Shruti Mathur Narrator

Polly Sonifer Interviewer

July 9, 2000

PS: This is Polly Sonifer, interviewing Shruti Mathur on July 9, 2000. How are you tonight?

SM: Good.

PS: Thanks for meeting with me. I appreciate that. So tell me about yourself, tell me how old you are right now and all the important information I need to know about you.

SM: Okay. I am eighteen. I just graduated this year from Mounds View High School in Arden Hills. I plan to go to the University of Minnesota next year and I'm looking to study journalism. I like writing. I have a brother who's thirteen. He's not in the house right now which is why it's quiet.

PS: You live with both your parents here?

SM: Yes, I live with both my parents and my grandpa. He lives here with us, too. He came over ten years ago, I think. He moved in with us.

PS: What part of India is your family from?

SM: Originally, they're from the north, but we reside in Andhra Pradesh, in Hyderabad. The state of Andhra Pradesh in south central India.

PS: So what language did your family speak?

SM: Hindi. Mainly Hindi. In Hyderabad, the native language is Telugu, but again, since my family is from the northeast, we spoke mainly Hindi. And I think my grandpa can still speak Urdu, which is a language, I think, spoken mostly by Muslims. I'm not sure.

PS: Did you ever live in India?

SM: Never lived in India. I was born here, in Minneapolis, even.

PS: Oh, all right. But your parents both came from India?

SM: Both, yes.

PS: How long ago did they come?

SM: 1970 something. 1972, 1975, 1976, something around there. My dad came first and then my mom came.

PS: And you're their firstborn?

SM: Yes.

PS: The oldest.

SM: The oldest.

PS: The big sister. And you went to SILC [School of India for Languages and Culture] school. And tell me about how you were involved in SILC school, how you've been involved in SILC.

80,101

SM: I couldn't tell you about the first time I went to SILC, because apparently it was when I was first born, because my mom, I think, was one of the founding people, so I guess she used to take me there, and I used to just crawl around the halls. I think probably a lot of people remember me crawling around and peeking in their door. I was a little kid, so yes, that was how I got started in SILC. And then, you know, when I was five or six, I think they have an age where you can start, I could finally start and be a SILC student myself.

PS: So were you pretty excited about that?

SM: Yes, I think I was pretty excited at the time. Everyone, I think, probably goes through phases where it's that. I think at first you're probably excited to start and then it's like, "I don't want to go to SILC," and your parents drag you, and then later on you realize the importance of it and it's just like a cycle, sort of.

PS: So you were five or six when you first started going?

SM: Yes, initially.

PS: And what did you start to study there?

SM: I started, and my language, of course, was Hindi. I probably started in General Knowledge I, because they have different levels, and I couldn't tell you my elective. It probably was music at first, because I think new students are always required to take music, so I probably started out in music. I'm pretty sure, actually. I remember music.

PS: And your mom was a teacher there?

SM: Yes. She taught Hindi, and my dad actually also taught SAP, which was SILC Achievement Project. I wanted to take that and the year that I was old enough to take that, they canceled it.

PS: He just didn't want to have you in class.

SM: That's what I think. [Laughter]

PS: So you were involved with SILC for twelve years, from five until eighteen?

SM: Yes. Wow, yeah, I guess so. I never thought about the numbers.

PS: And you just finished this last year? Did you go this last year?

SM: I didn't go as a student. I was a teacher.

PS: You were a teacher. Okay, so you were eleven years a student.

SM: I started teaching—well, because last year, I wasn't really a student but I wasn't really a teacher. I think maybe officially I was registered as a student but I didn't really take classes like normally. But last year I didn't teach. I just was there, and I showed up every week and helped out, I guess. So I was just like the go-fer [an assistant, go for this, go for that]. So I don't know how many years I was officially a student and how many years I was officially—you know what I mean. I was just gray matter.

PS: Gray matter, okay. And this next year, you're going to be at the U of M?

SM: Yes.

PS: So what does that mean for your lifetime at SILC?

SM: I don't know. I'm kind of thinking maybe no, because I love being there but I don't know how difficult it will be to commute. I mean, for sure, I'll probably be involved in like the big school events. It will be totally fun to come back. But I think, my thoughts on the matter, probably our family as a whole probably will just be kind of pulling out as we get older and older. New people take over.

PS: Does your brother go?

SM: Yes, he goes, quote, unquote. He's usually busy. He has a lot of things with [Boy] Scouts, so a lot of times he has Scouts on Saturdays, and the other times he just won't go. He refuses to

speak Hindi at all. I'm taking Hindi at the U, actually, right now. I took that instead of Spanish or German or French.

PS: Because I bet that was easy for you. A fluff course.

SM: Yes, you bet.

PS: So you were a student and a helper, and at first you said you were really excited when you were five or six?

SM: Yes, because finally I could meet all the big kids, I think. It was like, now you can be with the big kids. I'm pretty sure I was excited.

PS: And how long did it take you to say, "Ah, I would rather sleep in,"?

SM: Let's see. Maybe about two years. I remember around second or third grade just, "No." That was a phase where I gave up everything. I quit soccer, I quit dance. I don't know, I became a virtual recluse at the age of eight or something.

PS: Really?

SM: Not really. I don't know, but I just remember going through like probably my early teenage rebellion at the age of eight or something.

PS: You were precocious.

SM: I guess so.

PS: So you went because your mom and dad said you got to go, and you thought it was really cool.

SM: Yes, and then probably through elementary school and a good chunk of middle school, I was not as excited that I had to go.

PS: So you were willing to go even though you didn't want to, just because they said you had to.

SM: Well, at first I wanted to, but then after a while—yes, because they made me go. I mean, I didn't really have a choice. Maybe part of me wanted to go, you know, but it was still such a hassle because I think that was still at the point where SILC was on Sundays at eleven o'clock, instead of Saturdays at 12:30, and it was just like, oh, they made you get up and be out of the house by 10:30. I just wanted to sleep in and watch cartoons.

PS: So it really wasn't that you hated going to SILC, it was more—

SM: It was just a hassle. It wasn't SILC necessarily, I don't think. I'm not sure. I just know that pretty much everyone goes through that phase. Almost everyone I've talked to.

PS: Do some of their parents just let them quit coming?

SM: Yes.

PS: And other parents say, "You gotta go."

SM: Yes.

PS: And if the parents make them go, then what?

SM: Then, I think, usually they get more of an appreciation with it. I'm sure SILC turns up in a lot of college essays. You know, it was always positive then. I know for a fact that one of my friends—he wrote his on SILC and got into Berkeley.

PS: As we go through the rest of the time together, I just want you to feel free to tell stories about any things that you remember, even if you think they're really long-winded and you shouldn't go on and on and on about it, just go ahead and do that, because that's perfectly acceptable. So I'm going to ask you first a series of questions about what you studied and what you got out of what you studied, how it was for you being there.

SM: Well, I studied Hindi and General Knowledge and cooking and dance and yoga and whatnot. And in Hindi, I guess, I don't know if I—like, there was a point in Hindi where I stopped learning because I was eventually older than everyone and past everyone. And so then, I don't know, it was just like, it was kind of weird, it was like reaching a plateau or leveling off or something like that. Because I knew I could go higher than the plateau or something like that, but you know, I just kind of leveled off. I wasn't learning anything, I was just kind of sitting there, but I did learn it.

I definitely have an ear. I don't know if it's because of SILC or from being around the house, but I recognize words and I can hear things, but I still have trouble with responding and that's partially why I took Hindi at the U, because I want to communicate, not just understand what they're saying and reply back in English. You know, that's not fair to make them speak in English all the time either. I get nervous about speaking because when I do open my mouth all my relatives make fun of me.

PS: Really?

SM: Yes, because I sound awful.

PS: Even grandpa?

SM: No, not really. I don't know. They still kind of laugh because I guess it's kind of like someone coming up to you, and it would be like, "I that pencil me write," or something like that. That's probably pretty much how I speak like and I don't know, I don't laugh at people like that when they're first learning English, but I don't know, I guess it's acceptable to laugh at me or something.

PS: Maybe when it comes from the mouth of a cute little child, it's kind of cute.

SM: Yeah, probably.

PS: But it's still easy to take it the wrong way.

SM: I think it's just almost one more thing, they're so American.

PS: She can't even speak Hindi.

SM: In General Knowledge—I found myself using a lot of what I learned in General Knowledge in school. Because what General Knowledge is, is like social studies, basically, and I guess what you get out of General Knowledge depends on the kind of teacher you had and who you had for a teacher. Like I remember one year, I had a teacher who was quite strict. He made us take notes and I think we usually actually had final exams and worksheets and it was like real school. And that's probably about the time I didn't like SILC, is my guess, you know, when it stopped being fun.

But I found myself learning a lot, like a lot of times, impartial facts, like I wrote this once in an essay thing that I wrote for the SILC yearbook, like I remember that Shah Jahan built the Taj Mahal for his wife, and he was imprisoned for it. I don't remember why or anything, but I know a lot more background. I know when India's Independence Day is and how long they were under British rule and things like that, and it ended up coming back to me in high school, especially because in eleventh grade, we have this World Areas class, and I happened to get Asia for an area.

My teacher happened to be the one assigned to Asia. I think it's a stupid system because I didn't learn anything about Latin America or the Middle East but anyway, I happened to get Asia. One of our sections in Asia was, of course, India and ironically enough, in the middle of the India section I went to India, but I found that everyone else had to do their worksheets from the book, and flip back in pages, finding the answers. I just went through all the answers and just wrote my answers down and I was done. It was just a piece of cake, because it was all up here and I just knew. Kind of cool, you know, because everyone's coming to me for answers.

My teacher, I think, probably dreaded my class because he had to get up there and say those names, and here was someone who knew he was saying it wrong. It'd be like, "Actually, you say it this way." So I had fun with that, like, that was cool. I think it's probably kept me more open to other cultures and whatnot and more understanding. I can perhaps say names or Thai or something like that, just because I have more of an understanding of hard-to-pronounce things. I can't pronounce like Polish names, for example. You put a couple of Zs and Ks and Ys and I don't get it.

PS: Sure, a whole different system.

SM: Right. But I can, you know—I don't remember what my point was.

PS: It's okay. I have more questions.

