

RUTGERS, THE STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW JERSEY

NEW BRUNSWICK

AN INTERVIEW WITH RITU CHOPRA

FOR THE

RUTGERS ORAL HISTORY ARCHIVES

INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY

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and

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EDISON, NEW JERSEY

JULY 14, 2022

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Shaun Illingworth: This begins an interview with Ritu Chopra, on July 14, 2022, with Shaun Illingworth and ...

Adithya Venkateswaran: Adithya Venkateswaran.

SI: Thank you very much for joining us. We really appreciate it. To begin, can you tell us a little bit about your family background, starting with your mother, where she came from, and what you know about the family history on that side of the family?

Ritu Chopra: Yes. My mom was born in 1945. She was born in the northern province of India, in Haryana, Kurukshetra, which is a holy land, so to speak, and is very well mentioned in the epic of "Mahabharata." She grew up there and went to high school. She was a stay-at-home mom throughout her life, a kind, generous, loving mother. I'm very proud to say that she had a lot of influence on us. [Editor's Note: Kurukshetra, a city in the Indian state of Haryana, is the setting of the Sanskrit epic poem "Mahabharata."]

SI: Do you know anything about the family background, if they had moved around, or were they always from that area?

RC: I do not know if they moved around. This was post-independence from the British. Prior to that, I think the family history is in that area. If they moved within that area, it's possible. But my grandfather was a landowner, and he had fruit gardens. My assumption is that they were pretty stable, given that they were landowners.

SI: This is up in the region not that far from New Delhi. Is that correct?

RC: Yes. I don't know the exact distance, but it's not too far from New Delhi. A few hours, I would say, max.

SI: Tell us about your father's side of the family.

RC: My father's side of the family, my father's family was a little bit [on the] northern side of the border. My grandfather, my father's father, was also a landowner. Both grandfathers were business associates and friends. They had known each other for a very long time. On my father's side, I know a little bit more history. He was the only son in the family among six sisters, so he was raised differently as a boy and the only boy in a family. But my grandfather, my father's father, and his siblings, my dad's uncles, my granduncles, their family was spread out. Some people were very scholarly people [of] their generation. They were spread out. My grandfather was a landowner, and they had farmlands as well. Based on that, I think that they didn't move too much until after the British left in 1947.

Both grandfathers were friends, and they made a commitment to strengthen their friendship. At that time, in our culture, it was very common to associate friendship and family relations and strengthen those relations [by] giving a daughter's hand in marriage. My mom and dad were engaged when my mother's mom, my grandmother, was expecting, before my mom was born. [laughter] So, that word was given. During the British partition, the families lost contact with

each other until after seventeen, eighteen years. The families reunited, [when] my mom was in high school. The interesting story is that when they were kids, my mom was born, maybe a couple of years old, and Dad was about seven, eight years old, approximately around that, my dad would give rides on a tricycle to my mom. So, they played as kids, and then the family separated.

As I mentioned, my dad's side of the family, my great uncles, were very scholarly persons, but my grandfather was a landowner. So, there was a lot of knowledge, skills, and things within the family, and given the large extended family, I have been in touch and seen distant cousins grow up and kind of follow the footsteps of their ancestors, so very scholarly, highly-accomplished people. Most of them remained in and around the New Delhi area.

SI: Did they ever share any other stories about the partition period, any stories about its impact on your family on either side?

RC: Yes. As a little child, I remember a lot of stories, because my dad's side of the family was closer to the border, and there was a lot of disruption. Families on the other side of the border, which was divided as Pakistan, were coming on this side of the border in camps, and stories coming out of those refugee camps were horrible and heroic both. My dad was, at that time, around ten or eleven years old, so he remembered a lot. We, as kids, my cousins and us, when we were growing up, my dad told a lot of stories that he remembered and he learned from elders. Some of them were very chilling. The few that I share, young boys, especially [those] who would venture out to play, were advised not to go near the camps because there would be robbers, as well as there would be other people trying to steal any belongings or valuable items from refugees. Dad tells the story that he became friends with, later on in there, [a] youth, and this young man was a refugee. I remember Dad had all kinds of emotions, telling us that story that the friend was sleeping in a refugee camp as a young boy, and [his] family had taped some valuable items of precious metal (gold) around his body. They had advised him if somebody comes in the night [and] touches him, don't move and let them take away whatever they take. It happened. It actually happened. It was a common scenario for people to come in and search for valuables. This young boy was giggling, and he couldn't hold it when they were touching his body. As kids, we would laugh. But, going back, listening to that, because I do some social work and I'm involved with some humanitarian work myself, and I see what life would have been in that situation as a ten, twelve-year-old boy, that you could be killed instantly and not live through it. That friend, he remembered his story that he was giggling, and it was very hard for him to stop giggling. We can take that very lightly. Altogether, to me, I see the trauma, I see the journey, and I see living through it and growing up to tell that story really shapes our stories.

There were many stories of people being dismembered at the border. One of my grandfathers was brought to the border by a Muslim friend on horseback, and my grandfather was about six-foot-five inches tall, so a very tall man. The Muslim friend had put a burka on my grandfather and put him on a horseback ride and brought him to the refugee camp in the darkness. He encountered a Muslim army on the way and fought with the Muslim army on the way to the camp. He would not let them see the man (person) in the burka because it was a really tall person, a big build. He told the Muslim army, "That's my pregnant wife." So, he refused to

show the face and saved him [by bringing] him to the camp. Those were a few of the stories that I remember that I heard a lot growing up.

SI: Your parents got married in the late '50s?

RC: My father was a college graduate and was going to law school at that time. Mom had passed high school. They married, I believe, in 1955 or '57, sometime around then.

SI: I wanted to ask about their education. Your father went very far in his education. Your mother finished high school, you said.

RC: My mother finished high school. My father was a very scholarly person. When he passed, he was a well-known attorney. He was also on the list of counsels [at the] American Embassy in New Delhi. He was also an expert on the law of diplomacy and UNCITRAL [United Nations Commission on International Trade Law]. When I was in high school, my dad was among the two attorneys in the entire country of India who were on the list of the UNCITRAL subscription; that's for the United Nations trade law disputes. So, he was one of the two recipients of this journal. After his death, I still have that journal as a memory from him with his signature on it. He was a very scholarly person. Being an attorney, a civil attorney, he did publish *The International Law Reporter*, a monthly journal, which was used as a publication or a text material in some law universities in many countries.

SI: For your mother, was it unusual for a woman to graduate high school, or was that the norm at that time?

