have the time where you would try to, sort of meditate, in a sense, where you would do the dead man's position, where you're laying on the ground on your back and you just relax for ten minutes, and it was almost, for us, it was like a little sleep time. And it was just relaxing, it was very relaxing, and it was a good thing at the time. Oh, Punjabhai Patel, that's his name.

**PS:** So that one made an impression on you?

**KG:** Yes, it was good. And now I don't do it, but my father is quite involved with yoga, on his basis. Every morning he wakes up and does it, and I definitely understand the benefits of it, but I just haven't taken to doing it full time, I guess, yet, but it's something I know, the benefits are very great, so that I will go back to it at some point. Maybe when I can't run anymore or bike, but I think it's something I will go back to, maybe down the road.

**PS:** Did you have homework?

**KG:** There was homework.

**PS:** What kinds of assignments did you get?

**KG:** I think it varied, depending on the class, and the level of class. As a little kid, they'd say, "Practice writing the alphabet" or "Practice learning these verbs or these words." In general knowledge, it was, "Remember this time, civilization, who did this, who did that." In cooking and classes like that, I don't think there really was homework, per se. In dance, no, I don't think so, unless they said, "Practice," but I can't remember practicing on my own. Because I couldn't remember the steps unless the person in front of me was doing it, and I could botch it then. But generally, it was for the language classes and history classes, I think, that we had homework.

**PS:** Did you have tests?

**KG:** Yes, I think we had quizzes and tests. Each teacher was different, but nothing where we really sweated it. I never felt that I sweated it. It was like, "What? Am I going to get an F?" It didn't really affect the school grades, so as a little kid I was just like, well, you know, it's okay if I don't do great. I guess that's not the best attitude, but I was a little kid, so that was the way that was.

**PS:** Now, the people who were teachers were all volunteers at SILC.

**KG:** All volunteers.

**PS:** And were any of them trained as teachers, or did they do other things, like they were engineers and secretaries?

**KG:** Yes, exactly. Most of the teachers when we started were our moms. And no, most of them didn't have teaching degrees or any kind of formal education on that. Many of them had degrees in whatever and they all worked or they didn't work, but no, it wasn't a formal thing like that. They were just spending time and trying to teach us our language and history.

And over the years, I think we've had a few people come in who have had formal training, and help with setting a curriculum at the beginning of the year. So they tried to make it as—they tried to take good things from the school system, such as setting a curriculum, setting goals for the classes, and doing that type of thing.

**PS:** Did you ever have either one of your parents as your teacher at SILC?

**KG:** Yes.

**PS:** And how was that?

**KG:** That was all right. My parents never treated me any different. Actually, maybe they were a little harder because you couldn't get away with not doing the homework. Your mom and dad checked you during the week. But I remember having my mom for Gujarati one year, and definitely my father for a few years, for general knowledge, because my dad was pretty well-versed in history and liked to teach it. So later in SILC's history, he started coming to school and teaching, and he was a general knowledge teacher, and I remember having him for a few years, and it gave me a different understanding of my own father, I think, that, you know, he knows a lot about this stuff, wow. I knew he was smart, but he knows a lot about this stuff, too, and not just mathematics and sciences and engineering.

**PS:** So it actually increased your respect for him?

**KG:** Oh, yes, definitely. I just saw a different side of him, because usually he was a workaholic, starting his own business up and that type of thing. But then when he started coming to these things, it was—and he would, I think I remember him doing yoga with us, even, because he likes to do that. So he would do that, and yes, that's what I remember.

And my mom, she was a good teacher. She was very understanding with the students, that I remember. For Gujarati teachers, I remember it being about three teachers or four teachers that I still remember who they all were. Ranjan Patel, Shanti Shah, my mom, Neena Gada, and I think my dad did it later on, Ram Gada, but I didn't have him for that.

But I remember having all of them as teachers, and each teacher had a different style. Each of them had their own quirks or just the way they talked and what we learned, and their expectations were different. Those were the main teachers that I remember, and I'm sure there were others.