SM: Good.

PS: You also took cooking. What was cooking like?

SM: Cooking was fun. Cooking was the class that everyone wanted to take, but they finally had to set an age limit because they had stoves and whatnot. It was so exciting, because you got to actually eat when you cooked and stuff like that. I don't remember recipes or anything. Like I was just saying to my mom the other day, "What am I going to do? I can't cook." I can make like *paratas*, but that's just like bread. You need something to go with that. I can't make chicken. What am I going to do?

It was kind of fun, but especially since we have different cooking teachers, like we have a cooking teachers from north India and south India. They're such different areas, and the food, like north Indian food is thicker and creamier, and south Indian is waterier. I'm partial to north Indian food, which explains things.

And I don't know, yoga was always fun, because it was like the chance to stretch out and stuff like that. It was just kind of cool, especially now when everyone is doing it. I went into the high potential program at school, and one of the high potential things was a yoga class for relaxation, and they taught us like the sun posture, and I knew it all, and I knew the actual real terms for the thing.

It kind of amuses me now. I probably seem very condescending or smug or something like that, but it's amusing to watch everyone. It's like, yoga. I took this when I was eight. I still remember these things. Dance class. I danced at Festival of Nations, seriously, every year, every year until one year. I was kind of a tomboy and I'd rather be climbing trees than dancing, so I kind of balked at dancing, but I think I secretly really liked dancing.

I don't know. Dance class. A lot of times dance class wasn't the whole year. It was like right when Festival of Nations came around, and we started learning the dance and stuff. And I guess it was fun, going out there and performing at Festival of Nations and stuff like that.

PS: Who was your dance teacher?

SM: Oh, it changed all the time. It changed all the time.

PS: Every year?

SM: Every year. I think for a while, Rita Auntie, [Rita Mustaphi] she does Nrita Jyoti, the Kathak Dance Theatre around here. I think she used to teach us. I remember that faintly. I think she used to teach us. Usually we had a series of other teachers. I think Uma Auntie taught us for a while. I have to admit, I didn't really like the south Indian dances very much, and for a while we had a string of south Indian teachers. And then about two or three years back, my friend, Veena, took over the dance program. So we had a lot more fun. We did kind of more film-y songs instead of classical south Indian or anything like that.

PS: Film-y songs. Tell me about film-y songs.

SM: Songs from the Hindi movies which are a species unto their own, I guess, I don't know. I think that the thing that sums them up the most, if you ever watch *The Simpsons*, there's this one *Simpsons* episode where Apu, the Kwik-E-Mart clerk, moves in with the Simpson family and a while later they had an outtake show, quote, unquote, and one of the outtakes was Apu sitting the family down.

He goes, "This movie was a great hit in India," you know, and they're all sitting down to watch this Hindi movie. And you see this girl walking across the screen, you know, the trees, going, "I love Johnny," and singing, and then all of a sudden, someone crushes through a window and they start yelling at each other and going 'blah, blah, blah, blah,' and then they start fighting, and then all of a sudden, dance music comes on and everyone starts dancing. Oh, when I saw that, I started laughing till tears were coming out of my eyes.

PS: Because?

SM: It was Hindi movies in a nutshell. Obviously, they, *The Simpsons*, have an Indian writer, because they completely capture it. Oh, I just started laughing, because that's what it is. It's like huge, dramatic, four-hour plot lines, and lots of melodrama, tears, and fighting and romance, and then the occasional random dancing thrown in. It's like one second they're in the mountains, and the next second they're on top of a train, dancing and singing. It's like, where did this come from and why are they allowed on top of the train? You know what I mean? It's funny. And the guys are all wearing their Gap clothes. Like I remember, this one film, this guy's wearing a big Gap t-shirt, and he was the cool one.

PS: So it was more fun to dance dances to the film-y music than to the classic music?

SM: Yes.

PS: So what kind of steps did you do to the—

SM: I guess it was probably closer to—It was like American/Indian, like a mix. Like you know how they have Spanglish? I guess it was kind of like that, like just a total mix, because, well, you'd never dance it though, in America. Like if Americans saw that it'd be like, that's Indian. But if an Indian saw the stuff, they'd say it's American. So it's like not distinctly anything. It's like kind of folk, because it's kind of like hip-hop. Like Indian, with a hip-hop twist, or something like that.

PS: Almost like disco with Indian moves.

SM: Yeah, there you go. Exactly, actually.

PS: So how did that go over? Did you dance that at Festival of Nations?

SM: Yes.

PS: How did it go over at Festival of Nations?

SM: I think it went real well. I think they loved it. To be honest, you know, it gets kind of boring sitting there. Everyone's doing their traditional dance and it's a lot of, excuse me, Scandinavians doing their little walking around in circles and playing their [makes musical sounds]. You know, like, why? I think it was kind of, probably kind of cool, like a huge flash of color and boom, boom, boom, You know, it was like probably more people could relate to than strange horns or something like that, you know what I mean?

PS: And people in the Indian community thought that that was okay for you to show up with this film-y music? That's not considered trashy?

SM: I think so. Actually, a lot of people do film-y dances nowadays. They're more popular. They go over well, they sell the program tickets.

PS: Are there people that come through town and do film-y dances?

SM: Yes.

PS: Indian performers?

SM: Yes. When we have Holi or Diwali functions, you know, a lot of times the programs, there will be like dances from songs from Dil Se or something like that. A lot of people will do that. We had a dance group for a while, me and my friend, Meera, Veena, and Laxmi. We were the Desi Chicks.

PS: Yes, and what did you do?

SM: We did Indian dances, like to film-y music a couple times. We had actually seriously like three dances, but Veena moved to California and Laxmi dropped out or something, and Meera is going to Winona next year and I'm going to be here at the U.

PS: So what's the play on words with Desi Chicks?

SM: Dixie Chicks.

PS: Oh, Dixie Chicks.

SM: Dixie Chicks out of Desi Chicks.

PS: All right. And Desi means what?

SM: Like Indian.

PS: And where did the Desi Chicks perform?

SM: We performed at the Festival of India. We performed at the—I can't remember if it was the Hindi Mandir or the Geeta Ashram Holi, but I don't know, I think it was the Geeta Ashram's. We performed at Irondale School for their Diversity Day. I think we did that twice or something like that. We had planned on doing more, but it just kind of fizzled out when Veena moved.

PS: So she's obviously not teaching anymore?

SM: No, she just moved in June.

PS: She just finished. So who's going to teach dance in the fall?

SM: I don't know. They probably have a plan. They probably won't think about it until sometime in January when you've got to start training the people for the dance in May.

PS: So these dance classes don't go through the whole year of school?

SM: I think like Veena made an effort, especially with the little kids. Like this year, we actually had two dances. One was one that Veena was teaching, and actually did more of a typical south

Indian dance this year, and another was—I don't know which uncle was doing it, but by a group of Punjabis, and so they did a *bhangra*, the little kids. You know, it's just kind of fun for them to jump around. And I think Veena tried to have a dance class full year, especially because I think she wanted the dance to be really good this year.

PS: So what exactly is a *bhangra*?

SM: Bhangra? It's a typical Punjabi dance. It's a lot of yelling and kicking.

PS: Yelling and kicking? Sounds violent.

SM: Doesn't it? I don't know how to explain a *bhangra* dance.

PS: So are they using sticks, or just their bodies, or are they in circles or pairs?

SM: No, sticks would be a *gharba*, which is another type of dance. They just kind of hop around.

PS: No pattern to it at all?

SM: I think there's a pattern. Oh, actually they do use some sticks in some *bhangra* dancing. I can't remember quite how they use it. So they're hopping around going, "hup, hup, hup, hey," you know, stuff like that, and it's usually the men who do it.

PS: Okay, so this is a boy thing?

SM: Guys. Yeah, I think it's the big macho male thing, or something, I'm not sure. Maybe women do do it, but I've only seen guys.

PS: So the women do this feminine, classical dancing.

SM: I'm not sure what the women do. I think they probably get into it, too. I'm sure they do, but I've only seen men perform it.

PS: Okay, interesting. So when you have to take five classes at the U, are you going to take Indian dance?

SM: I should. I don't think they offer it. I'm actually thinking, like if I don't go on Saturdays, I know that Rita Auntie, I used to do Kathak dance, and I really want to do it again. So I'm thinking of maybe, you know, I think she has a class on Saturday, and that's why a lot of people had conflict with SILC and Rita Auntie's classes. I might try and see if I can somehow find myself transportation to Crystal and start taking that again. I'd really like to.

PS: Does she teach those at her house?

SM: Yes, at her house. I'm pretty sure, unless something has changed in the past, you know, ten years.

PS: So, other subjects that you studied?

SM: At SILC?

PS: Yes.

SM: I think that's basically it. Hindi, General Knowledge, and a variety of the culture courses. I did music, I did yoga. I must have done art. I don't think I ever took the art class, I think probably just mostly my art experience was helping Mom. I don't think I ever took the art class, like making things, but I knew the options.

PS: Tell me what kind of connections you had with the teachers. Obviously, you had a lot of different teachers over the years.

SM: Yes, a lot of different teachers. I remember like one of my teachers, probably because she was younger. Her name was Dimple, which, first of all, I thought was a cool name. She was my Hindi teacher. I just remember her at St. Anthony that year. I remember her teaching us the last letters of the Hindi alphabet. I still use it what I learned. Somewhere near the end it goes 'yuh, ra, la vah, sh.' She taught us a little trick to remember that, something like "Your lover shah" or something like that, and I still use that. I remember us talking about the last couple of letters were like 'aksha, tra, oya.' It sounds like "upchuck." So we started calling it "upchuck trogya" or something. I don't remember what we started saying, but we kind of had fun that year.

I also remember another Hindi class. I think probably my mom was teaching. There was a Hindi like poem, rhyme, sort of thing. It was [says stuff in Hindi]. Basically what it is, is, "Once there was a crow, he was thirsty. There was a jug with some water in it, but the water was kind of low. He put some stones into the water, the water rose up. He drank the water, and that's the end of the story." And "kahani" means story.