RC: I would say it depends on the families. Because of the commitment that was made, girls were not really expected to stay unmarried for a long time. Mom, after high school, and when these families had reunited, they wanted to gain back strength in their friendships, and my mom was a beautiful woman, so the families just had no reservations or anything to call that commitment off. My dad continued his education, and mom would stay home. To answer your question, what is customary? I think, given the post-independence turmoil the country was going through, the stability of the family was more important than education for women. That's my assumption because I have come to know that people, if they were far away from the northern border, their opportunities and resources were very different than [those] who were close to the border.

SI: When they were first married, did they set up a household in New Delhi right away?

RC: Yes, yes. Most of our families were still a unit. My father was the only son of the family and he was the youngest among the siblings, so my grandparents lived in the same household. Father continued his education. He started his practice. They remained in the New Delhi area until I was married and I came to the United States.

SI: Adithya, go ahead.

AV: Ms. Chopra, I was really intrigued by what you said about your father's experiences as an attorney. One question I have is, had he ever told you what made him go for diplomacy or international trade law? Was there something that drew him to that?

RC: I don't know exactly what drew him to that, but he was a scholarly person. I could talk to him so much. I can show you so many ways that he influenced me in [how] I went through my life [and] how during my forming years, he was my mentor. That's part of my memoir, that we both were on a journey, that I did not know until he passed away, his family, after the partition, my grandfather, dad's father, lost their lands. There was looting, killing and stuff. So, they had to move closer to the New Delhi area and lost everything. They came [with] whatever they carried on their backs. My dad, as a high school student, would work part-time jobs, weaving chairs and things, fixing broken furniture for the universities. He enrolled in university doing that.

There is a picture--I don't have it handy--but there is a picture of my dad and two of his siblings, sisters--they were kids, they were teenagers--they are sitting under a lamppost in the twilight and they're fixing those chairs and things, and those were the stories that they went through. My dad told [me] that he studied under a lamppost because the land at that time government gave in lieu of the land farmers had lost--there were no regular services. He would deliver milk on the weekends because he'd go to school during the week. So, on the bicycle, he said that he had to pass through a jungle area. There was no population because this was an uninhabited area. He talked about this experience so many times before I came to the United States, because when our cousins, the younger cousins, and families would come, they would want him to tell those stories. One story of his experience was that he had those milk cans on the back of the bicycle, both sides. He was going to deliver the milk, and there was a snake that wrapped around the wheel of the bicycle. He said, he was fifteen, sixteen years old, he threw the bike, and screaming, he ran towards the village. [laughter]

Those are some stories that we can make some sense of how difficult it was for them to be totally disrupted when they were so well off. They were so well off. They had hundreds of people to work on their farms and they were well taken care [of], to become completely dependent on land that is inhabitable and snakes crawling through in jungles, and he had to pass that and study under the lamppost.

He was a very well-known attorney in his community. I pretty much interned with him. This is a beautiful story that I would like to share. His clients would say, "Mr. Chopra, my documents of my land and my company's documents are safer at your table, at your desk, than they are in the vault of my company. I fear threats. I fear death. I fear thefts." That's how trusted he was. He mentored me so much, without both of us knowing what he was prepping me for.

One day, his clerk didn't come. Maybe there was some death in the family or something, but the clerk didn't come. There were no cell phones at that time. Some messenger came and told my dad that he cannot come for a couple of days. My dad needed some forms filled out for the court because the forms every day need to be filed for whatever court processes. I was thirteen, thirteen-and-a-half years old at the time. It was summer vacation. We were just all kids playing around in the house. He called me in his office and he asked me to fill out those forms. He gave

me instructions. I started filling [them] out. He looked at those forms and his eyes lit up, and he was so happy, smiling. He lovingly tapped my head and then on my back, and then he says, "You have beautiful handwriting." [laughter] Then, it became a habit. He would call me in the office whenever he needed something to be written, and give my dictations, especially when his clerk wasn't around or the typist wasn't around. My dad used to laugh at his own handwriting, that he couldn't read his own handwriting. [laughter] His typist preferred [me]; he would give me dictations, and I would write it. The typist preferred my handwriting to my dad's handwriting to type his documents.

I was learning. I was learning a lot, even in my early teens. Sometimes, I would ask him questions, all the time I'm sharing his part of my memoir story as well, I would ask him questions, and he would smile and he would laugh. He says, "You're really intelligent, and you're asking good questions and stuff." He would then explain things to me, all the legal terms and things. At that time, the Urdu and Hindi languages, the court papers were written in those, and the typists, with the old typewriters, would type two or three copies of the drafts and stuff. Dad would make notes and stuff, and then he would ask me to check this and check that and fill [out] that form. So, I was learning a lot.

The one thing that's very emotional, he impacted me in so many ways. His clients would come to the home office. I was in my mid-teens, sixteen, seventeen, around that. I was doing a lot of research. He had some civil cases through his American client through the American Embassy, that they were referred. They were publicized in the media because of the type of cases they were and in Supreme Court and high court. There's only one Supreme Court for the whole country, whereas here in the U.S., every state has a supreme court of its own. He would take me with him. I would borrow the black gown of his assistant because she was about my height, and my mom got me a white sari because that was a requirement to appear in a high court, the white sari and a black gown, without a tie, the British-style ties. So, I would go as an assistant when I was eighteen. Because of these high-profile cases, the media would be present, not paparazzi media, print media. They would ask questions, so I would listen. Sometimes, they thought that I was the assistant or I was the person; they'd ask me if he was busy. What impact he had made [on me]--I'm the firstborn of five. Out of the five siblings, I'm the firstborn. He would tell his clients, "She is my son." So, he gave me the respect, the credibility of being a son in the family. In our families, the presence of a son [means] you are the successor of the family. So, he saw that.

When I was in eighth grade, he gave me a diary. It's customary, a lot of the industrialists print the diaries every New Year as a gift. So, he would have too many, and he'll give one as a gift. He gave me a diary. On his diary, on the back of the diary, [it was] entirely blank. On the back of the two pages, he had written two poems in Urdu. My dad was the only person in the town--two people--who could read and write Urdu. I didn't know that. It was the newspaper guy who told us. My dad would subscribe [to] nine newspapers every day, a very scholarly person. At the end of the month, the newspaper guy would come to collect the bill, and he was talking to mom one day. He says, "Mr. Chopra is [one of] the only two people" that he delivers the Urdu newspaper. So, that's how I remember. Those Urdu poems, I got translated after he passed away. I did not know that. It's entirely an emotional experience for me, what was written in

those poems, and that was all this time with me, me not knowing. But I see that as a blessing, that it was more of a higher purpose of his teaching me and prepping me for what I had become.