**PS:** Did it ever occur to you that you wanted to study a language other than Gujarati, or was it just assumed that your family was Gujarati speakers, so that's what you would study?

**KG:** You mean, another Indian language?

**PS:** Yes. Like, why wouldn't you study Hindi or Malayalam?

**KG:** Well, I think I questioned that at one point. I said, "Wouldn't it be better for me to learn Hindi, because more people speak it in India?" They were like, "Yes, but we think, when you're in India, you're going to be with your family. You don't speak Hindi to them, you speak Gujarati, pretty much." So that was the reasoning. And no, I don't think I ever really, at that time, had thought I wanted to learn another language.

Now, currently, or in the last few years, I'd been told that the U of M had been teaching Hindi, so I'd thought about going to take some kind of accredited course, where it's more of a structured type setting, where maybe that would motivate me more to learn. So I've thought about it since then, but at the time, no. It was, "I want to learn Gujarati, it's my mother tongue. I should know that, so I can understand people at home and in India."

**PS:** And yet, when you were at home, you wouldn't speak it.

**KG:** Well, you know, yes, I would say it's partially my fault but I would say it's a function of just where our family dynamics were at the time. I think over the years, my parents just spoke less and less Gujarati. When I was a little kid, they spoke English in the home, for the most part. When my sister was born, they spoke Gujarati, because they had just gotten here maybe three years prior, or my dad had been here maybe five years prior, so they were still, I guess, "Indianized."

But when I was born, which was about ten years after my dad had been here and maybe eight since my mom had been here, I think they had definitely gotten a little bit more Americanized and comfortable speaking English, and so as I remember it, and I think my parents agree with this, is that they didn't speak enough, so we kind of both take the blame as, "Well, Ketan didn't really just catch on right away, but also we didn't speak enough of it to him."

And so over the years, they'd always say, "Okay, we're going to speak more and more to you," and they'd start doing it and then they'd go back to English. And it was them and me, so it was interesting that they have—now, I mean, you listen to them speak and it's—I mean, when they're alone and talking to each other, they'll speak English. Sometimes they'll speak Gujarati, but I think, I would say, a higher percentage of the time, they're speaking English to each other, than even Gujarati, and that's maybe because they've lived here longer than they've lived in India now.

**PS:** That's a good point. And yet you still value the fact that you could still, at this point, understand Gujarati if somebody spoke it to you?

**KG:** Yes. I think it's great. I definitely would like it, and I guess you can say "like it" but you have to really work hard to do it, but to be able to understand more and be able to just speak. I

think when I when younger, I didn't understand it. I didn't understand the mechanics of language, I don't think.

**PS:** Any language?

**KG:** Well, you know, I knew English but I didn't completely have a command of it when I was learning a whole new language. And then, in class form, when we were in classes, it was more the structural writing and reading, and they didn't emphasize as much speaking in class, at SILC.

So I would say that—I mean, I look back at it now and I think it was my own issue in the sense that I didn't understand structure, and when I went to Spain and I learned Spanish and I really put two and two together that, this is how a sentence should be structured. Now English is opposite a lot of, most of the romance languages, the way you structure a sentence. But Gujarati is very similar to, I think, the way these romance languages were, sort of. The words weren't the same, but the idea of the way they structure the sentences was similar.

**PS:** Say more about that.

**KG:** I guess just like where you put the nouns, where you put the verbs, is just different, and I think I learned a little bit more of that. Now I look back and I think I could have—see, now I think if I could get immersed in Gujarati or take classes, I think immersion is probably the best thing for me, but I think I'd pick it up much quicker now than I ever did when I was younger. Because I definitely was a slow learner as a kid, and I think I developed over the years as a better student, and I think just more well-rounded as I got older.

**PS:** And yet your sister, Lisa, just seemed to have more of an affinity for languages and picked it up fairly quickly, just in context?