And one of the kids, Robin Panda, was trying to show that he knew his Hindi, and "kava" is "crow," and "kahani" is "story," and he was trying to tell us that he saw crows in this backyard. And he goes, "I saw a couple of kahanis in my backyard the other day," which is just "stories," and I just remember that being really funny. I mean, I found the oddest things made me hysterical, back in those days. So you know, someone could hand me a grape and I'd curl up, laughing.

PS: So you laughed at other people's lack of Hindi skills as well?

SM: My teacher laughed, too. It was just funny because I was just imagining a bunch of books lying around in your yard. Can you just see a bunch of books lying around? "I saw a bunch of stories in my backyard," and going around and like trying to scare away the stories, or I don't know. Stories with wings on them or something, I'm not sure.

PS: You said you went to India while you were at SILC, right?

SM: Oh, yes. Several times.

PS: How many times did you go to India?

SM: When I was in SILC, or total?

PS: Total.

SM: I don't know, before I was in second grade, I think I must have gone about three times, but after school started, then I started going by year to school, so I went second grade, fifth grade, seventh grade, ninth grade, eleventh grade, five, so maybe I've been around ten times. My first trip was when I was two months.

PS: You don't remember that one, obviously.

SM: I guess, I could kind of notice with each trip, like me understanding more. Like in second grade, I used to just sit there. I couldn't drink milk after coming back from India in second grade, because in India they have goat's milk and it's unpasteurized and I couldn't drink milk. I just started to drink milk again. Milk, milk. I started to drink milk again for the first time. Because after that, I just couldn't drink milk and you know, it was just, everything was dirty and gross over there. I was just a snotty kid.

Then in fifth grade I went again, and then in seventh grade I went back, and going in seventh grade was after my uncle had died, and I guess it didn't quite hit me then. Like he was one of my favorites. I don't know, he was just a really cool guy, and he lived right nearby.

I used to go over for breakfast every day in second grade, and then in fifth grade, I didn't go over for breakfast. And he used to ask me, "Shruti, why don't you come over for breakfast anymore?" And one time during our trip in ninth grade, they were talking about him, and I went upstairs to my room and just started crying. And everyone's like, "What's wrong, what's wrong?" It was just like, "I never went to breakfast, I never went to breakfast."

For everyone else, they could sit there and discuss it because four years had passed and they realized what happened, but for me it was like it was yesterday. You know, it was our second trip. I mean, I know he doesn't hold a grudge against me for not going to breakfast, but it was still like, I never went to breakfast. It could have been the least I could do, was go to breakfast

every morning. I used to have cereal at his house, and he knew I couldn't drink the milk so he used to have like a little bit of—what do they call it, Ovaltine—so I could make it a chocolate milk, so I could actually drink the milk. I could stomach it then. I don't know. I wrote a story about that.

PS: Well, he touched you.

SM: Yes. He was my mom's favorite uncle.

PS: So he was actually your great uncle?

SM: Well, it's kind of messed up. He was my mom's dad's youngest brother, so he was my mom's real uncle, but he married my dad's sister, so on that side—

PS: So that makes him double-related.

SM: Yes, so then he's my uncle on that side. So his kids are both my cousins, because cousins are considered brothers and sisters in India, so his kids are both my uncle and my brother.

PS: Well, that's strange.

SM: I found out that basically, everyone in my family is connected somehow. We just recently went on a trip to the East Coast, and we visited some people in Boston, some people in New York, and everyone is related to each other.

Actually, my one cousin, the one that I was just talking about who is my brother and my uncle, I was thought he can't be related in any way on both sides because he's already related on both sides. So then he'd be already related. My mom said, "Actually, we're related to his wife, too.' Like her mom's—it's her cousin on her mom's side, so it's not related to him, it's related to her. And I was just like, "Can we not marry outside the family here?" It reminded me so much of *Gone with the Wind*, with the Hamiltons always marrying the Wilkes, you know what I mean? So we'll see with me.

PS: Not thinking about that yet, are you? No.

SM: Not any relatives, no. They're all thinking. I guess last year when I went to India, my dad got several people going up to him, and saying, "You know, your daughter is very nice. When she comes of age, I have a son about her age. He's doing very well. He's looking to go to America." I'm like, "No, please, no."

PS: Because?

SM: I'm seventeen. I have eight years, at least, before I want to get married. I want to finish with college and maybe get established. I don't want to think about that now, and least of all, don't want to be arranged or set up with someone I don't know. It's not necessarily that I don't want to marry an Indian guy, because I want to marry an Indian guy. I just want to marry an Indian guy, but an Indian guy from America, not an Indian from India, because I don't know—I told my mom once this and she just started laughing at me.

I said, "I just don't know what to do with them." I don't know what I'd do with him. It's completely different, it really is, you know, and I wouldn't know what to do. He'd probably be like used to Mommy always being there and making his food and I'd be like, "Yeah, go buy your own TV [frozen] dinner."

PS: Oh, okay. You're all Americanized and independent and he'd be—

SM: Well, sort of, yeah. I don't know, I think it would be two different worlds. Like, even if they are progressive-minded people, it's still, it's too much. I could never go and live in India, for sure.

PS: So you're not sure that you want to have an arranged marriage?

SM: I don't. Actually, I'm pretty sure about that. Maybe that's part of my Americanization, but yes, it just, I don't know. It bothers me. Like I think my mom, she knows that, but I think part of her still wants to stick to tradition a little bit. She says just meet this one guy, or something like that. And then after that, she's like, "Okay, I've done my duty." I think she did that once. I met some guy and she says, "What did you think about him?" She goes, "I've done my duty. Just did a little bit."

I think my parents, I don't know if they were just telling me this or what, but my dad says that he wanted my mom or something like that, but I think it was basically arranged. I don't want to know how they were arranged.

PS: Really?

SM: They must have been. I think their great-grandparents, because my mom was a Mathur before she got married to my dad. I think their great-grandmas were half-sisters or something.

PS: And then she just happened to end up with that same last name, so she didn't even have to change her name. That was handy.

SM: She's been Preeti Mathur always. I thought it was kind of odd.

PS: So you don't know if they had a love marriage or an arranged marriage?

SM: I think it's probably both. I don't know, though. I think it was probably more arranged than anything, because I know my mom was pretty nervous. I remember her telling me, she said, "I didn't know what to do." You know, because my dad's a quiet guy.

PS: That's curious that you don't even want to know about that, about your parents.

SM: Well, no, I mean, I think I've asked them, how were you guys married. But I'm not quite sure, because I think they were arranged. I think you can basically say they were arranged.

PS: I understand that there's different levels of being arranged, too.

SM: Yes. It wasn't like they were born and their parents are like, "Here, you're going to get married when you're thirteen," or something.

PS: But they actually get the consent to it.

SM: Now there's the interview process. I guess you go out on a couple chaperoned dates. Actually, maybe they don't even—I think my mom, the whole time, I think my parents went out, but always, that one uncle I was talking about before, always went out with them, for the chaperoned dates.

PS: Make sure they didn't get into any trouble?

SM: I guess so. I don't know what trouble they'd get into, but hey.

PS: Well, you never know.

So when you went to India as a child, you said that people in India would laugh at you because of the way you spoke Hindi?

SM: Yes.

PS: And that encouraged or discouraged you?

SM: Completely discouraged me.

PS: So while you were there, would you keep trying to speak Hindi or not?

SM: I would maybe try a little bit and then I'd stop altogether, because they all spoke English, you know, so it wasn't a problem. If they all didn't speak English, if we were from a small village, or from, even maybe a town that was a native speaker of my language, because as it is, I couldn't understand the locals, because they were all speaking Telegu, which I really don't

understand. I just know what it sounds like and I know it's Telegu. I'm like, "Okay, sure, anything you say."

So I was totally discouraged. And they quit speaking Hindi around me. And I mean, they know that they can't speak their secrets in front of me, because I completely understand them. But a lot of times, sometimes, they'd speak—even now, they speak to me in Hindi, and I'll just reply back in English. I mean, I understand, I just don't want to speak.

PS: Now what's the block?

SM: I'm scared. I don't want to sound like an idiot, do you know what I mean? I just don't want to sound like, "That pen over there my me write," I just don't want to sound like that. You know, basically, that's what it is. I'm using the wrong tenses a lot, and after I do it a couple times, and my mom corrects me and I know she's trying to help me, but I don't want to speak anymore. It's like a pride issue, I think.

PS: So you just freeze up.

SM: I just freeze up. She's like, "It shouldn't be 'meeray,' it should be 'moojay,'" and I just don't want to say it anymore.

PS: So you don't think that studying Hindi in SILC school helped you fit in or adjust or anything when you would go to India, because you still wouldn't speak?

SM: It probably helped me, because it tuned my ear, definitely. I mean, as for fitting in, there's no way I could have ever fit in, because I was always the American girl. Everyone knew me. I didn't know everyone. There's a bazillion cousins. They're all, "Shruti, *jiji*," and I'm like, "I don't know you." "Shruti, do you remember me?" You know, I don't know what to say. It's like, "Yes, I remember your face." I can't remember everyone, but to them, it's the foreigner girl. I don't know if it's the foreign girl coming home or the foreign girl coming to visit. I never know.

PS: So you had the sense that you were pretty special, and very important to them?

SM: Oh, yes. Because sometimes it was more—I don't like being treated like a glass doll. But anyways, you know, it's like a glass doll, make sure she's happy. It was like, "Hey, people." Especially lately, because I've wanted to get to know things more. It really frustrates me when they speak to me in English, because how am I supposed to learn, you know what I mean? There's no way I can learn if I don't hear it. You can't expect someone to learn something if they've never heard it. It's like a practice makes perfect sort of thing.

PS: So could you listen to a whole Hindi movie right now and understand it?

SM: No, because they kind of talk too fast. It's like, even if you've taken Spanish, and you go watch the Spanish channel, it's like blah, blah, blah, blah, and you're like, well, I know they're talking about going to that one party, but I'm not quite sure what he said. And plus, with Hindi movies, I could understand it even before I spoke Hindi, because the context clues, I suppose, are pretty obvious, and Hindi movies are pretty predictable. You're like, well, I know the guy's mad at the girl, and I know blah, blah, but why exactly that, or what's his name again? I'm sure my mom hated watching movies with us.

PS: How do you know?

SM: "What did he say?" "Shh, I'm trying to listen."