If I look at the kindness that came from my mom's side and humility and the scholarly mindset from my dad's side of the family, I see that as a combination that shaped my life. He always taught us, "Don't judge anyone, who they are, by where they come from. Respect people [for] what values they have [and] how they treat you." In his office or at our home, it didn't matter if someone worshipped in a mosque or church or temple or gurdwara. Whoever came, he never left anyone empty-handed. He always gave something. People admired him so much that when he passed away, my family booked a community center for his last rites [and] final goodbyes for a thousand people. There were about thirteen hundred people, three hundred people outside the hall that they could not fit. Among them was his childhood friend, who had a liver transplant, and he insisted [to] his children that he wanted to say goodbye to my dad. In the wheelchair, he was brought. It was a very emotional experience to hear the legacy he had left.

SI: Adithya?

AV: Hearing what you have said about your father, it certainly looks like he was a big role model, and the way you mention how you went to work with him, would you say that you had a moment where you considered following in his footsteps of doing law?

RC: Doing what?

AV: Doing law, becoming an attorney.

RC: Yes, yes. I was. He wanted me to become a judge because he tried a couple of times. He wanted to be a judge. The Hindi language, [there was the requirement of] passing tests, very complex tests for civil services. He didn't know the Hindi language. He knew English and Urdu. So, he could speak but not write for the complexity of passing the test. There's funny jokes and things that he used to tell us about it. After two tests, he realized [he would not pass], so he remained an attorney. He wanted me to go to law school. When I got married, actually, I was prepping for the law school entrance exam myself. My one brother and one sister are judges now. My brother is a senior judge in Delhi High Court, and he works with even foreign delegations in arbitration court. My sister is now being appointed a judge in a high court, which is sort of a political position. For the last about fourteen years, she had been a sessions judge in the state of Haryana, which is surrounding New Delhi. So, I was prepping for law school. I didn't join law school. I had gone through law prep after my bachelor's, but I got married. I moved here, so my circumstances changed and I didn't have the opportunity to continue my education in law. Yes, that was the intent, but I ended up working with corporate lawyers and many other law professionals anyway. [laughter] The law profession history is just kind of continuing in our new generation as well. My niece and nephew are law professionals, working with very famous law firms and married to lawyers as well. Given that, we have about six or eight attorneys right now in the family. [laughter]

SI: Tell us a little bit about your early years, your formative years in the '60s and '70s. What was your neighborhood like? What was it like growing up in this household with all these children?

RC: When I was about seven years old, my family moved to a newly-developed sector, which used to be farmland. Here, we see that developers take up the land and put in housing. It was a pretty similar situation, but there were no schools. There were a few kids in the neighborhood. I recall, within a half-a-mile area, there would be about eighteen, twenty kids in different classes. We would walk about two kilometers one way to a nearby village. There was the only school, a primary school there, elementary school in a village. Beautiful memories of those [walks], we would pass through--there was a historical farm that has the five-thousand-year-old history of a battle that took place and a birthplace of a very famous poet. That poetry is still part of the textbooks in the school. So, that was the birthplace, and we would see all those peacocks dancing. It was a wonderful walk with [the] dozen kids going through walking. Our parents never worried that we walked alone two kilometers one way to the school and came back every day. [laughter] It took about a year and a half before a school building was built in our township, where I studied until high school.

The neighborhood was developing, so the houses were far apart. My best memories are, from my childhood, we played, girls and boys. We have funny stories that I told my children that we played with other kids. We didn't have toys and games. We built clay furniture for our dolls. We'd have a doll's wedding, and every kid brings in some snacks from home and then we will celebrate weddings. My kids would laugh, "So, you were innovative?" I say, "Yes, sure. You could [say] that." We enjoyed our childhood so much.

As I see children now, and being part of the cybersecurity profession myself and having my own nonprofit where we support some of the initiatives towards gender-based violence or human trafficking, I have come to know the dangers [of] the video games for even young kids. What a difference in my lifetime to see from where I grew up and where I see [what] my grandchildren will go through. It's a stark difference.

I can recall that my mother would not worry [about us]. All the kids in the neighborhood went back home in the evening when we were hungry. We were so tired, running around in the playgrounds and stuff. Safety was never a question. None of those kids I ever saw after I went to high school, but the memories that created in us was a free childhood to grow. My parents, even Mother, who was not highly educated, but was very kind, both [my] parents, their goal was to give their daughters and their sons the best, highest education possible. Sometimes, from my father's side, from his elder sisters, there would be pressure [to] just marry off your daughters and not give them education, but my father stood up lovingly. He respected people and he would give them respectful answers. He supported education.

Mother was the rock of the family. The funny story goes in the family, Dad, when he comes home, he would look for Mom the first thing, "Where's Mom?" Then, he looks at her, and then he'll go to his office. [laughter] The personal expression of love was not public. So, he will just look at her and go to his office. But that would be the first thing. The kids would be [there] when he enters. We were studying, doing our homework, reading or playing games, whatever

the time of the day was, so his first question that comes out of his mouth, a few words, right away is, "Mom?" Then, he looks at her [and] goes on. All of those memories of a happy and comfortable childhood really was a foundation to build upon for the life to come. I'm very happy about my foundation.

SI: I'm curious if religion or spiritual practice played any role in your family or married life early on.

RC: Yes. My family was very spiritual. Of course, religiously, we practiced Hinduism, but nothing fanatic. There was just that adherence to the social norms, the major festivals, and there was so much anticipation and celebration around it. On my dad's side of the family and mom's side of the family, there were a lot of siblings, a lot of cousins. My dad's side were older than us; Mom's side were younger than us, because my dad was the youngest in the family, and my mom was the firstborn in the family. Given that, we were in the middle. We learned from our older cousins, and we taught our younger cousins. I was the big sister to boss [them] around. They remember it, and they don't hesitate to tell me. [laughter] It was a happy childhood. There are a lot of memories of those big celebrations that relatives, the close family members, would come together, weddings. It is famous that Indian weddings are show off and big weddings and last for days. Maybe it wasn't a show off, given, at the time, the country was going through post-independence. They're good memories of those, families coming together and being part of the life change and a big life event. The lovingness of the extended family that we received--the hugs, tight hugs from aunts, and so many blessings--just countless experiences I have.

SI: Tell us a little bit about your early schooling, this elementary school you went to, and then going into high school. Do any experiences stand out, or do any teachers stand out as being impactful or a mentor?