**KG:** Most definitely, yes. She was a talker. She was in everything and talking and always very outgoing, always the one everyone knew about, you know, an outgoing girl. So she spoke really young, as I can remember my parents telling me. And I think even one summer, two summers in a row, I think, my grandparents had come from India, my dad's set and my mom's set, their parents. So Lisa had spent a whole summer with each of them, just speaking Gujarati and Kutchi.

So they also had that experience that I never had, so I think that might have helped her, too, because she would spend days talking to my grandfather, who has since passed, who I actually never met, talking to him. And he was an uneducated man, but knew English. He was an amazing man. He died in the seventies, I think it was, late seventies, but that was something that they would tell these stories about that Lisa learned Gujarati. She would speak Gujarati and he could speak English back to her, and they would teach each other. She would sing songs to him, so it was like a teaching thing almost. So it was really interesting to hear that.

**PS:** So she did get an immersion experience that you never got?

**KG:** Oh, yes, most definitely, most definitely.

**PS:** Now you said you quit going to SILC when you were about fifteen?

**KG:** Yes, fourteen or fifteen.

**PS:** Was that the norm at that time?

**KG:** Yes, I felt that I was getting a little too old and as you become more of a teenager, I guess, you definitely rebel, and you don't want to—you just want to make your own decisions, I think. And it was one of those things where my parents still wanted me to go but I said, "No, I'm not going to go anymore." It wasn't because I thought SILC was bad, I think it was just more, your ideas of things were changing, your activities were changing. I was involved in sports more, I was doing different things that I wanted to do, I think, more. And I think it was definitely an age thing. At that point, fourteen, fifteen, I was one of the oldest ones there, along with a few other students, and they had stopped maybe the year before even, and so I was like, "You know, I think I need to stop going now." Since then, I hadn't gone back because of college and now work.

**PS:** How did your parents take that, when you announced that you weren't go to go anymore?

**KG:** As I remember it, they said, "No, you're going to go," and I said, "No, I'm not going to go," and it was one of those arguments between parents and kids, and in the end I just decided I wasn't going to go, so they said, "Okay, well, we'll respect that. You're old enough, you've done it for ten years, about. If that's your decision, that's your decision." They were always very understanding parents so I wasn't like breaking their hearts or anything like that, I don't think.

**PS:** Tell me about the peer interactions you had with your friends at SILC school. Have you kept in touch with any of those people, did you get together outside of school? What kinds of things did you do during school together?

**KG:** I think as a kid, as an older kid, when I became maybe about ten or eleven or twelve, I think, I just remember, I always tended to hang out with older kids, for some reason. So I was with older kids, so no, I generally don't think I spent time with—I didn't spend time with them outside of SILC, unless it was at an Indian function, because they were either fifteen, sixteen, seventeen years old, or something like that, and I was just a little kid. It's not like we're going to go out and hang out on a Friday night.

So in that sense, no, but as a kid, yes. We had friends that we would go out or meet at—when there would be dinner parties, we'd all be at the same ones, that type of thing. But the interaction with kids, I mean, maybe not outside, but inside SILC, and I hadn't mentioned this yet, but this,

it's coming back to me, is a huge, huge impact at SILC, for anyone that attended, and anyone can attest to this. And you'll hear this in many of the interviews, I bet, from students.

There was a time where we had break time, cookies and milk. That was considered the best time of SILC, because we'd get cookies and milk, and we'd always try to get more. It was a time you could just talk with your friends and just fool around and play or do whatever, and that was, I think about it now and I remember. Like I was talking to another alumnus of SILC and she and I were talking one night, just recently, and she said, "Do you remember cookie time, how great that was?" and I said, "Yes, that was a great time, where we could just all just get out of class and we'd be so happy, and just go talk to all your friends that weren't in your class or whatever." That was a big experience in all of the SILC students' experience at the school.