PS: Oh, okay. So she wanted to watch the movie, and you kept interrupting? Okay, that's why God gave us pause buttons.

SM: There you go.

PS: So were there other things, that when you would go to India, that were helpful that you had gotten or learned at SILC, that made it easy to be there, or do you think you would have been okay in India regardless, because you were with your family?

SM: Well, I couldn't even pinpoint anything... like once I learned in General Knowledge that this country was like this but, I couldn't even pinpoint anything specific. I guess it's just more being familiar with something. I guess, it was almost like a scrimmage before going to the real game. Like, being there with other Indians, a kind of mini-India. It's like when you Chicago, Devon Avenue is like mini-India.

Maybe it's that, or it could be like coming home from the big match and bringing a souvenir tape or something like that. You know, being able to connect to the match still. I don't know, because, like a little separate community. It's just a way to keep in contact. In a way, it's way different than India, because in India, I haven't come into contact with north Indians and south Indians and people who speak Malayalam, Telegu, Hindi, and Orissa and what-not. So in a way, it's different. It's almost like everyone's coming here.

Like in India, it's like, my family speaks Hindi and the servants speak Telegu. It's like, you understand Telegu but it's not your language, or whatever like that, and here, it's just like everyone is just kind of clinging to each other like, "You're Indian, too."

My friends make fun of me because I'll see someone that, you know, like "The Rock," he's a wrestler. I'm like, "I think he's part Indian," or everything's always about, something Indian, and I think they're kind of getting annoyed. My friend, he laughs at me, you know.

PS: These are your white American friends?

SM: Yes.

PS: Not your Indian friends?

SM: No.

PS: They understand.

PS: Like, I'll see someone on the street, there will be like an Indian person on the street, and he'll poke me and go like, "Hey, Shruti, do you know him?" I'm like, "Oh, shut up." I mean, I know I must get annoying, saying that constantly and stuff like that. I mean, they're just poking fun at me, but it's true, I do know Indians here. It's probably actually because of SILC. Everyone knows my mom. I don't know everyone, but everyone knows my mom. "Oh, are you Preeti's daughter? Oh, I saw you last time, you were this big. My, you've grown." I think, because of SILC, everyone knows my mom, and because of my mom, everyone knows me, somehow.

PS: You kind of like that, or not?

SM: Yes. Yes, it's nice.

PS: Like you have a place and you know your place. It's 'Preeti's daughter.'

SM: Everyone else has places, like I think, because every other Indian group has their little sub-Indian groups, based on language and area and stuff like that, and we don't have anything like that. So I guess SILC is sort of our thing.

PS: So was there ever any issue? Did you ever consider studying a different language other than Hindi?

SM: No.

PS: Why not?

SM: Because I didn't understand Hindi enough to want to go and learn something else. I wanted to keep learning Hindi even though I wasn't learning anything. I was afraid maybe it [some other language] would confuse me. I don't know. None of the other languages interested me. Like, I didn't want to learn Telegu, I didn't want to learn Tamil, I didn't want to learn Malayalam. It was just like that, because, I don't know, because Hindi is something that's almost kind of universally known, like English or something.

PS: And yet, the kids who studied Malayalam, were they the children of Malayalam-speaking parents?

SM: Usually.

PS: So did most kids study their own parents' language?

SM: Oh, yes. There were a couple times where like they had already—We had a Malayalam girl, she had already learned Malayalam, she was fluent, even before she started taking classes, so she started taking Hindi, too.

PS: Tell me about you and the other kids. How was it being with the other kids?

SM: I liked some of them, and I hated some of them.

PS: Yes? Say why.

SM: Well, it wasn't necessarily always through SILC, but there's this sort of Indian kids that are just like the really snotty kind, and very cliquey. It's like being shoved back to middle school, like, where everyone's very judgmental, and, you know, they give you those looks, and it's like, 'well, get over it.' I'm over it. It's like they're still stuck there or something.

I think I always had fun. I think I had friends, pretty much. I don't know if I had my own little group but I used to hang out with Meera a lot, I think. She's my best friend. We met in kindergarten, actually. I think she used to go there and I think we used to hang out a lot. I don't know, because I don't think I was necessarily a loner, because I've never been a loner, but I don't think I had any like close friends.

PS: At SILC.

SM: At SILC. It was kind of weird, like the close friends that I had were the people that my parents hung out with. It was Manas, Arjun and Veena and all them, but at SILC, we didn't talk because we were stuck in this thing like boy and girl, so we just didn't talk there. They were my friends but we just didn't talk. I don't know. I never really thought about that.

Because I do know that the part of SILC I loved was milk and cookies, which was like the social time. Everything for SILC was for milk and cookies. Everyone will tell you that. My mom was asking me today. She's like, "Why don't you think of something about SILC? She asked you to think about something for SILC" And I'm like, "Okay, I've already thought of it. Milk and cookies." Milk and cookies was SILC to us, and that was also the social hour. You must have talked to people about it. I couldn't tell you any names, you know what I mean? Like, it's kind of sad.

PS: What does that tell you, in retrospect?

SM: I don't know. I don't know. Because I guess, I don't get along with them either, the Indian kids, because I'm not very picky like that, or whatever, I don't know.

PS: You're not very picky.

SM: I don't know. I think—I don't know if they think I'm too loud or what it is, like maybe I don't have enough status for them, or something. They just don't seem to like me, and I'm like, okay, I've got Meera and stuff like that. Because I have a lot of friends.

You know, it's like I'm a very social person. I don't remember specific names or anything like that. I remember the people that I looked up to, and I do remember hanging around and playing at SILC. I don't remember who with, at all. I don't know, that's kind of weird. I don't know who I hung out with at SILC. I don't know what to think.

PS: Did people pair off into pairs, or were there little clumps?

SM: Clumps.

PS: Okay. And what were the clumpings divided by? What language they were studying, or their age?

SM: A lot of times, age. Age. But a lot of times it was also age and the language they spoke, because I remember it was like Gujarati girls and stuff like that, back when we had that, or whatever.

PS: How did you see SILC change over the years?

SM: Definite decline in population. So much less people. And definite decline in—I don't know how to say this without sounding snobbish or something like that, but like, kids of Indian descent who are living with Indian parents and kids who are adopted. Kids who are adopted, we have like more, you know what I mean, like American parents of Indian kids coming, we have more of those. I don't remember having that many way back when. I don't know if it was because people didn't adopt Indian kids or what, but now we have less people with Indian parents and more people with American parents, I guess.

PS: And how does that change things?

SM: I guess we have a lot less volunteers. Honestly, there's kind of probably less of a social barrier, because everyone gets along. Because Indians are big gossips, I'll be the first to say. I mean, we gossip. Like, "Oh, did you hear? Did you hear?" Like, I notice that when I'm with Meera. We just totally gossip about everyone else in the Indian community. It's kind of funny. But yes, so I guess it's like, maybe we've eliminated some of those gossips, but we still have them, but not so prevalent. I guess there's probably less cold feelings, I don't know really.

PS: Cold feelings?

SM: I guess. I don't know, because I always feel that when you get divided into the separate groups. You know, it's like group, group, group, you know what I mean? Like, I've always felt like that about things. But it's just like, why are we dividing? It's kind of weird, like you can almost feel like—and they all sit there and talk their own language, in their own groups. God knows what they're saying, except for themselves. So it's like a shut-out, you know.

PS: So that always felt very isolating for you?

SM: Yes, it's probably nice, you know, to be able to talk to people in your language and stuff like that for them, but in a way, it was almost isolation.

PS: But it was the grown-ups doing that, right?

SM: Yes.

PS: What language did the kids speak when they spoke to each other?

SM: English. They all spoke English. That was probably more deliberate. Kids can be mean. Probably a more deliberate shutout or said something. I don't remember.

PS: What do you mean, the kids could be mean? By speaking English?

SM: Kids can always be mean. Do you what I mean? Like kids can just be mean. Like they probably said something, you know what I mean? Like, if you didn't want somebody to hang out, you probably just have to give them a look or something. Looks are huge with kids.

PS: But they wouldn't shut people out by using a different language?

SM: No, I don't think any of us had that much experience.

PS: So you wouldn't have been able to say the things you wanted to say? Like the Gujarati girls couldn't go over and speak Gujarati and exclude you Hindi students?

SM: Right, right. They probably could, but I don't think they did. I don't know why. Like, we kind of used Hindi at school sometimes. Like I remember, with one of my Indian friends, she was telling me, she was just, "Look at that guy in front of us. Look at his pants." They were complete floodwater [too short] pants, you know, before that was in style, you know. It was just kind of funny, because—it was one of the few times I've actually used Hindi like that. That was kind of conspiratorial, in school. Everyone else, you're like, you sound like you're talking like

gobbledygook. I can go, "blah, blah." They'd be like, "Yeah, sure. You said the exact same thing you did before."

PS: Was it kind of fun to make comments about these guy's pants? Admit it, you're a snob, right?

SM: Yes, it was fun. I was thinking about it already, and she just voiced it for me.

PS: Let's see if there are things that I've been meaning to ask you that I haven't yet. Oh, what was the most valuable thing that you got out of attending SILC? The whole thing of it?

SM: I guess just the feeling of self, maybe.

PS: Feeling of self.

SM: Self, you know, like getting to know maybe where I or my parents came from. It's not something I recognized, or was easy to recognize back then, like something I'm recognizing now and everyone else is recognizing too or something like that. It's kind of weird, like I finally—it was, oh it's the weirdest thing. I try not to cry in school, especially not in class. You know, I would if—I'm, you know, I'm emotional. And it's usually over something that like, so and so said something mean to me or something.

I shouldn't say "the other day." School got out so long ago, but it was near the end of the year. We had just finished Tim O'Brien's *The Things They Carry*. It's a book dealing mainly with Vietnam. And I cried in front of my entire class that day, how embarrassing, and they were all paying attention to me because I was the one speaking because the teacher had this practice. She wanted us to go through the decision process Tim O'Brien had to go through. Either flee to Canada, or go with the war.

And everyone divided themselves out. We had the gung-ho Republican, defense is great, yeah, kill 'em all, sort of guy over there, and the other guy, like, "No, we don't need this," he was over there. And everyone kind of, you know, we had more of those and more of those, and we had a couple of us, it was kind of divided, and then eventually made a decision.