RC: The early childhood, elementary, I was part of a program of handwriting. So, my handwriting was so beautiful, and I can brag about it. It is beautiful now in English or my native language, when I write in both scripts. That was the good memory of that elementary time of mine. It's just the experience that we had for a couple of years walking for so long and playing on the way back in a hot sun. We'd try to have our shade and then try to joke with kids and play with kids and run after each other. It was overall such a healthy, carefree childhood.

The best memories in that village school, they had an annual festival where all the village homes were decorated with colorful clay wall decorations, so beautiful. Our classmates would take us to their homes, and moms would give us sweets. In our lunchtime, we would go to their houses nearby. I remember those beautiful, colorful like cave art or something like that, but it's more on the walls of houses and their verandas. Culturally, when I look at now who I am as a mature human being, our traditions, our customs were built around how we express our humanity in them. It's really important. Either it's connected to a festival or social norm or whatever, or how I just lived. That's how they [were] expressed.

Peacocks would be all over it because it was on a little hill and too much vegetation, trees. We'd be in the classrooms [and] be hearing peacocks all over. [In the] rainy season, we would dance in the puddles and make little paper boats and all have a competition of the paper boats. All that,

how it shaped us, as I look at the casual childhood, you don't know at that time what's to come when you grow up as an adult, what you would become. This is a carefree world. When I see kids today, human trafficking or abuse or whatever, I'm sure that things happened at that time too, but we didn't [know]. As a child, how carefree we were, that foundation, the security of that, is the foundation of my confidence, regardless of what life had put me through, and I went through what my dad prepared me [for]. Unknowingly, both of us were on a journey. How I was able to navigate that [was] because of that happy and strong foundation I had. I don't know where I would be if my childhood experience was any different.

SI: Well, that's very interesting and in step with what you told us earlier about your relationship with your father. Were there any other folks who played a role in that as you got into high school, any teachers? It sounds like most of it was your father, but do any other figures stand out?

RC: Nothing as much [as] someone stands out. But I do say often, when I have a self-talk or I write about my memoir, that my mentors were all over the place. I was very much drawn into literature. I got so drawn into human behavior, especially when I had passed college. Somehow, this literature would make its way to me. I don't know how. I cannot explain how, but it would come in front of me from one source or another. So, I called them my mentors as well. Even [though] they were not living, they shaped my thought process. My dad did always say [to] respect people and don't judge them. Even if you judge them, judge them for their values, not how they pray, how they live, what they eat, what they look like. He would tell me lots of stories of many scholars that he had crossed paths with [and] how humble and simplistic they were. He said that this well-known scholar and a great statesman, his clerk was better dressed than this statesman. I would ask, "Why?" He said, "Because he was so humble." It didn't matter to him how he looked or dressed; it was what he brought to the world. Those are the kinds of words [that] shaped me so much.

As far as the teachers, I have taken so much interest, after I came to the United States, in the history, because people, in the early '80s, when I came--we lived in Midwest, and we were the only people of our kind--people around us would ask us questions, and I didn't know. As a young woman of twenty, I didn't know anything that they would ask. I would have to find answers. So, I became in love with history. But in high school, I did not like my history teacher at all. She was not engaging. She would give us very tough questions and then just be involved in her knitting and stuff with no engagement with students, so I never had a love of history in my school. That's the other side.

The other one that I would recall that had some influence at that time was my Hindi poetry teacher. She would sing and explain poetry, and some of that poetry, Shaun and Adithya, just shapes your thought process, because those words, a short stanza of the poem, are so powerful. They're packed with meaning. They're packed with learning. They're packed with so much teaching. She would sing and explain. Other than that, it was a pretty regular curriculum and notes and lists and homework and check homework. Nothing that I recall was outstanding that shaped me.

SI: Go ahead.

AV: Could you tell us a bit more about your college life? It sounds like you had a lot of different experiences in high school. Did you think you would carry forward with the same experience in college as well?

RC: Yes. It was an interesting story. We were living in an adjoining state to New Delhi. At that time, the setup was a pre-university, one year of pre-university, and three years of degree. At the same time, a new system was being implemented, two plus three. The curriculum I was in, it was called one plus three. The two plus three was the high school was up to tenth grade. In the new system, high school was up to twelfth grade, and then three years of college. So, I was part of the last batch of ten plus one plus three. I was in the state of Haryana, a university close to where my parents lived at that time. My father wanted me to join law school in New Delhi University. To join law school in New Delhi University, he thought it would be beneficial to me to do my bachelor's in New Delhi. After my prep, one year, I was brought into New Delhi University.

Now, [it was an] interesting situation as the new batch comes in. I scored very high in high school and prep, and they told me that I can enroll in the second year of the college instead of the first year of college. So, my second year, I was there two years, so I graduated at twenty. I was the only female, and that's another layer. This was a boys-only college. With the new system coming, they were also making the college coed. In the second year, they were all boys. I was the only female, and I had to finish two years in one year. I [would] spend most of my time between the classes and in a common room, because the classrooms are recycled and used for different classes.

At eighteen years old, in a second year of college, I was very heavily working with my dad on some international law cases. One of the cases, you may laugh, but it's a Bollywood story, like Masala at the top. This was a story of a child who was abandoned in Mumbai in a tourist hotel by a biological mother from New Zealand and the biological father [from] Australia, a cricket player. The mother abandoned the child. Another couple, an unmarried couple, the woman from Britain and the boyfriend from Germany, they adopted the child, but they couldn't. They started taking care [of the child], but they wanted to adopt the child. This is an interesting case anytime I talk about it. At that time, the Indian court would not give custody of a child to an unwedded couple. Media was involved. The mother had abandoned the child and left. She was not found. The father was located to come to India and grant custody rights for an adopting couple. The adopting couple had to go through a court marriage. They stayed in the country--they came in with a six-month visa--they stayed there six years. The boyfriend, a German guy, who was supposed to be the adopting father, got an exit visa. So, he was jailed, and they had no money. They were wearing those clothes that Sadhus would wear. They would come--every weekend, they were at our home, the little boy's to-be-father and mother, before he was jailed. My father was helping them in so many ways. I was actually researching the citations around those custodial cases around the world. My father would leave a whole big table of books with different laws and references. I would, during the day, research. I was very much involved in that. That was my college years. [Editor's Note: A Sadhu is a religious ascetic, mendicant or holy person in Hinduism, Buddhism and Jainism who has renounced the worldly life. Typically, a Sadhu wears minimal clothing, often consisting of a robe that is saffron or white in color.]