**PS:** That will break the teachers' hearts.

**KG:** But as a little kid, man, it's cookies.

**PS:** I know. Cookies are cookies, that's true, and milk is milk. Is it part of Indian tradition to eat cookies and milk? I thought it was tea and crumpets.

**KG:** No, it's definitely not, but for a little kid living in America, cookies and milk is a way to make them happy, I think. I think it wasn't like it had to be cookies. Each week, some family would sponsor the break time. I think a lot of times it was cookies, because it was so popular, but sometimes people would make stuff, or they would bring something in different. But I always remember the cookies and milk, because we all loved that.

**PS:** So you were, just a few weeks ago, talking with another friend who you went to SILC with, so some of these connections you've kept up?

**KG:** Oh, most definitely, I still have. One of them is getting married this weekend, Vishant Shah, who had been probably one of the first students, also, there, as his mom was a teacher, too, and he was a couple of years older than me, but he's getting married this weekend, and we're still very involved with his family and him.

And there are other families that we've just always maintained contact with, and as I've gotten older, we still have kept contact. There's a girl who I just happened to see at Thanksgiving last year, or, was it Thanksgiving? No, it was at—yes, maybe it was Thanksgiving, and I saw her again after maybe since high school, since we all graduated and went on to college, went all our own way, so it had been six years. And before that, it had been since SILC school.

**PS:** What's her name?

**KG:** Her name is Aparna Ramaswamy. I just happened to find out she lived two blocks away from me. So then we were like, “Oh, okay, we have to hang out again and talk,” so that was a person from SILC that I’ve also just recently started talking to again.

**PS:** And how is it to strike up those old connections?

**KG:** It’s great. Just being acquaintances, it’s always fun to see them, I think, and talk about old times, or even talk about new times. And with some of them, it’s even more so, because you’ve known them for so long and you’re always—even if you might not have a lot of contact, because we all lead these different, and different states, and different lives, but I mean, still you can go back to it and still be friends, and that’s the great thing, because you have this connection, where you spent so much time together.

And there’s other, you know, I had, I think, a lot of people that aren’t Gujarati but that were friends of mine, guys, mainly guys, because I was a boy, and I don’t see them often anymore, but when I do, it’s always, you know, it’s a big catching-up situation, where you’re trying to learn more about them.

**PS:** So tell me about some of the special events, those festivals, the special events that you were part of, the cultural festivals.

**KG:** Generally, the cultural festivals like Diwali and Navratri, things like that, those were the two major ones that I can think of, those were generally, we, as a Gujarati person, would go to the Gujarati Samaj events, which was a group of Gujaratis, basically, that would put on Diwali, Festival of Lights, or Navratri. And I guess, generally, it was always with the Gujarati group, it wasn’t with SILC.

The special events that SILC put on was doing special events for the Festival of Nations, setting up the—doing dancing or setting up, working at the food booth one day, or working at the exhibit booth, where it was more of like an exhibition of the country. We would work in those, or help put them together, or do those kinds of things. I remember my sister and some of the girls and my mom did sari-wrapping a couple of years in a row, where they wrapped people in saris. And so those were some of the special events for SILC that I remember.

But SILC tried definitely to stay away from religion, I think, was one of the keys, is they didn’t want to try to say one religion, go to one religion or that type of thing. So I guess those types of events didn’t occur through SILC, but Festival of Nations, the SILC picnic every year, we’d have a picnic, where that would be fun. You just get to go and play whatever, frisbee or volleyball or whatever, you know, go out and do something at a park.

**PS:** All those Indian sports, right?

**KG:** Exactly, exactly. Well, volleyball is, sort of. I mean, I'm sure it didn't start there, but for some reason, Indians like playing it. That was always one of them. Or we would play Indian games, though. And I can't remember the names, I just remember playing them. One was called *Ko*, where everyone would stand in a circle, and I could be wrong, everyone stands in a circle, and one person is it, you're all facing each other inside the circle, and there's one person who's like it, I think, and you're trying to catch the other—there are two people outside the circle that you're trying to catch, and one person's trying to catch the other, and I think—well, you know, I really can't remember all the details, so this is going to sound silly, but I just remember playing a couple Indian games when I was a kid, at these SILC picnics, but I can't remember the reason why we were doing it.