There's were three of us, we were like, "Can't we just stand here in the middle?" because we didn't know what to do. I thought for a long, long, long, long time, and finally my teacher said, "You've got to pick a side," and they picked to go over to the war. It was definitely like a huge majority. And everyone's over there, "Come on, Shruti, come over here, come over here." And I was like, "But I picked to go over there."

And then she asked to share why we did that. And the reason why I did that is because, for me, and like a lot of my peers, like, our parents came over in like the seventies. It wasn't necessarily for freedom because it's not like my parents were oppressed or anything like that, but in a way, it

was freedom. Like my mom was noticing something about that. Like, you know, it was like they came over for opportunity and they came over so they could raise us like this, and give us—and they've given up a lot like that.

And I was born in this country and I was born a citizen and as part of citizenship it says, you know, if there is a war, you will support your country, and you know, this is my country, and like, that's my country and this is my country, and who am I to say that, you know, like, "No, I'm not going to do what you say," when I've been given all this.

My parents came. And that was one of the first times I really appreciated what my parents did. You know, it's sappy and emotional. And like there was one other girl who totally understood where I was coming from, because her parents had come from Latin America. It was so embarrassing. I just sort of burst into crying. Why am I crying? I just started crying while I was telling everybody. I was just bawling about it. I think my teacher was even kind of shocked, like, "Oh, my God, she's crying." I mean it was kind of weird, but I don't know.

I guess, you know, it was just a chance, like going way back to the subject, it was just a chance to like get to know other Indian kids. Like not feel like the outsider, because there are so many Indian kids here who've never had that opportunity, who are just like—you look at them like, "Oh, my God, that girl is so American," you know what I mean? Like Meera or some people say that, you know, like they've been to India and they don't know anything about it, and they're just like, "Yeah, my parents are Indian," you know, or something.

It's like, I don't know, I guess it was just a chance to get to know other Indian people and be able to hang out like that. And I think it was kind of important because, I mean, people can be like, "Well, that's great," or something like that, but you know, you have your church and you go and affiliate with your own specific denominations. It's the same thing, it's just being with people that you know and who understand you and know where you're coming from and stuff like that.

I guess it's just probably a place to share things. I think it's probably important more for our parents, you know, to be able to catch a hold, but it was important to us because it was showing us, it was teaching, you know what I mean? Like a lot of people commend me and say, "You have a good sense of heritage," or whatever, like that, and culture, like, you know where you're coming from and stuff. I probably owe a lot to SILC and to my parents for making me go to SILC and stuff like that, because, you know, I wouldn't know. I wouldn't understand really. It kind of just made me—like I didn't realize that, obviously, until like two or three years ago.

And I guess, just because, like, probably if I had known it and had it taken away from me, then maybe I would have felt it, you know, but since it's always been there, it was like, "Oh, I have to learn it for myself," sort of thing and so, I guess, yeah, it's just probably, I know where I'm coming from more, you know.

And it comes out in the weirdest things, like, my mom's going to be embarrassed that I told you this story, but like, today we were saying to my mom—because it's part of Indian hospitality to offer snacks, you know. And she's like, "Well, what should I offer her today?" I'm like, "Indian snacks and American snacks." She goes, "Well, what kind of American snacks?" I'm like, "I don't know. Americans don't give out snacks when you first come in."

You know, it's just like the littlest things, like you will invite someone in to sit down and have a drink of water, even if they're just stopping through. Like my mom, like some work people came in with a couch the other day, and she offered them a Coke and they were really surprised, like, you know, but that's just part of it. Like you offer them a Coke.

We had someone come in and do an article on my dad for a cooking thing that he did, and you know, we expected her to stay for dinner and sample everything and sit with us, and we set the table nice and everything like that, and invited her to stay and she was knocked off her socks. She was completely surprised. She goes, "You want me to stay and eat dinner?" "Of course, we made this for you. You're not just going to watch. You're going to sit down and eat and not just sample it. We want you to experience a full Indian meal." And she's like, "Well, let me call my husband."

You know, she was totally surprised, and she said something in the article, like, you know, it was an Indian welcome. Ironically, that same night, two of our friends came over and stayed for dinner, because that's just the way it is. And she wrote that in the article, she's like, "You know, people always say the coffee pot's always on, but people in India really mean it." It's just like the Indian welcome. That's just the way it is.

And I notice the difference. I notice that with my friends. I don't know if it's partially because of who I am and how my parents raised me, just even, as they raised me, apart from Indian, but like, some of my friends are really stingy, you know what I mean? It's like, why wouldn't you do that? Like if we were presented with an actual situation of giving, like literally giving your shirt off your back, and I totally would have figured out a way to try and give this guy walking around without a shirt, the shirt off my back.

I'm like, well, you're wearing two t-shirts, why don't you give me one of yours, and I can give him this t-shirt, because I don't really like it, or something like that. My friend's like, "Like I'd give some mobile guy off the street my t-shirt." I'm like, "But it was like ten dollars at Target." I don't know if that's like Indian, or how I was raised, but it's like, why wouldn't you?

Going back to that—freedom—like when we were in Washington, just on July Fourth, the same time they were having this folklore festival and my mom was just noting that there were Hare Krishnas running around everywhere. Excuse me for being snotty, I don't really like them. I don't like them very much. It's like, converting is not part of Hinduism, and I just don't like the way they worship, but I'm not going to say anything.

But my mom's like, "Where else, on the Fourth of July, Independence Day, in the nation's capitol, could you have these people?" They had a huge section of the mall, and they were chanting and had their fires and propaganda up everywhere. My mom was like, "Where else, but in the nation's capitol, on Independence Day, can these people have a huge chunk of the mall and be preaching their religion, anywhere else? Only in America." We were right next to the people, the Mormons were handing out testimonials and the Hare Krishnas were going around and these people were here, and these people were here. And my mom's like, "Where else could you get this?"

PS: So that could never happen in India? The Hare Krishnas don't solicit in India?

SM: I don't think so. I haven't seen them. They're always American guys who shave their heads to renounce themselves and they've gone completely, I personally think, off the deep end. You know, gone too far in trying to get to know their spiritual self.

And you know, like, there are problems in India with the missionaries. I mean because of the tactics the missionaries were using. Like there's a huge uproar, because a lot of times the missionaries—I don't know why you'd want to do this, because you wouldn't have true believers in your faith but they'd use tactics such as bribery, with money, and like, "We'll build you a house if you promise to believe in our lord," you know what I mean? And it's like, that's not true faith, and a lot of people are just getting really annoyed that India is ruining the economy, losing culture, etc., etc., etc. And I think a couple of Christian missionaries were actually killed in riots and stuff like that, so you know, and actually, there are not a lot of places you could have something [like the Fourth of July] going on like that. It's kind of cool.

And I think in SILC, we didn't just learn about one thing, you know what I mean? We learned about—a lot. Even in school, I found it biased, like sure, we learned about India, but honestly, I know more about Latin America than I ever cared to know. Like, it's very specific, and what we teach in our school in very menial. It's like kind of odd like that.

PS: Like what specific things do you learn in school? In public school?

SM: Yes, you know how everything's always kind of—it's a little bit one-sided, do you know what I mean? Like, just a little.

PS: It's been a long time since I was in public school, so help me out.

SM: It's not really one-sided. Like, they're striving more and more and more to have a global view, but you know, you still have your textbooks where the—for example, the Civil War [Revolutionary War]. The American revolutionaries were the heroes, and the British were the bad guys. The British were probably also trying to defend their colony. This was a little bank they had there, you know. So you always hear that.

And like with India, there's still kind of almost a condescending view. It's not a down and dirty view. It's like, people still look at India as kind of being like—I mean it's dirty and yucky and stuff like that. I had that one semester where we learned about China, India, and Korea, or something like that, and every year I learned about Panama, do you know what I mean? It's like, they pick and choose what—because, you know, maybe because, more and more, with the type that are there, but it's like, I've learned about independence and American revolutionaries more than I, you know—

PS: Oh, so you covered that again and again.

SM: Again and again and again. We had like maybe half a semester on each of these countries, and I didn't get to do anything on the Middle East at all, because my World Areas doesn't cover that. Like, the only thing I know about the Middle East is what I know now. It's just kind of breeding ignorance, you know what I mean?

I know it's probably difficult for them to cover everything, but, you know, like my friend, he ended up having a teacher who taught Latin America, and he's like, "I don't want to learn about Latin America. I know too much about Latin America." You know, because we learned that in Spanish class or whatever. You just keep learning the same things, a lot of times. I graduated with a degree, because I can probably tell you, aside from physics and chemistry and grade-specific, I didn't learn much history or anything.

PS: Or the history that you got, you believe was somewhat biased?

SM: Yes, it was. I mean, no matter where you—you're never, ever going to get unbiased anything. It's just the way it is.

PS: And how was SILC different? Do you think SILC gave you something unbiased, or was it just biased in a different direction?

SM: Well, it was definitely biased, but it was because you were getting the insider's view. The people who were teaching you about India were from India themselves. They weren't teaching from textbooks or third-hand experiences. You know, they were teaching what they knew, and what they knew to be true. So in a way, it was probably biased, you know, obviously, towards India, but it was more real, I guess. It was more real than anything else, do you know what I mean? Because it was their actual experiences.

PS: So the teaching that you got at SILC, did it seem to be biased in a different way, or unbiased?

SM: It was biased in a different way, because it was more pro-India, but it was more real because of the fact they were real Indians teaching me that. You know, it's like their

experiences, it isn't someone teaching from a textbook, you know. It's not third-hand and stuff like that

PS: So were they talking about their own lives or were they talking about things that they learned as kids?

SM: Probably also the things that they learned as kids, so it was biased in that way, but for me, it just felt, you know what I mean, like more real. I could just notice the difference when I took World Areas in eleventh grade, and did that whole India thing. I learned about it, it was just a total different approach.

PS: World Areas was what you took in high school, in the public school?

SM: Yes.

PS: And how was that different from what you were learning in General Knowledge at SILC?