The good thing was, in my college years, three days of the week, I had to go to college. The [other] two days, I had no classes. I would study at home for [the] two years that I needed to complete in one year. I learned so much because I was anticipating [going] to law school. I would go with my dad in the white sari and a black gown into high courts and stuff. It was such a great learning experience, where my father taught me directly or indirectly how to communicate with people at the high stature, how to get your message across, [and] how to get the information you need. When people are distracted and they are walking in a hallway, as we see how media people get, you're walking along with them and you get what you need from them because you only have a few minutes of their attention. Without him saying it, I was just learning that. All of the experience that I had before I got married somehow prepared me, on my own, to make all the decisions and navigate through very difficult situations in life.

I did pass college. I was prepping for law school when I got married, and somehow, life had a very different plan. I did not go to law school. In hindsight, all of that experience, what didn't happen and what happened has also shaped me very well.

SI: Can you tell us a little bit about that period after you graduated college and when you got married?

RC: Yes. It all happened very quickly. My husband's family and my family had known each other for twenty-some years. We were not per se dating because it wasn't the norm. But a lot of the family relations happened that way. We had met and things, but when the prospect of suitorship was brought in, everyone was okay with it. It all happened so soon because he had already come to the United States. The family wanted [to] make sure that he married someone of his culture. It just went too fast. I was still applying for law schools, and I had gone to take tests at two or three different schools just [to] see if I don't get admission in New Delhi University. It's a very tough selection. So, I was just looking [at] options.

At that time, when we got married, it took me a few months to get my green card before I came to the United States. We lived in a small town, suburbs, in Wisconsin, out in a cornfield somewhere. When I look back, I wonder [if] there's always a higher plan of things that you have no explanation [for], but at that time, you're thrown into life and you have to make sense of it. I was too naïve, in many cases, because we were always surrounded by loving family, always surrounded by so many people around us. I never thought that I would be left that way, where we had to make decisions.

Here, as new immigrants at that time, the way the rules were, we were given eighteen dollars at the airport. You come in as a new immigrant with eighteen dollars in your pocket to build your future. All the raw energy and all of the emotion and leaving everything behind and not having that network, it's very unknown. It's just the spirit of who you are, and I think that spirit, my sense of humor, my ambitions played [such a] strong role into all of the unknown.

SI: Can you walk us through those first few days and weeks and months in the United States? What struck you about the place in Wisconsin where you ended up? What difficulties became apparent right away?

RC: Oh, my goodness. When I came, it was the middle of February from New Delhi to JFK [John F. Kennedy Airport] and the flight from LaGuardia to Minneapolis. My dad's client, a New York-based client, was a nurse and had the custody case in New Delhi that I worked on, on her case. She came to pick me up at JFK and bring me to LaGuardia. I came in the middle of February, arriving in Minneapolis with summer-like clothes and a small shawl/jacket/sweater type and my high heels. [laughter] Here, I found myself in the middle of a blizzard. It took us four days. My husband was, at that time, in South Dakota, Sioux Falls. He was supposed to move to Wisconsin within a month. So, he drove to Minneapolis to take me there, and then we were to come back a month later.

I'm just in the middle of the winter. He does not know anybody where he lives. It's knee-deep snow and ice all over. A month went by so fast. We didn't have the phone connections at that time, that you could pick up your home phone or cell and call. [It was] almost thirty-six years ago. I was writing letters to the family. I remember writing those letters to the family and receiving their letters. A month later, I came to Wisconsin again, the month of March, sometime in late March. Cold again. That's where he was supposed to start his work. Again, we were the only one of our kind. There was no one, so people knew [what] our car looked like, so if we go to a restaurant and stuff, a very polite way of asking, "Where are you from? What brings you here?"

I was just learning. I was just learning. We lived in that area for thirteen years. When my son was born, the first year when he started going to daycare, so pretty much twelve hundred people in town; everybody knew us. [laughter] Life in this early stage was very difficult. I did not have a chance to continue my education. My husband was himself in the medical field, but whatever took place with his family or him or his ambition or his circumstances is another story altogether. He chose to go into a business, and he was not a businessman. Nobody in his family was in business, so he didn't know. But that's what he chose. It required, on both of our parts, to work very long hours, seven days a week.

I had to make sense [of this], and many years later, I remember that if I didn't go to law school, there must have been a good reason. I reasoned with it. I don't know if it was the right thing to do [to] convince myself. I don't know what I should call it. Do I miss it? No. I became a different person. What skills I learned handling the business, no one in my family was a business owner. They were all in higher education and high-placed positions. What I was learning and I learned to navigate with people in a totally different culture without much means, without much financial means, I think it was a different phase of life, so I accepted it. I made sense of--I think I can say it over and over--I made sense of everything that I was going through and [did] my best. So, the experience of owning a business and making a living was unplanned, unprepared, but I learned a lot: how to navigate through different situations in life and [have] the self-confidence that was founded in my foundation, the ambition and ability to navigate, an ability to get through a situation, and work with people, helped me to move [through] that, too. It wasn't easy because you're not only an immigrant and have no support system, have no finances, and you're thrown into something that you did not even know [if] you know it or don't.

SI: It seems like everything was changing all at once.

RC: Yes, yes.

SI: What kind of business was it?

RC: He got involved in the souvenir gift and artifacts type of thing. That's not a high demand type of business. It required a lot of work, seven days [a week]. When the doors opened and closed, there were so many things to do. There were limited resources, so we'd end up doing it. I remember when I went to the hospital to deliver my first child, I was taken at seven PM; until five PM, I was working in the store, standing on my feet all day.

SI: Wow. What was a retail store?

RC: Yes.

SI: Okay. You were still waiting on customers and then going to the hospital, wow.

RC: Yes.

AV: Ms. Chopra, I heard you say a lot about what life was like when you first came to Wisconsin. Something that immigrants like me have gone through are homesickness, culture shock, and different things that everyone's gone through. Tell us a bit about your initial experience when you finally settled down. Were the people nice to you? Did they always talk to you? Were you included in the community? Can you say that you felt all of that in your initial days?

RC: As far as I recall, we lived in a very small town, about eight hundred, nine hundred people, for so many years, for thirteen years. I was a person coming [from] a happy childhood and being friendly. [Since] I was nine years old, I read the Cinderella story in the Hindi newspaper that my father used to subscribe to [of his] eight or nine papers, and every Sunday, he'd bring this children's section out of one of the papers [for] me. In that paper, there would be folk stories [from] around the world. The Cinderella story, I was nine years old--I always felt very drawn to other cultures and themes. So, I was very--I wouldn't say talkative--but a friendly person. But my husband was not. When we would [come] across neighbors or anyone and people would talk and I would respond and [be] happy, it's my nature, the person I was, he didn't like it, and he would pull me and not respond. The other people, I don't know what they thought. But because it was a small community, and we lived nearby, and we worked in our store morning until evening, and come back, and had the same routine the next day, it was a lot of work, there was very little engagement. There was not enough time to [even] think [about] what kind of living conditions you're in [or if] this is what you were expecting. No, there's no time for that.