**PS:** And the Festival of Nations? Which things did you specifically do? You said you danced.

**KG:** I danced a couple of years, I worked at the food booth for many years, I worked in the exhibit, or helped put it together, a couple of years. So I'd probably done all of those things. Every year I was somehow involved, even if it wasn't through SILC, and that's mainly because my mom was very involved also in the Festival of Nations, so my sister and I were always definitely first recruits to go help.

**PS:** Did you enjoy that?

**KG:** Oh, yes. Festival of Nations was great.

**PS:** What was good about it?

**KG:** Oh, the food was excellent.

**PS:** You like to eat.

**KG:** Well, you know, I was a skinny little Indian boy and my main thing when I was a little boy, is I wanted to gain weight and I wanted to get big, so I loved eating, and especially, going and having all those different types of foods, like seventy different countries, or whatever, so that was great.

But then, even like working in the booth was fun. It was always really fun, and I can't give you a specific reason why, but we just always had fun working, trying to get people to eat your food, and trading with the other ethnicities across from you, and trading food, and just always a great experience meeting the people, I think, and explaining your culture to them. It was really fun. I always had fun at that. Dancing was always a little nerve-wracking, in front of all those people, but we did it, and we were little kids and you screw up a little.

**PS:** You're cute.

**KG:** It was fun. Yes, we're cute little kids, so it was fun, it was all worth it.

**PS:** And the culture booth? Do you remember what the exhibits were, some of the years you worked in it?

**KG:** I remember one year it was weddings. I don't know if I worked in that one, but I remember helping my mom create some of the things, the decorations.

**PS:** Such as?

**KG:** There's these things—it's called a *mandap*, it's like a platform or whatever, with four pillars, you know, the four corners, covered by like a sheet or something, going into an apex at the middle. We didn't have it all the way to that level, but we had basically the pillars, and they had used glitter and different colors on a styrofoam background to show just Indian design and that type of thing. And someone designed it and we helped put the sparkles on it and painting and just doing stuff like that. Mainly, I remember, just sitting at the booth, manning the booth, and working there to answer questions, to talk about SILC or talk about Indian culture, that kind of stuff. That's what I mainly remember.

**PS:** And what kinds of questions did people ask you? Do you recall any of them?

**KG:** A lot of them were about the specific booth, maybe, because every year there would be a theme for all the exhibits, and every country would try to have their theme for their country. So that would always be one of them, whatever the booth was, ask us more questions, or get more in depth.

Other ones were, were you born here, I mean, just personal questions, I think, about India, where I was from, do I speak the language, and telling them about SILC. I guess I can't think of specifics. This was a long time ago, so I can't think of the specifics, but I mean, there were always lots of questions. People at the Festival of Nations were inquisitive people, generally, because they were there in the first place, so it was always interesting meeting those people.

**PS:** Did you ever feel like you were part of the display? Oh, look, there's a little Indian boy?

**KG:** No. No, I never felt that way.

**PS:** So when they would ask questions about you, like, "What language do you speak?" and "What kind of food do you eat?" you didn't mind that?

**KG:** No, I didn't mind. I was a little kid. I mean, you just answer them and it didn't seem abnormal to me at all. It was all just inquisitive people, enthralled by the beauty of your exhibit

or just of your country. Or maybe not enthralled, but just asking questions. So I never thought anything of it, I guess.

**PS:** So for you it was just normal?

**KG:** Yes, going there and doing that. I mean, definitely, it was normal. If I was just walking the street, it would be a little strange, I think, where people would just interrupt, you know, and stop and talk to you about it. But there it was, I think, expected, and you were told to answer, I mean, maybe not personal questions, but being a little kid, personal really didn't mean that much to me. There wasn't that much to keep personal, I guess, as a little kid.