SM: It was just totally—because I guess what it is, is because they had the American system of textbooks, it was very—and grad standards, even though we didn't have it, but you know what I mean. They had to teach you specific things about it. And then you had your teachers telling you up there, you know? Like when I taught General Knowledge, I taught the year one kids, and I tried to make it—in a way it was second hand knowledge—I tired to make it fun and I taught them what I knew, you know I mean? I lost my train of thought.

PS: Okay, so from your perspective, learning about India from an Indian was more genuine or authentic, just as if you were learning about Korea from a Korean person or about South America from South American person.

SM: Definitely, and then you have someone qualified to answer your questions, you know, like I could—Mr. Blin was my World Areas teacher, no offense to him or anything, but if I had chosen to ask him like, "Well, do you know why the Brahman caste got their name the Brahmans?" "I don't know, it's not in my textbook." You know, it was like he didn't know. But if you asked like one of my teachers, "Do you know why?" they'd be like, "Well, I think, you know, this is what I've heard," but they'd have more of an answer, because they know, you know, they just know more.

It's almost untapped resource because it's like, you never know how much you know until you try to teach someone everything that you know. Like, I guess I never realized that I—I mean, obviously I know the piano or something like that, but I didn't realize that I was so good until I take someone who's never touched a piano before in their life. It's like total untapped resource there.

Maybe even like, explaining something—I don't know what question I was answering but—it was just completely amazing to me—I never knew I knew about it. Like I don't know, I can't remember what it was, but it's like, "Oh," because that's everyday life to you. It was something like, oh, my aunt couldn't turn on the dishwasher, you know, and she's like, "How do you turn this on?" I'm like, "Oh, you do it—" because I never do dishes, you know, really I don't. Oh, you crush up this, and you put this in there, and you do like that. And that's normal, but that's something I taught her, you know what I mean? I didn't know that I had that to teach her.

PS: And she's from India?

SM: And she's from India.

PS: And she doesn't have a dishwasher there?

SM: She doesn't have a dishwasher. She has a dishwasher, but he's a guy. So actually he's the dishwasher, yeah. Yes, it's just like, and so having that, you know, I guess my parents probably didn't know how much they knew, but you know, they probably found they know a lot too, you know what I mean? It's like, there's so much. And like having something there had made a difference, I'm pretty sure.

PS: So do you think you got an Indian upbringing?

SM: Yes and no. I think other people got more of an Indian upbringing than I did, you know what I mean? Like some parents never left India in their mind, and they seriously mess with their kids. Their kids are going to need serious amounts of therapy someday, I'm sure. My parents—I don't ever give them enough credit for it, and I probably never will, maybe, I don't know, but they're more open and definitely, you know, way cooler about things. Like, probably half the stuff I do.

Even I can see the difference between my mom's best friend, she has two boys, even I can see the difference in the way we were raised. Like, he's just getting to be social, you know what I mean? Like he's just starting to hang out with people or whatever like that. Maybe that's also because of how he was, or whatever, you know, but like, she just, like, neither of her sons have ever really gone to a school dance or anything like that. And then there's me, who, you know, went to the first school dance I possibly could, you know, sort of thing.

So yes, I mean, there are so many different issues, like boys, huge issues, you know, the whole boyfriend thing, with having one. Not kosher, you know, certain thing. But my parents are pretty cool about that, I guess. I guess they've kind of accepted it. Like, the other night I went out with my friend alone. You know, he's a guy, by himself, and clearly, maybe she disapproved, but she wasn't going to stop me, because she knew she couldn't stop me, probably she thinks I'm eighteen, whatever, I don't know. But so, I mean, for parents to be like that was totally cool.

Of course, I see, like my other friend's parents are way more liberal. Like, she has guys over at her house all the time, she goes out with them alone. It's also, her mom was raised here in America, but sometimes she's more Indian than my mom, but that's another story.

But you know, there's all the different levels, but definitely, like, obviously, compared to my friends, a definite Indian upbringing, definitely. I mean, I eat Indian food for dinner, I understand Hindi, I have Indian customs, the ways and regulations, the norms and mores, you know, built into me or whatever. You know, because that's the way I was raised. And definitely, I'm totally Indian, you know. And everyone recognizes that. Like, I have my nose pierced. For most people it's a punk thing. I guess for me maybe it was more of a cultural thing, I don't know. At least that's my excuse, I have no idea.

PS: And your mom didn't mind you getting your nose pierced. Everybody else's mom says, "Don't do that! You have a beautiful face."

SM: Actually, everyone else's mom is like, "That's cool." My mom's like, "I don't know," because she still has her hole. She's like, "It's not going to go away." I'm like, "This is something I want to do." I was like, I was eighteen, I could do it myself, so I did it. But before she was like, "You have too big of a nose to pierce your nose." I'm like, "Hey!" You know, but I did it and I like it and she liked it. When I came home, she was like, "Actually, it's not that bad."

PS: So if you could it over again, and do SILC all over again, if you could know what you know now, is there anything that you would do or be differently?

SM: I probably wouldn't have protested as much. I probably would have maybe applied myself more in my classes, which is what everyone says about anything, ever, you know. I probably would have applied myself more, definitely, learned more, and taken advantage of more. Just taken advantage. Gone into it thinking, "I'm an Indian American," instead of "I'm an American Indian," I guess, do you know what I mean? Like, thought of myself first an Indian, then an American, instead of first an American, and then an Indian, I guess. Because I mean like I'm Native American, or something like that.

PS: So now that you're eighteen and you're going to go out on your own and be in the big world, if somebody comes up to you at college, for example, and says, "So tell me about yourself," what are you going to tell them? Who are you? What are you going to tell them?

SM: I always find "Who are you?" an interesting question, because who really are you, because usually when someone asks you, "Who are you?" "Oh, I'm Shruti Mathur, I'm eighteen, I graduated from Mounds View High School, Class of 2000, I have a brother." That's not who you are, you know what I mean? That's labels. Shruti Mathur. Maybe I made it who I am to everyone else. Shruti Mathur is not just a label, it's like an actual entity, but it's still a label, because, you know, I don't know, you can't really say, who are you.

I guess, basically, first thing first, you know, who are you, or something, but I guess when someone asks me, I don't necessarily come up to them and be like, "Yes, I'm Indian," because that's almost blatantly obvious. But if someone asks me, like, per religion, like, "Oh, what religion are you?" because, you know, I kind of—my parents were never really religious. My mom is kind of superstitious, which is partially why I think she does rituals and whatnot, but for me, rituals were never fulfilling in any way. Like maybe, you know, there are times when the rituals are comforting, but to me it was always just a huge safety blanket that I didn't want or need, I thought I didn't need. You know, maybe I did.

So for me it was always like more philosophy than religion, so you know, when people ask me that, I'm like, "Well, I was raised Hindu, but I really believe in all religions," you know, like because I have friends who are strong Christians or what-not. I listen to Christian bands and I have a friend who's Jewish. I believe in all religions, so I can't, I guess, I just say like, "Well, I'm technically Hindu," you know, sort of thing. Like it's just a "technically" thing, but that's also because of me.

So I don't know who I—like, I guess, if someone just asks, yes, like, if someone just asks who you are, I do the whole labeling thing, but if someone really got to know me, I think I wouldn't necessarily come out and tell them, "This is the way I think things, and I'm Indian, and I eat Indian food." I would just let them learn, you know what I mean? Like that's probably the best way. Because, it's not even something I can tell them, because to me, it's completely natural, you know, because, again, because it's who I am, you know. And next year, totally, I'm going to join the Indian Association. I'm so pumped for that.

PS: You want to hang out with the Indian students?

SM: Oh, definitely.

PS: Even though most of them will be from India?

SM: A lot of them, yeah, but that might be cool, you know. Maybe I'll drop my prejudice about, "I wouldn't know what to do with him. Shove him in a corner." You know, that sort of thing. Maybe that would drop or something like that. But definitely for sure, I want to do that. Like me and my friend, Meera, are excited.

I still see that need to associate myself with someone, and maybe that's why I kept going to SILC all those years, just to see other Indian faces every Saturday, because we have like three Indians in my grade, you know, because that's just the way Mounds View is. We have not even twenty-five in the whole school, or something like that. So it was like, not much.

So I guess it's probably just a way of associating yourself and, I don't know, maybe it's almost a reminder, too. Maybe I feel the need for that because maybe I feel the need to be reminded of that, you know, like, especially maybe next year when I'm not going to be involved around

there, to offer snacks, you know, or something like that. It's something I have to do on my own and somehow pass on. It'll probably be diluted.

PS: So talk to me about what you envision your future as like. I hear that you're going to go to college for eight years or so and then probably after that—I mean, you'll go to college for four, five, six, whatever, get your degree, get your job, settle into your career, then find some nice Indian boy to marry. And then what?

SM: I don't know because I'm totally torn on that one, because half of me wants to be on the travel channel, recording exotic beaches in the middle of New Guinea, you know what I mean? And the other half of me has a little mothering thing, you know. I want babies and whatnot. But I wouldn't want to do to my kids like, "Where's your mommy?" "Oh, I think she's in Panama right now." I'd kind of want to be there, you know, so I don't know.

I don't know if my house would be like at all, because I'm definitely not a neatnik. My mom is. She is perpetually cleaning. She claims she doesn't enjoy it but I think she secretly does. I'm wondering if it's partially obsessive-compulsive. But I don't know, and I don't know about the food, because like, certain Indian foods, I don't like. Like I don't like *daal*, but apparently, that's just a staple of Indian food, but I just don't like it. I don't like *daal*, I don't like *sambar* [both lentil dishes]. Maybe I just don't like lentils. So I don't know, maybe I have to learn how to make that, but I plan to marry somebody who already knows how to make Indian food.

PS: Oh, yeah?

SM: They know, I think. Because I don't know what I'm going to do without chicken curry. My mom says it's easy to make, but—

PS: So are you going to take some cooking classes from Mom this summer?

SM: I don't know, because I've gotten into this habit of eating Indian food for dinner. Eat whatever for breakfast, usually whatever for lunch, and Indian food for dinner. So I don't know what I'm going to do next year or the rest of the my life.

PS: Will you be eating in the dorms?

SM: Yes.

PS: They're not going to have much Indian food there, is my guess.

SM: I seriously doubt the possibility of that. I don't know, it'll be like weekend trips. "Mom, make me a huge thing of rice, chicken and spinach." I'll mix it up and keep it in my fridge and microwave it every night.