With the interaction with family, yes, there's a loss of that loving network that comes in. Most people that I have come [into contact with] that have a story of transition or a tough story, regardless of if they're a migrant or not, if there is a support system, people emerge out of that. The human race is resilient. People are resilient, and people overcome. It's just your experience when you have that network, there was none for us. As a young bride, I did not even know how

life should be. The community and inclusiveness, people were very friendly. They were very curious because they never saw someone living in that little town of any other culture. There were no other per se race in that area in the Upper Midwest, in that small community. I don't recall any experience that I would recall was horrible, never.

There was a very funny incident that I recall. One day, [the] sheriff stopped at our house. It was Sunday afternoon. He stopped at our house and rang the bell. He talked to us. He says, "We have someone at the police station. I think you can talk to them." So, me and my husband looked at each other. We followed [the] sheriff, came in our car to the police station, and here was a young man, Punjabi-speaking young man, who was totally erratic. He was lost. He was on a bus from Chicago going to Washington State near Seattle on a Greyhound bus, and he got off [in] Wisconsin. The guy did not speak English. He did not speak any language to communicate. Now, he's in a small town, wandering on the street and going crazy. Somebody called the police, and they brought him to the police station. Somehow, I was able to pick up a few words of his dialect and ask him questions. Then, I was able to make sense that he wanted to go to Washington. When the bus driver said, "Wisconsin," he got off the bus, and the bus left. He was an employee, or maybe someone to be an employee, of a restaurant from Chicago going to Washington. So, this whole incident was kind of funny that we recalled a few times, that people knew who we were, even though we were kind of a silent part of that community. I never had any kind of negative experience.

It's very funny, another incident is that there was a lake and boat tours in the lake. After our business slowed down--I think it was fall--I wanted to go take that boat tour. So, we said, "Okay, we'll take a couple of hours off, and we'll go." We're standing in the line of entry for the boats. I had very long black silky hair. Behind me is a Cherokee Indian standing there. He turned around, he goes, "Where are you from? Which tribe are you?" I said, "Oh, I'm not from a tribe. I am Indian." He said, "I am Indian." [laughter] I didn't know how to handle it. He's a big tall man. He thinks, "I'm the real Indian." I said, "Okay, I'm an Indian from India." [laughter] The Cherokees and Winnebago have reservations in that area. Why they're called Indians, I don't know. I have my own theory. It's just the idea that we humans, as we connect with them--as Dad used to teach--that you deal with people, who they are. Don't judge them [on] how they look or where they pray or what they eat. You don't judge people on [that]. Instilled in those values is how to communicate with people, so I immediately captured that situation of being a little bit out of hand, saying, "Okay, I'm an Indian from India." Who is the real, you or me, it's not a contest here. [laughter] I hope I answered your question.

SI: Those are really interesting stories, a lot of little things about getting settled in the United States.

RC: Yes, yes.

SI: You had two children while you were out there.

RC: Yes. They both were born there. My son is the firstborn, the daughter. Somehow, married life had been very difficult. With a newborn, I found myself in a very difficult situation. I didn't know what was happening, but it became abusive more and more and sometimes life-

threatening. In my community and my family, no one had faced this type of situation, and I didn't know how to deal with it, the stigma and all the kind of stuff. A neighbor, a confidante that I had, used to work in our business. She was an elderly woman. She would see things and tell me to be careful. I was very naïve to that. So, I became aware of the fact that if anything happened to me, my child would be taken away as well. My family would never know what happened to us, so I had to navigate that with silence.

My education was interrupted. I enrolled myself in a distance learning design course because I always felt like an artist. That was from New York and distance learning. I completed that. It took me two years. I completed that course. This thought, maybe with being a designer, I bring in my artistic abilities. I'm a painter. I painted a lot. Then, I would work at my convenience. That was my assumption, that being a designer, I could choose my hours to work and raise kids. Somehow, I knew that I had to leave that marriage but when was the question. My youngest two sisters were still studying. They were in their master's and things, and they were not married yet. Me separating from my marriage would have some sort of stigma or taboo [of there] being a divorced daughter in their family on their marriage prospects. That's how our society's outlook was. My father was very well known in the community being an attorney. So, I was sacrificing myself for the sake of the family's honor. I stayed until my youngest sister got married.

My two sisters, I was not allowed to go attend their weddings, so this was the last one. I had made the decision to go. As I was expecting, my brother-in-law was in the Indian army, recruited as an officer there, they delayed their wedding until after I gave birth to my second child and would be able to travel two or three months after. They delayed their wedding, so I could come. That was the time that I told my family that, "If anything happens to me, the children would be taken away in foster care, since you will never know what happened to us. I cannot live there." My father insisted so much that I come back.

I had taken that interior designing course. I gave it a try to see if I would find opportunities to utilize that because I passed that age--by this time, I was about twenty-nine, thirty--I had passed that age of the entry level of all of the things that I could have done. Then, the second phase is at age thirty-five, that you bring in a lot of experience and you go into the management levels. So, I didn't see either one fitting for me at that stage. I didn't have the experience side to enter or entry level; I missed that boat. So, I told my father, given the way society is, I have to work hard no matter what. I will live with dignity staying here [as] an artist. I can live my life and raise kids. So, the court did not give him custody based on their views and the evidence that there was. It was horrible. It was sickening. It was scary. They didn't give him custody, the things he had said and done. He was not employed. He couldn't take care of himself. I didn't expect then [to receive] any sort of support.

Two years, I was in that area. Then, I decided that I was at risk. In a small town, there were no opportunities for me to grow. I was turned down from a teller position, which was four dollars [and] fifty cents. [Having] a bachelor's and [having] so much experience, I was turned down for a silly reason. So, I understood that I probably would not be able to get into (words?) [inaudible] to raise my family.

The other thing was that he would never allow me to drive. You cannot live in [the] United States, even in New Jersey, you cannot live if you don't have a car or transportation. That is the case ten times more than here that you would have. You might have friends who drive. We have Ubers and taxis. There was nothing there. There was nothing. There was no need [for] that.