**PS:** We don't have a lot of secrets when we're tiny.

**KG:** Exactly.

**PS:** Now at this time in your life, you're not married, right?

**KG:** Correct.

**PS:** Do you think you might be someday?

**KG:** Yes.

**PS:** And do you think you'll have children?

**KG:** Yes.

**PS:** Now these are personal questions. You don't have to answer them. But if you have children, do you think you'd send your children to SILC?

**KG:** Oh yes, most definitely.

**PS:** And why?

**KG:** Well, I want them to get the experience I had, and hopefully even more so, but you know, they need to learn the language and learn about their culture, because no matter how Americanized you can feel—I feel completely American, let's put it that way, I do. I feel like an American, basically. An Indian-American, I guess I would say.

But I always know that I'm Indian first, in a way. And a lot of people say, "Well, you're an American now. You're an American." And I say, "Yes, but there's one thing that I'll never get past, and people's perceptions will never get past, is that they see me as an Indian." Even if I've

lived here all my life, maybe after I start talking and they realize, “Oh, he doesn’t have an accent. He must be born here or something.” Still, you’re always perceived as an Indian first and then, oh, you are an American, too.

So that’s something I’ve realized over the years, because before, as a kid, you would just try to be an American. I want to just fit in. But as you get older, you realize, you know, I’m never going to completely fit in, so it’s something you have to accept and embrace. At least I did, and that’s what helped, I think. And I think that would help my kids, when I have kids.

And the biggest thing, it will teach them that there are other kids like you. You don’t see them in your elementary school, but they’re just like you. And that’s the biggest thing, is knowing that you’re not alone, that there are other people out there that have the same interests as you. They might go to a different school, but we’re all the same nonetheless, and there are other people like you. I think that’s the biggest thing, is feeling the belonging, I think, more than anything.

**PS:** So if the SILC school hadn’t been there, do you think your parents would have still been doing these Saturday night dinner parties with all the other Indian families?

**KG:** Oh, no doubt. That was their entertainment. That was their going out to the bar for a lot of people here. They had dinner parties, and that was their way of socializing. It was always dinner parties, every weekend, they were booked, solid. I swear, going months in advance, they had dinner plans. And now my parents, as we, as kids, have left the nest, that type of thing, and they’ve gotten a little older, they don’t participate in that, they don’t have dinner parties as often now. They’re not as big as they used to be. I can’t say why that is, but I just remember, as a kid, we did that a heck of a lot more. It was, every weekend almost, there would be a dinner party somewhere that we’d have to go to.

**PS:** So do you think you would have gotten that connection to the Indian community with or without SILC, you personally?

**KG:** I could have, I guess, but this brought it—because generally, in those dinner parties, it would a lot of times be a Gujarati family, Gujarati families, from the Gujarati Samaj. And this way, I met so many other ones, so it was interesting in that respect, too, is that I met more Indians than just Gujaratis.

**PS:** Now you’ve referred, in passing, a couple of times to the distinctions that the various language groups or geographic groups from India make, among themselves, and that seems to be one of the things that SILC was very successful at overcoming. But you still know that that separation is there.

**KG:** Yes, I mean, it’s definitely there. If I think about many of the Gujarati families, they pretty much, I mean, their dinner parties are with other Gujaratis, and Bengali people, they have a Bengali organization. All the regions generally have their own organization, so in a sense, even

though SILC has been able to unify kids in our parents' social lives, they've still stayed separated, I think, a little bit.

And I don't think there are hostile feelings between any of the groups, but everyone just has different beliefs, I think, a little bit, and that carries over in an organization that's a little religious-based, a little more practice-based, where, you know, of rituals and that type of stuff, of daily life, or having a Diwali festival, might be different the way we, as Gujaratis, celebrate it, as maybe another Indian would. And so I think there is still definite separatism in the Indian community here, but at SILC I think it's washed away. The kids don't see it. Maybe in your language class you are, but overall, you still spend time with all the other students.