PS: But then you'll miss out on all that social contact.

SM: I'll probably take it downstairs and eat anyway, you know what I mean? I actually like the cafeteria food. I think it's good. I had it once, or a couple of times, because I took a class at the U. But I'm probably just going to have a total chicken curry and *palak paneer* craving. I'm like, "Oh, my gosh."

And my friends like it, too. Like my friends are totally—"Indian food, yes!" Like, everyone come to my party, I have Indian food. Yes! There are a couple poking at the *palak* and spinach and looking at it, "What is it?" because it looks kind of gross. It's just like green lumpy stuff, and poking at it with a fork saying—"What is that?" "Spinach." That didn't help matters, you know, but they taste and they really like it. That's kind of cool.

I like being able to say, like, well, everyone's like, "Your party rocked," because of the Indian food, you know what I mean? It was like, your party rocked because you're dual cultural or I don't know what I mean, you know what I mean?

PS: It's a way to be special.

SM: Yes. It's definitely my bribe, though. Everyone come to my party, I have Indian food. I'm surprised at the amount of people who like Indian food. Like my friend's going to Northwestern in Chicago, and we went to visit Chicago, and I know she's going to be like—she would love to frequent at Devon [Avenue], which is like little India, but she's like, "It's too weird, like American people walking around Devon." People look at you funny, because it's like being in India, you know, it's like guys going down the street with their windows rolled down, popping their Indian pop *bhangra* music and just cruising, and little shops with this and that and people yelling and it's just like being in India. It's a little cleaner, you know, but it's just kind of cool.

PS: But the architecture is not Indian?

SM: Definitely not, but there isn't much Indian architecture left in India.

PS: Oh, yeah?

SM: I don't think so.

PS: But it doesn't look like Chicago?

SM: No, it doesn't look like Chicago. So, I don't know what my house is going to be like. Hopefully, every day my family will be opening the newspaper to read my articles or something, but I don't know.

PS: If you do the baby thing, and you're the mom and SILC school is still around, will you make your kids go?

SM: Definitely.

PS: And when they say, "Oh, Mom, it's so boring and—"

SM: "Yeah, I said the same thing. Go." I'll be more like Vatsala Auntie, my mom's friend, and my mom. It'll just be like, "I don't care. Go."

PS: So why would you—what would you value for them? What would you want for them, by making them go?

SM: Maybe understand where their grandparents came from, or who they are, and how not to forget that. Like, America may be the melting pot of the world, but I come out with more spice than the others, you know what I mean? Like just to remind them, you have a little more spice. You're not just a huge stew, you're the jalapeno pepper that was tossed into that stew to make it more flavorful, you know, like you make it more flavorful. I just want them to know that. I probably won't tell them, "You're the jalapeno pepper," but something like that.

Because I guess it's important to know, because I know there's a lot of people, I'm like, "Oh, so what are you?" "I don't know, German, Scandinavian, blah, blah, blah." Everyone's just like, "I'm American." What does that mean anymore, do you know what I mean? So it's like, I can say, "I'm Indian," you know. I'm different, you know what I mean? Like, before though it was like, "Oh, I'm different." It's like the girl with the dark skin, or something like that.

I didn't really encounter much racism. I guess maybe I did. My mom says I did, maybe I blocked it or something, but you know, it's just like, something cool, like Batman, with a secret identity, except it's not so secret, you know what I mean? Like I go moonlighting on weekends in my Indian clothes. My friends took my Indian clothes and dressed it up for Halloween. They had a ball

PS: Oh, really?

SM: Yeah, I was Batgirl and my friend was like wearing like a kimono from Japan and my friends are wearing my *lehngas*. They were Indian princesses, they said, you know, because it looked like a princess dress to them. So, you know, just things like that, like the fact that they had the opportunity to do that.

And then maybe that would teach my kids like not—hopefully, by then there won't be as much, but you never—there will always be like some sort of racism, so maybe they won't feel like the kid with the dark skin or something like that, like, do you know what I mean? Just have more of a sense of where they're coming from, and maybe knowing where they're coming from helps

them know where they're going. There's always the thing, like, with me and my friends, like, "Oh, well, Indian kids don't do this. Indian kids aren't like..."

PS: Like what don't they do?

SM: For me to do journalism. Indian kids don't do journalism. Indian kids can be doctors and engineers and stuff like that. But I think that's good, our parents don't think, "Indian kids don't do that."

PS: So you're stepping outside of the mold.

SM: A little bit.

PS: What language would you want your children to study at SILC?

SM: Hindi.

PS: Because?

SM: That's what their grandparents speak and all their relatives in India are going to speak, and it'll help them going around India, as it is, because it's one of the national—you're not supposed to call it the national language, but it's just as common as English. Most everyone there knows Hindi or every language is pretty much close to Hindi.

PS: And how often would you take your kids to India?

SM: Every chance I got. Because it's important, you know what I mean? Like at first it's going to be like, "Oh, God," you know what I mean? But it's important. Like now I love—I want to go to India again, you know. The only part I dread is my relatives.

PS: Is what?

SM: My relatives.

PS: Oh, really?

SM: Well, my mom always says, going to India isn't a vacation. Everyone's like, "Oh, going to vacation?" She's like, "No, I'm going to India." Everyone agrees, like any Indian you talk to, it's not going on vacation.

PS: What is it more like?

SM: Well, have you ever been to like a family reunion? Like when there's so many people and they're all coming at you and it's just, it's craziness. And yet, it's almost like going home. That's kind of weird, because I feel like home there, but I feel more at home here, but somehow I feel home there. Maybe because of my relatives, maybe it's the "Indian soil," or something, I don't know.

PS: Do you keep in touch with your relatives between visits?

SM: Sort of.

PS: Sort of?

SM: I keep more in touch now with e-mail, like my cousins. But before I would never. It was like the occasional phone call and then it was like, "Hi, hello." You know, you can hear the echo of the voice and stuff like that. It's like, "How are you, you?" "Fine, fine." You know, you can hear the echo and it's so weird and the huge pauses, so it wasn't much of a conversation, so now I keep in contact with a couple of my cousins by e-mail, so that's totally cool.

PS: Do they come here to visit you, too?

SM: No.

PS: No.

SM: This is like the first time we have six people staying with us. It's like the first time.

PS: And they all came for your graduation?

SM: Yes, but I think it was more of an excuse, do you know I mean? Like it was just a good time to come, I guess. Apparently one of my uncles has said, "Year 2000, we're coming. Be prepared." You know, like in 1972, when my mom came over here, and it was kind of funny, because he actually did. It wasn't that necessarily he remembered that, but it just happened that way. I don't think anyone thought Year 2000 would ever come.

PS: But then it did anyway.

SM: It did anyways.

PS: The rest of these questions are about the board.

SM: I don't know anything about the board.

PS: What do you see happening to SILC in the near future? I mean, I know you were an assistant, kind of an assistant teacher this last year, so you got to see it from the other side of the fence.

SM: I was a teacher this year.

PS: You were? Okay.

SM: I had my own class. That was scary. That was really scary.

PS: Tell me about that.

SM: Well, there were thirty-five kids—I had the biggest class. I don't know how me, a full-time high school student, eighteen, no teaching experience whatsoever, ended up with the largest class in the entire school, but I did, and they're all like kindergarten and first graders—I had the first year kids, and there was about twenty of them, and it was just like, oh my God, and everywhere it was like, oh my God.

PS: Because they wouldn't sit still?

SM: Yes.

PS: Oh, okay. Thirty-five kids jumping around.

SM: Yes. And so that, first of all, was enough to daunt me. I'm not scared of large audiences. Like I think the number one fear is public speaking. No problem. Sure, you want me to give a speech. Okay, what do you want me to talk about? There was a little bit of nervousness. I was so nervous, oh my gosh. Especially when the Indian parents would sit in. I'd be like, "What if I'm teaching the kids all wrong and the Indian parent points it out?" You know, it was like, "Oh, my gosh. I don't know what I'm talking about."

It's also because I'm a complete procrastinator, and classes were prepared at about eight o'clock that morning, with the assistance of my mom and her millions of aids. I couldn't have done it without my mom. I really couldn't have. I know I couldn't have.

But we had fun. I tried to be more of a fun teacher. I wanted the kids to like me more, you know what I mean? I think they did, you know. I hope that I was probably like the older kid that everyone could look up to, not like stern teacher. We had lots of fun, you know, like on days when it was nice out, I was like, screw this, we're not having a lesson, we're going to go outside and play, you know, but it was a lesson because we played Indian games. Because I wanted to show them that it wasn't just history dates and whatnot. There are Indian games.

One time we went into the kitchen and we made food. There's Indian food, you know. And like that's part of history. I did a lesson on music. I don't think I ever had a lesson in music in General Knowledge. So we showed them the instruments, then we played different music, and then at the end we had a dance party. And at first, it was kind of like—some of the kids were just like, "Oh, I can't." And you know, eventually, we got even the boys to dance, and after that, everyone wanted to have a dance party. And I liked that.

A lot of times at the end of class, like, I would—you know, usually, it was a time filler, but also because—you know, I had them draw pictures of what they learned that day, because everyone likes to draw. It's a good release, and also it's because, so you're not just like going home and forgetting what you learned about. It's almost like regurgitating information, and when you bring that picture home, you have something to remind you, you know, and Mom and Dad tape it up, you know what I mean? It's like homework that you actually want to do.

Like sometimes we wouldn't have time to draw pictures. I'd be like, "Hey, you guys, draw me a picture for next week," and I'd get all these pictures, and sometimes I'd get pictures, "This is you," and I can see the outfit I was wearing last week. I don't know, I still have a couple of them, like a couple kids, like you know, they'd make one picture and they were really fast, so they'd make another picture and give it to me. Like, it's so cute. It's so cute. So yeah, it was fun. It was crazy, but it was fun.

PS: So when your kids, if they happen, someday, are going to SILC school—

SM: Hopefully, it'll still be around, I don't know.

PS: And will you be a volunteer?

SM: Yes.

PS: And what will you prefer to teach?

SM: I don't know.

PS: Do you think you could teach Hindi?

SM: No. Hopefully by then, maybe. I could teach the first years. You know, like beginners. But I don't know beyond that. I can be the milk and cookie coordinator.