This Winnebago Tribe had a trading post and a reservation where they had a bingo hall. One of my neighbors used to go play bingo there, a Caucasian woman. She knew about some of my situation because if I was at risk, I would come to her house. She told me they have a job opening, but they only hire Indian people, meaning reservation Indians, not Indians of India. That's another funny story that I told. She said, "I will take you. You can apply and see what happens." I applied. I had very long black silky hair. I fit in from the looks of that. They needed somebody so bad they hired me immediately. My husband saw money coming in, so he would drop me off, and this woman would bring me back and I'd pay her. So, I worked with them maybe four or five months. The money that I had, I saved all of it, all of it that I got. I bought a used car, and I took driving lessons. That empowered me so much that I knew that when the time comes that I [would be] able to leave. It was very scary moments, very scary moments. I had the support of a few neighbors and people who became aware; one told another.

As an artist, I learned Victorian crafts. Staying at home when I had time, I learned Victorian crafts, paper crafts, and so many things that I would do [with] a hot glue gun. I would make those beautiful crafts and take them as a consignment into different craft malls. I had my booths in four or five, so Mother's Day, Christmas, or other places, they would sell a lot of my crafts and give me [a] check. I kept saving that money, which helped me to move, over two, three years. I realized that my being there, I was sometimes in [danger] because [of] the rage that there was, and he would come and probably would do something. The future of the children and my own future, my ambition, my sense of humor, and the ability that my father had prepared me for, I wanted to have a better life for us. I wouldn't tell my family.

I moved to New Jersey, as my father had a lot of clients in New York. I contacted them. Mid-'90s, New York had a very bad reputation. I was scared. I didn't have enough money, just enough for me to come [and] find a job, but then my brother at the time was going to law school. He said to me that his childhood friend and their family is in New Jersey; he will connect me. I spoke to the young man, and he said, "I am renting a room in New Jersey." It was, I think, in Essex County somewhere. I was in Wisconsin. "I'm renting a room. Their children are about the same age [as] your children, and they're moving to Edison. Would you like to talk to them?" I said, "Yes." I talked to them, and I asked if I come, they can walk me around the town, so I can come and see. I left my children [for] two days with a babysitter. I came in, flew here on Saturday. Sunday, I went back, and they gave me the tour and stuff of the area. I ripped the pages from the old phonebook of all the recruitment agencies and rental places and picked up the newspapers, and flew back. Then, I made plans to move to New Jersey. That was in '96. I came with two suitcases on an Amtrak--two suitcases, two kids, and six boxes shipped via UPS. The boxes came later after I arrived. Since '96, I have been in New Jersey.

SI: Wow. That's a pretty amazing story. You have a lot of grit. Adithya?

AV: Just to confirm, Ms. Chopra, did you come to Edison or Essex?

RC: Edison. I came to Edison. I lived in [the] Edison area. I've lived in [the] Edison area now since '96, so it's almost twenty-six years.

AV: What was it like living in Edison at that time? Currently, I live in Edison. The population is now predominantly Indian-American. There are lots of grocery stores. There are a lot of different activities that they do here now in 2022. What was it like back then?

RC: Oh, my goodness. It was not as it is today, so I have seen all the growth. It looked like a different country. Coming from a small suburb of Wisconsin, a farm community, to New Jersey was like a different country. It was a very different experience. The first three years, in the winter, there was no snow; even if snow came, it just melted right away. The whole experience of the geographical, the cultural, and me having the sense of fear gone, that uncertainty and fear that I was living in, the threat of my life on a daily basis was gone, so I was in action mode. But I found that another set of challenges started.

I had to stabilize myself with two little kids. I asked my mother to come and help me out, but my dad was having some very serious health challenges. His spinal cord was compressed between the overgrown bone. He had a habit of reading books [with] his elbows on the table for hours and hours, so the neck somehow [became curved]. He was a chain smoker. He became incontinent, and he needed full care. Mother could not leave him. She suggested that I bring the children there for a year or so, so I can stabilize myself. The reason for that whole situation was my son was eleven, almost twelve, and my daughter was nine. I was working, and this was summer vacation. I had a babysitter nearby the place that I was renting. She had slapped my daughter, and my son told me. I got scared that [if] something happens or the kids take an action, call 911 on her or something. I got seriously scared. I didn't have enough means to send an eleven and nine-year-old to a daycare. They were very sensible kids. They were well trained to take care of themselves, and I took care of [them]. I was only two miles away from my workplace to home. I even would come home during my lunch.

It just started a chain of things that [had] nothing to do with me or my ability. I found myself in a mergers and acquisitions era, that every job that I would start, within six, seven months, companies bought [each other out], until '98. Two or three years, I went through a lot. In '99, around Y2K, I enrolled myself into an IT [information technology] course. I'm working daytime full time, and I have an evening job three days a week. Then, I'm studying on weekends, taking these IT courses. Altogether, it had been quite an interesting journey.

I found myself in IT; from law school, to being an artist, to going into IT, and writing a book. It wasn't until I became an empty-nester that I realized that I never healed. It was a milestone in life when my second child graduated. It was a celebration. You could see in the pictures how I'm beaming with light in those moments. The kids would joke. It was just a happy time. But when she moved out of the house, I realized, [with] the empty nest, that my world revolved around them and now they're grown-up adults; they're doing well for themselves. They turned out to be good citizens. I'm so proud of them and what they have become. But it was sinking in.

I came across a very high-ranking woman from the United Nations women's org [organization] at my friend's barbecue. This woman was her boss in [the] Netherlands. This person was posted in [the] United Nations in New York, and my friend stayed in touch with her. She invited her [to] a barbecue on a Sunday. She arrived early because my friend had to pick her up from a train station. I arrived early. I wanted to help out my friend before the guests arrived. It was a moment made in heaven. I don't know how else to explain. We connected immediately. We talked about a lot of things. I expressed my desire to help other people, especially women in my situation. I wanted to do so much. One thing led to another. I don't know, some voice was speaking through her. Within an hour, she convinced me to be a voice of millions who don't have one. I don't know what it meant. We talked about a lot of stuff before the guests arrived and all that. [When] the guests left, she was going to stay until late afternoon for the train to go back.

It happened to be so funny. It happened to be [that] my friend was going through a divorce herself. This was her way of inviting all her friends into her marital home before she leaves that home, so she was celebrating her friendship with people. When guests were gone, we cleaned up, and we were sitting in her backyard in a beautiful Basking Ridge home. It started raining. We have those memories of all three of us singing in the rain. We couldn't sing, and I was joking, I said, "I hope your neighbors don't call the cops." [laughter] We were screaming at the top of our lungs, and we were singing. Now, we have a very strong, tight friendship group, the three of us. All three of us were going through a very tough time in our lives.