**PS:** So now that you have taken your place as an adult in your community, you have some, it's sounds like, kind of passing contact with other Indians, that you knew as a child. Are there any other Indian people in your work setting or in your neighborhood or other places that you connect with, on a regular basis?

**KG:** Most definitely. I guess at workplace, yes, there are a few Indians. I've met some professionally, and I still keep contact with them, and it's something, as a kid, it's funny that, we would be walking down anywhere, Anytown, USA, we'd see an Indian, my parents would like either nod, smile, say hi, stop and talk to them. It was always just something they did, no matter what Indian kind you were, right? It was this, you know, just a natural bond that they all had, I think. As kids, we'd always be like, "Oh, you don't know them. What are you doing?" We'd get embarrassed as little kids, or at least my sister and I did.

And now, I see myself doing the same stuff, where, I'll be at work, when I first started, and I'd see an Indian and I generally wouldn't just go up to anyone and talk to them, unless I somehow had to work with them. A lot of times you just kind of nod first. The second time you nod and the third day you might go up and talk to them, or whatever.

But I know I've met a few people, my first days of Cargill, doing that, and definitely with the computer revolution in this country, and our need on computers, there have been a lot of Indians who have gotten the opportunity to come to America, based on their computer skills, or knowledge of IT [Information Technology]. So in our company, that's no different. We have a lot of Indians in our IT departments. So I've been able to interact with them.

In general, I don't interact with them outside of the workplace. Generally, because they're married, have kids. Pretty much, that's the main reason. It's that we have different interests. At my age, I'm still going out and doing different things with my other friends from college or from high school, or from randomness, I guess, or from SILC or from wherever. It's just different, I think, with the married couples and the people straight from India. It's a little different, I think, their goals or what they do with their spare time.

**PS:** So you can tell a difference between the people who were raised—even though they might be the same age as you—who were raised in India and are now here working as computer professionals, versus you and the other kids that went to SILC and were raised here?

**KG:** I wouldn't say there are glaring differences. I mean, I can say, just a superficial one would be the accent, but that really doesn't mean anything, I don't think. I guess I don't want to generalize, in this case, because, really, each person is different.

I have met like, at my work, who now doesn't work there anymore, but he was Indian and he's from southern India, and he traded and I developed a friendship with him and we still contact every couple of weeks, or we're e-mailing each other and going out for dinner and drinks, or whatever. And he's from India and he has an IT background but now he's more of a financial, so I mean, I guess, I can't generalize in that respect, and I wouldn't want to.

**PS:** So the distinction seems to be more about whether they're married and have kids yet?

**KG:** Yes, generally, that's—and actually, you know, to tell you the truth, I don't spend time with anyone from my work outside of work. It's not a decision, it's just something that's occurred, that I just haven't spent time outside of work too often, with people from work.

**PS:** I think I've asked most of the questions that are on the list, unless you have other stories you want to tell about things you remember from Festival of Nations or any projects you worked on or special days at school.

**KG:** One thing that was very interesting, or exciting, as a kid, was we had a lady who was from India, who worked for a magazine in India. The magazine was called *Femina*, and she did a story about our school, and interviewed my mom and I think my sister and Vishant Shah and numerous other people. I was still pretty young. But interviewed all these people and wrote this great story, and it was published in India, and so our relatives were able—you know, this is a popular magazine there, were able to get this and see what my mom and all these other moms and dads did for their kids.

And it was just something that was really exciting to see, you know, it had been published in a magazine in India and our family knew about it there. That was something I just remember as being a really cool thing that happened, because it wasn't just someone who worked at SILC, who wrote the story and got it published. It was someone who came here, who had heard about it and said, "I want to do a story on that." So I think that was an exciting little tidbit that happened at SILC.

**PS:** Do you have a copy of that article?

**KG:** I personally don't, but I'm sure my parents do. And I know my relatives in India even do.

**PS:** What you know about Indian culture now, as an adult, having studied it and lived there, off and on, was it pretty radical for a group of Indian women to start a school?