PS: That was your favorite subject anyway, right?

SM: The most important person in the school is the milk and cookies. If the milk and cookie coordinator doesn't have it together, everyone notices.

PS: Really?

SM: Yes. If one teacher's gone, no one notices, but if the milk and cookie coordinator isn't there and there's no milk and cookies, you know.

PS: Major revolt.

SM: Oh. Where's the milk and cookies? Actually, we changed it two years back. It's cookie and beverage. Because not everyone just wanted milk, so it's juice now. But it's still milk and cookie to me.

PS: Are there any things—oh, I didn't ask you about festivals.

SM: Oh, festivals. Those are crazy times.

PS: Tell me about festivals.

SM: Festivals were usually like—it was again, procrastination. I wasn't necessarily the one planning it, but everyone else I know is a procrastinator and it usually Rama Auntie [Rama Padmanabham] and my mom planning at the last minute to do something. And they were kind of fun. I don't know. I don't remember them, I guess, as much. The only things I remember were SILC Day, because of the pizza. That's why I remember it, because of pizza. But that's like kind of a big time. You know, you have to get your skits together and things like that.

PS: So what did you do at SILC Day? What were the activities of the day?

SM: They had SILC Day and the Awards Day, and SILC Day was the time for the Hindi and GK [General Knowledge] classes to show off their knowledge. So a lot of times Hindi would have a play or something like that, and it was kind of exciting. You know, you'd dress up and sometimes we'd dance with performing kind of dances. Then you all got pizza.

I just remember SILC Day. I don't remember why we had SILC Day, because we had the Awards Day. I guess SILC Day was just kind of like a presentation time. Awards Day I never really remembered, because it was always the same. I mean, SILC Day was always the same, but it was always kind of different. SILC Day was fun, especially when there was SAP [SILC Achievement Project], which I never got to take—thank you, Dad—but you know, they'd make like the "All-India Rap," [from Where in the World is—] "Where in India is Carmen San Diego?" they'd have fun things like that, and that was exciting.

Those were the big kids, too, you know. See what the big kids did, and that was kind of fun. And then we had pizza for lunch. I don't know if I just don't remember, like festivals like Diwali and Holi, from when I was little. Either that or we just recently started doing all-school festivals. We

must have done them before. I just remember them. Like all I remember is ones now, but maybe because I was more involved or whatever, like doing plays or skits for Holi or Diwali.

Yes, like this year for Holi in my class, I decided that I wanted to do something for Holi, so, what did we do? We took a big garbage bag and we tie-dyed things and stuff like that, you know, because I couldn't have different colors or something like that. We tie-dyed strips of fabric or something like that.

We used to have plays. Like a lot of it was, I guess, because now we have more South Indians, recently, so now maybe that's why I remember it, because we have more South Indian festivals, but I don't really know at all, because we don't really celebrate them much. So I just remember those. I don't remember all-school festivals. I remember Festival of Nations, every year. I mean, because I went every year, and danced every year and I got my little shoe every year.

PS: What little shoe?

SM: There's a guy who carves out little shoes and he can put your name and make it a key chain, so I have several of those key chains. I get one every year, and now I use the key chains more than I did before. Now I think I have more of a collection. The one year I couldn't go because I had chicken pox, my mom got me a key chain, a shoe key chain. That's the only thing I wanted.

I really remember Festival of Nations, because it was always fun. I got dressed up in my Indian clothes and I got to sit at the booth because I was helping. I got it from my mom, I can't say no. She can't say no. She was always helping so we were always involved, and I sat at the booth and I stamped everyone's passports and I felt so important, because I was so cool. You know, wearing my Indian clothes.

You know, we still wore our Indian clothes a couple of years ago, and at that time it was just me and my friends walking around, and people would come up to us. They'd be like, "Oh, did you make that dress yourself?" And then we'd walk away, just making fun of them, like, "Yes, I embroidered all the beads on it last night." Because you know, it's just, it's cool. All the beads and stuff like that.

So I definitely remember Festival of Nations more than anything, I think. The Festival of India, a little bit, too, because it was kind of the same thing as Festival of Nations, just only with India. I always liked watching dances because that was always fun. It's still my favorite part. I just like watching dances, I don't like the singers.

PS: What don't you like about the singers?

SM: I think it's boring. I can listen to Hindi pop songs, which are more American than anything. They're just funny, because no one in America would ever listen to them. But I just don't like Indian classical, I don't like—you know, I guess it's just like how people don't like oldies,

maybe, or how some people don't like classical music now even. You know, they can't stand to sit through Mozart, you know? A lot of people love it. And I guess it's probably like the same thing. I don't know, it just never sat well with me.

So I still don't like the singers, even though I appreciate it. And I know how it sounds. It's still—I don't know if I want to use the word "alien" to my ears, but it still just doesn't sit right. Because it's not necessarily alien to my ears, because I've grown up listening to it and everything like that, but it just doesn't sit right or something.

PS: Do you have any special memories about Festival of Nations or Festival of India, anytime, like you were all supposed to be dancing and somebody totally forgot their part or some—

SM: I remember somebody breaking her bracelet in the middle of the dance, and we were told to just keep dancing on, and we did, and her wrist was bleeding. I don't know, I have this fear of wrists.

PS: She broke her bracelet?

SM: She broke her bangles—because they're glass bangles.

PS: Oh, I didn't realize they were glass.

SM: Yes, they're glass bangles, so it broke and it cut her arm, like really bad, and I remember that. We just keep on smiling and dancing. I remember that, that was freaky. And I have this thing for wrists. I don't know, it's a phobia, like I just don't like—I can't even—I don't like to touch my own wrists. I just have a thing. I don't know if it's partially from that, or I've already had that, but I remember that.

I remember—well, I don't remember it because I wasn't there, but I guess it was when my parents were setting up for the Festival of Nations, there was a tornado in my neighborhood. And I remember that they were there, but they didn't hear the storm. I was like, "Didn't you hear it?" And they just walked out and their car was overturned. They were like, "What the heck?" But because it was just a big, tornado-proof place, you know, they didn't even know there was a tornado outside, and I was home alone with a babysitter.

I remember that there was a Festival of Nations, just like snippets like that. I remember walking around back and stuff. But I go to the Festival of Nations every year, so it's just familiarity. I mean, it's a little different with the RiverCentre being newly built, but I knew the bazaars and I knew the food area, and I knew the booths. It was just familiarity. And I guess probably that's what I remember the most.

My graduation was in Roy Wilkins [Auditorium] where they used to have the Festival of Nations and it was so weird to go into that back room where the booths usually are and I was just

standing there with all the graduates. It was like, "What the heck?" It was trippy because the only time I'd ever seen it was when, it was all decorated for Festival of Nations. You know, it was just like, oh, God. It was just empty, you know.

It was like, I've never seen the place empty and it was just—I know where to go every year. It's like I don't need a map anymore. I know where I'm going. It's almost like, "Do you know where this and this is?" I'm like, 'I think it's somewhere over there," because it's always over there, you know. They never change the location of the booths, so I don't know. I don't know if there's any particular memories. I remember how much I hated—my mom always used to put like a mole on my chin, with makeup. I don't know why she did it, but I hated it.

PS: A mole?

SM: A mole. Like a fake mole. She used to take the eyeliner and put—I don't know why. I still don't know why, but I hated it. I didn't want a big black mark on my chin. It was probably like, it was supposed to be like a beauty mark. I hated that.

PS: Did you then rub it off?

SM: After the dance, because my mom would make sure I had it on for the dance. But I didn't like it. I don't know, I hated getting eyeliner done. I'd have to look up, and my mom's sitting there with a pencil. I'm just like, "Oh." It just creeped me out. I remember that.

This year, they messed up with the music, royally. I wasn't dancing this year because I was too old. But they messed up with the music, so it's just snickers like that. Like running into people that you know and stuff like that. I remember the year we won. Just the main memories. It was really kind of hazy. We won the best booth, or best cultural exhibit.

PS: And what was your theme that year?

SM: Weddings. And Vatsala Auntie had been the main coordinator for that, so that was pretty exciting. So of course we had spent a lot time doing it, because Vatsala Auntie and my mom are best friends. So I always felt kind of like I won the award, too, because I had helped, you know. "That flower there I painted." Obviously, the booth couldn't have been done without me.

PS: And how old were you at the time?

SM: When did we win? I swear—because every year I swear it was last year, so I don't know. Maybe when I was—it was the in nineties, so '95. Oh, I swear I was in elementary school. I'm pretty sure I was in elementary school, so it must have been at least seven years ago. I don't know what year it was. Early nineties, 1990.

PS: Long time ago for you. Well, are there any other things that I haven't asked you about yet, that you think it's important to tell me about SILC?

SM: I usually have something for that, I don't know. Because I do that, too, when I'm interviewing. I'm like, "Is there anything else?" you know, just hoping. I'm not sure. I'm sure there is. I'm sure that I could just probably talk until the moon and sun have gone down, but, you know what I mean?

It's kind of weird, because this is like, next year it's probably not going to be in my life as much and it's kind of weird because it always has been part of our lives and Mathurs have always been part of SILC, so for us to leave, I think we're probably like the last "founding family" to be there, you know, so it's kind of weird to know that we're not there.

It's like a whole new gang, like, it's not the old gang. Like even if I wasn't—you know what I mean? I just remember how it used to be. You know, and it's not the way it used to be and I guess that was kind of weird, so it's kind of weird that next year I won't be going to SILC every Saturday, no matter what it is. It's weird and maybe scary to not have it in my life, you know.

It's almost like a part of me wants to go to SILC, but I know I have to get away sometime. I know there's a point for me to quit, you know. It's kind of weird, but that's probably next year, you know what I mean? Like, I could still go to SILC, but I'm not going to. I decided I'm not going to go back. I don't know, it's kind of weird, because I was in there from day one, crawling around, so you know, eighteen, moving out of the house. It's almost like moving out of SILC, too, you know, so it's kind of weird.

PS: A new phase of your life, but you'll get to hang around with the Indian students.

SM: You bet. The Indian Student Association. Definitely.

PS: Well, thank you so much for taking the time this afternoon. I really enjoyed speaking with you.

SM: No problem.