I find those incidents shape us in so many ways to write our next chapter, and it did. I'm a techie. Twenty years, I had been in corporate IT with Fortune 500 [companies]. I learned the best of the best methodologies that [the] business world can offer. My heart wasn't in there. I tried to run away from IT. After 2008, it became project-type things. So, you have a gig, and then after that, it's a budget issue. They don't need to keep you if they don't have the budget. It didn't happen for me. I would always be between situations, navigating myself. [I] wrote my first book. Then, in 2015, a TV show came--2014--a TV show with Princeton. So, this was a top-ten most watched online show until COVID. [Editor's Note: Ritu Chopra is the producer and host of *Despite the Challenges*, produced by Princeton TV. The program showcases the stories of individuals who have faced extraordinary challenges and have overcome them and, in turn, made a positive impact on the communities around them. More information can be found on Ritu Chopra's website at <https://rituchopra.com/tv-show/> and on YouTube at <https://www.youtube.com/@despitethechallenges>.]

I found myself doing so many diverse things. I want to say with complete humility and in the most humble way that I embraced everything. I'm not a filmmaker. I never had time to watch films. I'm just not fond of it. I don't hate them. But I learned everything [about] how to film. I was aware of the cameras as a TV show host and how to be able to interview people and stuff like that, which is [a] very good show that I did. I had to learn everything. My mentor was a NASA [National Aeronautics and Space Administration] engineer, and his story is that as a twenty-six-year-old NASA engineer, he was the person assigned to the machine to monitor the heartbeat of the first astronaut who touched the moon. [laughter] The people appeared, my gurus, my teachers, appeared from different phases of life, from all walks of life, that I had not known them. I'm so proud of each and every opportunity and grateful. It guided me through the

process. My films won four major awards. I'll show you. There was not enough room for the fourth, so we have three here. [Editor's Note: Ritu Chopra points to the awards. Ms. Chopra won the CICFF Outstanding Achievement Award in 2017, the CICFF Golden Fox Award, and the Silver Winner 2017 of the International Independent Film Award for her documentary *The Secret Crimes: And the Silent Epidemic of Generations*. Ms. Chopra was awarded the Best Shorts Award by Best Shorts Competition in 2017 for her documentary *Lead My Way: A Global Perspective of Domestic Violence*.]

That's the nonprofit [Lead My Way]. I am an artist and a photographer, and I do a lot of work myself. That's the nonprofit I have, which is education awareness and resources we provide for gender-based violence, but my documentary is gender neutral. The programs of my nonprofit are gender neutral. I believe that men, women, we're all part of the family unit. There are good people among us all over the place. A little boy and a little girl a mother raises, they grow up to be man and woman, and we cannot separate ourselves. So, I'm very proud that a segment of my documentary is positive male role models. I don't reject that. My father, my brother, so many men in my family and outside my family are good men that I have come to know. So, there's never that bias in my head. It was just my experience with my husband, so that shouldn't define the agenda. That's the person who I am. That fell in my lap, and I embraced it. Now, I've got four awards. My mentor said, "Don't let it go." "What do I do with it?" "You make an educational piece." "What does that mean?" "You train the first responders and others." "How do I do that?" "You set up a nonprofit." I had no clue how to do that. Just like entering law school to doing business to thinking of being an artist to being in IT and now I have another role to play, I embraced and learned how to run a nonprofit business.

It is still an active nonprofit but not funded. So, I raise funds to do annual symposiums. Two years ago, in 2020, actually, the Rutgers Sociology Department wrote a white paper [based] on the film. The eight-minute preview have been used at Rutgers. In many different areas of Rutgers, it has been used as a discussion opener. Colleges are using that eight-minute video and film. Two months ago, in May, I also had come in and screened the whole short film, thirty-seven minutes. So, it's being used. I am doing that work.

For my profession, my heart is not in IT. I'm transitioning. I'm an executive coach. I am writing a second book. My next book is in the process, the manuscript is in the process, *Women Leadership in the 21st Century: Raising and Creating Leaders of Tomorrow*, which is very closely tied [to] my executive coaching programs for mid-level professionals, especially when they have direct reports in the mid-management area. [There are] a lot of challenges the younger generations have. Being in the trenches for twenty-two years, I bring in a lot of experience on the disconnect [and] dysfunction of IT, non-IT, people challenges, and the technology's outpacing itself and how to communicate. There's growing pains to everything I have seen. So, I bring in a lot of strength there. My heart has been more [in] the last few years, ever since I tried to exit IT, to empower others. This nonprofit, Lead My Way, is a door opener. All my work is pro bono. I don't make a dime out of it. The film is out of my pocket. I have given the rights, too. It's my service to humanity. I have connected with individuals up to ambassador levels that I would never have being in IT, behind the scenes.

I never think of making money from a nonprofit. I see that what life put me through, what I learned, there was a higher purpose for me to be that force. This person from the United Nations, what she spoke, she instilled that in me to be a voice. It's happening. I get calls from women, even men, [who] have watched the film. They shared stories. They open up to share their challenges. In those moments, I feel they chose me not because I'm a filmmaker; they chose me [because] they needed to speak with someone they could trust. Being in data privacy and going back as my father was training me [in] confidentiality, to date, I find myself in [a] situation of confidentiality and the trust of other people is so important. Those values I was given from the very beginning. So, it continues.

I am seeing a bright future for myself and many others that I cross paths with. I have been on the boards of colleges. I have mentored young people, women, and I hope that I do more of it.

SI: That's a great place to conclude today since we are at the time I know you have to leave.

RC: Yes.

SI: Maybe we could do a brief follow up sometime in the future and delve more into some of these issues.

RC: Yes.

SI: I really appreciate all your time today and your candidness. It's really been a fascinating story. Thank you.

RC: Thank you. Thank you for the opportunity. I hope that some of these stories help others. They don't have to be immigrants. We have life experiences. Immigrants have left their comfort zone, so they're finding themselves in a new place that might not be as comfortable for them to be for their own reasons or for somebody else's reasons. So, I think there's a lot. I would continue. Early next week is a good time if you want to conclude. August is going to become tough. I am on my own schedule right now, because I'm finishing my manuscript. So, my calendar is flexible, if you give me some time.

SI: I'll email you some dates and times early next week. Thank you again. It's been really fascinating. Thank you.

RC: Yes, I have more fascinating things, but it all goes to what question you ask. [laughter]

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Reviewed by Molly A. Graham 11/14/2022

Reviewed by Kathryn Tracy Rizzi 11/28/2022

Reviewed by Ritu Chopra 2/14/2023