**KG:** From what I know now?

**PS:** Yes.

**KG:** Maybe a little bit, I guess, for their time, they were kind of forging ahead a little bit in the women's movement, I guess. I don't know. I don't think they saw it as that way. I think they saw it as, these are our kids and we're going to do anything we can for our kids. I don't think it was the school so much as making a school. It wasn't the organization that they were trying to create, it was the facilitation of teaching their kids about their heritage.

So I guess, when I think about probably their intent, I don't see it as them trying to be stepping out of the typical, let's say, or the Indian woman's role in India, that is generalized, I think, and in good cases, is true, in India, at least. But when they came here, I think a lot of people broke those molds and were able to come here because they thought differently in those types of respects. But no, I definitely don't think they were that radical for doing it. More than just really cared for their kids.

**PS:** So it was an extension of their mothering?

**KG:** I really think it was, that that's their responsibility to make—that was, they felt, was their responsibility, that they have to teach these kids their language and they thought, "Well, there are probably other people who need this, who can make it easier, so we don't all have to do all the work for each kid." So I think that was the intent, and I think that's their foresight that they saw, is that, we can actually help other kids and our own, and create this organization.

**PS:** Now you said at one point there were about 120 students, or 130?

**KG:** I think there might have been more. I'm guessing, but there was, yes, about that, I would say, 120, 130 students.

**PS:** And then since then, it's kind of flowed back. What do you attribute that to?

**KG:** You know, I haven't been involved in SILC for quite a few years, and I guess I don't want to comment. I mean, I can't comment on that because I really don't know what the reasons are. The only thing I can think of is that there are so many other organizations out there now, providing maybe not the exact same service, but there are Sunday schools for a religion that some people might feel their kids need more than they need—that they can teach them the language in

their house. So I guess I don't really know, and we'd have to ask the administrators, but definitely, I do recognize that that happened, that it has been going down since that peak time.

**PS:** When your someday children are ready to go to SILC school, what would be the things that you would want them to most get? Are there certain languages you'd want them to get, or certain kinds of cultural experiences, or certain foods or dances?

**KG:** You know, you never know how your kids are going to probably react when they're there. If you have a kid and he or she—I guess you never know how your kids are going to react to going to SILC school and if they're going to really embrace it and want to do things. And I guess if that's the case, I would pretty much want them to make their own decision, if they wanted to choose.

Now if not, I guess I would try to push them in the direction of definitely learning Gujarati, or Hindi, I think, based on what my parents and what my sister has done with her kid that's coming on the way soon here. But you know, general knowledge is a given in the SILC school. You take it no matter what.

And then I think from there, depending on the kid, I think it's going to be dance or music, depending on what they're inclined in or what's going on and what we think is going to be the best. It's something that I guess I haven't put too much thought into, but now that I think about it, if the kids are anything like me, I'll probably force them to do certain things that I think will be beneficial that I really found as good things.

I enjoy cooking, but I would wait until they're older to do something like that. But I think dance was good, music was definitely good, yoga. Those kinds of things are, I think, I mean, if the kid is going to go there for that many years, maybe even five, six years, you can allow them to experience many different things, I think, and that will be the best thing to do for it.

**PS:** And my guess is, when your kid says, "I don't want to go anymore, Dad," you'll just say, "Okay, fine, honey." [Laughter]

**KG:** Of course I would, because I would be a reasonable parent. No, I guess I'd probably react the same way my parents did, trying to do what's best for me. But I think in the end if you think the kid's a good kid and has his head on his shoulders, you've just got let them go sometimes.

**PS:** Anything else that you want to share with me tonight?

**KG:** No. I think that sums it up a little bit.

**PS:** All right. Well, thank you very much for taking the time.

**KG:** Thank you, Polly.

SLC Oral History Project  
Minnesota Historical Society